This has been edited by me with Grammarly and*HP-DG-AP-PN-RG-NR*.

**Chapter 7: Grimm Don’t Care About Your Drama**

While she had occasional issues with the cold, Pyrrha was an early riser normally, and that did not change after perhaps the best night’s sleep she’d ever had since becoming a Monomáchos (gladiatrix). *Brothers!* She thought, looking over and out a nearby window, a small one whose blinds Harry had used his Semblance to close last night. Neither of them had wanted to get up, but now the light was slowly filtering in, moving across the floor like an invading army. *I can’t remember a time I slept so well. Cuddling is* ***amazing****!*

Last night had ended with the two of them cuddling together, talking about scary movies she’d seen and that he and Tia had inflicted upon their younger siblings as they slowly fell asleep after several rounds of… Pyrrha really wasn’t certain what to call what they’d been doing. She’d heard the phrase ‘making out’, but she didn’t like it, and frankly, it seemed a little too blasé for what they’d been doing. Going to second base or any baseball-related idiom also annoyed Pyrrha. *I have never understood the Valian fascination with that boring game. Then again, considering my former profession and its place in Mistrali society, perhaps I should not be throwing stones.*

Pyrrha was still thinking about it as she slowly slid out from within Harry’s arms, smiling tenderly at how they’d been cradling her against him. There had been no desire to control her, no desire to protect her there, simply a desire to touch. Pyrrha stood up, stretching her almost naked body before looking down at her panties and deciding they needed to go. *Oh, t*hey feel very crinkly and dirty right now. *We should have had some of our clothing transferred over before last night. Ah, well. Hindsight and all that. I rather doubt either of us thought the night would go in the direction it did.*

She glanced at the small bedroom alarm clock and saw it was only a quarter till seven. And that Harry was frowning in his sleep now, his hands slowly moving across the bed as if searching.

Stifling her giggles with a hand, Pyrrha left the room. Moving to another one of the bedrooms, she grabbed, putting the pillow in Harry’s arms, which automatically closed around it. *He seems very used to sleeping with other people. Hehehe, probably Tia’s influence, no doubt. Her and the rest of his sisters. Not that I can blame them in any way if they get as good a night's rest being cradled in his arms as I did last night!*

With a shake of her head, Pyrrha made for the bathroom, where she did her necessities, before pulling on one of the bathrooms there. Perry had insisted they buy those and towels, although Pyrrha hadn’t been certain why until Harry had called Professor Goodwitch and asked if the townhome came complete with them. They didn’t, unlike the cooking utensils and cutlery.

*Normally I would want to shower, but I also want to clean up the kitchen first. We left it in quite a state last night, and Tia has always been very clear. If Harry does the cooking, someone else has to do the cleanup.* Pyrrha giggled again as she reflected on Arc Manners (apparently, the patent was still pending) as she moved down the stairs, shaking her head fondly. *And if I have my way, Harry will be doing a lot of the cooking, so the rest of us will have to get used to cleaning up after the fact.*

In the kitchen, Pyrrha did discover that they had indeed left quite a mess and quickly began cleaning, opening the windows as she did. As she did, she hummed an old Mistral hymn, thinking about last night and the future. As she did, she paused, remembering how they had escaped her fans the night before when her identity was exposed. *Oh dear, I hope nothing comes from that… or it does, as bad as it might be to think it, that none of it gets to me here at Beacon.*

**OOOOOOO**

Meanwhile, in Vale, others were also getting an early start to the day. One who actually should have been sleeping in was named Rattigan. He worked at the first grocery store that Harry and Pyrrha had gone to the evening before. He’d been on duty last night and had seen the ruckus occur as Pyrrha Nikos, the Invincible Girl, accidentally outed herself.

In all the turmoil, Rattigan, like most of the other people there, hadn’t thought about what Pyrrha might have been doing there. And accompanied by a young man to boot. However, after a night thinking about how best to profit from coming so close to the Mistral champion, Rattigan had an idea. So, he arrived at the store almost with the sun to see if he could find some evidence to back it up.

The store was still closed due to the issue with the sprinklers damaging some of the merchandise. As he entered, Rattigan saw two maintenance men replacing one of the sprinklers, which had apparently gone off at a false positive or something? Rattigan wasn’t certain, but he thought that matched what he heard from the manager and the police last night.

Swiftly, Rattigan bypassed the few other workers around, moving around the store to try and keep the others from noticing him. *There’s only room for one person to profit from this*. Entering the manager’s office, he moved to the wall where the CCTVs were. There, he spent about twenty minutes figuring out the timing of the incident last night before gleefully tracing Harry and Pyrrha’s movements through the store. By the end, Rattigan was almost vibrating in his seat as the mantra *money, money, money*, went through his mind as he watched Pyrrha and the unknown youth stopping and kissing occasionally. Of course, Pyrrha’s face wasn’t visible at those times but connected to the later reveal, there was no doubt about her identity.

He quickly inserted his scroll and downloaded the video from start to finish, the finish being when Pyrrha was dragged away by the unknown youth as the sprinklers went on. Seeing that, Rattigan grinned and deleted it from the computer. *That last bit will only make it better. It makes that guy look like a hooligan, taking advantage of the situation to pull her away from her fans. And now I’m the only one with a copy of it… heh. My manager is going to fucking flip, but that’s not my problem.*

Quickly leaving the store, Rattigan went to a nearby Internet café, where he quickly figured out how to sell the video to the most people for the most money possible, utterly uncaring of the turmoil this would cause.

**OOOOOOO**

Unlike Pyrrha, Ozpin was not an individual who could truly function until he was several pots of coffee into his morning. Therefore, he ignored his scroll going off until he had his seventh cup of coffee and sat down at his desk, finally willing to officially start his day. The number of people who had left him messages disturbed him greatly on a Saturday morning, but Ozpin quickly filtered through them, realizing most of them came from news agencies. *Of course. Members of the fifth estate always want to bypass protocol when it serves their purposes. Sad.*

Some of them were polite requests for Ozpin to comment on an event last night in Vale. Without telling him what event that might be. *If their belief in my omniscience wasn’t so self-serving, it might actually be gratifying.* Others were not so polite, demanding access to the school grounds to interview the Invincible Girl. Others outright demanded Ozpin identify one of his students. *Which is illegal unless they are being investigated by the police, in which case I could not release it to the news agencies regardless. Honestly, the intelligence of some people seems to go down the more a camera is pointed at them. Now… what is this one? It seems somewhat more legible.*

“‘Would you care to comment on the fact that Pyrrha Nikos, a young lady of impeachable character, seems to have been taken in by a young man who acts something like a rogue? And this not three weeks into Beacon’s school year?’” Ozpin read aloud, a faint frown appearing as he took another sip of his coffee.

*So, it has something to do with Ms. Nikos and Mr. Arc. I believe they were on a date last night, judging from the security cameras and how they were dressed, anyway. Oh dear, Pyrrha’s identity must have been uncovered somehow. But why are they calling Mr. Arc a rogue?*

Deciding he wanted to get to the bottom of this, Ozpin first sent out a rote response to every shill magazine or reputed news agency that had contacted him on this point. *Good grief, is it such a slow news week that even the better reporters have nothing better to do than celebrity gossip?* Regardless of who it was sent to, the message was the same: Beacon would never share personal information about their students with the public, and certainly not with any news agency. Nor would he allow anyone to come onto school grounds to hound his students. If anyone attempted to do so, he would have their licenses revoked and their equipment confiscated before handing them over to the police for trespassing. *I have two very important reasons of my own to never let such people snoop around. And if I find out they have tried to come here without my permission, I may do far worse.*

With that done and blocking out all further calls and contacts from individuals who had called him for now, Ozpin went digging, watching some of the actual news reports. Even Lisa lavender, a reporter who normally covered serious matters such as Dust thefts, White Fang riots, and gang-related violence, was covering this story. *It really must be a very slow news day.*

He watched the video from the grocery stores security cameras – which had been forwarded by a concerned citizen - pausing and rewinding to the moment before the sprinklers went off several times. Yet he could not detect any sign of Semblance use. With that in mind, he resolved to let Harry get away with using his Semblance in public. *No harm, no foul.*

With his curiosity assuaged as to why they were calling Harry a rogue and what all the fuss was about in the first place, Ozpin set aside any further thoughts on that score. Unlike some of the other teachers, he didn’t particularly care about his students’ love lives unless they affected their ability as Hunters and Huntresses. *Or my own plans going forward, which this will. But I can convince James to choose another student for the project if necessary. Pyrrha would have been a magnificent choice, but she has changed dramatically since the last time Lionheart updated her profile.*

Indeed, some of those changes were quite dramatic. Ozpin had expected a shy, almost unassuming wallflower of a young woman who didn’t really understand how to act beyond being pleasant to everyone outside of a combat scenario. Someone extremely sheltered, lacking in real-world knowledge, who would have been pliable, easily led. What he got was someone who understood the power of her fame but didn’t wish to use it beyond becoming a role model for others, who demanded that anyone who wanted to be beside her met her own high standards. A young woman who had friends and, while still somewhat self-effacing and not quick to put herself forward, did so regardless.

*Mr. Arc is also a question. I still do not know how much he or his sister are involved with what his family is doing. And how much of magic he truly knows or where he got it. He and the others passed the enhanced Initiation with flying colors. They even survived what I believe might have been Salem’s direct influence. But with the destruction of the cameras, I still lack a good enough idea of what Hadrian Arc is capable of. He’s been very careful to limit what he shows in Glynda’s class up to this point… perhaps pairing him against Ms. Schnee would force him to show more? Or one of her teammates? I will have to ask Glynda to set up such a ‘random’ match.*

*As to where he received his magic, I doubt any Arc would willingly be willing to work with Salem, even if she could bestow magic of that nature. He even wields Caliburn. There is something about that blade, something I cannot quite remember…*

At that point, his door opened, and Ozpin returned to the here and now only to groan as he saw Glynda come in carrying a stack of paperwork. “Please, Glynda, spare me. It’s Saturday. Surely just like our students we can afford to take a day off?”

“The difference between being an adult and being a child is that adults rarely get days off,” Glynda retorted, putting the stack of paperwork down.“There are several new requests from freshmen students requesting help to redesign their armor, which I think is excellent. Ms. Nikos and Ms. Rose have done wonders convincing other students they need an upgrade. I’ve also marked down those students who have **not** decided to try to better themselves. We still have two months left in the first semester, but…”

“Of course.” Ozpin agreed. If the students thought that they were at a plateau, already as good as they were going to get and didn’t understand they could at least upgrade their gear or weapons, that was a bad sign of their future prospects. Ozpin would rather expel such students than have them live on and cause issues in the field or tarnish his school's reputation. If the young soldiers of today do not realize the need to continually better themselves to combat Salem and her forces, then they will become a liability in the field.

“By the way, speaking of Ms. Nikos and her team, I will be joining you for lunch, I believe, tomorrow. I wish to ask Mr. Arc about something, and he and Ms. Nikos need to be informed that their relationship has been outed to the public beyond Beacon.”

Glynda rolled her eyes at that before narrowing them and glaring at her boss. “I believe they both understand that was only a matter of time. But whatever you have to talk to Mr. Arc about had better not ruin my chance at more meals from that young man.”

“Is his cooking really that good?” Ozpin wasn’t in epicure by any means, and he knew that Glynda enjoyed the whole dining experience. But even so…

“It is, and the cafeteria food is equally as bad.” Glynda retorted before quickly separating the pile into things that Ozpin only needed to sign, and forms she felt Ozpin should read through. “Now, set aside whatever mystery Mr. Arc represents for you and let us get this done.”

With a sigh, Ozpin did so, still mentally working on the problem of Hadrian Arc and his magic. *Where could it have come from? Perhaps a failsafe of one of the Gods that the God of Light did not deign to tell me of? Or is it something far more prosaic, another remnant of the age of magic that somehow survived? Regardless, I need to know and learn more about Mr. Arc, his abilities, and his motivations.*

**OOOOOOO**

Harry woke up slowly, as was his habit on the weekends. He frowned a bit, feeling himself holding up hello instead of Pyrrha, but shook that mystery off quickly. *She must have gotten up early.* And despite missing the warmth of his bed partner, Harry was fine with that. Indeed, Pyrrha’s drive to improve herself was simply part of her personality, and while he liked a more leisurely weekend, he wasn’t about to quibble. *Not after such a magnificent night, for certain.*

As that thought passed through his head, Harry found himself beaming, getting out of bed with a bounce in his step. Standing there, he did a few exercises to loosen up. Last night had been amazing from beginning to end, and Harry had to shake his head in wonder at how much fun he’d had with Pyrrha in many senses of the word. *So that kind of thing is what the boys back in Hogwarts or Lighthouse were always going on about.*

Despite being famous in his last life, Harry had no experience with the opposite sex beyond the making out point, which was all he had done with Ginny in his past life. He certainly could have had numerous flings, possibly even from the time he got to Hogwarts, let alone later, if he’d wanted to use his fame in such a manner. But Harry never had, not even realizing he could until Ron had pointed it out in one of his better diatribes.

Harry had ignored it at the time, but after the war ended, the idea occurred to him then. But he had never acted on it, not wanting someone who saw him only as the boy-who-lived to get that close to him. So last night had been a revelation on many levels.

Yet as much fun as he had with Pyrrha when their clothes came off, cuddling with her was just as much fun, if in a very different way. And hearing her reaction to her first horror film was politely pointing out in a loud voice in the middle of a crowded theater how such things could be done with Semblances or props was hilarious.

Looking around, Harry smiled tenderly. *Good grief, she’s I even cleaned up in here. Driven, empathic, beautiful, and willing to clean up after me when I’m a slob. I have certainly found a keeper.*

Heading to the bathroom, Harry showered, shaved a bit - something he only needed to do once a week - and headed downstairs, pausing to take in the view. Which had nothing whatsoever to do with the bright sunny day outside.

Pyrrha sat at the counter, a cup of tea sat in front of her, her scroll open as she read something on it, her eyes flicking across the board quickly. Pyrrha’s hair was wet from her shower, falling straight down her back and shoulders, her normal tiara resting nearby rather than on her head at the moment. She wore a generic bathrobe, the whiteness of it contrasting with Pyrrha’s healthy tanned skin, open at the top to let an indecorous amount of her chest open for his viewing pleasure.

Harry stood there for a moment just looking at her, then moved down the stairs quietly, surprising Pyrrha when he arrived, putting his arms around her. She jumped a little, then relaxed as Harry breathed into her ear. “You are so beautiful…”

Pyrrha hummed happily in his arms, leaning her head sideways to let Harry kiss along her neck, causing her to shiver for a moment before capturing his lips with her own. Between kisses, Harry thanked her for cleaning up after them last night, especially the desert, as that would save him trouble on Sunday.

With some reluctance, he pulled away, leaning his forehead against Pyrrha’s. “Does My Lady have any requests for breakfast?”

“My Lord’s presence is enough of a boon,” Pyrrha answered with a laugh, kissing him once more before pushing him away. “However, we did send a message to Nora and ran before falling asleep last night that they should come over.” She looked a little worried for a moment staring down at herself. “I must admit, I had forgotten that I didn’t bring along a change of clothing.”

“Why don’t you wear the jeans from last night, then?”

“Because I’ve already worn them, obviously,” Pyrrha frowned in confusion, not understanding what Harry was saying.

“They’re jeans,” Harry answered blankly. “And it isn’t like you were out in the woods or anything like that. Why would they need washing? I’ve gone weeks without washing mine.”

Pyrrha shuddered and not in pleasure this time. “That is such a boy response! Suffice it to say, Harry, that girls don’t think like that.”

“Then put on the hoodie from last night. You were wearing a shirt underneath it, so it isn’t like it got dirty or anything.” With that, Harry turned and headed into the kitchen, and Pyrrha reluctantly headed back up to the room, pulling on her hoodie. Pyrrha had worn a shirt underneath it, after all. She refused to do the same with her jeans, reasoning that there’d already been a few bathroom incidents within the team, and the hoodie covered her down to midthigh.

She came down to the amazing smell of Harry cooking breakfast for them and the rest of their team. Sausages, pancakes for Nora, and hashbrowns for her and Ren. They had discovered they both enjoyed much the same breakfast meals. Pyrrha sat back down when Harry waved off her offer of help, pulling out her scroll and beginning to read again, looking up occasionally as Harry went about the business in the kitchen, catching his eye as he looked at her, the two of them exchanging smiles.

At around eleven, the doors began to bang as if someone was taking a hammer to them. “Which I rather hope is not the case. We’d have to pay for the damages.”

Giggling, Pyrrha got up and had to the door, opening it with a smile on her face so bright that Yang, one of the people on the other side of the door, joked instantly, “Holy hell girl, I didn’t think I’d need my sunglasses inside this morning! That smile of yours would be a perfect anti-Grimm weapon.”

“Oh yeah…someone had fun last night!” Nora agreed, hopping forward and tossing Magnhild negligently over her shoulder where Ren hastily grabbed it as Nora hugged Pyrrha before pushing her way, a mock-serious look on her face. “Now, do I have to have a talk with Harry? He didn’t push you into anything you didn’t want to do, did he? I hope I raised him better than…”

She paused as Tia reached up the back of her head, gripping it lightly but very firmly. “No.” Harry’s twin said coldly. But even as she stopped Nora’s joke in its track, Tia’s eyes were locked on Pyrrha, an unfamiliar feeling going through her at the site of the other girl. It was quite confusing to Tia, beyond the idea that she wanted to smash Pyrrha’s face in. *I like Pyrrha, so what is this feeling?*

Pyrrha didn’t notice Tia’s scrutiny, busy fending off ribald questions from Yang as best a thoroughly blushing and sheltered girl could. Behind Yang, Weiss and Sung-Sun both looked on. While Sung-Sun was looking between Pyrrha and Harry with interest plain on her face, Weiss’s expression was a mixture of curiosity and embarrassed horror. Finally, Yang stopped talking for a moment, and Ren asked politely, “Do you need us to come back later?”

Thankfully Pyrrha looked over Yang’s shoulder at him, noticing that the only boy among them was looking away. “Oh, no. We um, weren’t er, doing anything. I just forgot to bring along a change of clothing, that’s all. I wasn’t about to put on my jeans from last night.”

All the girls there nodded at that, while Ren simply looked blank, and Pyrrha rolled her eyes, waving at the man.

They passed Harry in the kitchen, where Pyrrha paused. Feeling greatly daring, she hugged Harry from behind. “I hope you made enough for three extras. Tia, Yang and Weiss are here. Although why they are here, I don’t know.”

“There was a book sale in Vale that Blake wanted to go to, and Ruby got into her head that doing a cross-partner bonding exercise was a good idea,” Yang answered, taking in the view for a moment and answering absolutely no part of Pyrrha’s question.

Although Harry had put on his jeans from last night - unlike Pyrrha - he hadn’t put on a shirt, like Pyrrha, having not anticipated they’d get other visitors that morning, save perhaps his sister. Who had certainly seen him in far less. Now he was regretting that choice.

Staring at Harry’s well-muscled, perfectly toned back and side, Yang had to stop herself from whistling, instead biting her lip at the strange mix of homeliness and sensuality on display both. *Fuck me, and I thought P-money alone was sexy. This is like a double-whammy of sexiness… and that’s the first time I’ve ever thought something in a freaking kitchen could be sexy. I don’t know what to think about that. Ugh, it’s like thinking your parents could be sexy… nOOOOOOOOOO….*

While Yang had her existential crises beside her, Weiss also blushed a little as she took in the view. She was utterly unused to such scenes. Her family wasn’t exactly full of warmth at the best of times, and none of her family had ever learned how to cook for themselves as far as she knew. But the sight of a man cooking a meal for her… or rather Pyrrha and the rest of them as mere add-ons, was… **intriguing**.

Feeling Yang’s eyes on her and Harry, Pyrrha continued to hug Harry from behind, staring hard at Yang. *Now that our relationship is out in the open, I can finally stop Yang from flirting with him!* “No. Bad Yang. Get your own.” She finished this by reaching out and bopping Yang on the nose.

Yang sputtered at that. “I…urh…”

“Hah, she’s got you there, Yang!” Nora cackled as she sat down, gleefully anticipating tasting Harry’s pancakes. Beside her, Ren simply shook his head. Moving around the others, he entered the kitchen and began making them all tea.

Tia simply stared. Her face, what was visible above her scarf, was unreadable for a moment to any of the others. Even if they had been looking at her eyes, it was doubtful that any but Harry would’ve seen the turmoil within. Tia’s general approval of Pyrrha, and her friendship with the girl, were warring against some new motion, some new fear that was going through her like a freight train.

She stood there like a statue as the others chattered, and Harry finished breakfast, with Pyrrha helping him bring it all to the table, which Nora had already set up for them all. Tia still stood there as Yang regained her equilibrium. After a promise not to flirt with Harry, she began to ply Pyrrha with questions about the date, her eyebrows waggling suggestively, so much so that Weiss smacked her on the shoulder several times to try to get her to stop.

For her part, Pyrrha’s earlier courage had evaporated. Now she pulled her hood down over her face, looking away.

Harry noticed Tia’s stasis the moment he turned around. Leaving Ren to carry the food was on the table, he looked at his sister with some concern, moving over to her. “Tia? Are you okay?”

Tia shook her head, but when Harry was within reach, she pulled him to her, hugging him tightly. Harry returned the gesture as he looked at her in confusion. “Seriously, are you alright?”

“Jag vet inte (I don’t know),” Tia spoke in Swedish instead of the more common English. “It’s just seeing you like this, seeing you around Pyrrha like this… she won’t take you away from me, will she?”

Harry blinked, then remembered Tia’s concerns about Pyrrha after their first night sleeping at Beacon. Something about seeing Pyrrha and Harry the morning after their first real date must have triggered Tia to come back to that point. “Nej (no)! I wouldn’t let Pyrrha take me away from you even if she tried, which she won’t, and you know it. We’re family, Tia. That’s never going to change, even if I’m in a relationship,” he answered in the same language ignoring the confused looks the two of them were getting from the others.

Tia was silent for a moment, the idea that being Harry’s twin wasn’t enough going through her mind for the first time. But she banished it almost instantly, along with the accompanying image of Harry cooking for Tia as she wore the same clothing as Pyrrha, the same look in Tia’s eyes. That was strange since Harry had cooked for Tia numerous times over the years. *Heck, that’s why he and Pyrrha first met!*

And I’ve seen him in far less clothing. Setting that image aside as simply a strangely random thought, Tia concentrated on the most important thing: Harry’s words. “Promise?”

“I promise,” Harry said firmly. “Whatever my relationship with Pyrrha develops into, I won’t let it affect your and my relationship.”

Tia finally smiled at that underneath her scarf. She released an arm from around Harry to reach up and pull her scarf to one side before leaning in to give him a kiss on the cheek. “Good.”

Harry laughed at that, pulling out of the hug as he said in English, “Although, shouldn’t I also be requiring a demand from you, Tia? After all, eventually, you might get a boyfriend. Or a girlfriend. I’m not judging.”

Tia shook her head. Letting her scarf rest below her chin for a second more she let Harry see the sneer she wore at the idea before pulling it back over her mouth as she moved to the table with Harry. There, Tia pulled Pyrrha into a hug, hugging the redhead with enough force to make a normal person without Aura scream for mercy. As it was, Pyrrha still felt the air leave her lungs for a second as her Aura threatened to pop. “You hurt him, and I will tear you apart,” Tia warned, her monotone words giving them even more weight than shouting them would have.

Pyrrha chuckled at that and hugged Tia back. “I can’t say we won’t ever hurt one another’s feelings. Relationships aren’t all sunshine and butterflies. But I won’t ever deliberately hurt him, Tia. Outside of sparring anyway,” she added with a louder laugh.

Tia pulled back and looked into Pyrrha’s eyes, still feeling that strange unknown feeling, although it had decreased significantly with Harry’s touch and his words. Now she looked into Pyrrha’s face and nodded before leaning forward and whispering through her scarf into Pyrrha’s ear, “Welcome to the family.”

Pyrrha bit her lip, blushing rosily but trying to keep herself from squealing in joy at what was a major endorsement for her and Harry’s relationship going forward. This wasn’t hurt at all by the fact that Pyrrha had come to almost love the Arcs as a whole during her time talking back and forth with Harry over their scrolls.

Unfortunately, Tia wasn’t quite as silent as she should have been. Sung-Sun chortled behind a raised sleeve, shaking her head from side to side as she looked over at Harry. “My my, have you proposed already, then? Welcome to the family, indeed. You worked quite quickly, Hadrian Arc.”

“You dog! I’ve heard songs about putting a ring on it, but after only one official date?” Yang teased.

Harry blushed at that, while Pyrrha did much the same, pulling away from Tia as the two turned their attention to the food. “If the both of you don’t stop teasing, I won’t cook for you again,” He warned, causing both Sung-Sun and Yang to shut up. “I will note that you and Tia seem to have switched partners, Sung-Sun.”

Sung-Sun grumbled a bit, shaking her head but turning her attention to a more serious topic while Yang moaned about how Harry was being cruel and unusual. “We have, in fact. The two of us have decided to make that a semi-permanent arrangement. Whether or not Mila and Apacci will screw or fight is an hourly question, and it is an equation that Tia and I have decided to remove ourselves from. Besides, I wanted to ask you some questions about team exercises and cross-team training.”

Harry looked over at Tia, one eyebrow rising, his hand fluttering up and down as if indicating two different levels, and Tia nodded, shrugging her shoulders minutely.

Seeing this moment of nonverbal communication, Pyrrha bit down on her lip as a tiny spike of jealousy went through her. Harry and Tia were so close and understood one another so well! *But they are twins, Pyrrha, remember that. They’ve had their entire lives to get used to one another’s ways. You’ve only been friends with Harry for less than a year and dating in person for less than a month. You’ll get there. You just have to understand that Tia is very close to him, and so long as she doesn’t butt into romance-specific time, that is fine.*

“I take it you want to give the troublesome duo a bit of a wake-up call, convince them to push themselves harder?”

“Yes and no. Apacci and Mila take training seriously, but Apacci is so prickly that getting him to take on suggestions in any form is difficult. Mila Rose isn’t so difficult to work with but has something of a lazy mindset when it comes to trying to better herself outside of her specialties.” Like Yang and Tia, Mila was a power-type close-range fighter, but she was far more limited at range then Tia was, although her rifle gauntlet gave her a slight range advantage in comparison to Ember Celica, and her mace did a bit more damage in comparison to a punch from Yang. At least when the blonde wasn’t using her Semblance, anyway.

“I recently began putting my team through a series of training exercises, and I want both of them to build better weapons for themselves, or commission ones. Mila also needs better armor, and my own Huntress outfit could use quite a bit of work. Not everyone has the advantage of a family who can trace their Hunter ancestry back for generations after all.”

“You never have explained what your family does,” Harry pointed out. The light jibe at how their family had given Harry and Tia a leg up in many areas that most would have struggled with washed off him like water off a Grimm’s back.

Sung-Sun chuckled but didn’t answer the question. “Thus, I think I need some advice on team training, and, if that doesn’t work, I might want to set up a team-on-team spar. Either with team RWBY or Team ANVL. I don’t want my team to just skate by. If we try that, Beacon will eventually expel us. We need to excel.”

Harry nodded and held up his scroll. “Well, have you thought about…”

A second later, the two team leaders were in deep discussion while the other girls and Ren chattered around them. That conversation took up most of the breakfast, by the end of which Tia and Sung-Sun had agreed to hang out with Harry and his team and Yang and Weiss for the rest of the day, exploring the grounds further, while Weiss also agreed to help pay for the food, so long as she and her team had a standing invitation to join Team ANVL once a week or so for food.

Later that day, Yang and Tia left for Vale with Weiss, where they purchased a few more things for the townhome, which Harry ruefully noted, was being turned into a kind of hang out for the group of teens as well as the home for Team ANVL. He was fine with that, though, as were the others of Team ANVL.

The next day found Team ANVL and their acquaintances having a somewhat leisurely morning due to a major rainstorm that settled over Beacon and Vale. The various training grounds weren’t all roofed, and the older grades got priority for using them on days like this. This left ANVL, ARGT and RWBY to their own devices.

Team Ruby had decided to go into Vale. Tia and her team had been roped into helping professor Port capture a few Grimm for next week’s classes. As strange as that might seem, there wasn’t any great mystery about how that had happened.

That morning, Tia and Sung-Sun had tried to get in a quick spar with their team before the rain hit. This was a follow-on to Sung-Sun’s conversation with Harry the day before and her desire to force Mila and Apacci to start thinking about new ways to better themselves and their equipment.

Sung-Sun had gotten her team up, out the door and had been on their way to the training center when Professor Port spotted them. “Excellent. I do so enjoy seeing young Hunters and Huntresses taking their training seriously. It brings me back to my own school years. Indeed, seeing you dare the weather like this, your drive to push yourselves, I would be remiss if I did not give you a chance to excel.”

Port was a vision that day, wearing a massive raincoat that looked like it could make do as a tent, his blunder-axe on his shoulder. He held a series of cattle prods and nets in one hand.

“Damn, professor, you look like you’re ready for a war,” Apacci said while Tia and Mila took a step back. That sounded far too much to both of them, as if they were about to be volunteered for something. “What could you need our help with? And um… it isn’t going to be more paperwork or anything, right?”

“Hahaha, never fear, never fear!” Port Guffawed. “I’m not going to assign you more paperwork or anything of that nature. I fully understand how energetic young Hunters should be. No, instead, you all will come with me. I need to capture more grimm for this coming week’s classes.”

The professor smiled happily and slapped Apacci and Sung-Sun on the shoulders, nearly sending them to their knees. “Why, with four young helpers, I might be able to bring in something really special this time. And you’ll earn yourselves some extra credit. Come to the bullheads. To adventure! This reminds me of a time I helped old professor Aqua. Now, she was a card. Let me tell you, I…”

With Professor Port shimmying them on, the four members of team ARGT had no chance to escape.

This and RWBY’s decision to head into Vale allowed Team ANVL to spend the rest of their day in their new townhome without the need to play host.

Ren spent most of the morning redecorating his room very subtly. A student of Feng Shui, he moved a few pieces of furniture very slightly before putting up posters in carefully calculated places. One, on the interior wall, was of a nighttime sky of all things. Another on the outer wall was of a rock garden in the daytime.

In contrast to her bestie, Nora’s decorating was far more haphazard. She put up several posters of different bands and then removed her dresser entirely. She replaced it with the bed table from Ren’s room, something the two of them argued about for nearly half an hour, surprising Harry and Pyrrha. Both of them had thought Ren would have given in quickly, but it took Nora a while to wear him down. The spare dress was placed in the main room under the large TV Weiss had bought as a bribe to have more access to Harry and Ren’s cooking.

Meanwhile, Pyrrha and Harry decided that their relationship wasn’t to the point where they would be comfortable sleeping in the same bed every night. So, they had their own rooms, although neither really did much with them. Harry had never been into decorating, and Pyrrha struggled with the idea, the two of them standing in the bedroom door and staring inside at the small spare area.

“I really don’t have my own style regarding furniture or anything like that. I suppose I had a typical girl's style or a typical young Monomáchos in training when I was younger. I still have a few knives and teddy bears from when I was younger, including this one large teddy bear. I remember it looks almost like a zombie because it’s been all patched up and put together from different ones,” Pyrrha opined, looking a bit lost. “But I never really replaced all my childhood things with teenage things when I got to that stage, you know? I had a few paintings that my parents put in my room, my trophies. And… although it sounds quite cringe-inducing now that I think of it…” Pyrrha winced. “The first poster featured me from my time in the arena.”

“Did you put that up?” Harry asked, also making a face. *I can see the point of putting up a picture of you plus your family or your girlfriend.* *But a poster? A poster of just yourself? No.*

“My father put it up when we came home from my victory over your sister. At the time, I was so elated with my victory that I didn’t protest. And admittedly, that was only the start of my life in the spotlight, so it seemed more of a keepsake than anything else. But I did eventually come to dislike it quite a bit,” Pyrrha admitted with an embarrassed look.

“Eh, you should have led with it being from when you beat my sister. That’s definitely something to be proud of,” Harry winked at her. “Probably not to the point of putting up a poster showing just yourself making a pose, though.”

Now even more embarrassed, Pyrrha punched Harry gently on the shoulder before looking back into her bedroom. “Regardless, that leaves me with little in the way of ideas about what to do here.”

“Eh, I’d keep the dresser. Beyond that, I don’t really have much beyond a few pictures of my family to put up myself. You could hang your weapons somewhere if you wanted them on hand. Beyond that, I’d say do something about the bed or the blankets, and that’ll be enough. That’s what I’m doing in mine.”

“Hmm…” Pyrrha bit her lip for a moment, then asked hesitantly. “Um, Tia helped Ruby and Weiss put up real bunk beds in their dorm room. Do you think you could help me do the opposite? Er, I mean, setting up a hammock like the type Ruby used before? A real one that is not just handing the bed by a rope.”

Harry blinked, then looked at the walls and the size of the room for a moment. “Sure. We can do that.”

This took them a while because by the time they had figured out a plan, Nora wanted one for herself. “Oh, heck yea! Sloths sleep like they’re living hammocks, and this idea makes it sound like I can transform into one!”

That made no sense to anyone not named Nora, but it, that simply meant Nora and Harry had to buy two of all the supplies they needed while Ren went back to his calculations and Pyrrha retrieved her weapons. By the end of the morning, the girls of Team ANVL had their hammocks. These were not the haphazard affair Ruby had enjoyed. These were real hanging hammocks, hanging between the inner and outer walls by four points rather than the normal two. This way, they rocked a bit from side to side, but not a lot, and they were easier to get out of. Further, the bottom was made of a net, followed by a thick, almost futon-like mattress. The result wasn’t something Harry would enjoy using day to day, but Pyrrha was extremely satisfied, and as Harry and Ren headed downstairs to start lunch, Nora was already swinging on her bed.

When the doorbell rang an hour later, Pyrrha quickly moved to open it, finding the two professors there, with professor Goodwitch having been the one to knock. Ozpin’s hands were full, one with his cane, the other with his ever-present coffee mug. *He drinks almost as much coffee as Professor Oobleck. Odd, could he be just as addicted?* “Professors, good afternoon. Please, come in.”

“Thank you, Ms. Nikos,” Ozpin said, nodding pleasantly at the girl. “But before we sit down, could I have a moment of yours and Mr. Arc’s time? Best to get the official reason for my being here over with quickly.”

Pyrrha’s brows for out at that then shrugged her shoulders, and Harry quickly joined her, leaving Ren to take over dishing out the food. As it was lunch, albeit a late one, it wasn’t anything too heavy, an extremely tasty pasta salad to go with sandwiches. For those who wanted any dessert was the cherry and chocolate ganache from Harry and Pyrrha’s date. Harry took a moment to point out to professor Goodwitch the small bowl of dessert for professor Peach in the fridge before joining Pyrrha and Professor Ozpin in a corner of the main room. It wasn’t so large that it really gave them any real privacy, but it at least gave them an illusion of it.

“You wanted to speak to us, professor?” Harry asked.

“I did. I regret to inform you that your fame seems to have had its normal impact, Ms. Nikos. The two of you were recorded on your date last night. Specifically, someone was able to trace back your meanderings after the incident at the grocery store and discovered your brief moments of affection towards one another,” Ozpin drawled, shaking his head. “And alas for you and my inbox, it was a very slow weekend in terms of actual news.”

Pyrrha winced at that, shaking her head. “I wish my fans had the common sense needed to understand that I have a right to a private life, but…” Her eyes widened, and she hastily reached into one of her pockets. She was currently wearing another pair of jeans, baggier than the ones she’d worn on her date, and a nice blouse. “Oh, do you want us to transfer some money to the grocery store to pay for anything damaged by the sprinklers going off like they did?”

“Not at all. After all, you weren’t responsible for it, were you?” Ozpin answered with a smirk. Harry had made no effort to own up to anything to do with the distraction that allowed their escape, simply shaking his head and touching Pyrrha’s hand gently as Ozpin went on. “No, I simply wanted to warn you that you need to be a little more careful if you wish to go around incognito from now on, and you and Harry will no doubt be very much the topic of interest among your fellow students tomorrow when classes resume.”

“Thank you for the heads up, professor, although I doubt that telling us about it is the sole reason you wanted to talk to us,” Harry said slowly, gazing at the somewhat enigmatic Ozpin.

Ozpin sipped at his coffee mug, thinking to himself, *Yes, indeed, those are quite old eyes, Hadrian arc. I wonder what you have seen in your life to give you such eyes?* “No, it was not, although the topic alas remains the same. This morning, Ms. Nikos’s parents contacted me, demanding that I separate the two of you. Of course, I told them no, that I have no say in student relationships. But they were most insistent and threatened to pull you from the school. Of course, as you are eighteen, that is a useless threat, but it doesn’t seem to be stopping them. If you could do something to ensure that your parents do not continue to badger the school in general or me, I would appreciate it.”

“That’s right, I **am** an adult professor. I’m sorry, and I will also apologize to my parents for not telling them about Harry. But I am here of my own will and will not leave on their say-so. Their attitude toward my having a boyfriend makes me regret that. I am deeply sorry that they went to the effort of trying to pressure you, though,” Pyrrha answered, embarrassed for the second time that afternoon if for an entirely different and wholly unwanted reason. “I’ll call them after lunch is over.”

Harry touched her shoulder gently, giving her wordless support. He wasn’t about to butt in on a family matter, but he would be there to support her when she called home. “Don’t worry, I’ll hold your hand so you don’t backslide,” he teased and promised in a single sentence.

Pyrrha understood that he would support her despite the joking tone of his words and smiled at him. “I think I would like that.”

Ozpin hid his own smile behind his coffee mug, sipping at it, then decided to bring up the real reason why he’d wanted to meet with Harry. “The other reason I wished to join Glynda for this meal was that I had heard curious rumors. Rumors about Evig Låga actually spreading its borders. That is rarely a good idea without significant government backing and Huntsman help. I even heard rumors from Professor Lionheart that a new mining complex that Evig Låga funded was able to turn back a Grimm migration recently. I was hoping you could tell me why Evig Låga was doing so.”

*And in so doing, give me a better idea of your powers and your personality,* Ozpin added mentally. *After all, I can hardly come out and tell him I know his Semblance is simply magic rather than a Semblance.*

Gesturing with one hand to the table, Harry bought himself some time to think about that question. Since their first meeting, he hadn’t seen Ozpin at all, but even that brief meeting was enough to make Harry get serious Dumbledore vibes from the man. *And Mom and Dad both had much the same impression. I don’t want to give him any more information than I need to. I am not going to be used again!*

Thus, deciding not to inform Professor Ozpin of everything going on, Harry gave a brief outline of how Rasputin Violette, the bat faunus had come to live with his extended family in Evig Låga and how the Arcs had heard of the young man’s abilities. How with the help of Rasputin’s skills, they had found the Fire Dust and then begun to bring in miners. Harry didn’t downplay his own role in things. After all, Ozpin mostly knew about his so-called Semblance already. He did hide how much Harry had been the driving force behind the decision to expand, to organize the mine and the expansion. Instead, Harry made it seem like he was simply helping with everything as best as his Semblance allowed.

Alas, Pyrrha gave the game away with her constant glances in Harry’s direction. But even without that, Ozpin could read Harry’s body language enough to know Harry wasn’t telling him everything, but he was telling enough. *So, this is the start of a long-term project. And Harry Arc is rather passionate about it and about fighting the Grimm. Good. He is also quite intelligent and gives more than enough hints to prove that his ‘Semblance’ is more than it seems to those who know where to look. From here, I will need to probe the real extent of his magic, which Glynda will do for me. And to discover the source of it. Which I must do myself. If Harry will not share, I will need to look elsewhere.*

For now, he decided to continue to learn about Harry’s personality. “Fascinating. However, I will warn you that expanding in such a manner is always tricky. And there are always more Grimm than you think. How are you defending the mines? How many Hunters can Evig Låga afford to employ long-term? These are questions that must be answered.”

“You don’t need to be a Hunter to man a wall, professor. And so long as we remember that we shouldn’t treat them as animals, solutions can be found for the Grimm,” Harry answered.

“You don’t consider the Grimm simple animals? Why is that?” Ozpin asked, setting his fork down after having a bite of the pasta salad. It was quite tasty, and he admitted probably better fare than what could be had at the cafeteria. Although he still didn’t think it was as impressive as Glynda had made it out to be. *Still, little could be done to sandwiches and a pasta salad to make them better.*

Glynda might well have argued that point if she wasn’t busy eating. After all, it was known that enough coffee rotted the taste buds.

“Animals leave corpses, professor. Grimm don’t. Further, while many Grimm do act like the animals they sometimes resemble, when you put Grimm together, that goes away.” Harry shook his head. “I’ve also done the research. While the four kingdoms are as populous as they have ever been since the Great War, on the whole, humanity is still losing ground to the Grimm every few years. A Hamlet goes silent there, a village there, and humanity is the weaker for it.”

“All the more reason to not expand,” Ozpin answered mildly, smiling internally at Harry’s passion. *A young man’s intemperate passion, to be sure, but at least it is directed at the right target. I could wish that was true more often. Still, he obviously does not know the full scale of the threat.*

“Which gives up more land to the Grimm. No professor. Humanity must expand. We **must** reclaim land from the Grimm. We must be wary of our enemy but not let that fear dictate our actions. And we must not blind ourselves to reality as all too many people do to the world beyond the walls of the four city-states,” Harry answered, his tone becoming even more passionate.

“I see. That is an intriguing way to look at things. Although, what do you mean by ‘wall’?” Ozpin asked, suddenly going back to the original portion of the conversation, trying to discern more of Harry’s abilities.

Harry explained about the walls around the mine he had raised and the various trenches beyond. A defense in depth like that was interesting to Ozpin, but he pointed out that it wouldn’t work for very long. The Grimm would bring in more flyers. “While the nature of the surrounding territory cannot support flyers for overlong, that will not stop the Grimm if the Grimm sense enough fear to cause them to attack in the first place.”

“You make Grimm almost sound intelligent professor, able to plan ahead like that? As far as I know, even S-class Grimm can’t plan to bring in more Grimm beyond a certain distance. A distance measured in miles instead of hundreds of miles as it would need to be in this case,” Harry said, frowning slightly at the older man. *Does he know something about the Grimm he’s not telling anyone? What could it be?*

“Normally, that would be the case. But when S-class Grimm work together, their presence creates a resonance. Their commands, the impression upon the world such Grimm create expands more, bringing further Grimm. I have known Grimm to fly more than a hundred leagues to take part in an assault, led by multiple S-class Grimm, or when the target was fearful enough,” Ozpin answered, deflecting with the ease of long practice.

The world was not ready to know that a mind was guiding the Grimm. And as impressive as what the Arcs were doing, Harry was young yet. He might have guessed quite a bit about the Grimm, but Ozpin doubted that he would be able to deal with the fact that the Grimm could be led and controlled by Salem. Or that she had instigated the destruction of the world that had resulted in magic, mostly leaving the world behind with the gods.

“That is what Arturia and other Hunters are for. To take out the leaders if they can, to give advance warning when they can’t. And as long as our people don’t give in to fear, and we are prepared, I think we can handle an assault three or four times the size that Arturia and my uncle defeated this time.”

The certainty and Harry’s voice took Ozpin aback for a moment, but upon reflection, he decided to put it down to youthful ignorance. *Or perhaps a brother’s certainty in his older sister’s abilities. Arturia is one of the most dangerous Huntresses that we’ve ever graduated.* “That could work, although it will be exceedingly dangerous. Regardless, I can only applaud the courage to try. I just hope that your family is willing to cut their losses if it proves to be untenable. Beacon and I will stand ready to give whatever aid we can.”

Harry nodded, hiding a grimace inside with all the experience of a lifetime of keeping his troubles to himself and this lifetime’s training in keeping certain thoughts out of his face growing up with Tia and Arturia. *Surprising what kind of training you can turn to other goals, isn’t it?* “Thank you, professor. I’ll be sure to pass that on.”

Something about that rang false to Ozpin’s senses, but he couldn’t figure out if it was that Harry well knew any aid from Beacon would come too late or something else. He took another sip of coffee, wondering where to direct the conversation now. But before he could, Glynda interrupted. “Now that you have finished interrogating Mr. Arc about what his family is up to, Professor Ozpin, perhaps I can get to the reason why I am here? Beyond the excellent food he provided any rate,” Glynda said, having already polished off her own sandwich, whereas Ozpin had yet to touch his.

It was not a simple sandwich. Rather, it was perhaps the best she’d had in a year or more, a chicken BLT, with something done to the bacon to give it an extra smoky flavor. And instead of mustard or mayonnaise, Harry had made a sauce that made the entire sandwich practically sing. All of which only made her more determined to give Harry the one-on-one instruction he had requested for his Semblance and had so willingly paid for.

“Certainly, Glynda. I apologize for monopolizing Mr. Arc. Tell me, Ms. Valkyrie, given your personality, I can understand why you chose a hammer as a weapon, but why did you decide on having both a polearm variant and a short-shafted variant?” Ozpin answered, shifting to talking to Nora and Ren with these while Pyrrha ate her food, taking part occasionally in both conversations.

Glynda explained to Harry what the training would consist of and when they would meet during the week. It began as a bland discussion, but then they segued into what kind of abilities Harry’s Semblance gave him, with Harry plying Glynda with questions about her training while younger, as well as her role on whatever team she had been a part of.

Later, after the two teachers left and the rain had let up, the group of four teens decided to head to the gym since Harry doubted they would be able to get into any of the training zones regardless of the weather turning better. As they walked, Pyrrha nudged Harry in the shoulder with her own. “Is there a reason why you didn’t tell Professor Ozpin about your role as a leader in everything going on with your plans in Evig Låga? Or how most of your citizens will have their Aura awakened as a part of becoming a citizen?”

“The second one is easy. The governments of the city-states don’t like it when normal people have their Aura unlocked. It makes dealing with crimes much harder if more people have access to their Auras. As Headmaster here in Beacon, Professor Ozpin would have to toe the official party line, whatever he might think. And they’ve got a point. I know my parents and the council are worried about it. But I feel the added security against the Grimm is worth it, and so far, that opinion has kept that aspect of everything going.”

Pyrrha nodded thoughtfully, and Harry went on, watching Ren and Nora ahead of them. Ren had turned in their direction, obviously listening in but making no effort to join or give his opinion about what he had overheard. By this point, Harry knew Ren and Nora had overheard enough discussion to know Harry was more involved in Evig Låga’s decision to expand than he let on and that his Semblance was also more than it was listed as. But neither of them had asked any questions yet.

“As for the first? For one thing, Ozpin certainly isn’t in a position to help us. He could convince a few alumni to take on a job for Evig Låga, but we’d have to start paying them. Unlike with Arturia, my parents, uncle or their old friends.”

Pyrrha giggled at that, nodding. She understood that Arturia’s payment for staying home was simply to be there, and a part of her envied that. Indeed, a part of her envied the entire Arc family. She would have loved to have been born into a large family like that to grow up with friends. “And for the other thing? You said that was only part of your reason.”

“My parents don’t like him,” Harry answered bluntly. “They respect Ozpin’s ability as a Hunter and as Headmaster. But they don’t trust him, and after meeting and talking with the man, I can agree with them. I don’t know why, but… Well, I get the impression that he’s keeping a lot to himself. He also doesn’t seem to listen to other people very much, which is a bad sign in a leader of any sort. Beyond that, it’s hard to describe, but he doesn’t really fill me with trust, you know?”

He became more serious then. “And at the moment, the last thing Evig Låga needs is Mistral and the other city-states to become aware of the scale of our goals. Right now, we can get weapons and stuff on the black market. We can bring in more pioneers and miners so long as they can pay for transportation since we’re so far away from Mistral proper. But the moment it becomes clear we’re building up so much, the taxmen, the lawmakers and Mistrali pride come into play. I don’t know what happens then, and can’t really do anything about it either.”

Pyrrha thought about it for a few moments, then shrugged. Really, she hadn’t interacted with the headmaster long enough to get a read for him, and if the Arc parents had, she was willing to go along with their opinion. The fact that Harry’s own opinion seems to be inclining in that direction was also telling.

“I also think the headmaster likes to be a bit too mysterious,” Ren murmured, causing Pyrrha and Harry to look at him. “Responding in like kind is appropriate. But your teammates should also be informed of what you are up to, Harry. It sounds quite fascinating.”

When Harry looked at Ren, he and Nora had both stopped, looking back at Harry with interest. “Yeah, yeah, what are you up to in Evig Låga, fearless leader?”

Harry and Ren locked gazes for a moment, then as Harry cocked his head in question, Ren nodded firmly. Nodding in turn, Harry smiled and gestured them over to a nearby bench. “Well… what you overheard before is mostly true. The big differences are in the size of what we’re up to and my part in it…”

By the end of that conversation, Harry had two more converts, and the team as a whole had agreed to join the ongoing efforts in Evig Låga. And he had to stop all his teammates from calling him ‘King’ as Pyrrha sometimes did.

Pyrrha’s argument later that night was not nearly as pleasant. Both her parents demanded she cut off her relationship with Harry. In fact, they demanded she request a transfer to an all-girl team. It seemed as if the ‘Virginal goddess’ part of her public image was far more important than Pyrrha had thought. It had taken a nick when she had been, in her mother’s words, “Badly scarred by the Dark Queen when you pushed so hard to win that fight. Obviously, I’m happy you won, but even so…”

But with Harry there offscreen squeezing her hand in support, Pyrrha had refused. And, when her parents threatened to come to Beacon and “Sort this out in person!” she had ended the discussion abruptly by dropping the bombshell of her Shield Oath to Harry. They were still very unhappy about it, but both her parents came from old-time Hunter families. If Pyrrha had given Harry an oath like that, they couldn’t tell her to leave his side.

Of course, that was almost entirely separate from the idea of Pyrrha being in a relationship with Harry. Her father tried to call this an abuse of authority, but Pyrrha shot that down too. “Harry and I were semi-dating online long before we met again here in Beacon, and he and I had agreed to date almost immediately upon the start of Initiation. Before I gave him my Oath, father. And if you think I would become a órkos aspídas to anyone who would abuse their position like that, then you obviously have even less respect for my opinions than this entire conversation indicates!”

The smile this won her from Harry was almost enough to cause Pyrrha to beam back, giving his presence away. But it didn’t, and the conversation soon ended, with Pyrrha’s parents still unhappy she was romantically involved with someone. But Pyrrha bore that disapproval with disdain and eventually ended the call. If in the future, her parents wished to try and mend the bridges they had set on fire so comprehensively over the past year, that was on them. Pyrrha wasn’t going to make the first move there.

The night did end on a better note for Harry, at least when he received an email from Arturia. She was currently busy defending some of the survey teams as they did a more in-depth survey of the area. But next weekend, she was free and wanted to use the time to come and see Harry and Tia at Beacon. Harry quickly replied that he would be stocking up on food and was looking forward to seeing her in person.

**OOOOOOO**

The work week began and for the students at Beacon, the grind resumed like clockwork. Team ARGT slowly seemed to be finally coming together, if only at near sword point, while Team RWBY and Team ANVL continued to come together in a more peaceful fashion.

At the same time, the rest of the student body woke up to the reality that Pyrrha Nikos and Harry Arc were going out. For many this was not worth commenting on, while others, fans of Pyrrha, were bitterly angry. Part of her mythos was being an untouchable virginal Goddess of Victory. This meant, mostly, that she couldn’t be going out with anyone but the fan in question, so there was quite a bit of anger directed Harry’s way.

Apacci seemed to fall in this category, despite never having tried his hand at flirting with her. A few older boys who had tried to flirt with Pyrrha were noticeably annoyed but learning of the fact that she and Harry had basically been online dating for a while soothed their fragile egos. Cardin also seemed like he was angry about it, but why that was when he’d flirted with every girl in the grade beyond Ruby and Pyrrha (not well and save for Mila he’d never received anything even remotely positive) Harry had no idea. He tried to ‘rebound’ by flirting with Tia, who ignored him as always, making him even more annoying when they had to interact with him in class or passing him in the halls.

But by Wednesday, the furor had died down. The portion of the student population who were romantics, of which there was a majority, felt the two of them were an immensely cute couple. The fact Harry was one of the better fighters in the grade also cut down on any resentment some might have felt at him ‘winning the lottery’ by both partnering up with and dating Pyrrha.

Amusingly, there were no girls jealous of Pyrrha in turn. All of them, those who weren’t interested in Pyrrha anyway, had marked him down as taken. Some thought by Pyrrha herself, while others, in one girl’s words, felt Harry was “Way too much trouble than he’s worth. I’ll grant Arc’s handsome, and I sure as hell wouldn’t say no, but he and his sister are way too close. I would not want to deal with that crazy gal tearing me in half if we broke up.”

But as life continued on Beacon Academy, the news that Pyrrha Nikos was dating an entire unknown was still going around. Rumors had gone before the video, spreading to Mistral quickly. The video though, most of the news agencies were loath to share with their competitors for a time, and so it didn’t cross over into Mistral as quickly. Regardless, as with Pyrrha’s parents, rumor was enough to spark outrage, keeping the event in the news… that and the fact the tournament circuit hadn’t begun yet, so it was a very slow news time, celebrity-wise.

Eventually a few agencies in Mistral also were able to buy the video and play it locally. This sparked further outrage in most, and in one, avarice.

Stacy Arc, the estranged Aunt of the family, stared hard at a news screen showing Pyrrha Nikos, the Invincible Girl, the poster child of all Mistral, and one of the biggest celebrities in the world, going on a date with someone she recognized very easily. She sneered, downing her drink in one long gulp, ignoring the looks she was getting from some of the other dingy bar’s other patrons. If anyone wanted to fuck with her, well, Stacy had gotten back in shape since being banished from the clan. Anyone who thought to take advantage of a poor drunk woman would find it very hard to collect their teeth from the floor.

*Fucking little foundling! Seems to have certainly made it big since I was kicked out of Evig Låga. But I wonder how the family would react…heh. I know my brother. Guld will have run every time the idea of telling them about Harry’s real past came up. How will they act, and how would the Invincible Girl act if she learns he’s not an Arc?*

The idea that Pyrrha was actually interested in Harry for himself, rather than this being a relationship of convenience for her in some fashion, didn’t occur to Stacy. Nor did she care about Caliburn. Even though she had trained as a Huntress, Stacy had never tried to wield the family blade and had never believed the stories about Caliburn. *No, Hadrian’s a fucking foundling. And I’ve been hoping for a way to strike back at Guld, his slattern of a wife and the rest. Fucking bastard, just because I called the foundling a fucking outsider and pointed out Guld’s mistakes, I was exiled!*

It wasn’t fair, it wasn’t right, and if Stacy could cause the Arcs some problems, she would take it. *And this way, I can even make a bit of a profit for doing it without getting my own hands dirty*.

With that in mind, Stacy contacted a few newspaper reporters known for paying for information. All of them were very interested in who Nikos was dating, making Stacy sneer internally. *Mistral and their damned gladiators. Anything to ignore the problems beyond their borders.* Each time she had the money in hand, Stacy told the reporters about who Harry Arc was, emphasizing that they should look for birth certificates rather than just Lighthouse’s paperwork on him.

That would be enough to get the ball rolling, especially in Mistral, and Stacy knew it. After all, her dislike for Hadrian hadn’t come from nowhere. Indeed, as far as Mistral was concerned, she was far more normal in her opinion of such children than the Arcs or the rest of Evig Låga.

While Mistral was not as much about noble families and high society as Atlas was, Mistral, and many of the independent villages outside the city-state’s defended borders, had their own foibles. The public perception of foundlings, children with no known background, was one of them. It went back to when the Great War became a free-for-all as Atlas, then called Mantle, and Mistral had a falling out near the war's end. After their disastrous invasion of Vacuo, Mantle had tried to recoup some of its losses by attacking their equally maimed ally… hence why later, when Vale invaded Mantle, Mistral didn’t come to their aid, and the war eventually ended.

At the time, powerful bandit groups sprang up in various places around Anima and even began to make trouble in Mistral itself. Many did so by implanting foundlings in the communities, young boys and girls who were apparently survivors of Grimm or bandit raids. These foundlings were sometimes as young as babies like Hadrian. But somehow, even such young children would eventually betray those who had taken them in. They did so by sometimes literally stabbing them in the back, shutting down defenses or sharing information about the town with their original clans. Several villages and hamlets had fallen in that time, and Mistral itself had been attacked by a bandit clan. So, foundlings were very much looked down on, especially among traditional Hunter families or those who had taken up the Gladiator profession.

While Evig Låga had no such stigma, not having felt the sting of such incidents, the rest of Anima’s scattered communities would have a problem with the Invincible Girl, the darling of Mistral and its most loved daughter, going out with a foundling. Admittedly, there wouldn’t be much the public could do with Pyrrha and Harry at Beacon, but the reporters could maybe make trouble for the Arcs.

*Heh,* Stacy thought as she looked at her bank balance after her last call, grinning vindictively. *Not a bad day’s work. I’ll wish you luck, Guld. All of it bad, you old fuck. Couldn’t happen to a nicer asshole.*

*And meanwhile…* Stacy’s smile turned murderous as she remembered a recent offer she’d gotten. *I can buy better weapons, then find Lil’ Miss Malachite and put the bitch ten feet under. Fucking fool, there is a place in your gang for me, right enough. Right at the top.*

**OOOOOOO**

Harry met with Goodwitch Wednesday as scheduled early in the morning. The woman had been very clear that they would spend the entire morning training. They met in one of the training grounds instead of Professor Goodwitch’s classroom, where she had gathered several items. This was one of the more advanced training areas, one that you had to book quickly every week lest the upper years take it. It was set up with an even more advanced version of the Aura sensors in Glynda’s classroom.

Glynda explained this to Harry as he examined the training area. “This system isn’t solely set up to give a simple total and then adjust to direct hits to one’s Aura. Instead, once you step into that circle over there, we will be able to discern precisely how much Aura you are using for any single use of your Semblance, compare and contrast it to previous tests, and even archived files if need be.”

“The scientific method, then?” Harry nodded. “That makes sense. It reminds me of the system that my family and I tried to use, only far less advanced.”

“Headmaster Ozpin is good friends with General Ironwood and many of Atlas’s most prominent scientists. We here at Beacon are almost as advanced as Atlas Academy,” Glynda explained, her tone wry rather than proud or as if she was trying to show off. Rather, it seemed to Harry that she was of two minds about that.

“First, we will examine the various uses of your Semblance you have already shown while discussing your tactics. You seem to have grasped the necessity to use your Semblance in various ways to help your team and control the battlefield. Your assessment assignments have been excellent. But do not think I have missed the fact that you have yet to truly use your Semblance to its utmost in my class Mr. Arc,” Glynda warned.

Harry winced, and Glynda shook her head. “I realize that you have been pushing yourself and your swordsmanship. Your spar Monday with Ms. Schnee was quite acceptable. However, like Ms. Nikos, do not neglect the use of your Semblance. Especially large-scale usage. We will start small, but by the end of today, we will move from this room out into the forest, where you and I will have a duel. I expect you to give me your all at that point, or I will send you to see the nurse. Am I clear?”

While others would’ve been slightly startled or perhaps even frightened by her statement, Harry simply nodded. Arturia and his parents had all believed in the school of hard knocks, and facing someone with a semblance like Glynda’s would be even more interesting than facing someone like Pyrrha. The one time he’d sparred with Pyrrha, he’d been barely able to eke out a win by keeping the range open.

Pyrrha could use her Semblance without as much concentration as Harry needed. And, well, his armor and sword were both metal. She had somehow figured out Harry needed to be able to see and concentrate to use his Semblance and had loaded Milo with Flash rounds. Blinded and deaf, Harry had been forced entirely on the defensive for a while but had eventually worn Pyrrha down by simply waiting out her furious assault.

*Mind you, I could have ended it earlier if I had tried to transfigure her weapons. But I have no idea about Milo’s internal workings, and breaking even Pyrrha’s shield would probably have made her very angry at me. Not that that idea is going to help me here. Glynda doesn’t exactly use a weapon at all. She uses a riding crop to direct her Semblance, for goodness sake.*

Realizing with a start that Glynda was waiting for a verbal response, Harry answered, “I understand, Professor, and I look forward to it.”

Glynda’s lips twitched a bit at that, but she nodded. “In that case, Mr. Arc, I have supplied several large blocks of various materials. You will first try to lift them with your Semblance. Then you will try to, what was the phrase you used? Transfigure?”

“Yes, professor.” With that, Harry placed his scroll into the nearby computer system, then stood still within the circle for a moment. The room’s system played over his body, comparing it to the data on the scroll and generally getting a more in-depth feel for his Aura than the one in Glynda’s classroom.

For the next hour, the two of them experimented with Harry’s Semblance while Glynda posed problems, gave Harry some insight on how she used her own Semblance one part of the team and probed gently at Harry on his Semblance and its limitations. It quickly became clear to Glynda that Harry knew quite a bit about his Semblance already. What he really lacked was the ability to split his concentration between using his Semblance and other things. “You are already working on that, however. You also need to work on large-scale usage, as I said before. And both of those things can be taught better in combat than any other manner.”

For about an hour and a half, Glynda continued to run Harry through a series of experiments while talking to him and asking questions about his Semblance. Through these questions, Harry learned how Glynda had trained her own Semblance. It was quite a bit more limited than Harry's magic, but it was still an immensely powerful semblance.

Harry also learned some things about his own Semblance. Some of which were extremely mysterious. For one thing, Harry's initial assumption that transfiguration was simply a blanket cost on his reserves was false. Transfiguring one kind of stone into another one was something Harry had only rarely done before when he was working on the walls for the mining town and other major projects like that. Because of the size of those projects, he hadn't realized that the drain was far less than it would have been if he had attempted to transfigure the ground or stone into something else entirely.

It had held true for other things as well. Several times during experiments, Harry transfigured a metal block into other types of metal. This cost him far less in terms of his reserves than transfiguring them into stone or wood.

Glynda held up a gold bar, visibly fighting with herself for a moment as she asked hesitantly, "And Transfigurations like this are permanent?"

"Well, I don't know if metal-to-metal transfiguration is permanent. I know earth manipulation and transfiguration are. The mine's walls, for instance. They're still standing, and I worked on those months back," Harry said, staring at the gold bar. A lot of the problems facing the expansion project could be solved by applying for more money, and if Harry could just, well, will it into existence, that would be a lot easier than trying to set up transportation to Vale for their Fire Dust.

"In that case, we should set this aside for now. If it is permanent… We will need to discuss some manner of remuneration for you. The steel block, after all, was school property," Glynda said primly, although she allowed herself a small smile as Harry laughed, nodding his head.

But this also had combat implications, which Glynda quickly pointed out. "However, if you can transfigure something like this, it implies you can do the same to her weapons in combat. I would say you shouldn't do this in my combat class, Mr. Arc, unless you're facing someone who has said they will be upgrading their weapons soon. Very few people would be happy with having their weapons destroyed in such a manner."

"I know. I fought Pyrrha this past weekend, and she beat me, but afterward, when I said I could've tried a spell on her weapons, the look she gave me was enough to stop my heart," Harry admitted with a not-altogether fake shiver at the memory.

"Exactly. Mecha-shift weapons, in particular, would be very susceptible to damage." Glynda nodded. "Let us continue."

From there, they moved on to Harry's attack spells. Here, much of the information Harry already knew proved accurate. Certain attack spells cost him more Aura and were far faster for him to create mentally.

Throughout this process, Glynda was frowning a bit, pensively rubbing her chin thoughtfully a time or two, but she didn't share her thoughts with Harry, simply moving on to the next experiment while asking him questions about how he had come up with each spell in turn. That Harry had simply imagined the effects he wanted to achieve caused her frown to return, but still, she didn't say anything.

A time or two, however, she came up with suggestions that Harry had to smack himself for not thinking of.

"What do you mean you can't use your semblance to fly?" Glynda asked, frowning.

"If I tried to use my Semblance on myself, my own Aura would fight against the spell. It's like trying to push against the wall that I'm also holding up," Harry said with a shrug. "It's why I can't use my imagination to enhance my strength or speed."

"Yes, those two make sense." Glynda waved her riding crop to one side, lifting up one of the transfigured pieces of wood, then sitting back onto it before levitating it into the air, seemingly without concentration, as she looked at Harry, one wintry eyebrow rising. "But the other does not. This was the first thing I tried with my power. Are you afraid of heights, Mr. Arc?"

"Not a bit of it! And I'm going to go over into that corner and just sort of try to disappear for a moment in shame, professor. Don't mind me," Harry intoned, doing just that until Glynda smacked the back of his head with the same bit of wood she'd just been using.

"Knowing how to do that, Mr. Arc is only one portion of the issue. Let us see how much it costs you in terms of Aura to keep one person up in the air and whether you can concentrate on it and use other spells simultaneously."

The second proved far harder than the first. The spell to levitate an object didn't change much once Harry sat on the object in question. The object would still float, which made Glynda's eyes widen momentarily.

Admittedly, very few things they discovered about Harry's Semblance made sense in scientific terms. But magically, it did make some sense. The laws of Transfiguration that Harry could barely remember still made sense in this world to a certain extent. And charms were almost entirely the same.

However, concentrating on moving the levitated object while you were personally on that object was much harder. And Harry had to maintain that spell to continue to move. He had to stop and then recast the spell of moment later to restart moving if he wanted to attack. Harry was very quick at doing so, but even so, there was a gap there.

"And it would be even worse if I was levitating other people along with myself. I suppose I could use this to transport my team to Vale. Still, I don't think it's viable in a combat scenario just yet," Harry mused aloud.

Glynda rolled her eyes at the very idea. "Vale isn't that close, Mr. Arc. A bullhead travels quite a bit faster than you might think. How fast can you move the objects, and how much Aura does that take out of you? This is not a long-distance solution to a nonexistent problem you are dealing with here. It is the combat application of this that we are interested in."

Harry cocked an eyebrow at her, allowing himself a faint smirk. "And you never considered flying around for fun when you first discovered you could fly?"

The professor did not answer him, instead turning away. "I think we are done with that test, Mr. Arc. Let us continue."

By around 11 o'clock, Harry felt slightly drained from the magic he had been doing but had learned quite a bit more about how magic worked in this world, its limitations, and its new applications. He didn't know how well that would translate to his combat ability. Way more of combat than people think is about a rote response, training your mind and body to react in a certain manner and perform in a certain way. Part of the problem I've been running into is that so many of my last life's instincts don't translate into this world, and my new training clashes with those instincts. The same is true for spells.

As if reading his mind, Glynda walked over to him, handing her student a water bottle and a protein bar. "Come, Mr. Arc. Drink and eat those as we walk. It is time for us to test your abilities in combat."

"I'm frightened and excited all at once," Harry answered dryly, taking the items from her and following her through the campus to the cliffs overlooking the forest where the initiation had occurred. Here, Glynda waited politely until Harry was finished with his water bottle, then dropped off the side of the cliff, floating to the ground below, showing that while she could use other objects to fly, they weren't entirely necessary.

Probably more intensive that way, but it certainly works for showing off, Harry admitted ruefully. He looked around and picked up the staff of wood that Glynda had been walking with a moment ago, reflecting that she probably had brought along for this very purpose.

Perhaps he should've thought about that more clearly, because as he descended the cliff, Harry gaped at the site of several dozen bits of wood and stone flashing up towards him like shrapnel fired out of a cannon. "Yipe!"

Playing himself down onto the staff, Harry pulled it to one side, concentrating on flying through the debris flung at him from below. In his past life, Harry had been one of the finest seekers of his generation, a natural-born flyer. This came to the fore now, as he practically danced through the debris, zooming away from them even as the selfsame debris that had been flung up at him now came back down, still under Glynda's control, following him, trying to box them in.

More and more debris joined it, and Harry flew down towards Glynda. She was practically hidden among the foliage of one of the trees below, but the glint of her glasses caught his attention, and he began an attack run on her, assuming correctly that the match had already begun.

Seeing this, Glynda dropped from the tree, even as a riding crop flickered upwards once more. Instead of continuing to attack Harry, the bits of debris she'd been using flew downwards, disappearing into the foliage along with Glynda second before coming back up and into Harry as he jumped from the broomstick to the ground.

Harry was nearly caught by this, but a hasty shield spell protected him. It didn't stop Glynda's Semblance from reaching through it, grabbing his foot, and upending him.

He rolled, hastily countering her Semblance with his own magic, but had difficulty concentrating on both that and keeping up the shield. The shield faltered a second later, but Harry was ready for it. Instead of continuing to just defend himself, he went on the attack, Transfiguring the ground all around him.

Glynda had to nod in approval as she saw that Harry had taken the time to create a lion out of the ground instead of using spikes or similar. It roared soundlessly and charged toward her.

However, this simply gave Glynda more fuel for her Semblance to work with. A single thrust from her riding crop shattered the line into 1 million pieces, which she twirled around in the air, blocking two more spells from Harry before sending it straight at him.

"Either keep moving or create a protected position. Unless your armor is tough enough to withstand attacks, staying still is deadly in combat," Glynda said, moving around herself almost leisurely, but when one of Harry's spells got through her defenses, she easily sped up, going from a walk to a run as she flung herself forward into a role, coming up and smacking the ground with her riding crop. Like Harry, she could manipulate the ground, which shattered all around her, bits of dirt and even a few tree roots flinging up toward Harry.

Harry dodged those, then lashed out with a cutting spell, only to find Glynda had paused, staring at the magic spell coming towards her. She waved her riding crop, and Harry gaped in astonishment as his spell stopped midair and came back at him.

Such was his shock. Harry barely dodged in time, and he stared at her from where he had flung himself to the ground in shock. "How exactly did you do that?"

"My semblance is telekinesis Mr. Arc." Glynda intoned, and all around them, everything loose that had been created by the battle rose into the air, merging and creating a giant draconic creature coiling around the two of them. "That means mental manipulation of other things. At what point did you think energy, even energy created by a semblance, would be out of my control?"

"Well…" Harry's mused, staring from her to the Dragon all around him as it began to come apart and form smaller dragons and other creatures. "You learn something new every day."

Breathing in, Harry readied himself and then darted forward towards Glynda before stomping on the ground and creating a wall all around him. The wall shattered under the impact of the various bits of debris, Glynda was able to impart tremendous speed to them if she wished, and those bits of stone became more fuel for her before Harry thrust out his hands in every direction, sending them flying, a simple Expelliarmus overpowered as much as Harry could contrive, blowing the debris away from him as far as he could.

But the bits flinging themselves towards Glynda paused and blocked Harry’s forward momentum. “You’re falling into a rut," she said as she flung those bits back, and Harry hastily dodged, returning fire with ground spikes, a piercing spell and a cutting spell.

The piercing spell was so fast on the heels of a cutting spell that it forced Glynda to dodge rather than take control of the bolt of magic coming toward her. But she was able to do so easily.

"I noticed this while we talked about how you had come up with your various attacks. You call them spells, and that is fine, to begin with. But if you're Semblance is truly imagination. You do not need spells if your limitations are only those you set yourself. Simply will the effect into existence that you want to create. In our experiments, you didn't use any elemental attack beyond basic fire attacks. Expand your repertoire, Mr. Arc!"

A moment later, Harry was almost blindsided by an attack from behind, but he had heard the attack whistling through the air, and his insane reaction times saved him once more, allowing him to fling up a shield that slowed the debris for just a second, as he flung himself forward. Glynda's words of, "And always remain aware of your surroundings," followed him as he rolled behind a tree, which exploded a second later under the strike from a boulder that Glynda had pulled out of the ground with her Semblance.

"And that at least one of my professors is utterly terrifying," Harry grumbled, hopping to his feet, remembering some of the battles he had in his past life. Glynda's speed with her Semblance and versatility with it would've matched well against even the likes of Dumbledore or Voldemort. Moreover, her use of the terrain was simply better than theirs. Neither of those wizards would've thought to hide behind a tree for a moment or move so much during a battle as much as Glynda did.

"That too, Mr. Arc," Glynda said, without a hint of amusement in her tone as several of the trees around Harry suddenly shattered as if from explosions much like his own Semblance. He hastily used a fire spell to burn all the bits of wood.

He then pushed the fire spell outward, trying to do as Glynda suggested: use his imagination and willpower alone rather than direct his magic through spells. But it was far harder than even silent casting had been in his previous life.

A second later, Harry was upended again, this time by a bit of stone cracking into his back with enough force to cause him to grunt despite his Aura and armor protecting him. He came to find the remains of the fire he had just used a moment ago. "Oh, drat!"

Hastily, he used a water spell, thrusting that into the air. The impact of water and fire created steam, and he hissed in pain as the heat washed over him.

But it still blinded him from Glynda for a moment, and at least it seemed she couldn't use telekinesis on air or smoke. This allowed Harry to charge toward where Glynda had been a moment ago, silencing his feet as he went.

She wasn't there, however, having retreated further. "We will need to work on removing your bad habits, Mr. Arc. And, amusingly somewhat, your imagination as well."

Once more, Harry found himself surrounded by a single large creation of the various bits of debris all around them. "This is going to be a theme, isn't it?"

It was. The only time that Harry was able to throw off Glynda was when he used spells to hide his presence or silence his movement. And then, Glynda showed incredible agility, as well as reaction time. Several times she flipped away like Pyrrha or Nora could, lashing out with a kick simultaneously. And since her high heel was metal, that was no laughing matter. And Harry would probably go to his grave before admitting that he had blushed a bit at the upskirt shot this move afforded him.

Eventually, Glynda beat him, boxing him in again, attacking him from multiple angles forcing him to fall back on his trained responses. Those trained responses were not enough to overcome her speed and various abilities, although Harry was proud to see she was sweating a little by the time his back crashed into the cliff behind him, where several stones proceeded to bury him.

"I believe we are done for the day, Mr. Arc. I will have a formal write-up of your performance in this spar and suggestions for the future. I suggest we tentatively schedule to meet once every three weeks," Glynda announced, speaking to the rubble that had buried Harry for a moment.

Harry used his Semblance to push his way out, grumbling a little but nodding before ruefully looking around to discover where he had lost his sword. Glynda had used a tricky little move to disarm him a moment ago. She had launched a large-scale attack at him from every direction again, and while Harry was busy dealing with that, she had taken a single small stone and flung it at his wrist. Harry had exhausted most of his Aura by that point, and the strike had, while not hurting much, caused his hand to spasm open. Before Harry could grab his weapon again, a move from Glynda's riding crop and flung it aside away from him, and that moment of inattention let Glynda slam him back into the cliff face.

"That's fine, professor. Your schedule is a lot less flexible than mine," Harry admitted, pushing himself to his feet with difficulty. While Aura had allowed him to get through the battle without much in the way of actual injury, he was utterly exhausted, covered in dirt, grime, and mud.

"Very good, Mr. Arc," With that, Glynda gestured, and a piece of a shattered tree came towards them. The two of them sat on it, and she levitated them back up to the top of the cliff. After a final goodbye, Harry left her, limping away utterly exhausted and with a lot to think about.

**OOOOOOO**

Staring after the limping young man as he walked away, Glynda could only shake her head. Then she pulled up a scroll, looking into it at Ozpin’s face. “So, what do you think?”

“Fascinating.” Much like the majority of Initiation, Ozpin had been watching this spar through the hundreds of cameras scattered around the area. While many had been destroyed, he had still been able to watch most of the match. “I have to say, I haven’t seen anyone able to use so many different magical branches in a long, long while. Even a Maiden, or I at the height of my power, would be hard-pressed to utilize such transfiguration. His tactics are somewhat childish, but he can learn.”

“Which simply leaves the issue of where he got it. Do you think the Arcs have… have made a deal with Salem then?” Glynda asked, looking around quickly to make certain that she was alone. The secret of Salem, of someone able to control the Grimm, was so dangerous that no level of security could truly be called enough for it. “I cannot see it myself, but…”

“No. Harry personally might have, but even that is doubtful. He is decidedly not the type, and the Arcs are far too honorable for such things. Besides, unless Salem has grown far stronger since the last time she showed herself, she cannot imbue someone with magic. No, there is… Something else going on here. Another relic, perhaps. I need to research this, which means, alas, Glynda, that you will have to take over more of the pap…”

“Finish that sentence, and you had best get used to drinking your blasted coffee upside down for a few days,” Glynda warned. She allowed Ozpin to chuckle and back down before asking, “Do you think we should bring him in on the secret?”

“…No. Not until we know what Relic he, or perhaps the Arcs, have found. His parents don’t like me as it is. I had thought to bring Arturia in but decided their wariness of me would have colored her thoughts on me. No, it is best I back off for now, and we do some research.” Ozpin’s face turned a bit wintry, and Glynda sighed, knowing that Ozpin was now speaking as the leader of their secret cabal rather than Beacon’s headmaster. “Mr. Arc will serve best, I feel, by being himself. One way or another, he will act as a lightning rod, drawing attention and, perhaps, reactions alike.”

**OOOOOOO**

A very battered and extremely sore Harry headed back to the townhome. Opening the door, he was unsurprised to find that Tia was there, working on some homework with Ruby and their partners. As Harry had predicted, the townhome had generally become a hangout for all three teams. If there was one thing that Beacon lacked, it was a public area where members of two teams could meet and simply hang out together indoors. There were a few places outside with benches and so forth, but not enough to go around, even the relatively small population of students here at Beacon compared to that of a regular college.

After a nice shower, Harry went back downstairs, absentmindedly ruffling Ruby’s hair, dodging the smack sent at his hand with ease as he asked, “Hey you, where are the rest of our merry band of reprobates?”

“Pyrrha and Yang are fighting again. Completely weaponless this time.” Weiss reported, shaking her head. “Neither of them was pleased with how boring their matches on Monday were.”

“Yeah, given Pyrrha’s sighing and muttering on that score, I can well believe it,” Harry answered, wincing a bit. Pyrrha greatly enjoyed challenging herself, but she was getting into a bad habit of doing so without using her Semblance. That would have to change going forward. “And the rest?”

“Most of the others are in team matches,” Tia answered simply. “Blake is in the library.”

Harry understood that to mean that Apacci and Sung-Sun were battling Nora and Ren, and Harry understood why Sung-Sun would have set that up. Nora and Ren had the most experience working together of all the partnerships within their group. Fighting them didn’t do much for Pyrrha and Harry because their Semblances gave them such a massive advantage in a team versus team fight. But even so, Harry and Pyrrha always came away from those matches having at least learned how to better communicate with one another mid-battle.

Someone like Sung-Sun and Apacci, neither of whom had Semblances which could give them an edge, they would undoubtedly learn more. *While getting their arses kicked. I hope Sung-Sun realizes how that can be a bad thing.* While Harry didn’t have as good a handle on Apacci’s personality as he would’ve liked, he knew he was touchy about his Faunus status and slightly cocky. Not arrogant, Apacci understood he wasn’t the toughest person around, but he was still cocky.

Thinking for a moment, Harry nodded. “I’ll stop over and remind Pyrrha and Yang to not go too far in their spar, and then I think I’ll head to the library too.”

Tia instantly stood up and moved to stand beside him. Harry smiled at that, and the twins walked off, with Harry telling Tia about his training with Goodwitch. Tia listened intently, her eyes doing the strange, sparkly smiley thing that Mila and the rest of her friends were getting used to seeing when Tia was happy.

Behind the back of her partner, Mila snorted. “God, she makes my twincest is best jokes soo damn easy. It’s actually getting boring these days.”

“Don’t be disgusting!” Weiss barked while Ruby was making gagging noises. “It is perfectly acceptable to be close to your siblings. I have a very close relationship with my older sister… if not my other sibling…” Weiss trailed off, looking down at her paper, a feeling of chagrin at letting that slip going through her.

“Yeah, if they’re getting boring, you should stop using that line then! Ugh.” Ruby grumbled. “I swear if you and Apacci make that joke again, I’m going to take Crescent Rose to your head! So, what if Tia and Harry are close? Me and Yang are close too, and you don’t make jokes about us!”

“Yeah, buuuut there’s this way that guys and girls…” Mila began with a grin, only for Weiss to create a glyph on the table with a pencil, a loud ‘Hmm?’ coming from her. With a sigh, Mila shook her head. “You guys are no fun.”

“You’re the one who needs the most help in this class, Mila. If you don’t want to put your nose to the grinder, that’s not our problem,” Weiss growled out, causing Mila to sneer back. But when Ruby looked at her pleadingly, Mila sighed and went back to work.

**OOOOOOO**

Tia looked at her brother thoughtfully. While the others might have simply assumed she wanted to walk around with Harry for its own sake, she had noticed Harry had decided to leave the townhome when he had heard Blake was alone in the library. Once they were outside, Tia took Harry's hand in hers, tugging it and getting him to look at her. When he did, Tia cocked her head, one eyebrow rising in question.

Having long mastered Tia-speak, Harry understood what Tia was asking easily. “Why do I want to talk to Blake?”

Tia nodded, and Harry smiled, looping an arm around her shoulders as he whispered into her ear. “I don’t want to say it aloud since it isn’t really my secret to let out… even if she’s doing a piss poor job of keeping it. Let’s just say that Blake has some family connections I want to see if she can use on behalf of Evig Låga’s expansion.

Tia made a hum of confusion, and Harry continued, still speaking somewhat obliquely. “Right now, we need people who are willing to fight and carve out their own territory. And I think we have a lot to offer people willing to do that if we can connect with them without Mistral realizing.”

That, Tia understood. Getting enough workers to work even Evig Låga’s farms was tough. The mines were also manpower intensive. Spreading and connecting the mines to Evig Låga with still more farmland – and defenses – would need still more people. “Settlers. Real ones instead of miners or service personnel,” she mused.

When Harry nodded, Tia, knowing Harry wouldn’t tell her why he thought Blake could help, set aside that mystery. Instead, she let the companionable silence linger, simply happy to walk beside her brother, occasionally bumping her shoulder and his as he did the same. They made a stopover first to check up with Pyrrha and Yang, finding the two of them no longer fighting.

Instead, they were seemingly giving an impromptu class to several other freshmen, including two of Team CRDL for some reason, on unarmed combat. *Hah! As if anyone with a brain couldn’t tell where their eyes are,* Harry snorted as he watched the group of seven teens.

Pyrrha was smiling, one of her real smiles rather than the bland one she usually used in public, as she helped some other students. For her part, Yang seemed a little more resigned to it but willing to teach. Yang also seemed aware of the eyes on her and enjoyed the attention, while Pyrrha either was ignorant of the fact at least a few of the boys were there to ogle instead of learning.

Both of them waved at Harry and Tia when they saw them, but Pyrrha made no effort to break off, so Harry simply waved back, and the two Arcs left them there.

Harry found Blake in a corner of the library, sitting at a table with two books in front of Blake and a third one open in her hands as she read, her legs curled up under her. It wasn’t schoolwork but rather a fantasy novel series. She didn’t look up as Harry and Tia came close, merely waving a free hand at them.

At the same time, her bow twitched, and Harry shook his head slightly. *I wonder why the others haven’t pointed out that bows aren’t supposed to move of their own accord?*

Tia stopped nearby, looking over the fantasy section for a moment, while Harry sat beside Blake. “Blake.”

“Harry,” Blake responded, her tone noncommittal and dry, not looking up from her book, hoping Harry would take the hint and not caring about why he had sought her out. The two had talked several times, but it wasn’t like they were close or anything. And unless he was making fish, Blake didn’t care as much about Harry’s culinary skills as Yang and the others on her team. She respected him, but that didn’t mean she would let him interrupt her valuable reading time.

“I have a question, and I think it’s one I would prefer to ask you now, with no one else around bar my sister.”

At that, Tia moved further away while Blake finally looked up, frowning. *Where is he going with this? Does Arc know that I am a… But then why would he confront me like this? He’s friendly with the Schnee, he should know… Blast it, I wish I knew more about his hometown and how it treated faunus. I know miners were mentioned, but not if they were faunus. Although he and Tia are certainly friendly enough to any faunus they meet, and they seem passionately against racism of any kind. Maybe, if he’s ousted me as a Faunus, he’ll keep my secret from the others?*

“… I suppose I can’t stop you from asking. Realize I might not want to answer,” Blake said aloud, her tone somewhat astringent even as she realized this might not be as bad as her worst fears.

He shrugged. “Understood. I’m just wondering if you are still in contact with her parents, and if so, give me an introduction to Ghira?”

While Blake had realized she might have been outed, she certainly had not anticipated that. Her eyes widened, and one hand reached for where she kept Gambol Shroud on her at all times, hidden under her uniform skirt. *Is he threatening to kidnap me!?* “W, what?”

Not realizing what rabbit hole Blake’s thoughts had just fallen down, Harry shook his head slowly, seeing how tense Blake had begun. “Belladonna is an unusual name, Blake. And I’ve read enough history to know that the first leader of the White Fang and the current leader of Menagerie is a Belladonna.”

At that, Blake’s mind went further down its current dark alley, wondering what someone in a position of power in Vale or in Atlas would do with the information that she was her father’s daughter. That Blake had also been involved in the White Fang could be seen as Menagerie supporting the White Fang, something they were very careful not to do publicly. It would harm government-level human/faunus relations tremendously. That didn’t even consider the fact that she could be used as a hostage against her father and mother in some fashion.

Her hand flashed up, holding Gambol Shroud, but before it could rise even to the level of the table, she found herself frozen. Bonds of energy formed around Blake before her Aura could overcome the first spell Harry had cast on her. Harry then removed Gambol Shroud, shaking his head. “Don’t. I’m not your enemy Blake. I’m not an enemy of faunus in general. I want to form an alliance with Menagerie. Sort of, anyway.”

He glanced at Tia, gesturing with a finger, and she nodded, moving around before coming back and shaking her head. No one was nearby, and no cameras covered this corner close enough for anyone to lip-read. Which was probably why Blake had chosen it, Harry realized.

*Come to think of it, she does tend to choose corners and so forth. Is there something more to Blake hiding her identity as a Faunus than the typical prejudice she would face from people like Cardin and even her connection to her parents? Is that why she hasn’t come clean with the rest of the team despite all of us showing that we’re not exactly in favor of that kind of shit? I thought it was Weiss and the all-too-real issues between the Schnee Dust Company and faunus.*

Tia then joined them at the table, sitting on Blake’s other side, while Harry moved to sit across from her. Looking at Blake quizzically, then over at her brother, Tia asked, “Faunus?”

“Yep. And I think Ghira is a panther or cat Faunus,” Harry answered.

At that, Tia reached up to Blake’s bow and undid it for a moment, blinking at the site of the cat years. “Cute.”

Harry wouldn’t have called Blake cute. With the cat ears showing, Blake was… well, the quintessential cat girl, frankly, a walking fetish with her tiny black ears, gorgeous features and svelte, lithe body. Even though she wasn’t Harry’s type, Harry could recognize her beauty. “If you’re going to ask how long I’ve known, I knew from the moment I heard your name. And then, I’ve seen your bow tie twitch a lot. Bows don’t do that.”

Blake scowled, tightlipped.

Sighing, Harry released her from the secondary binding he’d used on her. *Damn, his Semblance is scary! So many uses. And now I’m trapped between two Arcs. If I were Yang, I’d think this was the start of a joke, but as it is, it isn’t all that comfortable.* “Fine. You know what I am. What’s this about wanting to make some kind of alliance with Menagerie? You’re a student. You told us all about the Arcs and Evig Låga, but…”

“Evig Låga is expanding,” Harry cut in bluntly. “We found an immense Fire Dust vein several hundred miles away from Evig Låga and have set up a mining complex. The general plan going forward is to simply colonize the rest of the territory between those mines and our Evig Låga. We’ll set up defenses around the area, but what we really need right now is settlers. People willing to carve out their own homes in the wilderness. And I know Menagerie has a major overpopulation problem.”

Menagerie was a large island, about the size, if the Atlas of Remnant could be trusted anyway, of Australia back in Harry’s old world. That was a lot of space, admittedly, and it was in a temperate zone, with very livable conditions year-round in terms of weather.

In terms of geography, however? The island's interior was dominated by massive mountains and a desert, making farming difficult. It also didn’t have any Dust sources anywhere on the island. There were few rivers, none of which were useful for various reasons.

This was why even though the faunus ‘won’ the island in the Faunus Revolution, they still felt they’d gotten screwed over by Atlas and Vale, who had agreed to let them settle the island in peace. It was why only a fifth of the world’s Faunus resided there. But Harry was right. Even that was pushing it, given the island’s natural resources.

“You are insane! You’re trying to expand out into the Grimm lands without any natural defenses? That’s crazy,” Blake exclaimed, somewhat derailed from her real concerns about suddenly being outed like this by the sheer absurdity of what Harry had explained so bluntly.

“So people keep telling us. But we do have a few natural defenses. And considering that the defenses around the mine already slaughtered a Grimm migration led by a Dread Wolf, I think it’s possible.”

He leaned forward, tapping the table between them for emphasis as he remembered the similar conversation he’d had with both Pyrrha, and in a smaller way, Ozpin. “Every few years, the Grimm claim more land. They wipe out some small outlying settlements or other. Life in the four big city-states continues, people sighing, shaking their heads at the idea of anyone living beyond the walls of their city-states. Never realizing that with every loss, humanity as a whole is made weaker, the Grimm stronger. Far too many people think they are simply something that must be endured, like bad weather. They are not. They are a challenge and a challenge that humanity has been slowly failing. And yes, Blake, I include faunus among humanity.”

He added that last bit as he saw Blake’s mouth opening, probably to let loose some tried and tested retort. Watching her close her mouth again made him smile, and he tapped the table again. “That’s why I want you to contact your parents. I would love to see more faunus joining our efforts.”

Tia nodded from Blake’s other side, understanding why Harry wanted to talk to Blake and fully agreeing with his thoughts on this matter. *Dad also told him he could make deals, which would be backed up by the Council.*

Now completely on the back foot, Blake could only shake her head a few times, trying to get her mind around what Harry was saying. It was extremely ambitious, yet the passion he spoke with called out to her almost as much as the White Fang’s original call for true equality had. “I…”

“And if you’re wondering whether or not I will out you to Weiss and the others, don’t. That is an internal Team Ruby issue, and I will not get involved. I believe you should tell them, though.”

Deciding to do her part, Tia reached under the table and gripped Blake’s hand, squeezing it gently. “Tell Yang first.”

Harry agreed. “I think she already suspects something. I’ve seen Yang looking at your bow a few times after it's moved.”

Blake once more had to fight down an urge to flee, although from what she wasn’t certain. Yet Blake knew that wouldn’t happen, not with the two Arcs on either side of her for certain. And a small part of her felt that Harry was right. Yang had begun to make a few cat puns around her when they were alone. Blake had ignored them, but in retrospect, it was a very obvious sign that Yang knew something was up.”

*And Tia’s right that I should tell my partner first. I doubt she’ll reject me even if I come completely clean… “*If, okay, I can set aside my personal issues. But this sounds far too much like you would be bringing in faunus as manual laborers. That’s how Atlas treats its miners, how it, Mistral and Vale have sometimes treated my people. No matter how much of the work is being done by faunus, we’ve never gotten our fair share. And any promise made before our people start to arrive is worthless.”

“I can show you our contract with the miners we’ve already brought in. I have a copy of it on my scroll.” Harry hadn’t helped write up that agreement, but he had been a part of the meetings that had hammered it out between Sunflash and the local lawyers at his father’s behest. “Any workers brought in would get their fair share.”

“But what do they have a say in what their share is! Are any faunus in a leadership position?” Blake argued back.

“Not yet.” Harry agreed. “Sunflash is our mine foreman, but he… well… he doesn’t exactly have the personality necessary to work well with others.” Tia let loose a chuckle at that, having met the man once, and Harry exchanged a grin with his sister before turning back to Blake. “All right, so that’s a bit of an understatement. He makes Tia look positively loquacious in comparison. And he doesn’t have my sister’s personality to make it work.”

Tia beamed at that with her eyes, which Blake found honestly quite cute.

Harry went on. “But the mine complex will nominate a voice to the Council that leads Evig Låga. Our survey teams are led by a bat Faunus, and he has a major say in how they are deployed and everything else. Once the next phase of our expansion starts, he’ll probably be elected to the council position. Positions on the Council are based on merit, not connections, and not blood.”

Seeing the jaundiced look Blake was sending his way, Harry shook his head firmly. My family has a say in the Council because of what we do, not because of our name. Similarly, newcomers will have to earn respect, but in Evig Låga, we’ve never gone into anti-faunus discrimination. Not as far back as I’ve found in the records, anyway. Heck, the final straw in my father exiling my aunt was how she spoke about some of my older sister’s faunus friends.”

Blake looked at Harry thoughtfully, wondering if he was telling the truth. But remembering his stance against bullying, how easily Harry had accepted Mila and Apacci, and how he had spoken to Violet, she supposed he was telling the truth. “All right, I, I suppose I can believe you on that score. But I still can’t help you. I… I’m not exactly on speaking terms with my parents,” she blurted out in a rush.

That caused Harry to blink in surprise. “Why not? They didn’t want you to become a Hunter?”

Blake chuckled humorlessly, grateful that there was at least something in the situation that Harry and Tia hadn’t figured out. “No, not that. They…’ Blake paused, her eyes widening as she mumbled. “They’d be proud of that, wouldn’t they?”

Looking at Blake’s expression, Harry started to chuckle, drawing her attention once more as she flushed in embarrassment. “That just occurred to you, didn’t it?”

“Oh, shut up!” Blake grumbled, looking away from Harry’s gaze. The fact that Tia squeezed her hand again under the table brought her no comfort, nor did the look of commiseration and amusement in Tia’s eyes over her scarf. A subtle person herself, Blake had long since gotten used to how Tia expressed emotions and knew that the girl was chuckling at her in her own way right now.

With a huff, Blake crossed her arms, glaring at Harry. Wanting to shock him, Blake let her tongue run away from her brain for a moment. “No, it didn’t occur to me. I ran away from home to join the White Fang…”

Her eyes widened as she heard the words coming out of her mouth, and Blake nearly activated her Semblance, but Tia’s grip on her hand stopped her. As gentle as that grip was, Tia was almost as strong as Yang when her Semblance activated, and Blake knew she couldn’t escape.

But to her surprise, Harry simply smiled wryly. “I can understand wanting to do something, wanting to solve society's woes.” *Merlin knows no one in a position of power back on Earth was doing anything.* “Have you killed anyone in cold blood? Planted a terrorist bomb somewhere world where it would hurt innocence? Note I’m saying innocents, not legitimate targets like mine supervisors or union breakers. Even bigots who routinely put their money where their mouths are and are willing to use violence themselves.”

“N, no. I, I would never agree to do anything like that,” Blake shivered. “The only time I was involved in an assassination mission was against a bastard who was keeping faunus sex slaves.”

“Then his death was more than justified. So long as you weren’t involved in any of those things, that’s good. Besides, you’re not with them now, are you? Sent here to attack Weiss?”

“Wh, no!” Blake exclaimed at Harry’s question before quickly lowering her voice as a loud ‘SHHHHH!’ could be heard from the librarian’s desk in the center of the library. “I, I left them. I couldn’t handle how violent the White Fang was becoming and how much our goals had shifted from gaining equality to just paying humans back, to lording it over them.”

At that, Tia smiled and raised a hand to rub Blake’s head… and ears. Really it was her ears Tia was most interested in. “That sounds like you made a good decision.”

Although it felt amazing, Blake batted Tia’s hand away, looking away quickly at Tia’s pout. *How the hell can she pout with just her eyes!?*

“I agree. Although don’t expect me to give out a head pat just for that,” Harry teased, causing Blake to grumble at how the two Arcs had torn apart any sense of seriousness. Still, she was relieved. They had both taken the fact she had been a freedom fighter so well.

“But seriously, if you’re not part of them any longer and want to make a difference as a Huntress now, I don’t see a problem with it. Indeed, I see it as quite laudable you left. Turning away from that kind of life once you’re up to your eyeballs in indoctrination? That takes a lot of courage.” *Courage I wish I could’ve seen more often in my old life. Far too many sons and daughters of death eaters followed their parents into that same kind of mindless bigotry and never repented.* “But I take it your parents didn’t want you to join?”

“… Yes,” Blake nodded. “Both of them had quit the organization, partly because My mother became pregnant with me and partly because even then, there were far too many people pushing for more action rather than peaceful protests. Neither of my parents wanted me to join. When they tried to stop me, I said some things, called them names…” The cat faunus seemed almost to curl inward. “Things I can’t take back.”

Tia’s hand on her own under the table pulled away for a moment, then Blake found herself in a sideways hug. *What is it with blondes and being so handsy?* She grumbled, internally. Externally, she tried to pull away, but even with one arm, Tia was far stronger than Blake.

“An earnest apology and an acknowledgment that you were wrong can go far,” Harry said simply. “I’ve no idea what words you said, and I don’t need one. That’s private. But and I know this isn’t entirely similar, but our parents had trouble with my oldest sister coming out of the closet, so to speak. A lot of words were said in the heat of the moment, but after my parents apologized, and my sister apologized as well, they mended their fences very quickly.”

Blake frowned at that, confused. “Wait, what did your sister have to apologize for? Did she say something to them too?

“That, and, well… she also had to apologize for how they had discovered her orientation.” Harry coughed delicately, looking away for a moment.

Blake snorted in laughter as the image came to her mind. “Let me guess, a study session with a ‘friend’ wasn’t studying anything but anatomy?”

“Got it in one. The Arc estate is large, and you’d think there would be a lot of space available for shenanigans, but there really isn’t, especially if you want to be indoors ‘studying’. My dad opened the door without knocking, and you can figure out the rest.” Harry laughed wryly, remembering that day with some exasperation.

It had been up to Violet and Harry to force everyone to calm down, and Saffron’s girlfriend at the time had never shown up again at the house. *Mind you, Saffron took that lack of courage as a sign and broke things off with her a few days later, so maybe it was all for the best. A few months later, she was with Terracotta, and now they’re getting married.*

“So as long as you open up with an apology, I think you and your parents will find common ground,” Harry said.

Blake stared hard at Harry, then over at Tia, who simply nodded. Then she smiled hesitantly, nodding at the two of them. “Thank you. And you honestly think that this expansion is possible?”

“I do. I was the one who convinced the Council that the mines were possible in the first place. And I helped a lot in setting them up. If we can keep control of the mines, we can expand between it and Evig Låga. It won’t be set up like it is in Vale or even Vacuo. You’re right in that we don’t have a lot of natural defenses or barriers. But it can be done.”

“It’s true. Harry’s Semblance, it made the mine possible. Walls that grew up in days rather than years. We can do the same thing elsewhere,” Tia agreed.

Once more, Blake simply spent a few moments looking between the two Arcs, thinking hard, trying to decide whether or not she trusted them. That answer came quickly: after all, she’d just shared far more than she had ever wanted to. *I kind of have to trust them… and honestly, setting aside my anger at how all this has happened, I have to admit that I would trust these two regardless. Tia’s too damned blunt to lie well, and Harry’s too earnest, I guess?* Blake wasn’t really at home with the idea of charisma, but Harry had that too.

That left her with only the question of what she would do. A part of her told Blake she really did need to reach out to her parents. But like Tia had said, admitting you were wrong was never easy. “All right. I, I think I need some time to process all this. But I will get back to you when I bite the bullet and contact my parents,” she finally said, nodding to Harry. “Just don’t expect me to do it right away. I will have questions about Evig Låga and everything else before I agree to be a mediator here.”

“Fine. I just wanted to get the ball rolling as quickly as possible. We’ve got another two months before the first break, and when I’m home, I’ll be working on the defenses for the expanded territory.”

“Good. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve had enough revelations for one day, and I’d like to lose myself in a story of romance and mindless violence,” Blake said drolly.

Harry nodded and stood up. “Happy reading, Blake.”

Tia remained behind for a moment to hand Blake her ribbon, saying, “You look better without it.”

Blake snorted at that. She watched Tia hurry after her brother, leaving Blake alone to her books and thoughts.

**OOOOOOO**

So, the week passed at Beacon. Harry and Pyrrha went on another date that weekend, and Harry and his team began to emphasize team tactics and communication. It would be a long time before their working as a full team became so natural that they didn’t need to think about it, but any road started with a single step, and Harry was determined to put in the work now.

Elsewhere, the furor of the Invincible Girl dating an altogether unknown was still going around Mistral. And thanks to Stacy, more than a few reporters, to use the word loosely, who were looking into this had been given a good place to start. Many had looked into Harry’s records at Lighthouse. This was easy as one, two, bribe. Lighthouse wasn’t considered that good a school for a reason. But Harry’s records there were decent, indeed top of the class. So that was a dead end.

His family, the Arcs, were well known in the gladiatorial circuits but not so much beyond that, so there was nothing much about them in Mistral itself. While an old settlement was relatively insular, was more than four hours away from Mistral by bullhead, and didn’t have any regular bullhead traffic. It was extremely expensive for non-Hunters to rent bullheads for any period of time.

Yet the Arc angle did add two possible scandals. First, the Invincible Girl dating the brother of her strongest opponent could lead to quite a bit of drama if the reporters were lucky. None of them were stupid enough to believe that, even if Harry and the Invincible Girl had been dating before the match, Arturia would have thrown the match in favor of the Invincible Girl. The two had fought far too hard for any Mistrali to believe that. But the idea of Arturia ‘losing’ her brother to her former opponent could lead to some drama.

And the rumor that Harry Arc might not be an Arc at all was another angle. First was the idea that perhaps the family didn’t know. Beyond the two parents, anyway. Which could lead to a lot of drama. And drama **always** made for a good story. Trying to find who Harry’s biological parents were could also be an interesting take. If he was connected to one of the bandit clans? There was a reason why Mistral distrusted foundlings, particularly old-time Hunter families.

To that end, a few reporters researched where Harry Arc could have been born. This led to the hospital where Hazel Arc had given birth to Tia. But just as Stacy had said, there was no record of Hazel giving birth to twins. Indeed, there was no record of anything to do with Harry Arc. As far as any surviving records, the baby had just been left there… which was in keeping with the kind of tricks that the bandit clans had done during the Great War.

So it was proof positive that Harry wasn’t an Arc. With that in mind, five of the most intrusive, scandal-driven shills headed to Evig Låga together.

**OOOOOOO**

As part of the effort to create an expansionistic mindset on a societal level, one that looked to expand into Grimm territory, Evig Låga had expanded its militia several times over the past few years. They’d already had a decently large force to begin with since the town had always been welcome to retired Hunters, something many other villages and towns were not. Many people believed that rather than simply fighting the Grimm, those with Aura stood out to the Grimm, drawing them in rather than negative emotions.

A large portion of that militia was always on short-distance patrols around the town, with more stationed at the mines. But they had many other recruits whose Auras were recently awoken and needed to be trained to fight Grimm.

Since the mine’s defenses had proven themselves so well, Guld and the council had decided they needed to do a thorough, detailed survey of the lands between the mines and Evig Låga before the next phase of the expansion. This meant everything from noting precise terrain features to the nature of the ground and even marking down where defensive towers could be raised.

So the council had decided to kill two Nevermore with one stone. Every day, they sent Arturia and Rasputin out with different militia squads. Arturia taught them about the Grimm and what to be on the lookout for, while the bat faunus and his team of geographers mapped the area as well as they could. Two weeks after Harry and Pyrrha had gotten together, the area, which was called the Corridor, was fully mapped out. This meant places where they could raise guard towers, where walls would need to be put down, and other things were all marked out.

This included a place on a river right at the edge of the planned territory. There, at a curve in the river, a waterfall cascaded down into the same river that was at the bottom of the gorge that helped defend one of Evig Låga’s flanks. With that, an actual hydraulic station could be put in place. Although waterpower was old technology, sometimes sneered at by proponents of Dust power, it would still be a tremendous boon for the growing town-cum-city.

Returning to Evig Låga, Arturia spent a half hour speaking with council members about the most recent training mission. There had only been a few Creepers, which served to blood the militia team, but nothing more. She had sent the group of eight men off to their temporary dwelling and then talked to a few other locals, farmers whose families had been in the town as long as the Arcs.

The older men and women weren’t quite friends, not to Arturia personally, but they were firm acquaintances, which was good enough. She wanted to ensure that the slowly growing village of tents the newcomers had put up wasn’t bothering the locals. In this, she was well pleased.

“De flesta av dem, faunus eller människor, de har gjort den här resan för att hitta ett bättre liv (Most of them, faunus or human, they’ve made this trip ta find a better life.) One old farmer put it succinctly in Swedski. “And all of them are willing to work for it too. We’ve a full family, led by two older siblings, working with us here on our farm. They’ve been a massive help to Kobalt and us. Your demands they unlock their Aura. That’s also enough ta put a spine in many. I approve of that, even if it goes against tradition. And of the newcomers too.”

His wife broke in then, speaking in English, something she had proudly said she was practicing to better talk to the newcomers. “Young Teal and Verdant, they’re good workers. They’ve asked to stay with us, and Kobalt’s agreed it’s a good idea. We need the help since his sisters both went off to try and make it big in Mistral. Bah,” she scoffed. “And not a word we’ve heard from them beyond a few messages every few months. Hah!”

The old farmer’s wife leaned in then, going on to say something that Arturia wasn’t nearly as happy to hear… again. “Kobalt’s sweet on young Teal, and he gets on well with her brother. You know, some of these newcomers are strapping lads~~. Maybe you should meet them in a less official capacity, hmm? It’s about time you started dating, my dear.”

Arturia’s teeth clenched, but she didn’t let her annoyance with that comment show. “Thank you for your words, Mauve, Kobalt. If you need them for the harvest Orange, I’ll make certain they aren’t signed up for training out on rotation. As for meeting any of the militiamen in less formal settings, that would be wholly inappropriate.”

Mauve tsked at her, which Kobalt wisely did not join in, taking a step back and nodding to Arturia as he moved to head back to fixing a farming tool he’d set aside to speak to Arturia. Mauve, alas, was a typical farmwife and was more stubborn than the ground her family had carved their farm from. “My dear, you’re not going to find someone that’s equal to the impossible ideal you’ve built in your mind. Best you find someone you can connect with rather than hold onto that dream.”

Again, Arturia’s normal cold control in public saved her from becoming angry. “I will thank you to keep your opinions on my love life to yourself, Mauve. Have a good day.”

With that, she turned and moved away down the dirt road. Soon Arturia was walking deeper into Evig Låga, nodding and waving her fingers at those locals who shouted her name. Several times she paused, ruffling the hair of children as they came up to say hello. Her mask never faltered at such moments, but Arturia’s touch was gentle, and she knelt down to eye level, speaking to the children in a far warmer voice than she used with any adult who wasn’t a family member.

The watching adults, those who had known Arturia all her life, smiled at one another. For all her cold, imperious nature, Arturia really was a big softie inside.

In this manner, Arturia’s previous annoyance was gone by the time she spotted her sister, Violet. The taller woman’s wide shoulders were just as obvious as her golden-colored hair despite being behind what looked like a large haybale Violet was pushing towards the Arc plantation. Arturia wordlessly joined her, allowing a real smile to cross her face as she looked over at Violet. “Good afternoon, sister.”

“Hah, good to see ya too, Artie, I forgot you were supposed to get back today. I loaned out Manticore and Ribald to the Yellowsprings. They’ve finished opening that new field, all these new hands we’ve got. More fool me, I forgot I’d need them to get their flour back to the plantation,” Violet grunted, naming the two main draft horses the plantation used.

“Well, then my timing was quite excellent,” Arturia murmured, and the two sisters dug in their heels, pushing the heavily laden cart along. Luckily the plantation wasn’t all that far away. Violet would have left the cart behind and headed back to get one of the motorized carts instead if it was. But they were busy elsewhere on the plantation right now with the Arc’s own harvest, so Violet had decided to trust in her own strength.

With Arturia helping, the cart moved along easily down the main street and past the entrances to two other plantations. But passing the entrance to the third, the Grååder (Grayveins), the pair heard shouts ahead of them. Not full-throated screams like a fight, but more like several people raising their voices to be heard over one another.

Gazing around the side of their burden, Arturia scowled as she looked over at the Arc Estate’s outer gate, then back to Violet. “Is there any reason why there are six people outside our gates with film equipment?”

“Why are you asking me?” Velvet quipped, also peering around the cart from the other side. “You’re the international Huntress and superstar, right?”

“I could wish it were otherwise. But you have a point. This wouldn’t be the first time since my battle with Pyrrha that celebrity chasers have come along trying to get an interview or worse.”

“Hah, I doubt after what Da did to the one who tried to sneak in and get some ‘candid pictures’ of you anyone else’ll try anything similar. Although, if they’re after you, why are they arguing with Dad rather than just camping out waiting for you?”

“Once more, you raise a good point. That’s two for two, sister.” Arturia sighed and released her grip on the handlebar she had been using. “Do you need my help anymore?”

Violet waved her off, and Arturia made her way over to the group of reporters behind. Over their heads, she saw her father was already there, glaring angrily through the gate at the reporters. Nearby several of the town militia, perhaps called by Guld, were also coming up behind the reporters but had paused as they saw her.

Guld hadn’t and was simply continuing the same argument he’d been making. “You lot must not have read our charter. We here in Evig Låga enjoy our privacy. You can’t try to come onto my property demanding answers, shoving your microphones in my face. Now, you have five minutes to turn back and get back on your bullheads under your own power. Or else, by the laws of this town, I will expel you with nonlethal force.”

“That just makes it even more suspicious! Are you or your wife trying to hide something about Harry Arc’s origins? Why did the Arcs take in a foundling like that?” Shouted one of the reporters, his voice only one of many most repeating the same question. Others were mentioning Harry possibly being a bandit of some kind, a sleeper agent. It made too much sense to the Mistrali, who had seen such things before even from babies back in the old days of the Colors War.

Arturia blinked, then her eyes narrowed, and her fists clenched at her sides. Only her normal cold self-control kept Arturia from reaching for Rhongomyniad on her back. If not for that control, the reporters would have had a very, **very** bad day. *How dare they! How dare they say Harry is a foundling! Is it just because of his hair and eyes! Mother has the same brown hair! Bastards!*

She strode forward to give them a piece of her mind, but her father saw her coming. Guld’s eyes widened at the sight of Arturia, and a sudden look of chagrin and guilt replaced the shock and anger that had been there. It didn’t last before Guld wiped it away, but the look still caused Arturia to pause, a jolt of shock going through her. That wasn’t the look of someone affronted by an accusation that had no basis in fact. That was the look of a man who had been worried about a secret and just had it come out.

Arturia stood stock still, watching until the reporters noticed her presence and began to shout their questions at her. That was honestly the worst thing they could have done, really. The rude shouting and denunciations of her brother broke Arturia out of her momentary stasis. She breathed in, then shouted, “ENOUGH!!!”

The sheer volume Arturia, who was, despite her presence, a somewhat shorter than average young woman, could put out startled the crowd of shills into silence. “I have heard enough! While all of you might not understand it, my brother, Hadrian, can wield the family blade, Caliburn. We have had that blade in our family longer than there has been an Evig Låga, longer than Mistral has been a city-state! At no point has any but our family been able to wield the blade.”

“Not tried to, but was able to,” Arturia emphasized. “I do not care about whatever mad thought has invaded your heads or why my brother suddenly matters to useless wastes of flesh like you all or your even more useless magazines. But the fact of the matter is, something about the metal Caliburn was forged from sucks in Aura, making it lighter in the hand, and only the Arc family has ever had enough to wield it without even feeling the strain. Few outside our family could even lift it up, let alone fight with it. Harry wields it like no one else can in our generation or my Father’s. Whatever evidence you think you have or why this matters to you, you cannot fight against that simple fact.”

That, alas, didn’t seem to matter to the shills. They started to bark out questions, and finally, the reason why the shills were interested in digging up dirt came up. “How dare the Arcs allow someone who could be a foundling to date the Invincible Girl!? Why are the Arcs willing to dishonor all of Mistral like this?!”

Mistrali natives had a bad tendency to either assume those born in the outer villages were also Mistrali or look down on them. Or both. This seemed to be a bit of that and the normal social issue with foundlings.

Arturia paused in her rebuttal, her eyes widening in surprise. “Wait, what?”

Like a shark sensing blood, one of the shills instantly changed tack. “Dark Queen, what does it feel like to know your brother is going out with your greatest rival? Do you see this as a betrayal? If you fight again, who do you think he will have helped against the other?”

“I rather think that Harry wouldn’t help either. He’d rather make a celebratory meal for after,” Arturia mumbled, her mind reeling from its second shock in as many minutes. The earlier revelation of what Guld’s expression could mean was still bouncing around her mind even as she defended her brother’s honor, but this was a bit too much.

Not that Harry was dating Pyrrha. As much as she was angry at having been defeated by the girl twice, there were no hard feelings between them. No, it was the idea of Harry dating anyone that struck her like a hammer between the eyes. A feeling of intense jealousy went through her, and all the years of trying to ignore the fact that her brother was pretty much her ideal man were swept away.

The shill who had questioned her and the one who had shouted out about how Harry and Pyrrha were dating began to shout further questions, mostly about Pyrrha and Arturia’s relationship, alluding to a far deeper hatred and rivalry than there was. But Arturia didn’t really hear them, instead trying to regain control of her emotions. Luckily her regal, cold expression had frozen in place, so none of the reporters realized how deep her inner turmoil ran.

But Guld wasn’t shocked. And after one reporter shouted out about how there hadn’t been any record of Harry’s birth, he finally lost it. He roared, stepping forward and letting his Semblance activate. Spikes of Aura flashed out, stabbing into scrolls and cameras, destroying them. “ENOUGH! Militiamen, remove these people. They are no longer welcome in Evig Låga. If they return or try to fight back, I will persecute all of you under the laws of our charter!”

This was no idle threat. Whatever Mistral or its citizens might feel, the precedent was plain. So long as the laws didn’t pertain to taxes paid to Mistral or were about making war, the laws of the village or town where a crime occurred superseded the laws of wherever the accused came from.

The reporters still shouted questions, but with their equipment destroyed and now finally cowed, none of them argued with the militiamen as they pushed the reporters away from the gates to the Arc estate. Soon they were away, along with the militiamen.

This left Arturia, Violet and Guld alone. For a moment, Arturia was silent, staring after the reporters while Guld opened the gate for Violet and her burden. But then, as Violet turned to Guld, Arturia spoke, her eyes twitching to his, narrowing dangerously. “Father, why were you looking guilty just then?” She almost hissed the words.

“Huh, so that wasn’t just me that saw that?” Violet mused, dumping the cart to one side to glare at her father. But while Arturia was suspicious and angry, Violet was almost amused as well as questioning.

Perhaps it was Violet’s tone which caused what happened next, taking away from the tension Arturia’s should have imposed. Perhaps it was because Guld, for all his courage as Hunter, wasn’t quite willing to step up to this particular task on his own. Perhaps he simply didn’t understand how much Arturia had just guessed, how badly she was reeling. Regardless, he attempted to deflect rather than calm things down. “Er… guilty? No, I, um, I wasn’t feeling guilty about anything those shills said. I was thinking about eating the last bit of dessert before your mother could get to it.”

He chose… poorly.

With a snarl to put a lioness to shame, Arturia slammed her foot down into the ground. Most people thought she needed Rhongomyniad to direct her Semblance, but that was false. To send it over appreciable distance and refine her attacks, yes. Otherwise, a lot of the heat dissipated itself. But Arturia could use her Semblance without her lance just as easily. And she had been the one to teach Harry he could use his Semblance through his feet for a reason.

A blast of ravening energy crashed out from where Arturia had stomped on the ground, slamming into Guld. He had been only a few feet away from his daughter and thus had no chance to dodge. And even with his own Aura protecting him from being hurt by the strike, the impact of the blast smashed Guld off his feet.

Guld also wasn’t armed as Arturia was, and when she ripped Rhongomyniad off her back, Guld knew he had fucked up.

But Violet stepped forward, laying a hand on her younger sister’s shoulder. “Now, now. While he had that coming, I think we’ll get more answers from a live father rather than a dead corpse. Further, I think this is a conversation we should have inside.””

Huffing, Arturia breathed in deeply, stopping herself from stabbing her father with some difficulty. Then she pointed over Guld’s shoulder. “Indeed.” *And if it means what I think it means… no, I need to set that aside. I could still be just jumping at shadows. After all, what I said about Caliburn is accurate.*

Grumbling a bit at how his daughter had so easily knocked him down, Guld got to his feet, shaking his head. Knowing there was no way to get out of this, he nodded in agreement. “…Let me call your mother and the rest of the family. We might as well rip the entire Band-Aid off all at once.”

Soon enough, the family was gathered, and after a brief argument between the patriarch and matriarch of the family, Hazel and Guld began their tale. How the town that Hazel had been brought to give birth to Tia had been attacked by Grimm. How the attack had bypassed most of the defenses because those defenses had been badly neglected. How the Grimm had even reached the hospital, causing both a fire and evacuation. And finally, how Guld had saved the young baby that became Harry Arc.

“Since then, we treated him as part of the family in every way we can,” Hazel said, shaking her head, an expression both sheepish and sad on her face. “I’m sorry we hid this from you, but for the longest time, it really didn’t matter… heck, a lot of the time, we really didn’t honestly remember it. Especially after Harry could lift and train with Caliburn before even unlocking his Aura.”

“There is that,” Violet murmured. Of all the siblings present – Saffron was still in college in Mistral – she had taken this news the easiest. She admitted early on that she had wondered about Harry’s origins but had set it aside, unaware of whether he was a ‘real’ Arc or not. “Any ideas?”

“We think it’s a mix of things. First, Harry probably does have some Arc blood in him somewhere. My sister isn’t the only Arc banished from the clan over the centuries. And there have been a time or two when second cousins could use Caliburn. And second, well, the longer name for Caliburn is ‘Sword of the King’. And you have to admit that Harry’s leadership skills are the best of you kids. No offense Arturia,” Guld answered, staring sideways at where Arturia was standing.

Arturia didn’t respond, her face remaining utterly blank. But this was not her normal aloof, regal expression. No, this was a completely blank look of a young woman thinking such conflicting thoughts that all bodily functions had shut down to concentrate on the internal battle.

“So… he is related to us, just not our actual brother? That’s good enough for me,” Magenta announced, although she was looking a little unsure, a tiny bit relieved and guilty about being relieved. “Um… I think you two were a bit cowardly for keeping this a secret for so long. And I’m not really happy about that. But I don’t think this really changes anything.

The twins, Ruby and Rouge, nodded their heads. “Harry’s Harry!” Rouge shouted with a grin. Adopted or not, he was still their brother. “Raise your hands if you think he’s going to treat you differently than he already does?”

Violet, Ruby and Magenta all raised their hands, although Magenta looked just slightly more guilty than a moment ago.

Staring at her little reader, Hazel cocked an eyebrow, causing the girl to blush and look away. Nodding in satisfaction that Magenta at least understood a part of why she and Guld had held off on talking about Harry’s origins, the Arc matriarch looked over to Arturia. “Arturia, are you in there?”

Being directly spoken to did not break Arturia out of her momentary stasis, her thoughts only now starting to come together in any coherent form. *Harry isn’t my brother. My… I will admit it to myself if no one else, my ideal man, is dateable!!* Her teammate had had a point back in her last year at Beacon. She had consciously or unconsciously then compared every man she met to Harry, trying to find someone who could match up against her brother in the areas that she was most attracted to: his kindness, humor, drive and moral strength. Harry’s being handsome certainly didn’t hurt, either, but it wasn’t the most important thing. Arturia had been prepared to settle for the best three out of four. But now?

*Four years, four years at the least I’ve fought this attraction to him. I tried to ignore that my feelings for Harry went in an entirely different direction than that toward a family member. And now I learn he wasn’t my brother at all. All that time, all that mental anguish wasted!! Give me back my mental health, Father, Mother!*

*And now, he is at Beacon. And not only is he dating Pyrrha Nikos, the redheaded wench, but Tia is right there! And she has had years to get closer to him than I am. I should never have gone to Beacon! I should’ve stayed home and apprenticed under Father. Then I’d be just as close to Harry as she is, and I could have convinced him to apprentice under me. Mmm... Under me… no, bad Arturia! Don’t let the horny in. You can’t let what-if fantasies overtake you. No, what you need is to...*

At that point, Arturia was knocked out of her thoughts by a tennis ball hitting her in the forehead. “Back with us, Arturia?” Arturia had the grace to look a bit sheepish, and Hazel snorted, knowing full well what thoughts were going through her daughter’s head.

“I, um, yes, I was thinking about, about how to break this to Harry, Saffron and Tia, yes. But you really should have told us sooner, Mother!” Arturia shot back, trying to take the offensive.

This didn’t work. Instead, Hazel simply snorted again while Guld sighed. “You’re right, we probably should have told you earlier, but as Hazel said, it didn’t seem all that important for a while, and then we were kind of afraid of causing a bloodbath within the family.”

The pointed look both parents gave Arturia told Arturia they knew precisely what Arturia was thinking and caused the Dark Queen to deflate. They had a point, after all. If Tia had recognized her feelings towards Harry as more than familial, as Arturia had, and then one or both learned Harry wasn’t their brother? Well, there would have been a lot of issues between them.

“Alright, well, I know about it now,” Arturia huffed. *And if you think that just because he’s going out with Nikos that I won’t try to claim him, either over her corpse or through simply convincing Harry that I’m a far better match, you have another thing coming. And if Tia gets in my way… well… I…* Arturia wasn’t certain what she’d do then, but she’s a Huntress. Even when dealing with her sister, violence was always on the table. *And I know Tia well enough to know that after I win, all she’ll demand is more cuddles and food. Hopefully…*

However, that all was for later. Right now, there were other questions to think about. “How will you tell Saffron, Tia and Harry about this? It isn’t the kind of thing they should learn about via those shills, but it also isn’t something they should learn about over the phone. I already have a ticket to Vale this coming Saturday. I can tell Harry and Tia then. But you should make some plan to get Saffron back home to tell her in person.”

“And I’m so certain you don’t have any ulterior motive,” Hazel snorted. “Now you listen here, young lady. I quite like Pyrrha. And you forget how awkward it would be for Harry if you…”

This discussion continued for some time, but it was like beating against a mountain for Hazel, Guld, and even Violet and Rouge, who joined in, if for rather different reasons. Violet still thought it kind of weird to be attracted sexually to someone who you had grown up with. Rouge was a major fan of Pyrrha’s and thought the two going out was both cute and amazing. Ruby and Magenta removed themselves from the argument, retreating to the treehouse.

Eventually, Arturia was worn down slightly. She would not be the only one going to meet Harry and Tia. Instead, Guld would get a ticket and head to Vale as well. His Hunter license allowed him to do that just as easily as Arturia’s. And Arturia promised not to just jump Harry the moment they saw him. All in all, that was two major concessions.

Alas, what Arturia would do about Harry’s already-existing girlfriend was another matter entirely…

**OOOOOOO**

Salem moved through her dark fortress, frowning in some annoyance. The Grimm around Beacon had been culled extensively back in the past few weeks, and she had been forced to pull her remaining Seers away from Beacon when one of the teachers, a rather speedy one, had almost spotted a Seer. The Seers had watched from afar as several teachers were called in to search for the one that had been spotted, and it nearly was spotted once more.

After that unfortunate chance, Salem decided to pull her Seers away. She still had a few hidden in Vale, waiting to follow Goodwitch or Ozpin from afar if they entered the city just in case, but her ability to watch events around Beacon, already curtailed after losing one of her local Seers in the Initiation, was even worse now. *And I did not even get to see much violence in that gamble. While several Initiates might have died leading up to the Cenitaur appearing, none of the students it personally attacked were slain.*

*Although, it was interesting to watch that youth with the Earth Semblance… if I didn’t know better, I would have thought it was Ozpin after he gave his powers to the blasted Maidens, limited but still powerful. His take-charge attitude also was interesting. Regardless, I have already warned Cinder of him, and that is not as annoying as feeling an ancient Grimm of my own creation dying.*

Salem could control the Grimm she specifically created up to a point and could direct them even from long range. But it became quite difficult the longer the range was. Still, Salem knew where most of her creations were, like tiny bits of expanded thought, and she could tug on them at any time.

One such, a simple Beowolf she had made after the Color’s War, had since evolved several times, becoming what Hunters called a Dread Wolf. But that creature was now dead. The strand connecting them had been severed more than two weeks ago. And Salem, despite pulling on the string of three other Grimm of her creation in Mistral, had no idea how it had died. The terrain there was difficult to cross, and none of the three had been anywhere near where the Dread Wolf had last been when Salem reached out to it. She had found a minor human settlement with, admittedly, advanced, dangerous defenses, but surely that would not have been enough? The Dread Wolf should have been more intelligent enough to retreat and besiege the place. So what had happened to kill it so quickly it could not?

That unsolved mystery was a minor annoyance compared to the issue with Beacon and her Seers, but it still niggled at her mind occasionally. Regardless, Salem set it aside for now, interested to see if her most intelligent, if only scientifically speaking anyway, servant had anything interesting to report, as his message to her had indicated.

**“Arthur, you informed one of my servants that you had something to show me,”** Salem began without preamble as she entered a large room in her castle. Despite being nearly half the size of her throne room, it looked packed with enough tech and gear to be a mad scientist’s dream.

One more devoted to engineering than biology or chemistry, perhaps. In several areas around the room, robotic parts hung from various books, and in the center was one of the latest Atlas robots, alongside an extremely shrunken version of the Atlesian paladin, one of their newest toys.

Salem stared at it for a moment, then shook her head with a sneer. As if such things would make a difference against the hordes of Grimm out there. *And it will entirely defeat the purpose. The more you create robots to defend you, the more you ostracize your Hunters, the weaker your society becomes as a whole. All an enemy must do is get behind that shield to the raw flesh underneath, and the victim will crumble just like a human would.*

She ignored the fact that Arthur Watts wasn’t actually working at the moment. Instead, he had been watching what looked like a soap opera of some kind. He turned rapidly enough to her, the TV turning off even as he bowed grandly, so Salem was willing to overlook his foibles. After all, Arthur Watts was one of the first human agents she had gathered in this generation, and his skill was a central pillar of Cinder’s plan for Beacon and finishing off the Fall maiden.

“Yes, mistress, of course. I finished the program to override the Friend or Foe Identification System in the droids. Honestly, it was quite easy, considering how much of that programming was based on my own work before I was run out of the Atlas military. Observe.”

Salem watched as he moved over to a nearby computer and input some orders. The two Atlas droids came awake, turning around, their weapons coming up and pointing nowhere. “If you could bring in a Grimm for a moment, my lady?”

Salem raised an eyebrow, then gestured. Rather than create a Grimm directly in front of Watts, she mentally summoned one from nearby. Seconds later, one of her Seers appeared, floating into the room through one of the walls, startling Watts, if only for a second. Instantly, the droids trained on it, but then Arthur recovered from his surprise and hit another button. Suddenly, they stopped moving, returning to parade rest. “And now…”

Arthur ducked behind a protective shield for a moment, then operated a series of controls there. This caused two paper cardboard cutouts to pop up from the floor. One of them was made to look like a woman, a woman that Salem didn’t recognize and believed was probably random. The other was in the form of General Ironwood, the current ruler of Atlas. Salem had an extensive analysis of the man and knew him for one of her stauncher foes, but in a way, one of the most flawed. *He takes power so much onto himself to try and change the status quo, yet now that he has that power, he is unwilling to wield it as necessary. Pathetic.*

Instantly the droids turned in that direction, their guns rising and firing without any warning or shout to surrender. Both targets were riddled with the bullets quickly, and Arthur smiled as he turned the droids off and stepped back out from behind the protective wall. “The droids will not only see the Grimm isn't a threat, but they will willingly target any humans they come across.”

**“Excellent.”** *And there is the other problem with having artificial creations protecting your society. They can be warped and manipulated to turn against you.* **“So, Cinder’s plan is viable then?”**

Arthur grumbled a bit at that, looking away from Salem, and Salem had to hold back a self-satisfied smile. She had carefully made certain that all of her direct subordinates were in competition with one another for her favor, the better to make certain that they both did their best and would never think about uniting against her once her real motivations became known in the future. And while Arthur and Cinder could generally be trusted to be civil to one another, the daggers occasionally came out when they were alone with Salem. *And it must almost pain Arthur to actually admit that Cinder’s overall plan is quite elegant and destructive as well.*

“Yes… Cinder’s plan will work... so long as a twenty-five-year-old woman who literally drips sexuality from every pore can act like a regular Academy student,” Arthur mumbled most of that under his breath, but Salem still heard him and snorted internally in amusement before Watts went on. “I don’t think the IFF virus will become as widespread as she thinks, even if we are lucky enough to get it into the STC itself. The commanders of the Atlas military and the computer technicians they have working for them are not idiots.”

**“But we know with the troubles that Cinder’s pawns have been causing in Vale, Ironwood intends to take a large portion of his military with him to Vale before the Vytal Festival. And there, they will not have access to such resources, correct?”**

“I don’t deal in absolutes. I’m a scientist. In a real-world experiment, there will always be unknown factors,” Arthur practically snapped before pausing and bowing his head deeply. “Your pardon, my queen, I let my temper get ahead of me for a moment there. Any mention of the Atlas military gets my ire up.”

**“After the way they treated you, it is understandable. But do not let it happen again.”** Salem warned, her tone giving no inflection to the words, but then again, they didn’t need any. **“And what of your own addition to Cinder’s plan, bringing down the STC?”**

“That is much harder. I wasn’t involved in setting the STC up, so I don’t know any of the backdoors or mistakes I can attack in its programming. I’ve had to start from scratch. The cascade effect is one that I have been able to program, but getting it to interact with the STC unseen, keeping it dormant and spreading until it’s activated so that **everything** goes down, is very hard,” Arthur admitted. “I should still be able to finish it in time for Cinder to place it, but it will be tight.”

**“Very well. Given the importance of the plan to retrieve the Autumn Maiden’s powers to my overall goals, you will need to concentrate on this almost to the exclusion of all else. Including your own side projects.”**

Arthur frowned, his brows together for a moment as she looked at her. “You sounded almost annoyed, my lady. But I assure you, I am more than capable of handling any duties you wish to introduce. The programming is time-consuming to be sure, but for someone like me, having other things to concentrate on at the same time is often more beneficial than working on a single project and getting into a rut.”

**“Very well.”** Salem knew that Arthur was speaking more due to ego than any real desire to help, but Salem was perfectly willing to take advantage of that. It was how she had recruited the man, after all. Watt’s bruised ego and pride made for easy pickings. “I recently was checking over my scattered forces in Mistral and Vacuo, and I discovered that one of them had been slain recently. Indeed, I sent one of my other Grimm to investigate, and they discovered that his entire pack was no longer around. Instead, they observed some kind of new human settlement, one with massive walls and defenses.”

“One where there has not been a human settlement reported before?” Arthur asked for clarification, and Salem simply nodded, causing Watts to stroke his chin thoughtfully. “So, who is trying to expand then? Or… no, it is more likely some kind of mine. Much like in Mantle. A small, confined area, easier to defend. That gives me a starting point at least…”

Arthur moved over to one of his computers and tapped in the query he wanted, looking at the latest data they had on Mistral’s local dust sales. “A Fire Dust mine, perhaps? Unfortunately, given the fact it’s happening out in the Grimm lands rather than settled territory, no one will have needed to file any paperwork for it. We’ll need to look at information readily available on the net on what independent town or village has begun to bring in more workers… bullhead records, yes, that will work…”

As a somewhat amused Salem watched, Arthur began to use the secret STC tower he had created himself, using a purloined copy of the programming behind the device to connect to the worldwide communication network. He wouldn’t be able to stay on it for very long unless some of the computer specialists on the other side noticed there was a fifth receiver out there. But he didn’t need to.

Moments later, he said simply, “Evig Låga. Known for producing Hunters of decent quality and being a decent, if small, farming community. It’s generally speaking a nothing backwater, but perhaps they are looking to expand?”

He shrugged his shoulders as he turned back to Salem. “I’m afraid without being on the ground in Mistral, that’s about as much information as I can get us, mistress.”

**“That is enough. I will send a few Seers to speak to the Cowardly Lion to follow up on this information.”** Salem answered even as the town's name stayed in her mind, almost like a long-forgotten memory. Whatever it was, however, did not come, and Salem went on smoothly, a thin smile appearing on her face. **“It is always good to remind the turncoat of who now holds his leash after all.”**

**OOOOOOO**

Thankfully, while some Mistral rags continued to run stories on whether or not Harry was a real Arc and others speculated that Pyrrha was somehow being manipulated by him, the real newspaper outlets didn’t run with it. The Arc’s support of Harry, and their distance from Mistral, it had to be said, had somewhat curtailed the idea that Harry was some kind of plant. Further, the bandit clans hadn’t used the Foundling Technique for at least forty years. The only real headway the shills had was in printing about how shocked Arturia had looked at the idea that Harry was dating her ‘hated rival’. And even that was ignored by the better newspapers. So, while the furor about Pyrrha’s dating status continued, it no longer dominated the news.

None of this furor had touched Pyrrha in Beacon. The second week of her and Harry officially dating moved on without any real incident. The schoolwork continued to hammer all of the freshmen class, and the various teams only did well if they came together to help one another, something that ARGT and others had issues with due to the characters of one or more of the teens within. Still, Harry and his friends had a decent grasp of the scholastic side of things. Even Ruby was at least treading water rather than drowning now, and everyone was now looking forward to the trip to Forever Fall.

Tia stretched her arms above her head, popping several bones as she did, letting loose a low hum through her scarf, pleased with how her Thursday had been going as she sat on a bench, enjoying the feeling of the sun upon her. With both of them free from Aura training, she and Harry had decided to go exploring in Vale for a bit together, which had been a great deal of fun. They had found a gag gift for Arturia, a shirt with the image of a chibi queen and the words ‘Your Majesty demands’ on it. They had returned to Beacon only a few moments ago, with Harry giving her a hug before hurrying off to meet with his team and heading to the gym for strength training.

*Even when in a relationship with Pyrrha, he’s still making time for me,* Tia thought with a smile, pulling her knee up to her chest and leaning her scarf-clad chin on top of it. That this gave a passing boy a heart attack at the upskirt shot she had just given him was completely lost on Tia as her thoughts centered on Pyrrha and Harry. *Honestly speaking, he was dating Pyrrha since after initiation. I should be used to the idea by now and not be dealing with this strange feeling.*

She still wasn’t certain what she was feeling, but Tia knew it had something to do with seeing Harry and Pyrrha together in a romantic moment, which they occasionally did, even in public now that their relationship was out in the open, and more so in team Juniper’s townhome. Still, the feeling went away whenever Harry paid attention to Tia. That was good. And when Tia was with Pyrrha, there wasn’t any hint of that feeling within her. It was just seeing them together that had a weird effect on Tia. *Is this really jealousy? I don’t like to think I’m that petty, but…*

“Tia? Is there something wrong?”

Looking up, Tia found Sung-Sun standing in front of her. She raised one eyebrow in surprise at the disheveled air of the normally poised, immaculately dressed girl. Of all of their acquaintances, Sung-Sun was ahead of even Weiss in terms of making certain she looked as good as she could. “What happened to you?”

Sung-Sun let loose a dry little chuckle, shaking her head. “Well, recall that Ms. Goodwitch wrote a critique on my last match saying that I needed to unlock my Semblance? Well, I requested to get out of a day of Aura training so Professor Port could help me try to unlock it. He seems to have taken an interest in our team, and when he offered, I accepted.” She shook her head once more, her lips twisted into a grimace. “If I had known his idea of unlocking my Semblance basically boiled down to beating me up, I might not have been so quick to jump on his offer.”

“Do you want me to hurt him?” Tia asked, getting to her feet and moving over to her team member. Sung-Sun was almost to the point where Tia would consider her a friend, and if Professor Port had beaten her up, Tia was more than willing to return the favor, teacher or not.

“Now, that would be quite an interesting match. The Monster of the Arcs against the Juggernaut of Beacon,” Sung-Sun laughed, patting Tia’s shoulder. “But no, thank you. Although I would have preferred to have seen some progress with my Semblance. How did you unlock your Semblance?”

How people unlock their Semblance was as unique as individual Semblances could be. Sometimes it happened when you unlocked your Aura, although those times were few and far between. Sometimes, it was when you were in a fight or a life-and-death moment of some kind. It could be as simple as a specific memory coming to mind or the sight of something important that took on new meaning as the individual looked at it.

Tia shook her head, wishing for a moment that Harry was here to explain this for her, but pushing on regardless. “I found myself wrestling with the Grimm, a Liger Fang at one point. It and its fellows had ambushed us. Then I was covered with armor and tearing it apart even as it tried to do the same to me.”

Humming under her breath, Sung-Sun nodded thoughtfully. “That makes sense, given the appearance of your armor, I suppose. Although I hope that my Semblance is a least a little more elegant. No offense.”

Tia just looked at her blankly as if asking why she would take offense at all, and Sung-Sun shook her head. “Nevermind. Did you finish all of Professor Oobleck’s homework?” When Tia stopped and looked away from her, Sung-Sun laughed. “Well, I did, but I didn’t finish our language arts assignment.” While Sung-Sun had no trouble reading the assigned texts, she struggled with writing in general. “Shall we perhaps work on them together? That trip to Forever Fall is supposed to happen tomorrow, correct?”

Tia nodded in response to both observations, knowing that getting the work done before the weekend and the trip to Forever Fall tomorrow was a good idea. The two of them continued on their way, with Sung-Sun explaining how Port had put her through the wringer to awaken her Semblance, with Tia nodding at intervals to show she was paying attention.

However, the twosome's good mood disappeared as they opened the door to their dorm rooms and found Apacci and Mila on Mila’s bed. Both of them were naked, making out as Apacci’s ass thrust forward, Mila’s leg locked around his waist.

“Ugh,” Tia groaned, turning away and grabbing at some of the clothing that was fallen to the floor in the twosome’s hastiness to get to the bed. She hurled it towards them, looking away as the lovers stopped what they were doing, gaping over their shoulders before Apacci scrambled to cover himself.

*For someone so cocky, he doesn’t seem to like being on display. Not that he has much to be cocky about. Harry’s much more handsome,* Tia thought, remembering the times she had bathed with her twin. Harry had always been quick to hide his front from her, but Tia had seen his naked rear several times and always enjoyed the view.

Sung-Sun also looked away, blushing slightly from the view but more from anger than anything else. “Dammit, you two! What have we told you about moments like this! Either find someplace else on campus or tell us ahead of time so we know not to come back.”

While they weren’t a couple, Mila and Apacci had flirted almost from the outset. They got on one another’s nerves as often as they flirted, though, so it had always been a coin toss which way they would go. But just in case Sung-Sun had talked to both of them about needing to remember the dorm room was a shared space.

“Eh, it was kind of more impulse than planned,” Mila said, stretching languidly on the bed, utterly unconcerned of her nakedness in front of the other two girls and amused to note Apacci’s eyes tracking to her chest even as he tried to pull on his underwear, which had hit him in the head a second ago. “Spontaneity is the stuff of life, you know.”

“Not when you are living with three other people in a small, confined area! Brothers, it even smells in here!” Sung-Sun’s voice rose into a shriek as she pointed at her bed, having just spotted something she really didn’t want to. “And what the hell is that wet spot!”

“We were going to replace it before you got back,” Mila said with a shrug.

Tia moved to open the windows, having not made the connection between the musky smell in the air and sex before Sung-Sun had mentioned it, but now having no wish whatsoever to continue to smell it. Indeed, a part of her was telling her to just leave and move in permanently with Harry and his team. But Sung-Sun needed her support right now. And retreating like that wasn’t in her nature either. *It would make it seem as if I was in the wrong to walk in on them rather than them being in the wrong for doing this in the first place.*

With that in mind, Tia spoke up, adding her voice to Sung-Sun’s. “Idiots. You need to control yourselves better.”

“Oh, shut up!” Apacci said, having finally pulled on his boxers. “We can’t all be a prude or someone more interested in boinking her brother than seeing this fine piece in front of her.”

Tia’s brows furrowed, not having heard that term before, but getting the gist of it. The image of herself and Harry together came to her then, an image helped by the sight of Harry and Pyrrha that first Saturday morning in the townhome. For some reason, Tia’s mind forced her to imagine herself in Pyrrha’s place, and the thrill that went through her at the idea took her aback before Sung-Sun’s repost drove the image and the thrill of it out of her mind.

“And not all of us are horn dogs who chase after every skirt they see! I honestly thought better of you, Mila. I know Apacci is a horn dog, despite being a deer, but did you have to give in to him like that?! And what the hell did you do on my bed!”

“Persistence sometimes pays off, and it’s been a while for me anyway. Say what you will about his technique, at least Apacci’s enthusiastic and willing to be led,” Mila retorted.

Sung-Sun’s blush returned with a vengeance, and she stammered to a halt even while Apacci rounded on Mila. “I don’t remember being led to, I remember taking the lead, and I remember you liking it, Mila!”

“Enough.” Tia’s single word was accompanied by her stamping her foot on the ground so hard that there was a loud creak and groan from the floor. “You are in the wrong here. We have all had to make allowances to try and share a room like this with one another. We cannot forget that.”

“… Wait a moment. The two of you were supposed to be in Aura training this morning.” Sung-Sun announced, her eyes widening. “I wasn’t there because I was working with Professor Port. Did you …”

“Well, not all of us can grow to be Aura monsters like Tia over there. So, we figured we might as well use the morning to get some cardio in,” Mila snickered.

Apacci laughed. “That’s right. No one is getting anything out of that class except for Ruby and her fellow short stack. You can’t do anything with your Aura once you’ve got it. All this nonsense about building up your reserves is just that. It’s like saying human society isn’t biased towards faunus, patently impossible.”

That laugh was the final straw, and Sung-Sun scowled, breathing deeply a few times to regain control of her temper. Then she deliberately turned and locked the door to their dorm room which had closed behind Tia and Sung-Sun, thankfully, before turning back to her team. “All right, I think it’s high time we all have a little chat…”

What followed wasn’t really a chat of any sort but a diatribe that segued into an argument, which almost segued into a full-on fight right there in the dorms, with only Tia preventing such by siding with Sung-Sun. This, in turn, caused Mila and Apacci to team up against them, which Apacci took to mean it was a human versus faunus thing, accusing Sung-Sun of being prejudiced against them rather than it just being her anger at their lack of work ethic.

This went over very poorly, and Sung-Sun’s self-control began to snap at that point. Eventually, they got so loud that several other freshmen teams came in and separated them. Thankfully, with Team ANVL moving into a townhome, that meant their old dorm room had been left vacant, and Tia and Sung-Sun were able to spend the rest of the day and that night there instead of with their teammates, both of them knowing that this probably marked the end of Team ARGT unless both sides of the argument could try to understand one another.

**OOOOOOO**

“… So, are we going to talk about the elephant in the room, or just keep ignoring it?” Ruby whispered, looking distinctly uncomfortable as she sat beside her sister, with Harry and Pyrrha sitting across the aisle.

“How exactly would we talk about it? It’s a team issue, Ruby. Unless you can make all four of them sit down and apologize to one another, there isn’t really anything we can do,” Yang sighed, ruffling Ruby’s hair affectionately.

“While it is quite uncomfortable to see Argent pulling apart like this, I don’t think any of us can deny that it has been coming for a long time,” Harry added with a shrug.

“I will admit to being very uncomfortable right now about the tension in the air, but I have no idea what we could do to help,” Pyrrha said, glancing over her shoulder towards where team ARGT were very noticeably not sitting together, separated by team CRDL and team BECH, a team of two boys and two girls, only one of whose names Pyrrha could recall at the moment. “And a large part of me, I’m sorry to say, is simply telling me to stay out of it.”

The four of them and the rest of the freshman class were all sitting in rows on a large bullhead, the same one that had taken most of the freshmen to Beacon the day before Initiation. The entire grade was now being taken into Forever Fall, a forest several hundred miles away from Beacon. It was a somewhat hilly, even mountainous forest, but the Red Trees there were famous for yielding up a sap that had numerous uses, both in cooking and medicine. The grade had a full class on it with Professor Goodwitch, who was still filling in for Professor Peach.

But it was well away from Vale, so Hunters had to be brought in to do the harvesting. Since it was a relatively easy task, Beacon used it as the first expedition for the various freshmen teams, a sort of unofficial test of how far they had come in the first month – normally - of education. It was no secret that it also was an evaluation for each of the teams as a whole.

And regardless of how well each of the four might be prepared individually, it was clear to Harry that Team ARGT would not pass this evaluation.

“Does anyone know what caused it?” Harry whispered, looking over to his sister, who gave him a wave. He waved back, twitching his head toward her official partner, but Tia simply shrugged her shoulders as if dismissing the issue entirely. Which he had anticipated, really.

The other girls all looked to Yang, who rolled her eyes. “Do I look like a gossip to you?”

“Do you really want us to answer that?” Ruby quipped before quickly finding herself in a headlock. “I give, I give!”

“In answer to your question, all I know is that there was a lot of shouting going on yesterday afternoon, then Sung-Sun and Tia came out of the room with all of their stuff. They took over to Team Anvil’s former room, and that’s it,” Ruby answered. “Team Beach and Marianne’s team had to separate the foursome.”

“Great, just great. We’re going out into the Grimm lands with the Team that might be imploding on itself,” one of the other team leaders muttered from nearby.

“Anger won’t bring as many Grimm as fear, and none of those is the type to feel fear for any Grimm out there,” Harry rejoined. “I think the best thing we can do right now is to be there if they want any of us to act as moderators. Otherwise, hope that the teachers know about it.” *And finally get off their asses and do something about that team! Merlin, they still have Tia listed as its official leader!*

Soon enough, the bullhead touched down in a clearing, and Glynda, who, as she told Harry she would, was in charge of this expedition in place of Professor Peach, hopped out of the bullhead, gesturing the students to join her. All of them did so, moving into teams automatically, even team ARGT, if only due to peer pressure and the glare that Glynda was currently giving the entire class.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is Forever Fall. Team Leaders, you should all have gotten an email with a map of the area laid out in a grid pattern. Each Team has been assigned a section of the grid. You will each take three glass containers, replace the filled containers, and return them here. Points will be deducted for any damage done to the trees and destroyed containers or damage to the spigots that have been placed in the trees. This sap represents a good portion of Beacon's funding for your class and the sophomore class. Do not forget that the money we earn here will generally be returned to you in our various services.”

Most of the young adults nodded at that, but Ruby was more interested in the view, staring around at the red leaves of the trees, her eyes wide with wonder. “It is so pretty…”

Hearing that, Glynda allowed her glare to fade as she smiled as she looked at Ruby, nodding her head. “It is indeed Ms. Rose. I routinely come here with Professor Peach on this mission, not just to keep an eye on freshmen but because it is gorgeous here. But I will remind you there are still Grimm in this forest.”

Ruby grinned and gave her a thumbs up, completely unconcerned, and Glynda sighed. But this was something Harry had noticed about the younger girl. Even more than Yang, Ruby seemed to take it for granted that there would be Grimm everywhere and was completely unafraid of them. And it wasn’t a childish kind of fearlessness. Rather it seemed as if she really didn’t see the point of being afraid of the Grimm.

Shaking his head at that, Harry looked at his Team, glancing over to where he saw Sung-Sun and Tia were now standing several yards away from their official partners. *Crap.* “Wait here a second, team.”

Pyrrha smiled, understanding what he was going to do, while Ren and Nora simply nodded their heads, watching as Harry made his way over to his sister. “Hey Tia, where were you all assigned?”

Tia wordlessly held up the map of the forest, laid out in a grid pattern, with one of them highlighted. The email had been sent to her, another sign, much like her need to sit through the boring leadership course, that Beacon hadn’t woken up to the reality of Team ARGT.

Copying the grid number onto his own, Harry moved around and began to ask the other teams where they had been assigned. One of them, team BECH, volunteered to switch with Team ANVL, and Tia smiled behind her Huntress outfit’s long turtleneck as her twin returned to her. “Thanks, Harry.”

“No problem, Tia.” He then looked over to Sung-Sun and murmured, “And we’ll talk about what’s going on with your team later. I think it’s time to go to Professor Goodwitch after this.”

“This, as you put it, just occurred Thursday. I wanted to see if tempers had cooled to the point where both sides would be willing to apologize after a day in Professor Goodwitch’s class,” Sung-Sun answered, sighing. “That hasn’t happened. Whereas I think Tia and I would be willing to apologize, if not to work with them any longer, and Mila at least seems somewhat repentant, Apacci is still extremely angry, as you can see.”

Indeed, as they were talking, Apacci glared at them and now had marched off into the woods on his own. Mila looked between the two girls and Apacci before shrugging her shoulders and trooping off after Apacci. Almost but not quite in the right direction, Harry noted.

“You can’t always expect teenagers, or adults really, to act maturely,” he said drolly, remembering a time when he wouldn’t be so mature. The less said about how he had approached the concept of the opposite sex in his fourth year and beyond, the better he felt. *I shudder to think of how I would be around Pyrrha if I hadn’t had Dad around to talk girls, dating and so forth with. Well, that, and several years at Lighthouse watching how other teenagers treat romance.*

“Too true. Although what this will mean for Tia and me long term, I have no idea.”

Harry answered that would be something they would have to talk about later. He knew that Tia could easily apprentice with Arturia or even their own Mom or Dad if she had to. It wouldn’t be quite the same as being at Beacon, and while their parents were incredibly talented Huntsman, they weren’t quite to the level of Arturia, so that would probably be his preference for her. But Harry felt a pang of unease, uncertainty and… something else at the idea that Tia would be so far away from him. He put it down to the fact that she was the last member of his family he had with him here at Beacon and moved on.

Ruby had seen what Harry had done and decided that ANVL and RWBY should stick together. Now she zipped around the area, talking to the other team leaders. She found another team, team MARN (Maroon), who was willing to change places. Their leader, a girl almost as short as Weiss but with almost the same bust size as Yang, pointed to several of her companions. “We had just begun to upgrade our weapons, and a few of us couldn’t get them back before this. If you are willing to take a position on the outer edge of the grid, I am more than happy to switch places.”

“Thanks, Martina,” Ruby said, grinning at the other girl, who was quite soft-spoken most of the time and had what Ruby thought of as a very cute accent. She came from some independent village or town in Mantle, which was staunchly anti-authoritarian.

“It is not a problem, Ruby. Now, take your Team and hurry after your captain,” the black-haired girl said with a wink.

Although a little confused by what the older girl meant by that, Ruby nodded and raced over to her Team, telling them the news. The only one who seemed to have a problem with it was Blake, which Yang instantly noticed as they moved after the diminutive duo as they moved deeper into the forest, calling out Harry and Pyrrha’s names. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Blake answered instantly, only to sigh as Yang continued to look at her. “Nothing major, I mean. I had an uncomfortable conversation with Harry last week, and I’m still thinking about what he said.”

Blake was watching for this time and noticed Yang’s eyes flicking up above her head. But the blonde simply said coolly, “If he said anything to make you uncomfortable, I’ll pound him into paste. I don’t care how many tricks he tries in sparring if I can close the distance...”

“You’d get a sword to the face,” Blake replied drolly, smiling even as she said it and bumping her shoulder against her partner. Harry had sparred with Yang on Monday, and while Yang was mobile enough to dodge most of his tricks at the range, when she had closed, expecting an easy victory, his sword had nearly taken 20% of her Aura in one strike to her leg, and then she had found herself blasted off of the edge of the arena by an entirely new Semblance technique of Harry’s.

He put it down to having sparred with Professor Goodwitch the day before and learning more about what his Semblance could do. But Blake wasn’t certain that was the case, although she would be hard-pressed to tell anyone why.

“And it’s nothing like that,” Blake went on, shaking her head. “It’s about me. Part of me I’ve been trying to avoid talking to anyone about.”

Yang nodded slowly, then before Blake could move, she found the blonde’s arm around her shoulders, squeezing gently. “Whenever you’re ready to open up, I’m here. You’re the **purrfect** partner, and whatever secret you are keeping, I’ll back you up.”

That, and the look up to her ribbon, made Blake realize that as much as she wanted to not admit it, Harry was right. Yang had figured out her secret and hadn’t said anything beyond dropping cat puns like that one, which caused Blake to bite back a groan as she shook her head. “Thanks, Yang. I…” Deciding, rather ironically in her internal opinion, to grab the bull by the horns, Black pushed on hurriedly. “Do you want to talk tomorrow? If you’re free, that is. We can go to the library or into Vale…”

“Sure, partner, whatever ya need.” Yang agreed easily, and the two smiled at one another before a shout from Weiss interrupted their moment. With a final look at one another, they hurried their footsteps along when Ruby turned to shout at them to hurry up.

Throughout all of this, only Ren noticed some of the looks sent their way from several other freshmen. Most of those looks he put down to simple jealousy still. More than a month into the semester, people were still jealous of Ren, Harry and Apacci for seemingly having some of the better-looking girls in the grade on their teams. Ren had been called the Harem King for some reason because he hung out with Team Ruby and Nora, while Harry was simply being called a lucky bastard along with a sis-con for dating Pyrrha and his relationship with Tia.

But a few of those glares were far more heated, far angrier. The ones coming from Team CRDL came under this heading. Since the initial few clashes with Team RWBY and Team ANVL, CRDL had halted many of their attempts to bully others. But they still tried to throw their weight around, tried to be the big men in the grade, only to fail or be humiliated whenever Harry or his Team spotted them. Harry and Nora had humiliated them in combat class more than once, while Pyrrha and Ren were always quick to offer help and suggestions to anyone else in the freshman class, bar the four would-be bullies. That and Cardin’s jealousy for Harry getting with Pyrrha, and even somehow bribing Beacon to give them a townhome when they didn’t need one, made for a dangerous combination.

Now Cardin whispered to his cronies,” So nice of them to say aloud which portion of the grid they’d be in. Did you get the stuff, Dove?”

“Yep. It wasn’t easy to smuggle them into Beacon, though. I say we dump the box somewhere. No way we can get back aboard the Bullhead without Goodwitch noticing. And you owe me money for bribing the worker who loaded our weapons and gear,” Dove answered.

“You know I’m good for it. Excellent. Let’s fill a few of those jars and then get after them. Arc is going to pay for humiliating us so often, and that bitch of a sister too. So nice that they were willing to stay together like that.”

Elsewhere in the forest, Harry and his Team had succeeded in finding a tree that wasn’t already marked, and Ren had already found one of the spigots, complete with one of the filled jars they were supposed to replace with their own empty ones. However, their troubles began then, as Nora pushed Ren out of the way, pulled the jar out of its holder, and held it above her head, letting the sap drizzle down into her mouth. “Yummy!” She said, slurping it up happily before throwing herself down and sticking her mouth under the spigot.

“Nora!” Ren and Harry exclaimed as one, with Ren trying ineffectually to pull her away.

“No! It almost tastes as good as your pancakes, Ren!” She mumbled, her mouth still open under the tap.

Harry shook his head and gestured. A levitate spell pulled Nora away before her Aura overcame the spell, by which time Pyrrha had moved over and stood between the other girl who had the spigot, giggling a bit at her attitude. “Nora, you can have some of our sap when we return to the bullhead. We need to return with those filled containers, and we’ll never get that done if you try to fill your stomach first.”

“Okay, I can wait, I suppose. But I demand a full jar for myself!” Nora exclaimed, her tone mock pompous. “My servant Ren will put them on the cakes of pan, as together they will become a meal fit for a queen!”

The others all laughed and moved around their area, discovering which tree was ready to be harvested. “Is that the right word? You harvest the sap? Or you tap the sap?”

Everyone there shrugged ignorance at Ren’s confused question, and the work continued. Nearby, Harry caught glimpses of Ruby zooming around the woods, finding the trees for the others of her Team to look over quickly.

Harry looked to one side as he heard a grumbling growl, but instead of seeing his sister or Nora rubbing her stomach, he saw an Ursa moving through the woods. It looked like a young one but was already sniffing around one of Team ANVL’s spigots. “Pyrrha, one shot to the head, knock it away from the spigot, please.”

The Team’s sharpshooter obeyed instantly, and Harry did the rest, using a spike of the earth underneath the Ursa to stab it through the chest, armor and all.

“Aw, I wanted to see if I could tame it!” Nora whined, Magnhild on her shoulder.

Ren shuddered, but Pyrrha giggled at that as Harry snorted, shaking his head as he looked around them. “Maybe if another one turns up, Nora. And you can promise to keep it away from the trees we’re harvesting from. I don’t know about you, but I almost felt sorry for the critter. It was just looking for a bit of sap, after all.”

Pyrrha giggled again at that, shaking her head as she full well Harry’s opinions on the grim. Moments later, there was a series of shots to one side as team RWBY dealt with another interloper. On Team ANVL’s other side, Tia and Sung-Sun had also finished tapping their trees, and now Sung-Sun came over, pulling off her combat boots and gently setting her feet into the water of a small stream that wound between their areas. “Oh my, this feels nice.” She murmured, glancing over to Tia.

Tia joined her, pulling off her own and setting her feet in the water before slumping back onto her back and looking up at the sky happily.

Harry grinned and moved over to sit beside her head, ruffling her hair fondly. “You okay?”

Tia nuzzled her head against his thigh. “I am now.”

Pyrrha looked at them and shook her head, once more banishing a feeling of competition and jealousy, reminding herself that the two of them were twins. *Not even normal siblings, but twins. Obviously, they would be close. And remember, Tia has already let us have romance-time several times since Harry’s and my first date. If she’s not going to get in the way of Harry’s and my relationship, I’m not going to try to get between them.*

Still, that didn’t really help banish Pyrrha’s concerns, only to battle them.Tia was simply very touchy-feely with Harry, and to a lesser extent vice versa, more than she thought most teenage siblings would be. And sometimes, Pyrrha caught a look in Harry’s eyes that told her Harry was aware Tia was a woman*. With Tia, it’s far harder to tell if she sees Harry as ‘brother’ as well as ‘man’ or just ‘brother’.* Regardless, there was a ready acceptance of one another that she and Harry had yet to achieve.

That observation spurred Pyrrha forward, and her own boots came off quickly. A moment later, she was sitting beside Harry’s other side, leaning against his shoulder, paddling her feet in the river in delight. “I’ve never been out in nature like this. It’s amazing out here. The closest I’ve ever come is some of the parks in Mistral, but those are so… choreographed, I suppose? Unnatural natural beauty, if you understand what I mean.”

Harry nodded, indicating he understood, kissing her forehead gently, causing her to blush prettily. As nice as that touch was, Pyrrha still wasn’t used to public displays of affection. *Of course, our current circumstances really aren’t very public in comparison to a few other times we’ve held hands or hugged back in Beacon, but even so*. *What would the gossip rags back home say if they saw me now?* She thought, giggling and thanking Professor Ozpin once more for the Beacon policy of not letting any outsiders, reporters especially, access the school. *Mind you, if Beacon was physically connected to the Vale, I doubt that would have stopped them. But as it is, it’s worked so far.*

“Nora, Ren, come over here.” What followed was a rock-paper-scissors petition between the six of them, ignoring the presence of Apacci and Mila wherever they were. They should have been nearby, and Harry had seen them through the woods occasionally earlier. Neither had made any effort to join the others and seemed to be moving deeper into the woods. The last time Harry had seen either of them had been at least an hour, maybe longer ago.

Nora lost the tournament to her very dramatic bemoaning. But then she cheerfully climbed a nearby tree that wasn’t being harvested currently at Harry’s orders. There, she provided overwatch for the teams.

“Paranoid much?” Yang joked as team RWBY came towards them.

“As gorgeous as this place is, we’re still in the Grimm Lands, Yang. Most single Grimm might be no threat to any of us, but a group taking us unawares could be,” Harry answered firmly.

Ruby nodded and volunteered to take up a guard position along with Nora, the hammer wielder cheerfully greeting her as Ruby climbed the same tree, with Nora hauling the shorter girl up easily. “But we demand pancakes for this service!”

“She demands pancakes. I demand cookies! Cookies baked by Harry or Ren! I want to see what you guys can do with them,” Ruby shouted, nearly drooling at the idea.

“I normally add a bit of ginger and a dollop of molasses to any cookie I make. Or, in this case, sap,” Harry answered drolly as he looked up at the two of them, causing both girls to shout in joy.

Ren looked over at Harry apologetically, wordlessly volunteering to do the cooking, but Harry suddenly waved him off, shaking his head. “I’m never going to complain about cooking for people I like.”

That caused Ren to smile, the two men exchanged a fist bump, and the group settled in. Several of the girls pulled out scrolls and started a first-person shooter competition in some kind of game, enjoying the downtime as they waited for the rest of their classmates to finish. Harry was content to sit there, talking quietly to Tia about what had been happening with her Team.

The peaceful nature of the scene shattered like glass as Nora shouted, “Hey, what are you doing?! Ren, look out!”

While the shout might’ve been intended for just Ren, it worked to get the rest of the teams startled, looking around them. But even as Ren flung himself sideways, it was too late. Two jars of sap flew through the air from Team ARGT’s side of the river, crashing into Harry and Sung-Sun, who had the bad luck of sitting near Ren at the time. The jars shattered on Harry’s armor, covering him, Pyrrha and Tia with droplets of sap, covering Tia’s face entirely and even getting some into Harry’s eyes.

For her part, Sung-Sun was almost knocked off her feet by the hit of the jar. She stumbled as the top of the jar opened, splashing into her face and upper chest, causing her to cry out. “What in the, who would do something like this!?”

Nora had turned around the tree she was in and now fired off a grenade in the direction the flung jars had come from, which hurtled through the bushes to crash at the feet of Cardin and one of his teammates, the people who had thrown the grenades. However, two more jars were already arcing the way of the teens.

They shattered on the ground before Harry could clear his eyes of the sap. Now dozens of large wasps burst out, buzzing angrily as they zoomed around before becoming attracted to the sap.

Sung-Sun gasped as several of them began to sting her. Tia, who hopped to her feet angrily, growled out her activation mantra for her Semblance. When the rapier wasps came for her, they couldn’t get through her armor, and she crushed one of them with a lucky blow.

But the others were too fast to hit, darting around the Hunters. Only Blake with Gambol Shroud could defend herself very well, and before Harry could clear his eyes of the sap, every one of them had been stung. Stung multiple times, Sung-Sun had panicked and fallen into the river, using the water to defend herself from the wasps. Weiss and Pyrrha had also been stung several times, and Weiss was shouting out, “How! How are they getting through our Aura!?”

“They secrete some kind of acid or something along their needles that can penetrate Aura,” Sung-Sun shouted before dunking her head back into the water. She laid out flat, as there wasn’t enough water to submerge herself. But it was helping to wash away the sap, which was attracting the rapier wasps. “They’re native to Vacuo!”

Finally, Harry wiped away the sap and glared around them as he shouted at Nora. “Nora, who threw those?” A second later, a wide-angle Stupefy flashed out, passing over the teams, all of whom had Aura, and were thus immune to such a low-level spell, hitting the rapier wasps. The rapier wasps were not Grimm but simple animals, about as large as a human’s hand, with long thin needles for stingers about as long as a man’s middle finger. They had no natural protection against Harry’s magic and fell out of the sky in droves.

“Cardin and his merry band of assholes!” Nora reported, jumping down from where she had been watching the forest around them. Magnhild hammered out, and soon dozens of the wasps were squished into a paste. “Sorry fearless leader, I saw them moving through the forest, but not what they were holding.”

“No worries, Nora. I asked you to watch for threats, which should’ve been just Grimm out here. They also came from behind us rather than in front.” Harry used another spell to wash away the sap from himself and his sister, then Pyrrha, whose entire hair had been splattered with the gunk.

She was forced to duck her head into the water to get rid of most of it, as Harry’s spell would have been too painful if he had used it on her hair. Ten minutes later, her hair was finally free of the tap, and as she pulled her head out of the water, shaking her head from side to side, the redhead growled, “I’m going to kill Cardin. I don’t care if he’s part of the Winchester Clan. I’m going to tear his heart out.”

“Get in line.” Sung-Sun snarled in response as she finally pushed herself out of the water, completely drenched but now without any sap in her own hair or on her body.

She was also now showing several growing spots on her face and forearms where she had been stung. Weiss was also visibly stung in the face, neck, and hip, large reddish marks growing as they shivered in the water. Pyrrha’s armor had saved her from similar stings save on her inner arm.

“Which way did they go, Nora?” Harry demanded, fingering his sword by his side.

“After I fried on them, Cardinal ran right by us deeper into the woods, fearless leader. I… Oh…” Nora murmured, staring in that direction. The other teams all turned and looked and repeated Nora’s words as one. “OHhh….”

Three of Team CRDL were charging back towards them through the woods. Although not their leader, for some reason. With them were Apacci and Mila. And behind the five teens came several dozen Ursa of all kinds, including one massive Ursa Major. It was easily the largest any of the freshmen had ever seen, even Harry and Tia. It was so large that its head would probably be around two stories tall if it stood upright. And its armor looked weird, not just with more red veins in it, but with a strange series of blisters on its back. But it moved quickly for all of that as it charged after the panicking, fearful teams as they rushed toward their comrades.

*And fear brings the Grimm,* Harry thought, looking up to the sky as the other teams spread out, preparing for battle. And above them, Nevermore began to appear, flying out from deeper in the woods. “Fuck.”

**OOOOOOO**

Well before CRDL launched their foolish attack on Harry and Ren before Apacci and Mila had decided to skive off from their work. Sung-Sun and Tia could gather up the sap-filled jars on their own, and both wanted to get away from their sanctimonious teammates for a while.

United in their afront and annoyance, the two faunus marched off through the woods, muttering angrily to one another. But eventually, Mila had enough of that and slumped down against one of the trees, gazing out through the forest around them. “You know, I hope you know the way back. It just occurred to me that we’re all the way out here in these woods.”

“Don’t worry, I can get us back,” Apacci snorted, leaning against the same tree before admitting with some difficulty, “I suppose we should’ve thought about that before walking off. But we’re still not that far away. I can hear one of the other teams shouting something or other.”

“I can too, dingus! But I can’t figure out which direction it’s coming from,” Mila groused, shaking her head.

For a moment, the two of them were silent. Standing there, Mila began to feel a little uneasy at having marched out this far away from the others and from the whole argument with Sung-Sun and Tia. The lion faunus wasn’t about to admit they were right. Life was too short to care about school, grades and such. All Mila was here to do was get her Hunter's license. With that, she could travel for less than a tenth of the expense she would otherwise. Fun, frolic and adventure was Mila’s goal in life, with money a distant fourth. Sacrificing herself, like Tia had said more than once was part of a Hunter’s job, fighting the good fight, doing your part against the Grimm? All of those were barely thoughts in her head, let alone motivations.

But that didn’t mean that Mila didn’t want to get along with her teammates. And she knew this would have consequences if the team couldn’t patch things up. Two teams of the freshman class had already been kicked out of the school. Only one of the eight teens had been offered a chance to resume their Beacon experience next year when they could make more partners. Why those two teams had been disbanded, no one quite knew. But there were rumors about a lack of work ethic and some kind of sexual thing going on there.

Mila didn’t know what to believe. But she knew they were in for a bad time if both sides of the argument didn’t come to some kind of understanding soon.

Apacci’s thoughts on this matter were not nearly as deep. Although they were perhaps as self-serving in the name. To his mind, Sung-Sun was just as much of a rich bitch as the Schnee girl, someone who Apacci had trouble not punching in the face daily. And although they hadn’t been obvious about it, it was obvious to him that Sung-Sun and Tia were just as biased against faunus as Cardin. They didn’t espouse actual bullying or violence against the faunus, but they were more than willing to look down on Apacci and Mila, and force them to follow their rules, their intrinsically racist rules with its demand that they excel or be left behind.

It didn’t occur to him that Weiss’s or Sung-Sun’s attitude towards Apacci had anything to do with his cocky, flirtatious attitude. Apacci wasn’t a part of the White Fang, but he believed in their idea of Faunus supremacy rather than equality.

However, the deer faunus wasn’t one for thinking deep thoughts most of the time. With nothing better to do out here in the woods, he tapped Mila on the thigh with his finger. “Hey, since we’ve got nothing better to do, do you want to make out for a bit?”

Mila started at that, then shrugged. They really didn’t have anything better to do after all.

The two of them were going at it hot and heavy a moment later. Their armor had long since been discarded, and Apacci’s shirt was also lying on the ground by that point. Mila’s was swiftly joining it when there came a growl in the woods nearby.

Both of them froze, with Mila halfway to pulling her shirt up over her head, blind as Apacci turned towards the noise slowly. His eyes widened as he finally remembered they were in the Grimm Lands. A second later, he leaped away from Mila as quickly as he could, trying to grab at their weapons before a group of Ursa attacked from all sides.

Mila blindly hammered one of them away with a fist, pulling her shirt back down before her knees were taken out from under her a second later. She rolled away from the head of the next Ursa, taking out one of its legs with a kick but doing no real damage as another blow crashed into her back.

Apacci had reached his weapons and now took down one Ursa with a precise strike to the neck from his dagger before stabbing the next in the eye. Kicking Mila’s weapon over to her, Apacci dodged around another charging Ursa but took a blow in the side from an Ursa Major. He flew a short distance through the air to crash sideways into a tree, where Apacci shook his head, knowing that strike had taken out a lot of his Aura. “We gotta get out of here!”

Mila was also becoming frightened, unable to control her emotions as the same Ursa nearly knocked her onto her rear, its next bite clamping down on her shoulder, burning Aura to block before she could wrench away. Their fear brought more Grimm, and several Nevermore appeared in the sky above, diving down upon them.

“We got to get back to the others!” Mila yelled as she rolled away from the Ursa attacking her. She slashed at it with her mace only to gape as she saw Apacci run away through the forest. “You cockbite!”

Battering aside another Ursa, Mila raced after her companion. A few creepers tried to keep up, but she shot at them with her rifle gauntlet even as she picked up the pace.

A moment later, Apacci got his comeuppance as he crashed headlong into Russell Thrush, who was also running through the woods from a different direction. The two raced around a large rock outcropping, only to slam into one another like bumper cars, bouncing off and then tripping over one another.

“What the hell, you asshole?!” Apacci growled, hurling Russell off him as they finished rolling, only to stop and stare. Nearby, he could see the rest of team Cardinal. Sky and Dove were also retreating quickly, but Cardin was going toe to toe with possibly the largest Ursa Major in all the world.

The thing stood at least 3 feet taller than Cardin on its hind legs, and he was one of the tallest in the freshman class. The thing was also twice as wide as a normal Ursa, and its Grimm mask was more developed, as was that on its paws, reaching to the spiked elbows. The knees were also spiked. As Apacci watched in growing fear, the massive Ursa Major battered aside Cardin’s mace like it was nothing, and a second later, a claw raked out, crashing into Cardin and hurling him off of his feet to slam with enough force to shatter the tree trunk of a nearby tree.

“Shit!” With that, Apacci was on his feet, realizing that Mila had bypassed them all and was racing away.

Apacci followed quickly, with Russell and Sky also following. Dove hesitated a second before also running away, leaving Cardin there to face the Ursa Major on his own. Not one of them had thought of working together to take it out. Not one of them had considered anyone else’s well-being. The fear of the Grimm had gripped them now, and they were in full flight.

**OOOOOOO**

Seeing the onrushing Grimm, Harry immediately barked orders, taking command of all the teens there regardless of their team. “Ruby, hit-and-run attacks, slow those Beowolves down before they can cut off Russell and the rest of those idiots from the left. Nora, I want a wave of grenades behind them. Try to separate the rest of the Grimm from the fucktards.”

“Lien for the swear jar!” Ruby hissed before racing off.

Harry ignored her as Yang and Weiss both groaned. “Ren, Sung-Sun, watch the skies. Tia, Yang, and Pyrrha straight up the middle. Weiss, be ready to support with Glyphs or fire. When Mila and the rest get here, spread out into a line, I want you separated but still able to go to one another’s help. Blake, watch our flanks for now. Switch up as you can.”

A real close-order formation wouldn’t work, of course. Not only were the woods too dense for that to work easily, but the fighting style of the teens was far too different for it to work. Being in contact would at least allow Tia and Pyrrha to go to the aid of the others, with Yang’s Ember Celica at least providing some cover close-in.

With the orders given, Harry gathered his magic and slammed a foot into the ground. Spikes of earth appeared, racing towards the incoming Grimm, hitting several of them, knocking them off their feet or impaling the Grimm outright, slowing them down an instant before Ruby reached them through the woods. She used Crescent Rose to bounce around the battlefield for a second, slicing several Grimm into pieces and shooting others, giving the fleeing teens time to open up the distance.

Gunfire began to play across the front as Blake, Ren, and Pyrrha opened fire with their more long-range weapons. Meanwhile, Sung-Sun fired into the air at the first Nevermore coming through the foliage above them. A second later, Yang’s shotgun shells joined them right before she crashed into the first of the Ursa that her sister had taken out, hurling it backward. Another Ursa tried to swipe at her, but she ducked under it, grabbing the creature’s arm and using it as a bar to hurl herself forward, smashing her feet into a third.

A Beowulf leaped over the first Ursa but ate a shotgun shell to the side of the head, and the fourth and fifth both fell to precise shots from Pyrrha as Tia howled, almost as beastly chilling a sound as the Grimm made, crashing into two others. The Beowulf of the pair died instantly, its skull shattering under the impact, while the second Ursa Yang had attacked lasted a few seconds longer before Tia snapped its neck with a blow from her fist, hurling it aside into another Ursa as Tiburon stabbed into a Creeper.

So defended, the five racing teens should have been able to rally. But to Harry's surprise, they didn’t. Instead, they fivesome kept on retreating, running past their classmates towards the distant bullhead. “Dammit, get back here! You’re Hunters! You don’t just abandon your own!”

Called out like that, Mila and Apacci hesitated, slowing down slightly, and Harry barked out orders to them, demanding that Apacci add his guns to the defense against the Nevermore, who were now diving down into the woods in a frenzy. None of the Nevermores were the Greater variety, so they had to rely on claws and talons. But there were a lot of them, and even normal Nevermore grew to around the size of Ruby.

Hesitating once more, Apacci grunted, smacked his face and nodded. While a part of him wanted to keep on running, he knew that if he did, his life at Beacon would be over. As much as he had begun to dislike a lot of the school’s attitude, he wasn’t going to let them kick him out for being a coward. Mila had already joined the fight, her mace taking a Beowolf in the face and crushing its skull.

Staring up into the sky at the growing numbers of Nevermore, Harry ordered Apacci, Weiss and Ren to come together. “Weiss, you’ll be able to use your Glyphs better from a greater view of the fight.”

“What are you talking about, Arc?” Weiss barked as another Creeper came at her. The dense nature of the woodland was cutting down on their visibility badly, and she had moved to support Blake and Ruby.

“Just get over here!”

“FINE!” Weiss snarled back before joining the two boys.

Once they were within twenty feet, Harry tapped the ground under his feet, a new image of what he wanted coming to the fore of his mind. All three of them stumbled as the ground rose underneath them, creating a platform about a story tall, smashing branches out of its way. This let Apacci and Ren raise their hands and guns out of the forest's foliage to fire at the incoming Nevermore.

Recovering slowly, Weiss shook her head as she murmured, “Arc’s control of his Semblance never ceases to amaze me. And he still says he needs to work on it? I seriously need to get in touch with Winter. I refuse to be left behind.”

So saying, Weiss used one of her glyphs to create an ice sheet in midair, blocking several of the Nevermore, before stabbing her sword forward, stabbing one of the other Nevermore that had come too close.

The ones she had frozen fell, shattering on the ground below while Apacci and Ren began to lay down suppressive fire. Their guns, too small caliber to do too much damage to Ursa unless they hit one of the vulnerable points, were great against the Nevermore. This left Weiss to duck back under the foliage, staring down into the ongoing battle, using her glyphs as she wished or as Ruby, who had a better idea of her skills than Harry, called for them.

Below, Harry continued to use his magic, creating bulwarks scattered around the area, doing so almost practically blind, thanks to the trees all around them. But his mental image could still override reality in a wide area around him. Dirt, rock, it didn’t matter. Harry’s mental image changed the ground regardless. “’Ware the ground. Bulwarks upcoming!”

Nearly out of the range of Harry’s spell, Ruby blinked at that, then nearly stumbled as the ground underneath her lifted. “EEEP!” she kicked off, bouncing up into a tree, then used Crescent Rose to bounce forward, shouting, “Black Rose!”

Gambol Shroud wrapped around her and having just alighted on a nearby mound herself, Blake whirled, turning the momentum Ruby had created and flinging Ruby around a small open area around them for a moment. With Crescent Rose now in its scythe form, Ruby sliced into the Grimm all around before being flung back towards the central pillar, Blake taking to the trees and following her.

Elsewhere, Pyrrha hopped from one mound to another, lashing down at the Grimm with her javelin or using them as a firing platform, much like the small tower Ren and the others were using. Nora began to use the same thing, although Harry couldn’t actually see much of their individual areas of the battle. *Blasted trees!*

He could hear them, Yang and his sister, though.

“Yeehaw! Aww, fearless leader gave me a step up. How cool! It’s like playing whack-a-mole now! Here Grimmie, Grimmies!”

“Fuck that noise!” This was followed by a sound like someone had shattered a stone. “Oh… that worked.”

A second later, a flash of blue appeared as a spear of water appeared, stabbing through a Grimm and a tree behind it. “Oh. Too much power.”

With the bulwarks helping them, the teams moved closer together, closing ranks further as the Grimm pressed in, with Mila, Blake and Sung-Sun being pressed back on their flanks. As she moved back into sight of Harry, Sung-Sun caught his eye, raising a hand in the air and making a circling motion to get his attention. Harry grimaced at that, and he shouted, “How many!?”

“I don’t know. But Sky and the rest of the fools are still drawing more Grimm after them. And I can hear further fighting out there, but…” Sung-Sun grunted, ducking under a blow from an Ursa before nearly getting her head bitten off by a Creeper, her punch dagger gauntlet stabbing down into the Creeper’s maw. Without Weiss and Harry covering her, she might not have recovered enough to defend herself from the Ursa and several more Grimm who nearly pounced on her.

As Sung-Sun straightened up and pulled back further, she continued her report. “But I don’t know if the other teams are dealing with this assault as well as we are.” *Really, Harry’s orders to Nora and her grenade launcher saved us from the initial rush, letting my so-called teammates join us and for all of us to whittle down their numbers.*

“There’s worse!” Mila began as she pulled back along the battle’s other flank. Two large buttresses defended her sides, and she pulled straight back through the woods toward Harry, with Blake suddenly appearing in the trees above to help her lay down fire. “There’s this fucking massive Grimm out there, an Ursa Major, but one that makes most look tiny! I don’t think it’s an S-Class, but it might be close.”

Pyrrha and Tia were the last to pull back into Harry’s line of sight. After barking further orders to the teams, Harry began to use his magic more offensively. He tried to follow Glynda’s injunction about not using even mental spells, only his imagination, but faced with an actual battle, he couldn’t and fell back on his old standby. Not that it particularly slowed him down. “Yang, Nora, back and duck!”

As the two Huntresses flung themselves backward, the two trees they had been fighting near exploded, sending deadly shrapnel into the Grimm all around them. This didn’t stop the Grimm, but it cut down on their numbers enough for Yang to charge to Sung-Sun’s side, leaving Nora to hold that segment of the line for a moment.

“Weiss!”

“On it!” Weiss shouted from above, one glyph helping not defend the anti-air team disappearing as she whirled. Sweat dripped down her face as she thrust Myrtenaster forward, and a glyph appeared under Nora, turning hot pink for some reason.

“WOOOO!!!” Nora shouted, feeling herself moving faster, her blows hitting harder. “HA, oh wow, it’s like I used my Semblance!” With the glyph from Weiss speeding up her movements and empowering her blows, Nora turned the area Harry had cleared into an abattoir for the Grimm.

Trusting Ren to have one eye on Nora, Harry turned his attention to Mila’s segment of the battle. Another series of attack spells lashed out along with shots from his rifle, followed by still more bulwarks.

But this had taken Harry’s attention away from the original front of the battlefield. And with a roar that caused all the faunus to grab at their ears, The Ursa Major Mila had warned them about appeared. Its claws smashed into a tree trunk, shattering it into pieces with a show of strength that even Tia would been unable to match, hurling the pieces into Ruby and the nearby Sung-Sun.

“Aggh!” Ruby fell with a cry of pain as her leg was taken out from under her mid-run, and she rolled along the ground, only her Aura protecting her from either losing the leg or gaining a concussion as she crashed headfirst into a boulder.

Sung-Sun took a piece of wood to the chest armor, which protected her from permanent harm along with her Aura. But it still flung her off her feet, and she crashed into the river. “Brothers blast it! I’ve had enough of being wet!”

“Ruby!” Seeing red, Yang charged forward, but Weiss had been forced to help defend against a renewed Nevermore assault. And more Ursa were coming out of the woods all around the embattled teams now.

To the right of the main battle, Mila had a brief second to look away from her own battle as the Ursa Major appeared. For a moment, her brow furrowed, confusion plain on her features. But no one was near enough to notice or had enough attention to spare to care. And the next second, Mila had to turn her eyes to her portion of the battle.

The giant Ursa Major bellowed a challenge, and it and Yang exchanged blows as Harry, and the others were hard-pressed to deal with the renewed Grimm rush. Water from Tiburon flashed out, punching through several Grimm before Tia bisected another Ursa. Mila crushed the skull of one Beowolf, then exchanged blows with two more as she fell back, her rifle ammo expended.

Meanwhile, Harry’s spells continued to flash out, Harry staying in the central position, lending help where he could with his spells. The battle was so frenetic, with so many Grimm and his friends scattered so much by the nature of the terrain he knew instinctively he could do more by standing back and providing long-range support rather than rushing in. And indeed, in the next few moments, only his magic saved Ruby, who had yet to get to her feet, Sung-Sun, and Nora, as she was forced to retreat.

“Nora, grenade hell!” Harry bellowed, a cutting spell cutting down one Ursa before Harry used a levitation spell to grab Ruby and drag her back. “Close ranks!”

As grenades exploded in the few areas where Grimm had bunched up, Yang caught sight of Ruby lifted into the air out of the corner of her eye. Ruby’s leg was bent at a very bad angle, and the young girl’s face was scrunched in pain. She was still fighting, though, and Crescent Rose sliced into an Ursa’s side even as she was pulled away.

This moment of inattention cost Yang. A blow from the Ursa Major caught her in the side of the head, sending her stumbling. It empowered her further though, and she turned back to the Ursa Major, her eyes now a burning red as an Aura of flame appeared all around her. “Nice shot, bitch. Now take some of mine!” She howled, battering aside another blow from the Ursa Major strong enough to nearly cause it to lose its balance on its hind legs. Another blow to the chest sent it stumbling back, and a third cracked its Grimm mask as Yang went to town on it, pushing it back into the woods and following after, leaving the rest of them behind.

But unfortunately for the rest of the teams, Mila had been wrong. There wasn’t just one giant Ursa Major. There were two. One of them had been somewhat late to the party thanks to having been busy elsewhere. Now it appeared, and the first the teams knew of it was it rounding a tree and smashing Mila off her feet with a single blow. Mila had no Semblance to turn kinetic strikes into strength, and the blow flung her through the air.

As it came out from behind the tree, the differences between this giant Ursa Major and the other that Mila had noticed before became apparent. This one had the spikes at the elbows and knees that Mila had seen on the one fighting Cardin, whereas the other lacked them. And to the astonishment of Blake, who was getting into position above it, the creature also had small spikes on its back. Which it apparently could shoot out, doing so when she leaped down at it, Gambol Shroud poised to stab.

“YEEP!!” Only a last-minute use of her Semblance saved Blake from getting hit. Her Aura might have tanked the blows, but maybe not. Certainly, it didn’t save her much when the Ursa Major twisted around faster than anything that size could move. Its paw swiped the hidden cat faunus out of the air with a cry of shock and some pain as that one blow broke through her Aura. “FUCK, it’s fasTTTT!”

Blake’s words broke off in a hiss of agony as the back of her head crashed into a tree branch. With her Aura already popped by the Grimm’s blow, the strike landed, and Blake fell onto her rear, seeing stars and completely vulnerable.

With Harry pulling Ruby through the woods – not an easy task thanks to the branches and trees between his position and where she had gone down, plus her Aura fighting his spell’s influence on her body – and helping the others, it fell to Pyrrha or Tia to defend Blake. Pyrrha was busy dancing around and between more than a dozen Grimm while above her, three Nevermore who had broken through Ren and the other’s fire dove and twisted around her.

Tia was protected from them by the denser foliage above her current position, and she was the only one in a position to go to Blake’s aid, but Tiburon had just gotten stuck in a tree. Instead of wasting time trying to pull her blade out, Tia left it there, charging forward as she reached inside herself and released the control she kept on her Semblance. Having already activated it earlier, Horrible Belle swiftly spread to cover more of Tia’s body, moving from where it had covered her hands, feet, upper chest and lower face to cover the rest of her. In seconds, only Tia’s eyes and hair could be seen as Grimm-like armor covered the rest of her.

Seeing this, the nearby Sung-Sun stared, nearly costing her, as a Nevermore that had just broken out of the foliage above nearly took her head. Pyrrha also gaped, but the four-time champion kept moving, her weapon shifting into a sword to stab deep into one Beowulf before she blocked a blow from an Ursa with her shield. Milo shifting into its javelin form, she took it through the neck. “Tia, what…”

As the transformation completed, Tia’s mouth, which had before seemed to be a solid piece of bone marked by a teeth-like design, opened, showing the massive serrated teeth were very real. “ROAOOAOAAAAARRRRRR!!”

All the Grimm throughout the battlefield paused at that noise, and Tia launched herself into the massive Ursa Major. The two titans crashed together with enough force to send Blake stumbling away, holding her hands over her previously hidden ear. It knocked over several Creepers who had been passing the larger Ursa Major on both sides, which saved the still-downed Mila from a mauling from which her Aura might not have been able to defend her.

The Ursa Major bit and tore and slashed at Tia as she did the same to it, having completely abandoned her weapon. Fangs clamped down on her shoulder, and Tia was lifted off the ground, the Grimm shaking her like a dog would a rat. But her own bite on the Ursa Major’s shoulder didn’t lessen, and her arms came up, grabbing at its throat and digging in even as the creature began to claw at her sides.

“Mila, get up and help Blake!” Harry shouted, dumping Ruby to the ground more harshly than he would have liked. He took a brief second to conjure up a blast of lightning, sending it toward Nora. “Nora, go crazy!”

With that, Harry darted forward using his sword and his rifle arm to direct his spells to either side, smashing several Ursa off of their feet or slicing them into ribbons as he closed with where his sister was doing battle with the massive Ursa Major. “Ruby, long-range covering fire! Sung-Sun, Mila, Blake, pull back.”

Pyrrha saw him coming and redirected her efforts to try and keep the riffraff at bay. But there were so many Grimm! It reminded her quite a bit of their Initiation and the battle she and Harry had fought in Chian before that. But there, the terrain wasn’t quite as dense or as much of a negative factor as here. Still, Pyrrha was holding the line well, drawing more Grimm down on her as she leaped, danced and cut all around her, the style she had begun to develop, a mix of large-scale random movements and precise but now minimalistic strikes, taking a toll.

Elsewhere in the woods, Yang was simply too furious to care about what was going on elsewhere. She and the first giant Ursa Major were locked in their own duel, and Yang’s Semblance, Burn, was giving her greater strength with every blow she took.

Similarly, Nora was holding down a segment of the battlefield, the same area Harry had opened up beforehand. Her grenades were all used up, but her Semblance, High Voltage, had activated. This gave Nora added speed and strength, although the amount of electricity going through her also cost her a large portion of her Aura to deal with. But she and Harry had experimented with this before, and the jolt would last Nora a while.

On the other side of the battle, Mila and Blake were battered by their close encounter with the close-to-evolving Ursa Major and had trouble retreating from the Grimm. Even as he charged towards his sister’s position, Harry saw this and sent spells their way. Spears of stone slammed into the Grimm, and shields of energy appeared, defending their backs occasionally from strikes from the Grimm, while still more spells cut the Grimm into chunks, hurling them every which way.

Then Harry was past them, reaching his sister and thrusting his sword into the leg of the massive Ursa Major, who hadn’t noticed him. The leg gave out, and the Ursa Major lifted its maw from where it had been trying to bite through Tia’s Aura and armor to howl in agony. “AYOOOOO!!!”

That was the opening that Tia needed, and she wrenched her upper body back. Her sharklike teeth tore a chunk of armor and flesh from the Grimm, making one of its upper arms flop uselessly at its side even more than the lower leg that Harry and stabbed.

It snarled and headbutted Tia hard. Even though her Semblance and Aura protected her, this caused her to reel backward just from the impact, and then the Grimm charged, taking them both down to the ground, trying to use its weight to its advantage.

But Tia rolled as her back crashed into the ground, dragging the Grimm to one side and gaining the upper hand once more as she brought one of her feet into the conflict. The long claws there almost looked like those of a raptor, and they began to gouge into the Ursa Major’s stomach.

Meanwhile, Harry had turned his attention back to the overall conflict. He saw that several other freshmen teams had arrived from the rear of the battle. None of them were racing forward to engage the Grimm in close combat. And indeed, from what Harry could see, many were sporting wounds of their own. But they instead spread out through the woods behind the main battle. There they used cover and the bulwarks Harry had created in the area, firing at range, adding an impressive amount of firepower to the battle. Most targeted the Nevermore, who were now overwhelming Ren and the others, dozens of them now coming through the foliage above.

Those Nevermore began to pull back or simply die where they were, although Harry was surprised not to see Professor Goodwitch or very many of the other students.

Regardless, the battle was turning against the Grimm now, and Harry decided to hasten that along.

Stabbing Caliburn into one Grimm charging him, Harry let it there for a second as the Grimm began to disintegrate around the sword, raising his hands above his head. Remembering what Goodwitch told him about not letting himself fall into the whole ‘spell’ concept, he willed a ball of flame into existence. It was hard, imagining that ball of fire above his head without mentally intoning the spells needed, but it came to him and with it far greater control. “BURN!”

With that, Harry gestured to either side with his hand, the fireball enlarging into a spike of flame, which he twisted around in midair, and then sent forward into a nearby Ursa Major, a much more normal looking one than the two monsters Tia and Yang were fighting. The flame speared through the Grimm’s head, searing into the creature like a plasma torch and continuing on as Harry gestured with one hand, sending it into still more Grimm. Harry grit his teeth now at the effort began to exhaust his Aura to the point he could feel it, but again following Goodwitch’s instructions, he thrust his other hand forward. “AND FREEZE!!”

Every Grimm on the battlefield that he could see found themselves frozen, and Blake and Weiss both stared as their opponents did the same while Apacci whistled. “Holy Shit! If this is what fighting with Goodwitch is like, damn!”

“Less talking, more killing,” Pyrrha ordered loudly, stabbing her sword form weapon into one Grimm, then slashing across the throat of several more. “Harry won’t be able to hold them in place for long!”

Not two minutes later, thanks to the other freshmen teams, the sky was completely clear of enemies. Since none of them were feeling any fear any longer, the Grimm stopped coming at last. Weiss now used glyphs to help herself, Apacci and Ren back to the forest floor, where they moved forward to help their friends deal with the final Grimm still being held frozen in place by Harry’s power.

It was only then that Professor Goodwitch arrived, flying through the air on a bit of wood that looked almost like a skateboard. A still gently sparking Nora opened her mouth to comment on that, but the glare on Goodwitch’s face froze the words in her mouth as the last of her Semblance disappeared with an audible pop from around her.

Waving her hand, Goodwitch picked up nearly all the remaining Grimm in sight, smashing them together and against the tress, pulping them in short order. Yang arrived during this, looking a bit battered, but rushing to her sister, going to her knees behind the wounded Ruby. “Are you okay, sis? I saw Harry pulling you back. That bastard that hit you’s ash now!”

“Yaang, I’m fine,” Ruby whined, pushing Yang’s hands away even as she winced. “My leg will just need some rest and… to be set. I’m not looking forward to that, but so long as I don’t move, it’s just a dull throbbing kind of pain.”

Goodwitch saw this, and if anything, she became even angrier. She turned her attention to where the last Grimm still alive was rolling on the ground with an almost equally terrifying-looking Tia Arc before using her Semblance to grab the Grimm’s head and snap its neck. Tia snarled at that, shoving the Grimm off her even as its body began to dissolve, a feral light in her eyes. Harry saw this and was already moving, but no one else noticed for a moment, looking over one another or looking at Goodwitch.

“What… exactly… happened… here?” Goodwitch demanded. “Three members of Team Cardinal crashed through the woods and to the bullhead, terrified out of their wits, bringing down every Grimm in the area! I helped deal with that and backtracked their trail. What happened to scare them, and where is their team leader?”

Tia growled, snarling at Goodwitch as if she was an enemy and only now did the others realize that something was wrong. Goodwitch raised an eyebrow and her riding crop, but Harry hastily said, “Stop!” He knew from experience that if anyone tried to attack Tia in her berserk state, it would continue, forcing her to fight whoever attacked her until her Aura ran dry. She had nearly put their mother into the hospital at one point. Her fight with Arturia had leveled several dozen acres of forest.

But Harry knew that Tia wasn’t entirely out of control. She simply responded to any threats directed at her.

With his sword firmly in its sheath, Harry stepped forward, his hands empty as he held his arms out to either side, ignoring Goodwitch and the others. “Hey, Tia. It’s time to put Horrible Belle away. The fight’s over. Come back to me.”

Pyrrha smiled and added her own words to that as Tia stared down at Harry as if she wasn’t seeing him for the moment, her eyes almost as red as a Grimm’s. “Harry’s right, Tia. You did amazing, but it’s time to get back to normal.”

Nora leaped forward, landing nearby where she grinned at Tia, the sudden movement causing Tia to start and snarl at her. But Nora ignored this, waving her hands dramatically from side to side. “Yeah, you were awesome! You were all growl and roar and slam! I wonder if you’d let me ride you as you are now, that would be awesome.”

“Heh, now that would be kind of cool, I guess. But not right now. Right now, I want my Tia back to normal, okay?” So speaking, Harry reached Tia, gently touching her shoulders before slowly pulling Tia forward as if he would give her a hug but in slow motion.

For a second, Pyrrha and the others feared Tia would lose it at that touch. But it seemed to be the final act that Tia needed to come back to herself. The red in her eyes faded, and slowly so did the armor around her body, starting from her feet and face.

Soon, Harry was hugging an almost fully naked Tia to him. Tia’s Huntress outfit had been shredded upon her full transformation, with only the pants surviving, albeit with a rip in the back from some piece of debris. Her chest pressed into his own, heavy and no doubt soft as her chin rested on his shoulder, making Harry very thankful for his armor. Even so, he repeated his favorite mantra from the last near-decade to stop his eyes from trailing downward. *Remember, she’s your sister, you wanker! And you’ve got a girlfriend! Don’t be a fucking pureblood ponce!*

“I lost myself again,” Tia murmured into his ear, her arms going around him as the last vestiges of her Grimm-like armor disappeared, leaving her a little weak. The feeling of Harry’s hands on her bare back was also **interesting,** a part of her desiring more skin to touch. But Tia couldn’t dwell on it right now, as exhausted and annoyed with herself as she was.

“Maybe you did lose yourself a bit, but in doing so, you stopped that massive Ursa Major cold and saved Blake’s life. Maybe Mila’s too.” Blake huffed a bit at that but didn’t argue. “And it doesn’t matter if you lose yourself so long as you find yourself again. And I’m always going to be there to help, Tia.”

Tia pulled back to look into Harry’s face for a moment, then smiled and kissed him on the cheek, murmuring an affirmative noise as she nuzzled back in.

Pyrrha moved forward, feeling a bit of jealousy as Tia’s naked body pressed into Harry’s armored one, but the sight of the two siblings sharing the moment was too precious for her to be all that annoyed about. Instead, she joined them, looping her arms over their shoulders. “Not just Harry, Tia. You have other friends who will be there for you too.”

“Heck, yes! Group hug!” Nora shouted, barreling into them, almost taking the trio off their feet, but a laughing Yang had also moved forward from the other side, and her strength helped to study them. Thus, Harry was in somewhat of an enviable position, one man being hugged from all sides by four extremely attractive girls, until Ren came close enough for Nora to snag him with an adroit use of Magnhild, dragging him into the hug as well.

Professor Goodwitch let them have their moment as she helped Weiss and Ruby, the two of them explaining everything from their perspective, while a somewhat shamefaced Mila admitted what had truly sparked the Grimm assault. At least from her point of view. Mila was quick to point out she had no idea what was going on with Team CRDL, hoping to mitigate the Professor’s anger.

This was somewhat akin to spitting into the sun, and Goodwitch’s glare was such that Mila and Apacci both quailed under her gaze for a moment before she pointed back through the woods towards the bullhead. “You will return to the bullhead and wait for me.”

With that, she moved over to Tia, staring at her clothing for a moment and gesturing with her riding crop. Tia stiffened as a tingling began in her pants, the rips and tears being repaired as she stood there. When it was done, her pants were fully repaired, But the upper portion of her Huntress outfit was gone, utterly shredded and torn off earlier in the battle.

“Here. Let me help.” Harry hastily pulled off his cloak, putting it around her shoulders and using his Semblance to melt it into one piece, hanging like a parka around Tia’s body to hide her partially nude form.

“Thanks, Harry,” Tia said, hugging him again, then Pyrrha, leaning against the redhead tiredly as Harry turned to the Professor.

“I think in the future, Ms. Arc, we will need to figure out some way of protecting your modesty after moments like this. And your control in that form. Much like Ms. Yang, your Semblance has a mental component, and I will not see you pass on to your sophomore year here at Beacon without full control of your Semblance,” Glynda warned.

Tia nodded, still leaning sideways against Pyrrha.

“Ms. Yang, Ms. Valkyrie, with me. The rest of you return to the Bullhead once you have gathered your jars. This battle should have removed all of the nearby Grimm from the area, so we should be all right to do so, but I want us ready to leave if Cardin needs medical attention.”

The others all nodded and quickly spread around the area, with Blake and Sung-Sun during the majority of the work to find and retrieve the glass jars of syrup. Soon the others were quickly loaded down with them, bar Weiss. She had gotten through the battle against the Grimm without being hurt, but she was now somewhat suffering from the initial battle with the rapier wasps.

They returned to the Bullhead, informing the rest of the freshmen about what had happened. But all conversation halted as Glynda, and her two companions joined them. In the air to one side of her, Goodwitch carried an obviously makeshift stretcher on which lay Cardin. He still looked alive, but there was a lot of blood there for certain.

“Everyone aboard,” she ordered, glaring hotly at the rest of team CRDL and then over at Mila and Apacci, all of whom flinched under her gaze. “And believe me, we will discuss this with headmaster Ozpin when we return.” With those ominous words, she turned, leading the now subdued group of teens back through the woods of Forever Fall.

**End Chapter**

Well the secret is out, and the feathers are going to fly soon! The problem with Huntresses and Hunters? They are literally trained to look at violence as a viable solution to most life’s problems. Salem is also generally becoming aware of the new mines, but has no recourse to what she can do about them easily. And her other plans continue. Ozpin is also now aware of Harry’s magic, and looking for ways to manipulate him.

From here on, we will have one half of a chapter with school stuff, and half Arc family drama/romance issues. Beyond that, I hope to not get bogged down by school time, speed up events and show in small blurbs (which will be tough) the teams training and growing. When they use moves/new weapons later I don’t want it to come out of left field, but I do want it to be new and maybe even a surprise. Tough line to walk there. I also hope this chapter will be the last to reach over 30,000…