

I can't draw and ain't British.

So... this chapter was only supposed to be around 30,000 words. A few scenes first ran over, and then I ran into the whole Arc confrontation scene. I really, really didn't want to leave that for the next chapter, but getting it all correct, making certain the characters were acting like themselves, and that it all made sense was very hard. I think I got it right, but I would appreciate your opinions.

And now, let the show begin.

Chapter 8: Sudden Changes Bring Great Turmoil

One arm around his twin, Harry sat with Tia to one side of him and Pyrrha on her other side and Ruby sitting next to Harry. When they had first sat down in the transport bullhead Pyrrha had looked a little put out by that arrangement, but soon realized Ruby was simply trying to ply Harry's brain on the fight they'd just been in. With the two of them earnestly talking about the battle and showing no sign of grief or shock, the rest of the team leaders, Sung-Sun among them, followed along quickly. Soon all of them sat around Harry and with a faint smile at how well her Rigas could gather others to him, Pyrrha turned much of her attention to Tia.

Pyrrha was used to Tia being subtly touchy-feely occasionally with her twin. But now, suffering through sensation withdrawal, she had turned into a veritable cuddle monster, needing to feel things against her skin, preferably the touch of other people. This caused Pyrrha to nearly squeal aloud at how cute she was being, despite her usual unemotional face. She pulled the girl into a one-armed cuddle and began to run her hand up and down Tia's arm and into her short cropped blonde hair, listening with half an ear to the discussion the team leaders were having.

For his part, Harry found himself needing to bolster everyone's morale a bit. Everyone, even the battered Ruby and Blake had been in high spirits at first once the flow of Grimm into their positions had ended. Then Goodwitch came back, using her Semblance to carry a horribly wounded Winchester. The sight of Cardin's still body floating behind Goodwitch had brought the morale of most of the young would-be Hunters plummeting down, so much so that had they stayed in Forever Fall, they might well have attracted another horde of Grimm.

So, when Ruby approached him to talk about the fight despite needing to hobble along the deck of the bullhead, Harry grabbed it with both hands. And like he had hoped, this started a cascade of relieved conversations elsewhere in the large bullhead and spirits lifted throughout, even among those who were not looking forward to their return to Beacon, Mila or Sky Lark and the rest.

An hour later, and everyone was talking quietly, trying hard not to look over at the badly

wounded Winchester. He was being kept alive by one of the other freshman at the moment, whose Semblance was called Stasis. It was an amazingly useful Semblance that literally froze someone in place from the inside out, stopping all their bodily functions. Not like they were frozen, but rather as if their personal sense of time had frozen. It was one of the strangest, most powerful Semblances Harry had ever seen, but apparently took a lot of concentration to activate, and constantly drained Aura after it was. By this point it looked like Pastel Checkers, the young freshman in question, looked as if he was going to keel over before another hour passed.

Still, we should be near Beacon by now too. Although I wish we could somehow share Aura with one another. I know I've still got power to spare, Harry mused, watching the leaders ahead of him murmur to one another as they tried to work through the question he'd given.

"It seems to me that in this scenario, falling back would be the best idea, at least on the right flank, but I feel as if that is a trap given how you described the battlefield," Martina, another leader who Ruby had befriended, hesitantly gave her answer. Her accent was what Harry thought was a distinctly Italian one, giving her voice a lilting, almost musical tone. What it was called in this world he had no idea, but it put Harry in mind of Blaise Zabini from his old life, although far more dulcet.

"It is, so you're right about that. Anyone want to take a guess why only having on flank fall back would be a bad idea?" Harry asked, looking around at the other leaders. Somehow the conversation had shifted from being about the battle they'd just been in into a discussion about the proper tactics to use if any of their teams had been caught out on its own facing a similar Grimm rush, with Harry as the instructor. Thanks to his father's lessons and his own tactical sense, he was fine with that, but it made him snort internally at how the conversation had gone.

"Ooooh, be, because if you do fall back on one flank, you're going to leave your other flank exposed. It might have the natural defense of the river, but without someone to watch their right, they could be easily flanked by Grimm going around the river!" Ruby exclaimed, holding up an arm like she was in class. Having been given some pain killers, she could barely feel her face, let alone her broken leg. "And, and the more trees you put between the teams, the harder it becomes for them to work together, so no matter how good a defense, that's still a major weak point."

"Right. It could be done, but it would need to be done very carefully, with communication and slow movement."

"Scoot and shoot," One of the other team leaders nodded, an Atlesian like Weiss although from far less rarified social circles. "Pairs covering one another. I still think making for that butte would be a safer bet."

"But you'd be caught in the open around it and what if there are aerial Grimm perching

there already? Non, it is better to stay put, wear the Grimm down until the negative emotions pass, then slowly give way to them,” Tristain Silverstream argued. His accent was French to Harry’s ears but was called Southern Mantleian on Remnant.

“The emotions of the people caught up in the attack is important. It was the fear and shock of team CRDL and our teammates that drew the Grimm down on us after all. But staying put seems... wrong,” Martina shook her head.

“Tactics are often dependent on weapons **and** terrain, as I said. Tristain would do well to hold, Ruby and your team, Martina, would make good use of fire and maneuver. But you can’t forget that the terrain is just as important.” Harry grinned teasingly, trying to chivvy them past a faint dip in the overall morale of the group that came from Martina’s reminder.

“OOOOOH, I know, I know!” Nora shouted from nearby, waking up and angering Weiss, who had, amusingly fallen asleep, using Yang’s lap as a pillow. The grin Yang gave Weiss enough pause to let Nora go on blithely, bouncing in place, a grin on her face that she normally only showed when scarfing down pancakes. “The trees, right!?”

Several of the other leaders made to protest this, then gaped at one another, while Ruby began to giggle. “Oh my god, Nora’s right! Harry said the majority of the Grimm were Creepers, with only a few Nevermore and Beowolves. Creepers can’t climb trees! Concentrate on killing the Beowolves, and you can totally take to the trees, ousting the Nevermore and keeping them at arms’ length.”

“Whereupon the Creepers will circle, try to wait you out, all the while you’re thinning the herd. Damn I feel stupid now,” One of the other team leaders exclaimed.

“Sometimes the best answers are the simplest,” Harry answered with a smirk. “Its why my tactic of raising a buttress was so effective, and why I brought it up. Always recall the Grimm come in various types, and sometimes the terrain can help you beat any particular type.”

While Martina and a few others hissed and booed in response, Harry laughed, and Ruby started to go into a long discussion with one of the others about the best order their teams would have to climb the trees. In the background, Weiss had begun to lay into Nora for waking her up, the diminutive heiress utterly exhausted from their ordeal even though she hadn’t been in much close combat. Blake added her own hissing snarl to the argument. Her head had taken a nasty hit during the fight, and while her Aura had helped her out, she was still dealing with a headache from the hit.

For his part, Harry no longer the center of attention, leaned back. He wasn’t tired, not really. Just somewhat emotionally drained from the ordeal, and from the need to keep up appearances. Now that the other team leaders had turned back to their own smaller conversations, he could rest a bit, and turned his concentration on Tia.

As he looked at his sister, he found she had fallen asleep, simply leaning against his

partner. He smiled at that, then found his emerald eyes being caught by Pyrrha's jade ones. She smiled back at him, whispering, "Are you okay?"

"Mm, not hurt or anything, just a bit tired up here," Harry gestured vaguely towards his head, using his free arm. Tia had yet to relinquish his other one even in her sleep, tucking it against her side like a teddy bear despite Pyrrha having pulled her slightly away from him. "This was not what I expected today, and facing combat when you're not ready is never easy."

"True, nor was this," Pyrrha giggled, gesturing down towards Tia. "This is just a bit beyond her normal hug-hungry attitude. It's quite cute, I will say."

"Yeah, whenever she uses her Semblance at its utmost Tia always craves touch afterward. Her armor deadens her to the sensation of touch for a bit, even after she's canceled it out, so she needs more touch to offset the feeling," Harry explained with a shrug. "What about you? How are you dealing with your third major clash with the Grimm?"

"I... I don't feel tired, either mentally or physically. I wasn't concerned or frightened at any point during the fight. And now that it is over, all I feel is some annoyance at my own performance."

Harry cocked his head, and Pyrrha leaned in, whispering so that only Harry and Tia could hear. "While my Semblance helped me control my weapons and occasionally aided my aim, I didn't use it nearly to the level I want to. I know I can't use my power on Grimm directly, but even so..."

"We do need to concentrate on that, I think. I hadn't wanted to up to this point since I didn't want figuring out a solution to that problem to dominate our team exercises. But now I think we do need to," Harry nodded firmly.

Pyrrha nodded at that, then looked around as one of the other freshmen, who Ruby had apparently been cheering up for some reason, nearly pulled her out of her chair into a hug. "Oh, you're just too precious! Xiao Long, I'm stealing your sister. She's my little sister now."

"Dead skank say what?" Yang growled, making to stand up amidst the laughter of the rest of the group.

Over the now semi-loud argument, Pyrrha asked, "That sounds grand." Then her lips quirked, as Tia rubbed her head against Harry's shoulder. "And how long will this go on? If I was the jealous type this would annoy me, sister or no."

"Ehh, it should be gone in eight hours or so. Normally I would take her home, give her a massage or just curl up and watch a movie with all our sibs piled around her. You know what, that sounds good, let's go for a movie night, what do you say?"

Pyrrha smiled wickedly. "No, not a good movie night, a horrid movie night. Something we can make fun of." She paused then, frowning a bit. "Although I think we will have to make

certain that popcorn is the only thing that Nora throws at the TV.”

Harry nodded at that, and their other friends piled in, not noticing several of the other leaders watching this with amusement at how Harry had not just his team but six other teens looking to him for leadership. “You see now, how he draws them in, and us too, it is a natural thing, like gravity,” Martina whispered. “He really does act like a captain, does he not?”

The other team leaders all nodded subtly, the movement and Martina’s words unnoticed by Harry and Pyrrha. Of all of them, only Ren heard this comment, and smirked slightly. *You do not know the half of it, Martina. And I agree with you. Hadrian Arc is one to follow. Indeed, I think he has earned my trust now. I think it’s time that our ‘king’ and I have a serious conversation. About vengeance, justice, and my and Nora’s past...*

OOOOOOO

In the bullhead’s cockpit, Glynda sat, leaving the teens to talk and get over what had happened on their own. This too could almost be a learning moment, after all, albeit one that she would have preferred they go through at the end of the year rather than barely a third of a semester in: that Grimm were always around, and that tragedy could strike at inopportune moments. Well, that, and the fact that fighting Grimm trumped teenage FUCKING drama. Glynda would never deign to curse aloud, but after fifteen years of teaching prospective Hunters and Huntresses, she felt that the term ‘drama’ was a curse word all on its own, and when used in conjunction with people who had their Auras unlocked, it needed the addition.

Glynda had no desire to coddle the teens in any way, and frankly had better things to do with her time. In this case, that meant informing Ozpin about what had happened, an ear-bead stuck in one ear so that only she could hear her employer’s words. “I take full responsibility for what happened. We knew about the drama on Team Argent, but we should have taken more precautions. And we should have taken steps to further separate Team Cardinal from the teams they had been antagonizing.”

“Glynda, that would leave precious few teams, and you know it,” Ozpin answered dryly. “It’s almost impressive how well Cardin planned out this little assault. Almost. Alas for him, his wounds will not get him out of being expelled for it. The rest of the team... I will need to question closely on their participation in the planning of this event. Peer pressure can be a monstrous influencer.”

“But even that shows a lack of willpower. And they ran, Ozpin, rather than stand with their leader. To my mind that is an even worse indictment of their general attitude,” Glynda argued. “I vote we expel them all.”

“It is certainly on the table. Although it is not on the table for young Topaz and Rose. They are guilty of foolishness to be sure, but not hurtful acts towards their fellow Huntsman. Although they will certainly not get out of this scot-free.” Ozpin waved his coffee mug into the pickup, shaking his head for further emphasis. “Let us move on to more important matters. I

have Nurse Moonbright on standby. She will handle Mr. Winchester. His teammates, Mr. Topaz and Ms. Rose should be brought to my tower. As will Miss Greenscale and Miss Arc. And that is enough about the student side of things.”

Glynda hesitated for a moment, remembering how clingy Tia had been after using her full Harribel form, but nodded. “I will see to it. And I presume you mean you noticed the oddity in my report?”

“Indeed. The two extra-large Ursa Majors.” Ozpin paused, taking a sip of his coffee, letting the ambrosia that he had become addicted to several lifetimes ago sooth him as he thought. “I’ve looked up the records to make certain I was correct in my assumption, and I was. The last culling operation through Forever Fall was only two years ago. Port’s report on it is as... idiosyncratic as usual, but there were no reported problems from the various senior teams that took part in the event. And certainly, no Ursa Major escaped. So, either these two moved in...”

“Which is unlikely given how rarely Ursa-type migrate without joining a horde,” Glynda interjected, seeing his point.

“Or something else is happening. Salem’s influence at work, pushing more dangerous, advanced forms into areas where they can bother our students. Much like what occurred during Initiation. And then there was the report from Oobleck about a horde of Goliaths near Mountain Glenn. I had set the reports aside, believing they were too docile to be of much use on their own. But combined, these moves show that Salem is planning something. Or perhaps knows something.”

“The mystery about Mr. Arc, or our guest?” Glynda asked. Unlike her boss, she had to watch her words. The bullhead operators of Beacon were good, trustworthy men and women, but that didn’t mean they were part of Ozpin’s inner circle.

“More likely our guest. Beacon is a logical place for us to keep Autumn safe after her attack, after all. And her attackers were both certainly involved with Salem and would like to finish the job. The only issue is, who, how, and what resources they have,” Ozpin mused, his mind going back to a familiar problem, one he had been working with for several weeks, ever since Qrow arrived with the comatose form of Autumn, the Fall Maiden. A young woman who had yet to wake up despite the best Ozpin or Atlas’s technology could do.

“But the mystery about why humans would be willing to work with Salem of all people is one thing.” Ozpin shook his head, somewhat dismayed at the very idea. Salem had drawn psychopaths and killers to her occasionally before, but very, very rarely. And he had never seen any Grimm that could siphon off Aura or the inherent magic of a Maiden before. That was a disturbing upgrade from her previous resources.

“What should we do then?” Glynda asked.

“Send out Port and some of our other wayward students to do a culling through Forever

Fall and closer to home,” Ozpin answered with a shrug. “That is all we can do. And really, recall that Beacon is designed for just this purpose: to be a target and force Salem fight on my terms. We will see if we can wipe out her resources nearby, and thus force her hand in other ways.”

Glynda nodded, and the conversation continued on in that vein for a few moments. The seniors would be getting a workout the next few weeks. And Ozpin would be sending a request to Arturia Arc for a job, something he was somewhat pleased about. *Not only will Arturia be able to help us deal with the Goliaths, but I will be able to question her on the various things going on in Anima that lead back to Evig Låga. And perhaps discover why I, every time I interact with him, I am convinced more and more that Harry is far older than he appears to be.*

OOOOOOO

The freshman class arrived back at Beacon an hour after the discussion with the other team leaders had devolved, where they were greeted by the nurse and a few rolling stretchers. The badly wounded Cardin was set on one, with the unconscious, Aura exhausted Pastel next to him. Blake and Ruby were also ordered to share one, much to the younger girl’s protests. “But I feel fine, you just have to set the leg, and Aura will do the rest, right? I’ve broken my legs before. There’s no need for a hospital visit, or an examination. Or needles...not that I’m afraid of needles or anything!”

Beside her Blake nodded her head. “I feel fine too. I know I was complaining of a headache before, but I’m okay now.” She had no real fear of hospitals, but had to agree with Ruby that needles freaked her out.

The nurse was unmoved, however. She was a heavy-set, middle-aged woman with a bust almost as impressive as Tia’s, who waved a hand at Ruby, otherwise ignoring her as she began to use Her Semblance to start to heal Cardin of the worst of his wounds. Thankfully, Glynda had already fitted the man with an emergency blood pack, and that, the medical wraps, and Stasis had kept him from bleeding out. Still, his wounds were severe enough there was no way the healer would be able to see to them all in one sitting. Or even be able to see to them all period.

Still, she had the ultimate tool of any educator: the ability to multitask. “Ms. Rose, your leg was broken, not just dislocated, and even if it had been, your Aura is on record as being a malleable type, which does not automatically mean it will help you heal. So, unless you have a history of using your Aura in such a manner you will need some help. As for you, Ms. Belladonna, you took a hard knock to the head. I don’t know enough about your Aura reserves to tell you if your Aura prevented any damage to your brain. It isn’t the same thing as taking a blow to your body, your brain bounces around in your brainbox when your head takes a sharp enough impact.”

That caused Blake to widen her eyes, and she became more docile then. Weiss and Yang followed after their partners, giving Tia and Sung-Sun nods as they did, with Weiss promising,

“And that popcorn you recommend will be ordered and delivered posthaste, Harry. I am most looking forward to this caramel popcorn confection.”

The other teams were dismissed then by Glynda, with admonishments to the team leaders to submit a report on their team’s efficacy in the battle. “I will also want to know how many jars of sap you all were able to save. I realize it might seem a small thing, but that sap is an important resource to Beacon.”

Except for Harry, the other team leaders nodded and led off their teams. Harry waved off his team, but remained standing by his sister, trusting Ren to properly organize the movie night. Glynda looked at him quizzically, and Harry smiled thinly gesturing to Tia. “Familial solidarity, professor.”

Tia smiled behind her makeshift scarf, then looked at Glynda herself. “Can I go get changed, first?”

“Of Course, Ms. Arc. I further believe I can trust both you and Ms. Greenscale not to get lost between your room and the Clocktower,” Glynda remarked, before corralling the remaining trio of Team CRDL, Mila and Apacci. Both of whom looked disturbed to be bundled together with the four known racists but went along willingly.

Harry followed Tia and Sung-Sun, talking to them quietly about what might happen now. Both he and Sung-Sun wanted to use this moment to make certain she was officially appointed leader of Team ARGY, if that is, they remained a team. The school might push for them to be separated or the two Faunus expelled, but Harry doubted it. Sung-Sun agreed, saying, “I believe they will face repercussions, and we as a team will also but I think that being their official leader will at last let me have a big enough stick to pound some Hunter-sense into the two of them. At least when combined with the debacle in Forever Fall.”

Nodding Harry made to reply before his jaw dropped. Ahead of the two of them, Tia had opened the door to Team ARGY’s dorm room and promptly discarded the parka that had originally been Harry’s cloak. She stood there for a moment nude from the waist up, showing her sculpted, powerfully built back, a hint of her breasts showing around her side as she stretched her arms above her head.

The pants quickly followed as Sung-Sun giggled and Harry swiftly turned away, his face red as he fought his base instincts. *FUCK YOU HORMONES, that is your ruddy sister. How many times do I have to repeat the freaking mantra, don’t be a pureblood.*

But this was, much to Harry’s continued chagrin, not the first time one of his sisters had seemingly ignored propriety while around him. Arturia had done so routinely when she was a teen and Harry was a preteen, although it had slowly stopped. Magenta also did so, though in her case it was simple absent-mindedness, not forgetfulness. “Tia, remember the door is open, hmm? I’ve long since stopped trying to get you to realize I’m a guy, but come on, you don’t want to flash anyone else that could be around.”

“You’d stop them,” Tia answered simply, feeling an odd thrill for a second as she felt Harry’s eyes on her before he could force himself to turn away. *That felt... good. Hmmm... And had nothing to do with her normal reaction to the sensory deprivation caused by her use of her full Harribel form. Something to think about later. Time to see what will happen now.*

“Nevertheless, I do not wish to flash even your brother, my friend. So, if you will forgive us, Harry...” Sung-Sun announced teasingly. “I’m afraid you will have to wait to let out your inner pervert.” The door closed before Harry could retort.

Tia and Sung-Sun quickly changed, rejoining a still somewhat annoyed Harry, who glared at Sung-Sun. “I’m the pervert, am I? And who was it who got into an argument about that Ninjas of Love series a few days back? Who felt that the lead male needed to be, what was the term, ‘more forceful in his approach, both in wooing and foreplay?’”

“I really have no idea what you’re talking about,” Sung-Sun answered, looking away with a faint blush on her face.

Snorting, Harry let it go, going with the two of them to the Clocktower, where they found Glynda and the five other students waiting for them. Glynda nodded at how quickly the girls had changed, then looked at Harry firmly. “Mr. Arc, I understand wanting to make certain your sister is not overly punished for today’s events, but you have no official place in these proceedings. If you wish to be with her for moral support, I insist that you remain silent unless called upon.”

Harry nodded in understanding, saying nothing, but Goodwitch took this as a sign of his acceptance.

“Good.” With that, Glynda gestured the teens forward into the tower. They made their way to the elevator, which proved a bit too small to be comfortable. The boys stood to one side, the girls to the other to avoid issues, with Glynda standing between them.

Seeing the eight students marching into his office, Ozpin kept from frowning with some difficulty. *I suppose that I should’ve assumed that Mr. Arc would be here to back up his sister but therein lies a symptom of the problem. If he shoulders all the leadership position’s burdens, then why would Tia be willing to try to grow into... No, stop that, Ozpin ordered himself, taking a sip of coffee. Realize you made a mistake there, old boy, and you must own up to it now. I still believe strongly that chance separating the twins was a good thing during Initiation for both of them in terms of growth, but I made a mistake in assuming that Tia would be psychologically able to grow into a leader as her older sister did.*

For a moment, Ozpin let his thoughts wonder to Arturia. The prickly, haughty, arrogant and standoffish young woman, who held herself to an incredible standard and demanded any nearby do the same had been forced to soften her stance over her years here in Beacon. To let people in, and to trust them as she did her family, if not be as friendly towards her teammates as she was to her friends and family at home. Ozpin had made the blunder of assuming Tia’s

unemotional face and body language, her lack of verbal communication, was a similar defense mechanism rather than a sign of her true mental state. *That was my fault, and one I will be forced to rectify today.*

Taking a sip from his coffee like that allowed Ozpin to wait until the students at all been ordered forward until they were all standing in a line in front of his desk bar Harry. The leader of team ANVL stayed by the door with professor Goodwitch.

He let his gaze sweep across the seven students in front of him and was amused to note that while Sung-Sun looked down demurely, unable to meet his gaze, Tia simply stared back, completely unconcerned, perhaps not understanding that she too was at fault for the trouble that her team had found itself facing, or just not caring. *Then again, that too is in keeping with her psychological profile. Pity. Still, she is an incredibly powerful combatant, and wants to be a Hunter. We will see if she has the willpower to push through her own weaknesses in the future when she must be able to communicate and follow others without Mr. Arc or others around to direct her.*

Finally, as Dove Bronzewing looked away, flinching under his gaze most satisfactorily, Ozpin set his coffee cup down on the table with a clack, the sound much like someone had just flicked the safety on a gun off. All of the teens in front of him flinched at the noise, but Ozpin did not allow himself to smile as he began.

“The first lesson we gave you going into Initiation was that teamwork and getting along with your fellow Hunters was paramount. No matter who your partner is or even who you are fighting alongside from one mission to the next, it is the mission that matters. It is fighting the Grimm that matters. We here at Beacon have always pushed for teamwork above all other considerations because few Hunters can truly stand against the Grimm on their own.”

Listening to this, Tia was somewhat amused, although obviously didn't show it. She knew that her older sister Arturia was one of the few who could take missions on her own, being as good as she could be in stealth, and having a weapon and Semblance combo that made her extremely versatile.

She tuned back into what Ozpin was saying he continued on, apparently addressing her, Sung-Sun, Apacci and Mila first. “You must be willing to go along to get along and to leave your blasted egos at the door! I realize that at your age, that is very much asking a lot, but consider how many lives might be on the line when you go out into the field. Once you do, you will realize that demanding such a view is not that big a demand at all. If you cannot compromise among a team of three other people, how can we trust you to be able to work with a group of random Hunters, or to work with locals of any kind to save them, their families and livelihoods?”

He paused for a moment, staring at the three girls and young man, before going on mildly. “I am extremely angry right now both because of your actions and those of Team

Cardinal. I am also extremely disappointed that you four would allow inter-team turmoil to put yourselves in jeopardy, as well as others.”

Sung-Sun, Apacci, and Mila all winced a bit, while Tia simply looked on, staring back at the headmaster causing Ozpin to become somewhat nonplussed. But once more, now that he had finally gotten around to read Tia’s psychological profile, he decided to ignore that reaction. “However. I cannot deny that in this instance, much of the fault seems to lie on you Ms. Mila, and you, Mr. Topaz. Therefore, while I will be punishing all four of you to a certain degree, the two of you will be further punished for leaving your team behind while out in the field. Letting your team unity collapsed to the point that you four were unable to work together, is on all of your shoulders, actually doing so is on the two of you alone.”

As he went on, Ozpin’s tone turned far drier than before, and a little warmer than the previous biting, contempt-filled chill. “And in the future, if the two of you cannot keep it in your pants, that will be a problem you will need to solve on your own. I and my fellow professors are in the business of teaching Hunters, not getting involved in teenage soap operas or trying to reign in the hormones of our various students. We do not get paid nearly enough to take on such a Herculean task.”

Both Apacci and Mila blushed, looking down at their feet while the three men of team CDNL present tried not to snicker. They knew their turn was coming up and were actually somewhat relieved that Ozpin had decided to get the easiest portions over with quickly. It gave them hope that maybe, just maybe, their own punishments would be only a little bit worse than that handed out to team ARGT.

Ozpin noticed this and in an act of supreme self-control did not cackle at their naïveté. Instead, he kept his concentration on the members of team ARGT. “As a team, you will sit daily punishment classes with professor Oobleck at the end of every school day. You will do whatever he wishes you to do during those times, and if you miss even one session, the punishment for the rest of your team will be doubled. Work together or hang separately.”

All four winced at that, even Tia letting her annoyance at the thought show up in a faint furrowing of her brows.

“On top of that, Ms. Rose, Mr. Topaz, the two of you will serve detention with the groundskeepers every morning first thing in the morning at seven to eight thirty for two weeks. In that time, they will work you to the bone doing any odd job that is required around the campus. I will leave it up to their discretion what exactly that entails.” Ozpin smiled. “Of course, if your teammates decide to help you in this, then the days you must spend on it will be reduced commensurately.”

A sip of coffee and Ozpin went on while the four were still looking at one another. “On top of that, I noted while preparing for this meeting that your grades are barely acceptable by Beacon standards. You have up until the end of those two weeks to get them up to at least a B+

level across the board. Or else your entire team will be broken up, and the two of you will be expelled.”

Apacci tried to protest. “That seems too much! I’ll admit that we were in the wrong, but...”

“You’re being in the wrong is not the main problem here. All of your actions, your unwillingness to compromise, put not only yourselves in danger, but your two erstwhile teammates, and the rest of the freshman class. I will say it again. **The Grimm do not care about human drama.** They will simply take advantage of it.”

Here Ozpin paused, taking a sip of his coffee, and letting his eyes once more rove around the room this time also including Harry at the back barely seen over the heads of the other students. “Further, I informed you all in my welcoming speech that it is up to you to take the next step. It is up to you to find your direction going forward. If you are unwilling to do so, if you cannot put forth the effort needed to take a step forward on your career as Hunters and Huntresses, then it is best that you be expelled now before you waste any further of my or my teachers precious time.”

Apacci flinched at that, growling a little under his throat, while Mila looked away, a part of her noticing that the deer Faunus sounded more like he was a lion like her for a second there. That was kind of funny, although the look in Ozpin’s eyes as he looked back at them wasn’t.

Mila was not the only one to think so. Behind this little tableau, Harry watched on, frowning very slightly as he too looked into Ozpin’s eyes as he gazed at the teens in front of them. Those eyes were not the eyes of an educator. Those eyes reminded him far too much of Dumbledore at his worst. *He’s looking straight through them, he doesn’t care about them as individuals, only what they represent, future Hunters that could be of use.*

“Yes professor,” Sung-Sun answered, looking over at her two teammates. “I presume that Tia and I are going to be allowed to help them on the scholastic side of things as well?”

“I presume that you have been doing so all along, all of you. If you aren’t, that too is a problem. Although you’re speaking up now demonstrates another issue with your team, one that I admittedly must place on my own shoulders.” Ozpin stopped them, looking at Tia, staring into her cerulean eyes. “Tia Arc. It had been my hope when you came here that you would step into the leadership role as your brother has done, and as your older sister did before you. Indeed, going back several centuries, the Arcs have always been good leaders as well as fighters that you could find. I will admit that fact blinded me to the reality of you as your own individual person. Seeing as you have not been willing to grow into the position of leadership, and because I know that at least a portion of this issue within your team was caused by the lack of proper leadership and direction.”

His eyes flicked over to Sung-Sun. “As such, Team Argent, ARGT, will now become Team

Garnet, GART, led by Ms. Greenscale. I understand that you have already been doing the work for the Laws and Logistics of the Four Kingdoms class. If you require more help with that class, or in any way need to catch up in it, please inform Professor Olive that you have my permission to ask for help from your fellow leaders for the next month on projects that you would normally be working solo on. Further, you and Team Garnet will be allowed infinite access to any of the training grounds within the next three weeks to get your teamwork and cohesion up to snuff. However,” Ozpin warned, taking another sip to emphasize his words. “You will still have to attend classes and keep your grades up of course. And from now on, Professor Goodwitch will be teaching your will start drilling you class in team-based combat once every week.”

Behind the seven at the front, Harry winced, looking over at Professor Goodwitch, pointing lightly at himself. Frankly, only team RWBY had any real chance of beating his team if he used his Semblance. Even Tia’s team wasn’t a threat so long as Pyrrha, Nora and Ren could keep the rest at bay until his magic made the difference.

Goodwitch looked back at him, shrugging her shoulders, and whispering, “You already found ways to make my class more interesting Mr. Arc. I trust you can do the same going forward.”

“You’re not worried about that causing animosity between my team and others when they know we’re holding back or lackadaisical attitude with our opponents when they know they can’t really beat us?” That was the kind of thing that Pyrrha had dealt with in her career as a gladiator after all, and it was a natural human reaction to the knowledge that you were outclassed. To roll over and play dead so you didn’t have to deal with the feelings of being crushed when you were giving it your all.

“I think you’ll find, Mr. Arc, that between you, Team Ruby, and Team Garnet the freshmen already know where they all stand. And I rather think most of them will look upon it as a learning experience as if you and your team were my Teachers Assistants,” Goodwitch drawled, smirking very slightly.

Harry rolled his eyes at that, muttering about how if they were doing job, they should be at least paid for such, before turning his attention back to Ozpin, who had fielded a few questions from Sung-Sun about specific training areas, and whether or not that included full access to the smithy as Harry and Glynda answered. Her questions seemed to please Professor Ozpin, and the nod he gave her in dismissal was both dismissive and approving, and the four members of the newly renamed Team GART stepped back, moving back to join Harry.

In turn, Harry found himself being called forward as witness. Ozpin felt that he might as well use Harry if he was there the first place.

In response, Harry very clearly and concisely what had occurred there in Forever Fall, and then, when asked, mentioned the incidents between himself and Cardin, as well as those that he knew occurred between Cardin and other freshmen. “He’s been very open about his

racism towards Faunus sir, I know for a fact that he's tried to bully both Apacci and Mila, as well as several of the others. I do not believe that he ever **succeeded** in bullying Apacci or Mila, but he probably did with a few of the other Faunus. If you want more information on that, you can call other freshmen in to testify."

"But you had no idea that Mister Winchester felt a particular animosity towards you, Ren, and the rest of your friends above and beyond his admittedly atrocious behavior towards your fellow freshmen?" Ozpin asked intently.

While there were a lot of security cameras around the camp, far more than any civilian college would have, they couldn't catch everything. And moreover, most were of the recording variety. There was very rarely actually watched live outside places like the smithy or Ozpin's clock tower. Admittedly, any of the professors could watch those videos instantly thanks to their scrolls, but looking back over things that wasn't the same thing as watching them live.

"No sir. I knew he didn't like me, but the depths of his dislike was unknown to me," Harry answered crisply.

"Do any of you have anything to add, Mr. Topaz, Ms. Rose?"

Now feeling much better that they weren't under the microscope, both Faunus admitted that Cardin and members of team CDNL had occasionally attempted to bully them or browbeat them into doing something the four men wanted. Most of the time that came in the form of bullying them to give up various exercise equipment in the gym, or Cardin boasting about how he was stronger than Mila and trying to get her to 'wrestle' with him.

"Would you say that his bullying of you was of the violent type, or simply the malicious type? Do you get the impression that he would very much prefer you all dead, or just wanted you to be and I am sorry to say it like this, put in your place?"

"That's really splitting hairs Headmaster, and why does it matter anyway?" Mila growled. "The guy's attack on our teammates, well, if leaving our teammates when there might be Grimm about is enough to get us all punished as we were, then surely what he did is far, far worse."

"That is correct. However, I wanted to ascertain if there was anything that could have been spotted which would've warned us of his plans. And further, I wanted to know from your own lips whether the rest of team Cardinal were involved in his actions. At this point you have mentioned them joining him numerous times, but might I ask if any of these three went out of their way on their own to bully you? And Mr. Arc, did you see any of these three actually toss the jars of rapier wasps? Or was it entirely in the doing of Cardin?"

"While I can't say I saw them tossing them headmaster, I would also say that would be circumstantial at best. They'd taken us completely unawares, and I saw at least two shatter among my team and team Ruby before I saw one in Cardin's hands. And while I cannot

definitively say that one of them didn't throw it, they certainly helped carry the things out into the woods. That makes them accomplices, if not actually part of the planning for the vicious prank," Harry answered firmly.

However, when questioned, Apacci and Mila couldn't point to a single instance where any of the remaining three members of team Cardinal had bullied them without Cardin being around. Neither were willing to admit that they had probably been doing so thanks to Cardin pushing them into it, and all three had used slurs and other racial words without Cardin being around. They had simply stopped short of becoming physical or outright bullying without him there.

Now Ozpin finally turned to the three men, who had been standing at attention silently, as if hoping their very silence could work in their defense.

It didn't.

Ozpin carefully questioned each of them about events leading up to the rapier wasps incident, and thanks to not having had the brains to try to get their story straight on the Bullhead, all three attempted to tell a slightly different story. Each young man tried to pin the whole incident on Cardin, the only thing they had in common.

Eventually, Ozpin slowly shook his head and leaned back in his chair taking several gulps of coffee, to wash the taste of their idiocy out of his mouth. *What is it with being born into a noble family, of being born into money, that removes the ability to think from certain young men and women?*

"That is enough, I think. Mr. Bronzewing, Mr. Lark, Mr. Thrush. Given the fact that none of you were actually seen throwing the rapier wasps, I cannot blacklist you from trying to join another Academy. And unfortunately, having racist beliefs is not illegal, although acting on them is here in Vale. You could probably argue that your actions under Cardin were based entirely off peer pressure. But you did help him gather the rapier wasps, and in fact ordered them for him in the case of Mr. Thrush. Therefore, I am expelling all three of you, effective immediately. It is early enough in the school year that you might be able to find a place with Haven or Shade. I would recommend not trying to do so with Atlas. While you may find other individuals who think the way you do among the Atlas citizenry, you will find that the military Academy has no patience for such things."

Once more Ozpin allowed his eyes to move over all of the teams there. "You will have until tomorrow to gather your things and make arrangements with your families to meet you in Vale. And as for Cardin Winchester, he too will be expelled along with being blacklisted. Someone who attempts to use something like rapier wasps not only against his fellow students, but in an area where Grimm could attack, has proven himself a liability as a Hunter."

I am not looking forward to speaking to the young idiot's father, nor am I looking forward to the hit that our funding will no doubt take. Organizing a further harvest of sap from

Forever Fall during the culling that I've already begun to organize is not going to make up that lack, unfortunately. Which says nothing about the man's political clout and the issues he will make there, blast it. But this is my school, and Cardin has shown that he is not only unwilling to act as a true Hunter should but is more than willing to act in so petty manner that it puts other Hunters and Huntresses in danger. And I will not allow the Grimm to win any battles in the future because of young Mr. Winchester's actions!

With that, Ozpin finished with the former team of freshmen fools, waiting them off. "You are dismissed. And recall that any further actions on Beacon property will be done by you as individuals, rather than students. As such, you will be tried rather than punished by the school."

He had meant that as a warning to the three young men, as well as Apacci and Mila. Both of them had looks in their eyes that implied that the shoe was on the other foot, and they meant to ram that foot up someone's rear. But such would cause Beacon problems in the long run, and Ozpin refused to allow it.

He watched as the students left. Glynda stayed behind, moving forward to sit across from Ozpin, shaking her head. "Well, hopefully Team Garnet will now start to turn itself around."

"We can hope. Ms. Arc is far too powerful a huntress for us to allow her to fade into obscurity or be removed from our hands," Ozpin answered mildly.

Glynda looked at her boss for a moment, before shaking her head deciding not to comment on the fact that he had not mentioned any of the other three. She agreed in a way that Tia had a far higher ceiling than any of the other three in terms of her huntress abilities. But it would not have occurred to her to be so blunt. Still, she put it down to Ozpin trusting her to keep such things silent and turned her attention to other things. "And how will you be dealing with Winchester the elder? And will you do so now while his son is injured, or after he is healed?"

A deeply buried, very dark part of Glynda's soul rejoiced at the loud groan her words pulled from her boss, and she smiled as she stood up once more to go over and get herself a pot of tea from the small table in the corner.

This feeling did not last long, however. Even as he began to work on the paperwork to expel the members of Team CRDL, Ozpin spoke up, his tone musing. "Tell me Glynda, you and Young Hadrian decided that time slot Wednesday worked best for you, yes? How would you feel about taking on at least two other students from the freshmen class for... advanced instruction?"

Glynda scowled a bit, reflecting that would probably mean that she would have to forgo sparring with Mr. Arc. That had been a most therapeutic session, and she had greatly enjoyed it. Still, she nodded. "I can do so, but why? Mr. Arc was behind where he should have been in

his basic understanding of his Semblance and how to incorporate it into his personal style. While several of the other students have somewhat similar issues, none of them require one-on-one instruction to solve those issues.”

“Perhaps not. But with all these subtle moves on Salem’s parts, as well as the attack on Autumn, we might need new soldiers sooner than we had hoped.” Ozpin smiled thinly. “I also wonder what would happen if someone struck at our freshmen once more, assuming they are attacking mere pawns, but instead they turn out to be a series of knights. Yes, I think that could be most enlightening.”

OOOOOO

The air in the elevator was extremely awkward, especially without Glynda around to provide a mobile peacekeeping force. But thankfully, while Apacci and Mila were simply embarrassed and uncomfortable, the members of Team CRDL were in shock, and simply kept to themselves to one side of the elevator went down in silence. Apacci made to open his mouth several times, a sneer on his face, but Tia and Sung-Sun stopped him, shaking their heads firmly.

“There’s no need. They’ve been expelled, and I rather doubt we will ever see them again, that is enough.” Sung-Sun whispered to the deer and lion Faunus.

Both of them scowled a little, very much wanting to get a kick in now, but with Tia agreeing with Sung-Sun, and with Harry watching them from one side, they subsided quickly.

Outside the clock tower, Harry was surprised and gratified to find that his team was waiting for them. “Well, what’s the verdict fearless leader, do we get to break these three’s legs too? Make it a full matching set of team Cardinal in the hospital for 800 please!”

Harry frowned in confusion, and Ren shrugged his shoulders. “She found a game show on TV to watch while we were cleaning up. Beyond that, you already know about how Nora likes to introduce Magnhild to people’s kneecaps.”

Harry snorted, but gestured for Sung-Sun to speak as he moved over to stand beside Pyrrha, letting the trio of young men from CRDL go. He wasn’t sad to see the backs of them, although in his mind none of them had done anything to stand out. The only one of the foursome that had was Cardin, and not in a good way. It would be very hard to truly care about any of the three being gone, whereas Cardin he was quite happy to see leave.

Pyrrha, Nora and Ren all seemed to agree with that sentiment, while also becoming a little shocked at how much team GART now had been punished for their part in things. Nora gave that thought voice first shouting out, “That’s not fair! I mean they were kind of silly, and Apacci and Mila should never have left the group. Being out in the beyond is like being in a horror movie, you never leave the party. But even so...”

“That is precisely the point. We allowed our interpersonal relationships to color our abilities to work together. That is something Professor Ozpin and indeed all of our other

professors are death on because it can literally get us killed in the field. I am not particularly happy about having been so punished, but neither will I contest it. And I'm certain that I speak for all of us when I say that, yes?" Sung-Sun said, drawing the last few words out as she looked around at her team.

Apacci still looked angry, and standing nearer the man than the others, Ren heard him mutter about how he and Mila were only being so badly punished because the two of them were Faunus, and that holding them to the same standard of education as humans who had gone to school all their lives was racist in itself. He frowned at that, but since the other young man muttered under his breath and Mila didn't seem to hold any similar sentiment, let that pass for now.

Instead, Ren looked over at Harry and Pyrrha, knowing that three of them would probably be asked to help Sung-Sun and Tia get the grades of the other two were up to an acceptable standard. This thought was proven out a moment later when they began to walk away from the clock tower.

"I hate to ask, but given how much of our time is going to be taken up by team exercises, can I ask you Harry, or you Ren and Pyrrha, to help with tutoring? I know for fact that Tia and I both don't do well in the history class, or in our weapons maintenance classes, and Tia struggles in math. I'd also like your help Harry in specifically creating some new team building exercises. I've tried a few before, and I've looked online for others, but most of the ones I found were for corporate teams or building camaraderie in the workplace. Not for Hunters and Huntresses."

Nodding, Harry agreed to that saying, "In fact, you could come over for dinner tonight, and we can start together a training plan. Since Tia and team Ruby are already coming over, one more won't matter."

"Mah, and here I thought you were asking me on a date, and when you already had Pyrrha. I can't say I'm displeased to be proven wrong on that score, although I think it would have been quite amusing for you to have evinced such hubris..." Sung-Sun teased gently before her voice trailed off as she stared above her.

There, a nearby lamppost had shifted, its lamp holding arm seeming to strain downward towards Sung-Sun as she walked below it. It was almost as if the metallic lamppost was trying to smack her upside the head.

She stared up at it in confusion, hearing the strain of groaning metal, while Pyrrha growled, "Mine, back off you Vacuan harlot," under her breath.

Hearing this, Harry reached out and gently moved his arm into Pyrrha's, causing her to smile, and release her Semblance's hold on the lamppost. "Well in any event, we'll see you and Tia for dinner tonight, and the movie too. Until then, I think the four of you have to have some discussions, yeah?"

Sung-Sun nodded firmly, and soon enough the two teams broke apart.

That night, all of Team GART joined Team ANVL for dinner, and Harry instantly noted that there was still some tension between the four of them, or rather three of them as Tia seemed to ignore the tension altogether. It came about that both Faunus were willing to apologize for leaving the team when they were in the forest but were not so willing as to admit that they were the only ones in the wrong for what had preceded that breakup.

"I realize that in truth it was but the last straw, but given what Tia and Sung-Sun walked into, are you two going to become a couple? Are you a couple now? That's bothered me since I heard about what happened." Pyrrha asked in some confusion. And an attempt to make conversation, admittedly. *I do not do well in social moments!!!*

"I was wondering the same thing," Harry stated, backing his girlfriend. "And while I agreed that it isn't really anyone else's business who you sleep with, I think the dorm room is a little too small for that kind of thing. Heck, isn't our dorm room, the original one we were assigned, still empty? You could use that if you wanted to get frisky."

"Frisky? Did you really use the word frisky? Or was that a joke on my lion heritage?" Mila quipped shaking her head, looking over at Apacci, who shrugged his shoulders. "As for being a couple, that would be a big no. I mean sure, fucking is fun, but I'm not looking for anything serious."

"I'm not either. It'd be a bad idea on many levels. Not least of which is depriving the other ladies of Beacon my attention," Apacci said, winking in an overdone manner. "Once you have deer, you never go back!"

Harry shook his head at that, not really understanding that idea. Not Apacci's statement, but Mila's. While he could see why personal gratification and sex could be so interesting, he was very much a relationship sort of person. Harry had been that in his old life, although it had not panned out, and he had the relationship between his father and mother in this lifetime as an excellent example of what he wanted.

"We stayed in your old room the night before, that's true, although the other teams have been using it as a hangout spot, so it's not a long-term solution. Ooh, but we'll also have Team Cardinal's room to play with now..." The deer Faunus looked over at the lion woman, his eyebrows waggling conspiratorially. She instantly got it and grinned, nodding her head firmly. The next day, not even twenty minutes would pass after the trio of team Cardinal had left their room for the last time before Apacci and Mila started screwing one another on Cardin's bed.

That was for the next day, and thankfully for their sanity, Harry and his team would never learn of it. Tonight, they had more to talk about. With his team acting as mediators, the two sides of team Garnet began to talk about their other differences. As he put the finishing touches on dinner that Ren had begun, Harry listened with half an ear, not taking part, shrugging his shoulders internally. *I still don't approve of Apacci as a person, and I don't think*

the team is going to remain together for longer than this year, maybe. Mila doesn't seem to have the same drive as Sung-Sun and Tia, and Apacci... He is way too abrasive. Still, for now they will keep on going. And maybe by the end of the year, we can reach out to Arturia to take on Tia as an apprentice.

That was the first time Harry had thought of that solution, and it still sent a pang of honest pain through him. He'd disliked it when Arturia left home, but he'd had years to get used to her not being around often at this point. To do the same with Tia would be a massive wrench, no two ways about it.

For now, however, Harry set that thought aside, reminding himself that Arturia would be dropping by next weekend. Harry looked forward to that quite a lot and knew Tia did too. *She would move home the moment that Tia and I are coming to Beacon, ugh. Couldn't Arturia have gotten a job as a Hunter here in Vale? That way she could stop by every weekend. Although, come to think of it, that would just mean that she and Pyrrha would have a lot of chances to spar, and I don't know if Beacon could survive continued clashes between the two of them.*

Harry was well aware of the competitive nature of Pyrrha and Arturia's interactions, having seen Pyrrha's eyes light up with battle light whenever Arturia came up in conversation around her. But he was willing to play peacemaker between the two in order to see his older sister.

Venting from the steamer interrupted Harry's thoughts, and he moved over to it quickly, forking out several spoonful of white rice. Ren moved into the kitchen behind him to help, and Harry ordered his sister to set the table. "Foods up folks, get it while it's hot, and then, I think we should set aside team talk for a bit. We have something more important at hand to discuss: what horrible movie are we going to watch and make fun of tonight when team Ruby joins us later?"

OOOOOOO

The next day over breakfast, Harry looked across at his teammates as they all sat down to a breakfast, most of it cooked by Ren and a helpful Pyrrha. The two of them had decided Harry shouldn't cook every meal, and since pancakes was a natural breakfast food, Ren had taken over breakfast. "Given the adventure we all had yesterday, I am ordering a day of rest for all of us, folks. And I propose also that we do some cross-partner events. Ren, would you like to go into Vale with me today? I feel as if the two of us haven't spent as much time together as I have with Nora, let alone Pyrrha, and I'd like to get to know how you use your Semblance and skills more."

Since it had actually been Ren's idea for the two of them to split off today, something he had brought up to Harry the night before as they were cooking, Ren agreed instantly. "That sounds like a good idea."

Nora looked a little reluctant to let him go, but Pyrrha, deciding that Harry probably did need some guy time, something she had heard often about from other gladiators, she interjected before Nora could, nodding her head firmly. "That sounds like a grand idea. And Ruby mentioned that her team is also going to have a day in today. They were going to have a game tournament of some kind. Perhaps Nora and I could join them? I will admit that I don't know much about scroll-based or TV-based games. Or any games at all really, except football and some card games."

Nora looked aghast at that, throwing arm around her shoulders. "Oh, you poor deluded child! How dare your parents allow you to live your life in ignorance of one of life's greatest joys, that of having a computerized shotgun and shooting zombies in the face!"

"Well, now you all know Nora's favorite genre," Ren drawled shaking his head. "But while I can see why your parents wouldn't want you to spend too much time on computer games, why did they make an exception for card games? Those can be just as time-consuming and can also lead to gambling and such. From the picture you've painted of your parents to us, I don't see them allowing that either."

In reply, Pyrrha shook her head, somewhat amused. "Of course, they wouldn't. But card games can teach hand eye coordination, as well as how to read your opponent's facial expressions."

Ren nodded at that, and the conversation over breakfast then turned to the battle yesterday, all of them going over events and saying what they did or did not like about Harry's strategy. While it had worked, it was a bit too static for Pyrrha and Ren's preferences, which Harry admitted to.

Nora had loved the fact that Harry had been able to give her such a power up, and then had let her go wild. This surprised absolutely no one who heard it, but despite her blunt instrument attitude to many things, Nora had a brain, and she listened intently as the others talked about the battle from their own perspectives, as well as went over ideas for how to work better together in a woodland environment. It was decided after a few moments that Harry's inclination to fort up as he had would probably not be the best idea for the entire team going forward. Caught by surprise and on the back foot it worked quite well, but mobility would serve the team better if they were on a culling mission or trying to just get from one place to another. That, as well as better communication were the two main things that grew out of this conversation.

That last was Ren's suggestion and was one Harry agreed with wholeheartedly. "I'm not saying we should be talking to one another all the time, that kind of distraction will get us killed. But keeping up a steady stream of what kind of enemies were dealing with, any geographic features one of us sees, and so forth is a good idea. However, I don't think that kind of thing is something we'll be able to requisition from the smithy. I don't think they make the kind of helmet communicators I think would be best for us."

While Ren was speaking, Nora had already looked up the price for a civilian headset model, the kind that could link into a scroll and then use the scroll to communicate to other scrolls, or obviously, through them to other helmet sets. The ones rated for use outside of one of the city states were quite expensive, even the ones that didn't come as part of a helmet, which Nora and Pyrrha both refused outright. They were okay with the idea of using helmets on specific missions, but not to adding them to their overall Huntress garb permanently.

Harry was a bit annoyed at that but was willing to let that conversation go for another time as Nora had found a dealer for such items in town. It was a supplier who worked with the local police and with Hunters across Vale and would have durable, well made stuff. "I'll meet with them next Saturday morning. I've already got a meeting in Vale to go to that morning anyway, so one more doesn't really matter," Harry opined.

"And then we have Arturia coming in as well on Saturday. That will be most... Interesting. I hope she will have time for a friendly spar," Pyrrha mused.

The look in her eyes caused Ren to gulp a bit and for Harry to shake his head slowly, but Nora laughed. "Oh my God, you made that sounds so threatening and yet really fun at the same time. I hope I'll be there to see you and this Arturia girl throw down!"

"Please don't encourage her," Harry drawled, giving Ren a distinct sense of both wrongness and déjà vu at the same time. Hearing anyone else say that to someone else beyond Nora was bizarre in the extreme. "I really don't want for my family to have to pay for property damages to Beacon, and I really don't want my big sister to put my girlfriend into traction or vice versa."

"We wouldn't let it get that far," Pyrrha protested, but it was the protest of a dry twig in the face of a hurricane, as if she herself barely believed what she was saying. Everyone around the table laughed, causing her to blush a little, but she didn't apologize as she might have at one point.

After breakfast was finished and cleaned up, team ANVL broke up along gender lines for the first time, with Pyrrha and Nora heading over to team door Ruby's dorm room.

Nora knocked on the door so hard it almost like she was trying to get off its hinges, shouting out, "Ruuuuby~, can we come in to play?"

Of course, thanks to her leg, it wasn't Ruby who answered the door, but a somewhat irate looking Weiss. "Good, perhaps the two of you can talk some common sense into my teammates! Particularly Blake. Honestly Blake, I just don't understand your thinking, an RPG game is supposed to be played by yourself on your own time, not while surrounded by your friends."

"That's just because you've never played online! If we each play on our scrolls and create a guild, then..."

“Then there isn’t enough interaction with the rest of the game world for it to be fun,” Weiss interrupted Blake haughtily, shaking her head. “Besides we’d all be playing on our scrolls, and where’s the fun in that?”

“What else we supposed to play on? That tiny TV the dorm room came supplied with isn’t big enough,” Yang said with a sigh.

“I’m sorry to ask, but did you all forget that you have access to the TV in the townhouse? The TV that Weiss here bought for us all to use?” Pyrrha questioned looking at the four girls with some confusion.

Team RWBY all looked at one another, and then Weiss slowly shook her head. “Considering we were just watching a movie on its last night, that revelation makes me feel particularly foolish. But are you certain it won’t be a bother to have us over instead of having you over here?”

“Not at all. Ren and Harry went off to have a guys’ day down in Vale, and probably won’t return until dinner time. We might kick you out at that point,” Nora said with a grin, “but until then, we have that big old TV, and hours of fun ahead of us. Come on troops!” With that, she moved over to Ruby and hefted her into her arms. “Let’s go!”

Ruby grumbled a bit, but the nurse had ordered her to take a day off of her feet, and then to come and see her Monday morning to make certain the leg was healing properly. The nurse had been forced to spend almost all of her Aura on healing Cardin, so had left Ruby to suffer for the rest of the weekend on her own. On the other hand, Yang shouted, “Hey, if anyone is going to cart Ruby around it’ll be me!”

“OH god no,” Ruby whimpered. “You’re not supposed to make a wheelchair go as fast as a motorcycle; you really aren’t. And don’t ask about how she turns, nightmare fuel!”

Laughing, Nora raced out of the room with Ruby in her arms, shouting out, “Last one there is a rotten egg!” with Yang on her heels.

Blake, Weiss and Pyrrha all looked at one another, then sighed, and chased after the other three, with Blake at the back of the group. She had agreed to join the game tournament basically because her partner threatened to hunt her down if she tried to leave. She’d tensed up at the idea of again going over to ANVL’s townhouse again, but now, Blake couldn’t help but be grateful that Harry wasn’t going to be there. Ever since her discussion with him and Tia in the library, Blake had been a little leery about being around Harry, a little off-balance when looking at him.

I researched as much as I could about what’s going on with Evig Låga. I even posted a few questions on Faunus-run chat boards and saw that no one who actually lives there has anything bad to say about the place. That is good and means that Harry’s desire to open his hometown to further Faunus families and workers is honest. But that just means that it’s now

fully on me to reach out to my parents. That is... is going to be really hard...

“Hey Blake, get your head out of the clouds! Unless you really do want to play a first-person shooter like Weiss does, were voting for games now,” Yang’s voice interrupted, and Blake shook her head, and concentrated on the here and now. What to do about contacting her parents and getting them to talk to Harry would wait for a bit.

OOOOOOO

Elsewhere in Beacon, Team GART had woken up early that morning to work with the groundskeepers on the first of their many punishments.

Instead of going for an hour or two in the morning, Sung-Sun had called Ozpin, and successfully argued that they should be able to knock out three days of the groundskeeping for Mila and Apacci’s punishment on Sunday, to allow them to have a few mornings off during the week. Monday in particular was so difficult already that adding more to it including the afterschool detentions with Oobleck would be too much, even as a punishment. Luckily, she caught the headmaster without Goodwitch around, and had been able to prevail on him to that point.

This meant that one half-day of hard work on the grounds would let them get almost an entire week of this particular punishment over with.

None of them were very enthused about this. Not even Tia, who was no stranger to working with the soil and plants. But she and Sung-Sun still joined the two punished fellows in a show of solidarity that Sung-Sun hoped to use to soften everyone on the team towards one another.

“I thought you lived on a farm or something?” Mila grumbled from beside her as the group of them began to pull out weeds in preparation for enlarging one of the tree beds in preparation for a few new bushes. “I mean shouldn’t this all be old hat to you?”

“It is. But if I wanted to be a farmer, I would already be one with my big sister Violet,” Tia stated.

“It never ceases to amaze me to hear about all of your various sisters. However did Harry survive all of you?” Sung-Sun asked from nearby, a smile on her face. While working with large scale groundskeeping like this was not her cup of tea, she rather liked working with the soil in smaller allotments. *There is almost something Zen about a good garden, and this is actually quite soothing.*

Tia shrugged her shoulders at that, saying nothing for a time.

That was fine by Apacci, who resented this work quite a bit. Mila did too, being very much a street girl, and never having worked with plants at all before coming to Beacon. But in comparison to Apacci she was much more philosophical about things. Mila knew they had been

in the wrong for more than just what had occurred in Forever Fall. That they had indeed been slacking lately, overwhelmed by Beacon's workload and unwilling to work harder just to stay afloat, let alone excel as they had to.

Maybe, maybe I can take this as a wake-up call. Push hard, give it my all for the rest of the semester. But if things don't get easier at that point, perhaps being a real Hunter just isn't for me. That fight in the woods, and worse, the one during Initiation... The lion Faunus shivered a bit. Those fights had been well beyond anything I've ever faced before. And I really don't like the idea of taking on such odds going forward.

But if Mila was philosophical about things in the future, Apacci saw everything through the lens of the chip on his shoulder. And in both Faunus, as Harry had worried, as in Sung-Sun and Tia, there was still a kernel of future trouble among the quartet.

I won't even have any time to go into Vale, not even when there's that big recruitment drive for the White Fang next month. Not that I'm in a position to join, but it's always nice to hear about how my fellow brothers and sisters are striking back against The Man. Is this really what I want for my life, to help serve the man as a Hunter? Or maybe, maybe the White Fang would be able to use my abilities better, Apacci mused. I'll give this whole team thing a chance going forward, but I'm definitely not going to let it change who I am, that's for damn sure!

OOOOOOO

As the others were busy having fun or being worked to the bone back in Beacon, Ren and Harry had taken the Bullhead into Vale. Most of the journey had been spent in silence, neither man the sort to fill up the silence with inane comments. But it wasn't a tense silence, it was a companionable one, interspersed with a few questions about Harry's fighting style and Ren's choice of weapons. Harry was interested in what came first, Ren realizing he would never have the Aura endurance to be a frontline fighter like Nora, or the weapons that Ren called Storm Flower.

It turned out that Storm Flower came second. "I knew right off the bat that Nora would need someone to watch her back and someone to warn her if she was heading into danger. A scout and skirmisher I can do both of those jobs, and that is what I set out to train myself as. My Semblance lends itself to that, as we've already discussed. But if I didn't have Nora to watch out for, I might've gone down a different combat path."

Harry nodded, letting that thought percolate into his head for a few moments, then asking with a smirk "And you say the two of you are not together-together?"

"It is... complicated. And only about half of the reason has to do with the traditional problem between a man and woman who are friends with one another and worried about taking that next step," Ren answered dryly before becoming serious. "I, there's something I have to do, something I, I made a vow to do before I really move on with my life on a personal level. We'll talk about that later."

Raising an eyebrow at that, Harry shrugged but nodded. The two of them sat for the rest of the trip to Vale in silence, staring out a windows at the cliff as they passed by and then over the waters towards the city.

Exiting the Bullhead, both of them paused for a moment as they saw several people loitering around the area. Two of them had looked up as the Bullhead landed, while others had very distinctly not done so, but had reached into pockets, as if readying a scroll. Or a weapon, Harry wasn't certain which. *But this lot looks more like the click-click type rather than the bang-bang.*

When it became clear that there were two men aboard the bullhead and no one else, much of the interest in them or the bullhead from Beacon faded away. Seeing that, Ren's lips quirked. "Is there something going on that we don't know about? Or..."

"Or is this Pyrrha's fame were seeing, despite it being a few weeks since she and I went on our date?" Harry whispered back. "I don't know, and frankly I don't care. If the next time Pyrrha and I come to Vale and someone bothers us, they're going to find their scrolls suddenly no longer working. If I'm gentle it might be because it is missing a small segment somewhere cut away by one of my attacks. And if I'm not, I will have set it on fire in their hands. I firmly believe in privacy, thank you freaking much," Harry finished with a growl, causing Ren to chuckle a bit.

"Nora would cheerfully join you in breaking their kneecaps for certain," Ren said with a snort.

This caused Harry to snort, and after a second spent glaring at the men and women around them, Harry gestured them on. The two of them headed out into the city proper away from the landing area quickly, this being the landing zone devoted to Beacon. For a time as they talked, Harry asked Ren some questions about his hand-to-hand style, specifically his 'Aura Burst' techniques, which seemed a major game changer. Something that gave Ren, a very slight, not at all heavy person an impact against Grimm well beyond the size of his weapons. But if someone like Harry or Tia... or any Arc really, could figure out how to do the same thing, any Grimm, no matter their size or toughness, could be overcome.

That topic somehow segued into one about how Nora got the pink into Ren's hair and why it had remained permanent. Harry had never heard of some of the ingredients used in that experiment before, and he decided he really didn't want to ever again. Ren was just lucky that it hadn't dyed his skin permanently pink and that the damage to his hair hadn't included going bald eventually.

"That was, a major point of contention between Nora and I at the time," Ren reminisced with a small smile. "She was so proud of her achievement, while I was horrified, naturally, at the idea of going bald. It was our first real, massive blow up, but she eventually apologized and then burned her notes on the, the substance she created. I made certain she did, watching the

process.”

“Probably for the good of all mankind that you did,” Harry responded with a wry chuckle. “Just think if she could use it today to give her grenades that extra oomph. We’d have to deal with getting pink everywhere. I can’t imagine pink Grimm, or how angry Professor Goodwitch and the other students would get.”

A few minutes later, as Harry finished a story involving a stolen apple tart, Tia, and Violet chasing them around the plantation, Ren abruptly asked a question that had been on his mind ever since they had gone through initiation, and he had heard that Harry had been with Pyrrha during the grim invasion of Chian. It had taken him this long to get up the courage to ask, as it opened the door to a part of Ren’s past that he tried hard not to think about on his day-to-day life even as it drove some of his decisions in that life. It was why he and Nora had become orphans, why they had decided to become hunters, and why to this day, Ren had decided to not allow himself to build further bonds with even Nora. Not before his mission of justice was finished.

“Is it true that you and Pyrrha faced down a Nuckaleeve?”

Harry’s snickering at his memory cut off at that, and he looked at Ren quizzically. But he saw no need to hide it. It was common knowledge Pyrrha had been there, after all. “We did. Mind you, neither of us knew what we were facing, and the horde it was leading wasn’t the largest. My parents spoke to me about our battle against that thing in depth, and they decided that the Nuckaleeve was a newly risen one. While it had a lot of its breed’s intelligence and powers, it had none of an older Grimm’s intelligence or cunning. It just attacked as a group, no tactics. And it didn’t use its aura of fear or it’s noise attacks very well.”

It was a well-known fact that Grimm became more intelligent the longer they were alive, making them far more dangerous. But occasionally the rush of evolving into a new form drove a Grimm into acting almost arrogantly, biting off more than it could chew. Guld and Hazel both thought that was the case here and going by the information they shared about other sightings of Nuckaleeve, Harry didn’t disagree.

“Still, young or old, I think Pyrrha and I could’ve beaten it. It had no idea of how to handle my powers, and Pyrrha even then was a magnificent fighter, fully able to tie down its attention while I attacked it from every side I could for with my newly awakened Semblance.” He paused then, reaching out to grip Ren’s shoulder, making the other man turned to face him whereas before he had been walking stoically beside Harry, staring straight ahead as Harry spoke, his earlier humor in stark abeyance now. “But today, if she and I fought another one of those creatures, especially with you and Nora to back us up? We would kick its ass. Horde or no horde.”

“I should’ve known that you would discern that I had some personal stake in asking.” Ren noted ruefully. “I, I realize it is a long shot, and maybe many years in the future. But if we

graduate and decide to stay together as a team, I would rather like us to head back to Anima...” He broke off as Harry barked out a laugh, and Ren grinned somewhat ruefully, nodding his head slightly. “Yes, I suppose asking that is somewhat redundant in your case, and where you go, Pyrrha will. But regardless, even if we all decide to travel with you to your hometown and take up residence there, I would like us to be on the lookout for any missions that mention a Nuckaleevee or even hint at horse-like Grimm. Especially around the former territory of the town of Kuroyuri.”

Once more, Harry looked at Ren thoughtfully, putting two and two together and getting four. “You and Nora, you were from there. You were survivors of the Grimm assault that wiped it out. I’ve made a study of Grimm assaults, and I remember that one coming up in my studies. A Nuckaleevee led the assault, right? Baited out the defenders, then struck from the other side. The fear and horror of the townsfolk drew in still more Grimm. There were only two known adult survivors and...” he paused, looking at Ren. “And four or five children successfully evacuated.”

“Yes,” Ren sighed. “We, Nora was already an orphan at the time. She was due to be moved to Mistral, and ironically, it was only the fact a bullhead was coming to pick her up that let any of us survive. That Bullhead pilot was insanely brave and saved our lives. We, I lost everything there, parents, an uncle, a niece... the whole town. More than three thousand men and women.”

He shook his head breathing in deeply, banishing the memories with the ease of long practice. “Since then, Nora has attempted to push past what occurred to us and has succeeded in a major way. But I cannot. I can’t ever forget my promise to hunt that thing down, I can’t forget the misfortune that came upon us. I must...”

“You must exorcise the demons so to speak. I understand,” Harry nodded, likening it to how Harry himself had desired to face Voldemort, his parent’s murderer, in his past life. *And Sirius when I thought he was behind their murders.* “And if we do decide to stay together as a team when we graduate or even before that if a mission comes up once we’re allowed to take them, and we have any hints of anything going on around Kuroyuri, we’ll take it. I promise. You don’t have to face that threat alone, my friend.”

“Thank you.” Ren answered smiling slightly.

That smile disappeared into a pained grimace as Harry went on, grinning cheerfully now as he gestured in either direction. “I don’t even know why you thought you had to ask. We’re a team, and I would hardly ever want to get in the way of Nora and you moving past that ‘not-together-together’ thing, as I am quite certain she rather desperately wants to.”

The groan that Ren released amused Harry, but he continued to speak as if he hadn’t heard. “But for now, do you want to head to the bookstore first, the movie store, or the arcade? Those are about the only ideas I’ve got about how to spend guys day out. My father

and I went on a few, but most of those was based around us heading out into the wilds together. Evig Låga is not nearly as large as Vale or Mistral.”

“Bookstore first, I think. And if you could please refrain from bringing up Nora and her supposed interested me, I would appreciate it,” Ren replied with as much dignity as he could muster.

While this was a surprisingly large amount, Harry simply smirked at them, nodding his head, making no mention of the slight blush on his face or the grimace that flashed across Ren’s face. Evidently, the idea of dating Nora was both tempting and horrifying in equal measure. “Of course, of course. I won’t ever talk about how I think she is.... what was that term I heard the other freshmen use recently? Ah yes, thirsty. I won’t mention how Nora’s probably thirsty for a helping of Ren. Or how it could be the ultimate sign of romance that you literally decided to build your own combat style around helping her. Or the fact that she has that one pillow that she named...”

Those as far as he got before Ren slugged him in the arm, and Harry broke off, laughing.

The two continued to trade stories as they walked and about thirty minutes later, their brought them to a bookstore that Blake had recommended.

“Welcome to Tukson’s Book Trade, home of every book of the sun,” the proprietor said automatically as they entered. He was standing behind a counter at the back of the store, a middle-aged man of middling height but semi-broad shoulders for a civilian. He was also a faunus, with small furry ears peaking out of his curly hair, and some hair on his hands along with longer nails. Harry wasn’t certain what kind of animal trade he had, but felt it was something feline.

“Nice, definitely a good little patois there, although to be more realistic you might want to change it to ‘where you can order any book under the sun your imagination desires,’” Harry quipped, giving the Faunus a thumbs up.

“That’s a little too wordy, but if anyone tries to argue about the first one, I might be willing to switch it up,” Tukson chuckled. “Regardless, what can I get you two? If your Beacon students, I’m afraid my in-store selection of books on weapons is kind of small, although our magazine selection is larger if you’re looking for something to follow the latest trends rather than in depth stuff.”

“I believe there are a few comic books that Nora follows, and you can shut up, Harry,” Ren drawled, shooting Harry a withering look as Harry hummed a short portion of the wedding march. “Friends buy their friends comic books all the time.”

“Sure, after they buy their own stuff. They don’t make it a priority, especially when they’re on a guys’ day out,” Harry joked back, before turning and asking Tukson where his economics section was. There, he found a copy of a book that Professor Olive had

recommended, taking it out and placing it on the counter rather than carry the surprisingly sturdy book around.

“A little light reading?” Tukson asked looking at the book askance. “I will admit that book does get good reviews from people who use it, or I wouldn’t have it in my store. And it’s basically a Who’s Who primer in terms of the business side of things here in Vale. But...”

“Yeah, if you had a copier, I might try to copy out a few segments of it, but as it is, I’ll need to buy it. The rest of it might come in handy, but I have to prep for two meetings I have this Saturday.”

“More power to you I guess, and far be it for me to turn down a sale.” It didn’t have to be said that the book was also somewhat expensive.

At that point, Ren came over and put a few comic books down to one side of Harry’s book. As he made to turn around, Harry picked up the comics and set them on top of the economics book, causing Ren to turn and stare at him. “I don’t want charity.”

“It isn’t charity, call it an investment if you have to call it anything. I know that money is tighter for you and Nora more than it is for me and Pyrrha.” Harry very deliberately did not see the jolt the Faunus made at that name, watching Tukson out of the corner of his eye as the man settled down back into his professional look. That was good enough, Harry supposed. “But you two are part of our team. Don’t take advantage of it and keep on doing your part of the cooking and taking care of the townhome and we’ll call it even.”

“Fine, but we don’t spend more than fifty lien on myself or Nora. Total,” Ren hastily added.

Tukson snorted at that, deciding to help cut across this argument. “Kid, the book your friend here just decided to buy it so expensive, that he’s going to pay more in tax than you would have paid on those comics.”

Ren’s eyes widened a little, as he stared at the book, then shrugged, nodded at Harry, and turned back to browse through several other segments of the store, with Harry hollering after him, “And if you have any books that you don’t want me or any of the others to know about, I’m sure Tukson here will package them separately and put in a paper bag or something before I see it.”

Tukson snorted at that, enjoying the back and forth even as Ren gave Harry the finger, causing Harry to smack him again as he moved off, Ren’s deadpan of, “And I presume if you need a book to research technique with, he will do the same for you.”

Ren found a few other books that he knew Nora and himself would enjoy, and a book on surprising smoothie flavors. If there was an equivalent for Ren to Nora and pancakes, it was healthy smoothies. He was always trying different varieties of them, never settling on one particular flavor.

For his part, Harry picked up a few comics for Pyrrha, who he knew followed as few of them as well, two books in a series that Tia and he both followed from Mantle, and a book of various maps, showing the four city-states through the years as well as more detailed current maps of Vale. Since many of those maps were made to be extremely accurate, they could be of use on missions, and Harry was happy to find them.

Eventually, while Ren was able to stay below the fifty lien limit, he had set himself and Nora's contribution, Harry's contributions were far more expensive, as Tukson had warned.

It was after handing over his card that Tukson, chuckling at a joke that Ren had made at Harry's expense a moment ago, paused, staring down at the printout of Harry's name at the bottom of the receipt. "Are you, are you one of those Arcs, from some town in Anima?"

At that, Ren paused, standing next to Harry as both of them looked at the Faunus in some confusion. But Harry still answered in the affirmative. "I am, although where you heard the name, I don't know." *I don't think Evig Låga's expansion should have reached the point where it made international news. So, did my name come up in conjunction with Pyrrha or something?*

"Let's just say that as a Faunus who owns a business, I need to keep my ears to the ground to avoid trouble," Tukson said, gesturing up to his ears. "I've spoken to a few Faunus who have actually made the journey there including an irascible old asshole named Sunflash. It's hard to translate his grunts over the scroll, but he sounds happy enough."

"Yeah, he's not exactly the best at communicating in any kind of way other than smacks on the head and shoulder," Harry answered with a laugh. "And if you want to move to Evig Låga, I will say more power to you. We already have two small bookstores, but a third could do well, liven their competition up a bit. Especially since both of them tend to specialize, one for children's books and history books, and the other farming, engineering and Hunter type books. A bookstore that services all in some way would gain a lot of business."

Tukson hummed thoughtfully to himself, shrugging his shoulders. "I actually might take you up on that. It's not a good time to be a faunus in Vale right now. Normally I would be harassed once every other month or so, but lately? Well, there's a lot of tension in the air."

Ren glanced at Harry, and both of them shrugged their shoulders. "Sorry, but we've been hip-deep in schoolwork, and neither of us have been following anything local beyond the crime spree Torchwick's been doing. Is there something else going on?"

"Not really, but lot of people are saying it's White Fang, although why is beyond me. Even the police have implied it might be White Fang, and their public statements to that effect have had a major impact. It isn't getting to the point where the common person on the street is liable to attack me or my shop, but it's going in that direction. And of course, if I reach out to my fellow faunus to help protect my shop, I'm just going to be fueling that fire, and opening myself to accusations of being part of the White Fang. And if I don't, my fellow faunus might

think I'm a traitor or something equally stupid."

"Damned if you do and damned if you don't," Harry nodded in understanding. "I can't say that my team and I are in a position to help you with anything, but like I said, Evig Låga would cheerfully welcome you." *There's a reason I reached out to Blake after all, we need more settlers. A lot more. And every little bit helps.* "I can give you my contact number if you want any more information about Evig Låga or help in getting there."

Tukson paused that, staring across his cash register at Harry, and slowly shaking his head. "You really mean that don't you. I could tell that Sunflash thought you and your family were a good group of employers, but you don't seem to even care about me being a faunus at all, do you?"

"I've always thought that racism was particularly stupid," Harry answered bluntly. "I don't want any part of it. I also don't agree with how the White Fang are going about their business. Hate begets only more hate. I cannot disagree with the fact that Atlas for example still treats its Faunus miners horribly. But the White Fang are becoming more faunus supremacists rather than fighting for equality."

Tukson stared at Harry some more, then nodded. "Give me that contact info, and I'll get back to you if I decide to make the move. I don't want to take up your time any further today obviously." *And the next time Blake stops in for the latest ninjas of love, I can ask her opinion about you,* he thought. *If it dovetails with what Sunflash is telling me, I might just have more information to share with you than you have with me, Hadrian Arc.*

Nodding, Harry did so, and with the final farewell he and Ren left Tucson's book trade.

"Can I ask what is this meeting you are going to on Saturday? This is the second time today you alluded to it, but I don't think you ever actually explained," Ren asked.

"It's not a secret or anything I suppose, it's just going to be kind of boring. I got in contact with my father a week and a half ago, right before I went on that date with Pyrrha actually, and he said that they had found a transport service that would enable us to sell our Fire Dust directly to Vale if the price was above a certain point. It took me this long to set up a meeting with a local distributor, but I've got my father's emailed permission to act as an intermediary here. It's going to be extremely boring but given how badly Torchwick's depredations have hit the local Dust market, it will also be extremely profitable I think."

Nodding, Ren asked, "And I don't suppose that in the future you would be willing to extend your largess to obtaining some of that Fire Dust for myself and Nora?"

He was not surprised by Harry's affirmative response, and rolled his eyes at the other man, muttering about how Harry had to be careful to not be too openhanded. "The openhanded friend is often resented or conversely can also lead to dependency."

"I'm certain that my family and I can think of ways you and Nora can work off your debt

if it comes to it," Harry drawled, and Ren snorted at that as the two of them walked on.

Neither of them noticed how a very short, young-looking girl with multicolored hair had stopped walking as the two talked. Instead, she had reversed course a few steps, licking at an ice cream cone thoughtfully as if debating heading back into the ice cream shop to one side the pair of young Hunters had just passed. Now she stood there, finishing her ice cream off before reentering the store.

Moments later, she was back out, and took a second to look in the same direction Harry and Ren had gone, before ducking into a nearby alley way. There, she somehow disappeared from view, leaving only an empty ice cream cone behind.

The two young men stopped in for a brief lunch, ordered some more fruits, vegetables and so forth to be delivered back to the bullhead when they were going to return to Beacon, and then continued on to the arcade. Two hours later, they were still at the arcade, having played through most of the games there and Harry was staring up at the deck screen for Dance Dance Revolution, which was declaring Ren the winner.

His mouth opening and closing, Harry could barely get out a few syllables through his shock, let alone a full, comprehensive language. "How..."

"You have far to go in the realm of footwork and body coordination before you can challenge this mountain, grasshopper," Ren said, his tone like that of a Buddha giving out psalms while he smirked wickedly over at his opponent. "And here I thought you said you knew how to dance."

It actually had been quite close. When it had been a slow song at first, Harry had kept up easily, but his footwork had begun to suffer at the higher levels, and when the song had shifted into breakdancing of all things, Ren had been able to keep up, and Harry hadn't.

Harry narrowed his eyes as he glared back at his friend. "Of course you know, this means war."

By the time the two young men were back at Beacon, all he wanted to do was drop the food off in the kitchen and fall asleep. Instead, they walked into what was perhaps the most raucous first-person shooter tournament in Beacon history, with Nora and Yang booing and hissing as Weiss and Ruby finished off the temporary team of Pyrrha and Tia. And many of the girls were missing various items of clothing. To say that the sight was jaw-dropping was an understatement.

Astonishingly, Yang, who Harry had always reckoned would be good at video games, was in a bad way. Only her skirt and, supposedly, panties remained. Her breasts were a decent handful, standing high and firm over an amazingly good six-pack, better even than Tia's despite the fact she wasn't as strong as Harry's twin. Her breasts were capped by light pink nipples, and showed tan lines in the form of a slightly paler skin in the form of a tiny triangle around her

nipples, left behind by small nipple pads, maybe.

Blake was even worse off, which made some sense, given the fact Harry doubted scroll games had ever interested her. Blake's pants were gone, showing off a very nice pair of black lace panties. She had kept her stockings on, but gotten rid of her shoes and bra. Thus her breasts were fully on display, small well-formed mounds of nearly snow white flesh, tipped with startlingly dark nipples. Those nipples were currently hard, but Harry doubted that was from arousal, rather the slight chill from the air conditioning.

Nora hadn't seemingly lost much, or perhaps had started with more articles of clothing in her everyday wear. She was showing off a pair of pink panties and had nothing on her legs, but Nora's shirt was still covering her chest, along with whatever might be underneath. Sung-Sun was in a t-shirt and long skirt, having lost at least her shoes, socks and two or three other articles of clothing.

Tia was also nearly naked. She sat there in a pair of socks and panties, showing off her frankly incredible chest. Twin tanned mountains, larger than any man's hands, Tia's breasts were capped with dark pink nipples, only one of which was visible thanks to her long scarf covering the other. They bounced as they moved, slightly sagging under their own weight despite the six-pack and upper body muscles that Tia showed in abundance. It was evident she had sacrificed her bra rather than her scarf, something that amused Harry even as he very hastily looked away. The image was still seared in his brain though, and he had a devil of a time pushing it out of his mind.

Pyrrha was slightly better off wearing both bra and sleepwear below the belt. And Weiss and Ruby had apparently not lost nearly as often as the others. Both had lost their shoes and Ruby had been forced to set aside her hooded cloak, while Weiss had lost her blouse, but wore an undershirt underneath. It was nearly see-through though, and Harry and Ren could both make out the shape of her bra underneath.

The two young men looked at one another, sighing in unison, and then attempted to sneak past the group of huntresses. They even went so far as to duck, keeping low to the ground and looking straight ahead as they entered the kitchen. But it was for naught as Nora, looking away from the TV, spotted them instantly. "Rennie's back, and fearless leader too! You're back! Excellent, I crave pancakes!"

The reaction of the rest of the girls was immediate and undoubtedly very easy to predict. Weiss shrieked and made to toss her controller, which was still connected to the TV at them. Ruby and Blake responded similarly, although in their case, they had plates, bags of junk food, bowls, cups, and pillows to toss. Yang hopped to her feet, holding her chest with one hand as her other hand rose, her Semblance flickering into being around her as her violet eyes turned red. "YOU BASTARDS!!"

As Harry and Ren yelped and dodged the flung cups and plates that reached them,

Pyrrha curled up around herself, her previous red blush spreading quickly. "I knew this was a bad idea Yang! I can't believe you and Nora talked us all into this!" She was more than willing for Harry to look at her whenever he wanted but had already been having trouble with being seen so indecently dressed by the other girls. Showing herself off to another man, no matter how accidentally. *Cursed peer pressure!*

The only one who didn't seem to care one way or another was Tia, who hopped to her feet. She smacked aside several things that the others threw as she stood up, completely uncaring of her own partial nudity, tripping Yang at the same time so she fell face first in her charge. "Enough. They're already looking away and were not staring in the first place."

With her piece said and seeing no reason to say anything further, Tia moved forward, taking the grocery bags from the two men. Entering the kitchen, she began methodically to put them away in the kitchen, ignoring the others.

For her part Yang grumbled, pushing herself up from the floor, grabbing a bra. "Ugh, fine. But they better stay staring at the flipping wall for now. Not all of us are so willing to be seen like this. Blast it, I'm used to teasing boys with a hint of the council, not give away a look at them like this for free." She then smirked, tossing away the first bra she picked away. "Think that's yours, Nora, nice little sloth pattern there but a little too small for me."

"Ooh, thanks!" Nora said, grabbing the thing out of the sky and hooking it on quickly. The other girls also quickly began to dress, grumbling a bit as most of them wanted to take out their intense embarrassment on the boys. Weiss argued vociferously about it, but Pyrrha, recovered now, refused to allow it, saying that it was the girl's fault. "We should have thought about what would happen when the boys came home. We could have told them to come back after a certain time or left a note on the door. We didn't. And I don't see why you're so angry Weiss."

"Yeah, it's not like you or Rubes have anything worth seeing, even if you were fully uncovered. Which you ain't considering how badly you were kicking our asses," Yang quipped, causing Nora to cackle and her younger sister to slug her in the shoulder.

"WH, how, Yang! Grr, no, that's not it! It's the... the principle of..." Weiss trailed off blinking, then sighing, her anger leaving her. "I, I suppose we do have only, only ourselves to blame."

Breathing a sigh of relief at getting out of an impromptu session of dodging practice, Harry looked over to his companion. "Well, that was a... pleasant way to end the evening," he quipped.

Ren snorted. "I'm going to bed. Someone else can make Nora's pancakes for her tonight, I'll make some tomorrow morning." He went on heartlessly, not even looking at Nora as she collapsed to her knees and began to whimper. "Remember ladies, tomorrow morning is Monday, and I don't know about you, but that old saying about that day being horrible is very,

very true here in Beacon for me.”

“Too right. And since Ren here danced my legs off via DDR, I think it’s time someone else cooks too.” Harry might’ve been willing to cook for his team at least if Nora or Pyrrha had joined Tia in defending Harry and Ren from Weiss, Blake and Ruby’s blandishments (and thrown objects). Neither had, with Pyrrha simply curling in on herself and Nora joining in, hurling a few of the soda cans at the two boys. Not because, Harry thought, she was actually embarrassed, but rather because Nora thought it looked fun. Regardless of her reasons though, Harry felt a bit of punishment was in order. *I’ll make it up to Pyrrha later.*

The hangdog expression on the girls’ faces as the two men, ironically the best cooks among them, declined to cook for the night told Harry that his message had been received well and clear. *Don’t leap to conclusions like that girls, it’s never a good idea.* Harry walked up the steps very slowly, his legs really were that sore, despite his Aura, with a small feeling of accomplishment. It wasn’t every day that two men could overrule so many women after all.

School started up the next day on Monday as per usual, to the horror of the students subjected to it. And as they left their first class, Harry agreed aloud with Ren’s comment from the night before, adding, “I have to wonder if that is deliberate, tossing us into the deep end every Monday to get our brains back online. If it is, I pray that no other business or school ever takes up the practice. I don’t think it’s necessary and could perhaps be called torture if you stretch the term.”

“While it might seem a little rude to our professors, I actually agree with that sentiment,” Pyrrha muttered, as everyone around them groaned in agreement bar Weiss.

The young Schnee heiress was instead looking thoughtful, tapping her chin with one delicate finger. “You think they’re psychologically toughening us up then? I could actually see several reasons behind that. For long term battles or culling missions that push us to the point of mental and physical endurance, perhaps? Or when dealing with unpleasant things?”

“Hah, perhaps. But regardless of the reasons, I suppose we just have to grin and bear it,” he said, waving his hand towards where Tia and her own team had just exited another classroom nearby.

Normal classes rolled along as per usual the rest of the day but when it came to combat class, that routine ended for a moment. It was then that Glynda shared the announcement about the missing team Cardinal. Their being expelled from the school had been finalized including Cardin, over the strenuous objections of Winchester’s parents.

Smacking her riding crop into her other hand, Glynda looked around the classroom, her glare even more unnerving than normal. “I will say it again, as all your other teachers will. The Grimm are the enemy, not one another. We have to be willing to trust you to be able to work with anyone you meet on your job, to always put fighting the Grimm above all other considerations. As a Hunter there is no place for racism, no place for arrogance, or sexism or

attacking your fellow Hunters out of some misplaced sense of entitlement. Let the example of Team Cardinal embed that rule in your mind now, or they will not be the only team that gets expelled by the end of this year.”

She waited for a few moments to let that threat to sink in, and then called up the first pair of combatants, Mila and Ruby.

For team ANVL that class passed uneventfully, as did Tuesday, the only thing of note being that Harry took Pyrrha on a date on campus. He made up a picnic for the two of them, and Pyrrha chose the spot on campus, a small out of the way glade by Professor Peach’s classroom, which was frequented by couples. Having other people around doused their ardor a bit, but the two of them still spent most of the time on the date in one another’s arms just snuggling against a tree.

However, on Wednesday, Harry was faced not with his second class with Glynda as he expected. Instead, Pyrrha knocked on his door as Harry was getting dressed. When he answered, she poked her head in, holding out her scroll. “Professor Goodwitch has requested that I join your training with her. I think she was very serious about demanding that I start using my Semblance for larger attacks.”

“Well, my lady, far be it for me to object to spending more time with you.” Pyrrha laughed at that, and Harry went on more seriously. “I hope that we both have a good training exercise then. And we can also use it to start training ourselves to work together better. For instance, you’ve noticed how I routinely transfigure stone into various attack methods. But if I take that oath step further, and change the composition of the ground to iron...”

“Then I would be able to use it with my Semblance! Excellent thinking,” Pyrrha enthused, and the two of them shared a quick kiss before Pyrrha headed back to her room to also get ready for the day.

But to both of their surprise, they found that Pyrrha was not the only one joining Professor Goodwitch’s one-on-one instruction with Harry. Instead, they found their friend Weiss joining them. Weiss in turn stared at them both, cocking her head thoughtfully to one side. “Hmm... this is quite interesting.”

“I am glad you think so, Ms. Schnee. You are all here because your Semblances can, with the correct training, change the overall battlefield rather than simply single opponents. And when I say impact the whole battlefield, I mean just that. You three can shape the very terrain, the setting of the battle beyond what any of the other freshmen can do. But this is an aspect of your training that has been severely lacking up to this point. I have already been meeting with Mister Arc to help him create a combat style around his Semblance, build on his situational awareness and so forth. I will now begin that process with the pair of you.”

“Ms. Goodwitch, while I acknowledge the fact that my Semblance does have that ability, to take it to the next level requires very specific types of training,” Weiss argued politely.

“I understand that, and that your glyphs can lead into Summoning servants, Ms. Schnee. I have fought beside Winter occasionally...” Glynda trailed off into a mutter. “Much as I don’t like the woman.”

This caused Harry’s eye to widen in surprise. That sounded quite a lot like magic to him. *But then again, it isn’t the first Semblance I’ve come across that jumps over the divide there. Still, the implications are fascinating.*

“However, there are a number of exercises I believe that can help you train up to that point. For example, how large can you make your glyphs? How many of them can you create at a time? Furthermore, how far away from you can you create them? How many of them can you change at a time? I have been looking over your homework miss Schnee, and neither you, nor young Ms. Rose have mentioned any of those points.”

She saw Weiss stiffen, and went on in a far more conciliatory tone. “I have been pleased with how much the two of you are learning in my class. I have been more than pleased with how team RWBY has come together, and the team tactics that Ruby has come up with is almost as advanced as I would expect from a second-year team. But I think that all of you have fallen into the same trap. You have forgotten how varied the size of the battlefield can be. This must be solved now, before you can create bad habits of thought and style going forward.”

“The larger the battle, the larger uses of Semblance we’ll need to fight against the equally larger number of Grimm,” Harry nodded, agreeing, the memory of talking about the battle around the mines with Arturia in his mind for a second.

“I can agree with that too. I will admit that with my Semblance I’m basically fighting my trained instincts every time I try to do anything obvious or flashy with it,” Pyrrha said, then chuckled in a self-deprecatory manner, looking over at Weiss. “Even now, I’m trying to speak in a way that doesn’t bring attention to what my Semblance could be. That is a disservice to my overall combat level that Harry and I have been speaking about for a while now. We’ve just lacked the ability to figure out ways to train it although I do have ideas.”

“I... Will admit Miss, that I hadn’t thought of that before. Even in Forever Fall, we were all concentrating on our own small front. But if we had been forced to fight across a front the same size as the total area our class was fighting throughout on our own, that would’ve been very bad,” Weiss said, internally castigating herself a little. *Stupid girl, you should have been thinking about how the size of the area you need to defend can impact your strategy.*

“Precisely. And as I said, this way of thinking is best imparted now, before you have several more years to create bad habits. That goes doubly for you, Ms. Nikos. As you already noticed, you have built up those bad habits to a level far beyond Mr. Arc and Ms. Schnee’s level. You’ve been combating your flashier style in my class, and I hope to see at some point in the field that you have completely done away with it when fighting the Grimm. But you need to start using your polarity powers more openly.”

Weiss blinked at that, frowning in confusion as she looked over at Pyrrha. Pyrrha didn't respond to her look, simply nodding her head. "I'm also afraid I got into the habit of thinking that since the Grimm don't have any metal bits I can grab with my powers, that my powers were useless in battle with them beyond using my polarity skills on my own armor and weapons."

She looked over at Weiss with a shrug now. "So now you know the big secret to my success. Polarity, the control of metal. I used it against my opponents from the moment I learned of it, on my second rise to champion. It allowed me to redirect the weapons of my enemies so subtly none of them could figure it out, it only seemed as if I was just dodging their strikes. Only a few of them were able to power through it like Arturia and give me a real run for my money. And by then," Pyrrha scowled, shaking her head. "I had built up such a reputation that to save their egos, very few of my opponents actually gave me their all."

"... That speech you gave me and the others in the locker room before initiation makes far more sense now. That kind of ability, coupled with training it to the point where you can use it so subtly, is an incredibly powerful one." Weiss seemed to steel herself, then nodded firmly, staring back at the far taller Pyrrha. "But it isn't one that can't be defeated. I want to stand on that pedestal alongside you. And in the future, I think that now that I know if it, I will for certain give you a run for your money!"

"That is an excellent drive to have, in both of you. Now, to start with, I will walk you through the same initial exercises that I've already done with Mr. Arc, teaching you more about how your Semblance specifically works. Harry, take miss Schnee and walk her through the exercises you and I did on the machine over there. I will handle Miss Nikos."

A few minutes later, Glynda hummed thoughtfully, looking at the readings she was getting from the two girls. Both of their Semblances were less Aura intensive than Harry's or her own, and Glynda quickly decided that their Auras were that of a manipulative type rather than defensive. She made comments to that effect, gesturing at Weiss in particular. "While we know that Pyrrha's general style is to dodge as much as she can, you might need more work in terms of footwork in different environments to do the same."

She then did something highly uncharacteristic, flicking her riding crop Weiss so that she was lifted into the air, causing the young girl to squawk and stare at her in shock. But Glynda did not reply to her hasty queries of "P, p, professor, what are you doing?" until Weiss was in the air above Glynda, whereupon she tapped her fingers on the shoes that Weiss was wearing. She then glared up at Weiss so heatedly that Weiss gulped, freezing in place as if she was a mouse in front of a snake.

"And get rid of the heels," Glynda ordered, growling a little. "I cannot repeat this often enough. I do not care how short you are, or how much height your heels or platforms give you on a day-to-day basis. I do not care how hard you have trained on them to be able to walk and even fight at an adequate level. You will never be as mobile or as certain in your footing as

someone wearing normal shoes!”

“But professor, I’m sorry to mention this, but you routinely wear heels, don’t you?” Pyrrha asked. She and Harry had paused in their own exercises to stare at Glynda’s treatment of Weiss, but Pyrrha couldn’t stop herself from speaking up on the apparent sophistry.

“I routinely wear them in class Ms. Nikos. I have **never** worn heels in the field. Or did you not notice that I wore combat boots when we went to Forever Fall?”

Harry had actually noticed that at one point, but more in the way all of the male students occasionally noticed Glynda’s legs. He had thought her formfitting combat boots were quite a bit more attractive than her normal heels, but then again, he wasn’t a leg person normally, so his opinion was possibly an uninformed one. *Best not to say anything here, though.*

Unaware of Harry’s moment of ‘inner maleness’ Glynda continued. “A forest is no place for heels, especially thin, fragile heels like yours Mrs. Schnee. And do not get me started on fighting on sand, in craggy regions or in mud.”

She lowered Weiss to the ground, the girl stumbling a little when she landed, and Glynda looked at them all firmly. “Normally the professors will start deconstructing your Huntress outfit in your second semester, but if you are going to be working with me in this small group, I refuse to watch you prance about on heels like that.”

Ozpin had told her to see what she could do to further temper these young Hunters before their time. But Glynda had her own opinion on how best to go about doing that. And her own pet peeves too, heels being one of them.

Weiss flinched a little, but tried to rally, looking to Pyrrha for support. But she simply shook her head, raising her own shoes. “I’m sorry Weiss, but while I do sometimes wear heels, I did so in photoshoots only. I never wore them while I was in the arena. They were a massive liability.”

At that point, Weiss gave it up, sighing and nodding saying that she would order herself flat boots that very day. “I don’t know what my fashion designers going to say about it though.”

“Unless your fashion designer is intending to somehow join Team RWBY and go into the field with you, his opinion about your attire or anything else should not matter,” Glynda said shaking her head. *Ah, the problems of the bourgeoisie. Still, she has acquitted herself well up to this point. A little more of a push, and she might leave behind more of her preconceptions.*

The tests continued from there. It turned out that in terms of the size of Weiss’s glyphs, she had a much easier time of it shrinking them down than she did enlarging them. Enlarging them took both concentration and Aura, while shrinking them commensurately took away from the amount of Aura needed. Going small was far easier in terms of Aura, but much the same in terms of concentration.

Weiss however struggled for use for it up until Harry opined, “You don’t need a full-size glyph to enlarge the speed of a stab with your sword, or with one of your friends’ fists or weapons. Also consider how many of the small ones you could scatter around a battlefield like little mines waiting to go off when an enemy passes over them. You could even make it various different types. Make them speed-based so that they zoomed right past your position. Make them freeze so that they are frozen targets. Gravity, etc. Pretty simple.”

“I’m uncertain if the small glyph would impact the entire body though,” Weiss murmured. “I’ve not seen my big sister use our glyphs in such a manner.”

“There is a first time for everything,” Glynda announced, looking over at Harry with an amused look. “And since Mr. Arc was the one to suggest it, I think it behooves us to allow him to volunteer to be the guinea pig.”

Harry sighed but nodded firmly, even making a small joke about it. “For science!”

It instantly turned out that while Harry was right, so was Weiss. The smaller fist sized glyphs didn’t impact the entire body. Rather, they sped up the foot or arm that struck them. That still was enough to cause Harry issues, and several times he stumbled to a halt or fell flat on his face as Weiss caught him with one of those small glyphs.

On the other end of the spectrum however, it quickly became clear that Weiss struggled with using more than two types of glyphs at a time. And similarly, enlarging her glyphs to impact greater area was extremely difficult.

“... I think Ms. Schnee, that you, much like several others among the freshman class truly do need to buckle down and learn what you can from your Aura Maturation class. I think you need to build that up tremendously, along with your ability to multitask.”

“I would propose that living with Ruby and the others has forced me to start learning that ability already professor,” Weiss grumbled a bit, slumping down in one of the chairs nearby, completely exhausted by the exercises that Glynda had been doing. In comparison Pyrrha and Harry both looked somewhat drained, but not as physically tired as Weiss.

She blinked as Harry held out a bottled water, its sides glistening with frost, as well as a protein bar. “Good work.”

Nodding, Weiss took them, leaning back and watching as it became Pyrrha’s turn to be put through their paces by the professor. Previously, she and Harry had only been doing physical exercises nearby, waiting for their turn for some one-on-one instruction, and for use of the device used to measure Aura usage.

While Pyrrha’s Aura reserves were quite large, she had never truly trained with her Semblance to do large-scale things, as she and Harry had been talking about since meeting up here in Beacon almost from the start. So she was quite surprised at how much Aura it cost to lift the maximum amount of metallic weight that Glynda had brought in.

“Fifteen percent of my Aura!” Pyrrha gasped, staring up at where she was holding the weight in midair.

“Fifteen percent of your Aura to lift all of the various weights I brought in, Ms. Nikos. The totality of which makes up nearly eight hundred and twenty pounds. And I note that you are able to keep all of them in the air at once, and...” There she paused for a second, before barking out in order. “Move the two-hundred-and-twenty-pound weight. Pause for a moment with it in the air, before switching to the fourteen-pound doing the same thing. Then the eighty-pound weight. Move each of them in the exact same manner, up and down. Move that one as fast as possible in a circle while all of the others remain still.”

Grimacing, Pyrrha did so, sweat furrowing her brow as she obeyed. Moving the first three was easy, moving the other one was far harder, she struggled to any appreciable speed, but she had been training to do similar things with needles for more than a month now, and she was able to do it.

Meanwhile, Glynda was watching the readouts, humming in thought. Harry moved over to her and looked at the screen on her scroll in interest. “So, once she has something in the air and under her polarity power it doesn’t take as much to actually start moving around? That’s interesting...”

“Isn’t it? I think in that, Ms. Nikos’s power is perhaps the closest in how it impacts her Aura to my own. Now to make certain of that.” She looked over at Pyrrha, ordering her to set all of the weights down, and then to lift one of them up again. Pyrrha chose the heaviest one, something that made Harry snorted a little, and Glynda nodded. “A good choice Ms. Nikos, and lifting it up again showed an extremely slight dip in your reserves. A quantifiable amount to be certain, so we now know where to start in terms of large-scale usage. I noted that you were able to get the eighty-pound weight moving in an appreciable speed. Do so again, and...”

Glynda paused for a second, looking around, and then waved her riding crop towards one of the corners, where a simple punching bag was quickly pulled out of its storage space, and link up to a sensor. “Toss it at that.”

Pyrrha nodded, and with the gesture of her hand, raised the eighty-pound ball into the air. Her eyes narrowed and she gritted her teeth slightly, a look of furious concentration on her face as she pulled back her hand. Glynda made a note of that, wondering if the physical gesture helped Pyrrha concentrate. Regardless, the eighty-pound ball slowly flew backwards as Pyrrha directed it, then she hurled her hand forward, directing the ball with that motion.

The heavy weight slammed into the punching bag. Indeed, it hit at such a speed that it tore straight through it and embedding itself in the far wall. And this was not a normal punching bag either. It was one of the ones rated to be used by Hunters or Huntresses who had strength type Semblances.

Pyrrha blinked, then quickly began to bow towards Glynda. “I’m so sorry professor, I

thought you said to hurl it as hard as I could so I... I will reimburse the school of..."

"Ms. Nikos, have you forgotten what my power is?" Glynda asked, smiling somewhat fondly at the younger girl. She would never admit it, but she quite liked the self-effacing, gentle young woman a bit more than most of her other students. With a wave of her riding crop, the sand from within the bag rose in the air, coalescing into a mass, moving underneath the remnants of the punching bag. The sand filled the top of it up quickly, while her power knitted the outside of the bag slowly together, allowing sand to keep on pouring in up until the last moment. The wall was similarly repaired, and the eighty-pound ball returned to its own resting place.

Weiss and Pyrrha looked on in awe at the amount of control that took, while Harry wasn't certain it was so much control as simply willpower. She wasn't exactly moving each bit of sand singly, simply **demanding** all the sand in a specific area moved to her will. A very different thing entirely, and quite frightening. Even if she separated that into only a dozen smaller bits and then sped their movement up as fast as Pyrrha just did the weight... it would be like getting flailed alive by sand.

"Regardless, I believe that shows that there is certainly a more direct way you can use your Semblance offensively. Not just hurling your shield or spear about, but larger weights, to come in at different angles. Be unpredictable, Ms. Nikos, and obviously keep cutting down on your showy combat style. Now, let us see..." Glynda paused, reading the information on her scroll quickly. "That took you another appreciable amount of Aura, twelve percent to make it go faster like that on top of a bare one percent to lift the object in the first place. Moving it back and forth took much the same which is good. Now, Mr. Arc, could you transfigure that weight into so many needles for a moment? This could be interesting."

"Certainly, Ms." Having a good idea of what Glynda was going to be doing, Harry was quite eager to see how it worked. This was something he and Pyrrha had been talking about ever since school started. Within seconds, he had shifted the metal weight into so many needles.

Pyrrha lifted all of the needles into the air, grunting a bit in concentration, while Glynda murmured, "So, there is a difference between lifting one object and lifting many, but only slightly, you are still draining barely a percentage point. Which you had made up during that brief break. Excellent, although I will want you and Ms. Schnee to perform a few exercises so we know for certain how well your Aura reserves build itself up again."

However, when it came time for Pyrrha to send the needles forward as fast as she possibly could, that took an appreciable amount of both concentration and Aura, up to 5% more of her Aura to direct all of the needles at once at that speed than it had taken the single weight. Moreover, she couldn't make all of them go the same uniform speed. Several of the needles simply flopped, others moved forward only a few feet before falling.

However, the damage done by the rest of the needles caused Harry and Weiss to stare while Glynda nodded in satisfaction. “Yes, I believe that is a successful experiment. “

Ahead of them, several different Grimm holograms had been projected into a segment of the training grounds, and now were liberally perforated, as if each and every one of the subject you to a shotgun shell from hell. “You could say that. Have I mentioned Pyrrha that you are a very scary if beautiful girl?”

Pyrrha snorted at that, then swayed on her feet. Harry was there an instant, catching her elbow and holding her upright, as she mumbled, “Oh my, that seems to have given me a spot of a headache...” the former gladiator mumbled, her eyes practically crossing from the pain.

Glynda nodded at that, gesturing Harry to move Pyrrha over to the nearby seats as she explained. “Moving projectiles quickly is often harder than it looks. You must concentrate both on your target, the speed you wish your objects to go, and all of the objects at once, which is often quite complicated. Not so much in terms of Aura, but in mental control. I will repeat something that I have had to tell the student regardless of how well they have performed previously before coming to Beacon. The mental aspect of using Semblances like this is very different depending on what you are doing with it. And visualization is always important.”

“I’m curious professor: does that mean that if you cannot visualize what something would look like if you put it back together you wouldn’t be able to?” Harry asked quizzically.

“Correct. Furthermore, I cannot repair something that has been completely slagged as it were, melted down. My Semblance does not mean I can reverse natural processes like that,” Glynda answered. “The damage from an explosive is easy enough to repair to a metal sheet, but if that selfsame metal sheet has been melted until it is molten, I cannot reverse that. The only control the metal and shape it back into the shape it might have been. Whereupon I would be forced to wait until it cooled naturally.”

Nodding Harry thoughtfully tapped his chin for a few moments, thinking about that, and the fact his own *Reparo* spell didn’t work in Remnant as it had back home, being far less powerful. *I’ve not run into that kind of thing yet, but I can’t imagine a single spell would be able to shift something that had turned into gas or liquid back to normal.*

A moment later, Glynda had all three of them up and going through a series of exercises quickly. She didn’t spar with any of them that day, instead pushing Pyrrha and Weiss hard to understand how their Auras and their Semblances worked together. Just as importantly, and an area neither had worked on, was Aura endurance and recuperation. Pyrrha’s proved to be able to renew itself relatively well at lower numbers. If she used a large amount of Aura, it took far longer to rebuild. But that was normal. Indeed, even the Arcs had issues letting their reserves rebuild if they went below twenty percent.

In contrast Weiss had a lot of trouble rebuilding her reserves. Much like her physical

endurance, she had never really trained for long engagements. Something which she and Ruby, and even Blake, astonishingly had in common. Although the hidden Cat Faunus was so athletic, her physical threshold was far higher than the other two. Regardless, by the end of the day, Weiss was sweaty, gasping, and unable to even move her legs.

Still, Harry wondered if this emphasis on exercises rather than combat had been a one-off thing or would continue. *I'll be slightly annoyed about that, even though I appreciate the extra training that professor Goodwitch is offering Weiss and of course Pyrrha. But no longer being able to spar with someone who can truly push me hard while using the full scope of my magic here in Remnant is undoubtedly bad for me, personally.*

When they finished, Glynda took charge of the shorter far less physically capable girl, carrying her off via her Semblance. This left Harry and Pyrrha behind to clean up the various equipment, having already used her Semblance to clean up the damage done to the training area.

The two of them grabbed up a picnic basket that Harry had made that morning after Pyrrha told him that she would be joining his and Glynda's training time. The two of them made their way to the nearest open grounds area, and there slumped down. Pyrrha, exhausted to a point she had rarely been before mentally, barely even registered the fact that there were several other students walking nearby as she collapsed to the ground, leaning her head against Harry's side, whimpering. "I don't know what hurts worse, my head from all of the mental strain, my legs from all of the squats and other exercises Professor Goodwitch had me doing while she concentrated on you or Weiss, or the fact that I am so exhausted because I have never done anything like this before. Using my powers in all those different strange ways was a thrill, but also extremely difficult."

Harry put in arm around her shoulders, letting it fall down to her waist as he too leaned against the tree behind them, pulling out food for the pair with his other hand and laying a blanket out over their legs. "I know. Trust me, the first time she had me run through those exercises and then spar with her, that was a nightmare of a day. If not for my father and Arturia pushing my endurance training I would never have gotten back to the townhouse under my own power."

"I think for you, like it is for me, multitasking is going to be key. Being able to concentrate on multiple things at once, both your personal combat at the time, how you're moving your shield and spear would be included in that, as well as whatever you are doing with your Semblance elsewhere in the battlefield. I think we're going to have to break out a few blindfolds, or something."

"I have done that kind of exercise before, although as I've mentioned many times now, I've never used my power as openly. Doing both is going to be interesting..." Pyrrha grumbled. Then a thought occurred to her, and she opened her mouth, a faint blush on her face as she pointed at it. "Feed me?"

Rolling his eyes, Harry grabbed up a handful of grapes, popping them into her mouth one after another, before raising a sandwich for Pyrrha to take a bite out of. "Sorry, I don't have strawberries and cream. That's the normal type of food you would use with this kind of gag."

"Considering how empty my stomach is feeling right now, any food is good food," Pyrrha mumbled between bites, flashing him a warm smile. "Although I think that wasn't nearly as romantic either as I expected it to be."

"Setting is important, as well as feelings. I think we're both a little too exhausted right now to feel much romance," Harry snickered.

The two of them fell silent for a few moments as they concentrated on the food, with Pyrrha reluctantly taking over feeding herself. Then, as Pyrrha polished off the last of her first sandwich, she licked her fingers lightly of the balsamic dressing that Harry had used within it, cocking her head slightly to look up at him from where she still leaned against his side. "How are things going with Tia and her team? You spent dinner last night with them."

"All of them save Mila. Something apparently happened with her younger sister, a minor family crisis that she skipped dinner to be involved with," Harry answered with a nod. "I... I think that Sung-Sun has improved in leaps and bounds, and I'm grateful that she was given the leadership position. I think I've convinced Tia to follow her instructions as she would mine or Arturia's in terms of training and in the field. They've also officially shifted their pairs around. But I am still concerned about their team cohesion, and what that would mean in the future for Tia going forward as a Huntress. Still, I've mentioned a time or two that Arturia would cheerfully take my sister on as an apprentice."

"And Sung-Sun?" Pyrrha asked, mildly concerned. While she wasn't nearly as close to the Vacuan native as she was to Tia, Sung-Sun was still a friend. "If something does happen, what about her?"

"I don't know. That'll be up to her to decide as I don't think Arturia would be willing to take on two apprentices." Harry scowled a bit. "I'm not looking forward to being separated from Tia like that though. It would certainly be better for her in terms of her Huntress training, but even having her in Vale somewhere would have her closer, and... Well, I can't remember a time when we've been apart for more than a few days. Not even a week really."

Pyrrha nodded at that, having come to understand exactly how close the two of them were. Again, the thought came to Pyrrha that if they weren't related, if they weren't twins, then she would be somewhat jealous about how much time Harry and Tia spent together. But she waved that thought and emotion aside, instead smirking a bit. "So when we get a place of our own, I'd have to assume she would be moving in with us?"

Harry blinked at that, then flicked her nose with a finger, a faint flush on his face at the implications. "You're getting ahead of yourself there. We're still young after all. I know that your Oath means that you to follow me, but that doesn't mean that you are locked into this

relationship, Pyrrha.”

“I know that, but I also know that most Hunters and Huntresses marry in their early twenties. This is not a life that is kind to the elderly, and it is best to start thinking of leaving a legacy behind early,” she answered, sounding almost as if she was quoting something, which Harry recognized she probably was. It was true after all. Hunter families tended to marry early, and to have many kids. The Arcs were not unusual in that, although they did tend to take it a step further than most, and the whole seven to one ratio was highly unusual.

“I realize that, but I don’t want anything that far into the future to be set in stone, Pyrrha. To put it bluntly, while romance is amazingly nice,” Harry smiled tenderly and leaned down to give her a kiss on the lips, then the cheek, before pulling back, ignoring the fact that another student nearby had paused to watch them, his eyes widening slightly at the moment of PDA with the celebrity that was Pyrrha Nikos. Normally Harry and Pyrrha didn’t kiss on the lips while in public, but for the moment Harry couldn’t care less, dismissing the other student from his mind even as he became serious. “It isn’t my priority. You know what my priorities are.”

“And those priorities are why I wished to be your órkos aspídas. I know that romance isn’t your priority, and I cannot say that I love you yet Harry,” Pyrrha admitted. “Admire greatly and like? Yes. You are my best friend, a confidant and have been so since we first met. And I am...” He blushed a little, whispering the next point, looking up at him through her eyelashes in a way that set Harry’s pulse pounding. “Intensely attracted to you. But I understand that love is built on all of those, but deeper. I simply wish to acknowledge where our relationship could be going and make my own desires plain in that area.”

Her smile then turned somewhat wan as Pyrrha looked away. “My parents and my grandparents on both sides of the family were childhood sweethearts who met and married when they were young. And you have said many a time that your parents were the same thing. Is it so hard to imagine that we can go down the same road?”

“... No, no it isn’t. And I have to admit that I am feeling much the same way to you. I can’t say I love you, but I love being with you, if that makes sense?” Pyrrha’s beaming smile told Harry it did, and he continued with a somewhat embarrassed cough. “I just wanted to make certain that you were able to separate your oath from the relationship we are in. They are not the same thing, and I don’t... if there ever comes a time when you are attracted to someone else or discover that being with me isn’t what you really wanted...”

“What about you?” Pyrrha interrupted. “Is going out with me all you want? I know you just said you enjoy being with me, but I also know you have a problem with how famous I am.”

“I have a problem with how much attention being famous draws to you, and how rude people are about it. I don’t have a problem with your fame specifically. If anything, I am thankful for it, because your attempt to dodge your fame led to us meeting in the first place,” Harry corrected her mildly, running his hand up her side for a moment and letting it rest on her

thigh over her combat skirt. “But I was attracted to you almost from the start Pyrrha, and I have no issues with our relationship going forward. Even if you do tend to snore a bit...” He teased.

Pyrrha huffed but let that pass. She did apparently snore, something she hadn’t realized prior to spending a few nights in Harry’s bed sleeping beside him. Just sleeping, they hadn’t gone any further than they had after their first date. Although Pyrrha was greatly looking forward to when they did.

“So yes, I’m fully happy with our relationship as it is going forward. Just promise me that you won’t let your Oath get in the way of telling me when I go too far or when I don’t treat you right or something like that. I know it hasn’t happened yet, but I want to make sure it doesn’t happen going forward.”

“That... I might have a problem with. I do have a bit of a problem putting myself forward in social interactions. You and the others have been helpfully training me in that regard, but still, I’m not certain I would be able to speak up like that. But I can promise to try.” Pyrrha smiled then, leaning up to give Harry a kiss on the cheek and the side of his neck. “And you’re so good at reading my moods, I think you would be able to see if I was uncomfortable or annoyed with something anyway.”

“I can hope. Especially if what you are being annoyed at is me in some fashion,” Harry drawled, causing Pyrrha to giggle, and reflect that Harry was probably very happy that she wasn’t Nora, who let anyone know that she was annoyed with them and used the bluntest or rather the most blunt object nearby to make her annoyance known.

“Now, enough serious talk,” Pyrrha ordered. “Or at least serious personal romance talk. You mentioned a few tests you wanted to do while Glynda was putting Weiss through her paces?”

“Yes. I was wondering if you had ever actually worked with different types of metals. Iron versus steel, steel versus bronze and so forth. I can transfigure the ground or stone into any kind of metal, so I’m wondering if there is a noticeable difference in how much concentration your Aura demands if you’re moving different types of metal.”

Pyrrha hummed thoughtfully at that, answering in the negative. “Of course, most swords and so forth are made using a very specific type of spring steel, or Damascus steel if you want to be fancy. I have run into a few family blades made of specially treated bronze, or some that looked different, though if that means the metal was something different, I don’t know. Regardless, I’ve never noticed any of them being easier or more Aura intensive to control but then again I suppose that moving such in larger amounts would have made it more obvious...

She hummed again, then shrugged. “On another topic, I will also say that I have been thinking about perhaps adding some metal needles into my outfit and places. I had thought to wait for that till the second semester when Combat Gear and Supplies becomes one of our electives, but...”

“Best to get a heads up on it now, like Goodwitch mentioned with Weiss and her heels,” Harry agreed. “Having a set of needles in your clothing at all times to use as a last-ditch surprise is a really good idea though. Either them or ball bearings maybe? It depends on what kind of impact you want I suppose.”

He then snorted, shaking his head. “On a similar vein, I am wondering how hard it will be to convince Nora to change her Huntress outfit. Ren and I talked about that kind of thing occasionally when we were in Vale the other day, and I don’t think he will need much convincing. His outfit is already somewhat stealthy, and we can work with that, making it easier for him to blend in and scout around for us in the field while giving him some better protection.” *Not to mention my various charms. They won’t work for long, but have already proven to be a game changer many times.*

Pyrrha nodded wincing a little. She had been paired against Ren in their Monday training class, and even holding back and fighting with only Milo and no Semblance, she had taken the L of Team ANVL to school. His Semblance really didn’t have a direct combat application, although being so calm and controlled in any situation was a definite advantage. Yet Ren’s weapons just couldn’t do enough damage and while he was fast and agile, so was Pyrrha, and she was far better at it too. The match had ended very quickly, and Pyrrha had spent at least half the remainder of that day apologizing for it on and off.

And as for Nora, all of Team ANVL had gotten used to the fact that she was by far the most stubborn of all four of them. It took quite a bit of convincing to change her mind on something, although she was at least willing to listen to orders in training. This wasn’t training though; it was something quite personal and Nora was extremely proud of her Huntress outfit.

“But while Ren’s problem is a lack of Aura, Nora has decent reserves, but her Aura doesn’t lend itself to defense any more than a normal student’s. And her outfit doesn’t incorporate any armor. You can’t call those bits of metal on her sides and under her chest armor. More highlights than anything else,” Harry grumbled. “Maybe if we could convince her to go for the shield and hammer combination, that would be something. But as it is?”

“I think you’re going to have to admit defeat on a certain level there, Harry. None of us are willing to weigh ourselves down with too much in the way of armor. However, I agree that both of them do need some. Much like my own outfit perhaps? A full chest plate for Nora, and some brigantine for Ren? So long as we can get a design that doesn’t rattle or anything similar it would be an excellent idea I think.”

Pyrrha also gestured to where her shield lay nearby. “And as much as it pains me, I think I should have looked more into upgrading Akuo in some fashion beyond simply enlarging it after I beat Arturia.” A fierce grin appeared on her face than as it always did when she thought of that battle, before she shook her head, gently tapping the rim of the shield. “Perhaps something along here? How hard would it be to incorporate small... apertures I suppose, along the rim? Thicken the shield up a bit, and install small apertures across the rim where I can put

needles or ball bearings.”

“I think I want to somehow upgrade my wrist rifle too, and Storm Flower definitely needs some more punch. Ironically, Magnhild is tied with your Milo for being completely perfect the way they are for your combat styles.”

“And you’ve got Caliburn,” Pyrrha rejoined. “I can’t really see that a sword capable of cutting through near anything that’s never needed a sharpening needs an upgrade either.”

“True,” Harry said complacently, amused. Then he shook his head. “Still, for that kind of thing, I think we will need to discuss with Ruby. She is the freshman class’s best expert on that kind of thing. And I think we need to do it now. Remember that the school is willing to pay for such changes now, whereas later they take away that right. And isn’t she free at this point?” Harry glanced at his watch and nodded. “She is. Perhaps we should look into it now.”

“What, right now? That would mean moving,” Pyrrha mock-whined.

Harry laughed at that, and allowed Pyrrha another hour of cuddle time, which once the last of the students nearby had walked off, grew heated as Pyrrha rolled over, resting her thighs on either side of his. The intense make-out session that followed was quite nice, but eventually more students came by heading towards the training areas nearby. When they did Pyrrha instantly rolled off Harry, smirking slightly at the dazed look in his eyes, and the tightness with which he hugged her to his side. *Mission accomplished.*

For the next hour, the two of them did some experiments on various types of weapons and metals, seeing how Pyrrha’s polarity powers handled them. They quickly learned that Harry simply could not create a few things. First, mono-wire was nearly impossible to do. Harry just couldn’t create something so thin. But the school did have some wire-based weapons, and they worked very, almost terrifyingly well. Rope darts were well within Harry’s abilities to transfigure, and the sight of Pyrrha using her polarity powers to move them around was very interesting, although Harry did not appreciate suddenly winding trussed up like a kidnap victim. Chains too were a good idea.

But later that day, they did follow up with Harry’s suggestion on consulting with Ruby. And the younger girl’s squeal of delight at being asked about weapons designs could perhaps have been heard in Vale.

OOOOOO

That night as Harry prepared for bed, he was surprised when his scroll rang. Picking it up, he saw whose number it was, and his eyes widened before a smile appeared on his face. He quickly answered it and was unsurprised to see Arturia’s face staring back at him “Arturia, shouldn’t it be near the crack of dawn they are right nowww...” Something was different about Arturia’s face though, something that caused Harry’s greeting to slow to a halt.

Arturia smiled back at him, seemingly pleased with his confusion. “It is indeed. But I

have a dawn patrol with the next batch of militiamen. I tend to force them to go through a rotation, night, day, sunset, sunrise so they know how that impacts what they can see and sense. But I did want to talk to you for a moment. I realized I hadn't congratulated you on becoming the leader of a team, you were far too good at turning the conversation on me and the battle around the mines. Following in your big sister's footsteps, are you?"

Harry snorted at that, shaking his head slowly, trying to get over the impression Arturia's face was making on him for some reason. "Please, if anything, helping you become as good a leader as you are was practice for me becoming one myself. And you know all of the exercises Dad put me through."

Even as he spoke, Harry was examining Arturia's image in some surprise. Normally, Arturia's face was gorgeous to look at: pale skin, high cheekbones, small pert mouth, and alluring yellow eyes under short-cropped platinum hair. Arturia was the very definition of a regal looking queen of a woman right up until she smiled and warmth entered that expression, as well as her eyes.

But now, there was something different about Arturia. Her eyes were popping more than usual for some reason, with some kind of dark substance under her eyes. Her lips too were grabbing his attention, even as they curved into a smile, painted a dark purple, something Harry had never seen before.

"True enough. Still, I wanted to congratulate you. I also wanted to ask you if you had made the trip to Forever Fall yet. I remember that as one of the highlights of my own freshman year."

"We did, and it is a beautiful forest. Although what happened there wasn't exactly to my liking much."

Arturia's eyes narrowed, and the smile on her face, which Harry, if this wasn't his big sister Arturia, would've called coquettish, shifted into a frown. "What happened?"

"Nothing really major. Another team that was led by the freshman class's resident bully attempted to make trouble for the rest of us through the use of jars of rapier wasps. They failed, although a few of us got bruised a bit around the edges, and Tia decided to go full Harribel in order to deal with one of the more dangerous Grimm attacking us."

"I see that you have discovered brevity, Harry dear. Still, I can wait till Saturday to get the full story out of the pair of you as I do not doubt that Tia and you made it through in one piece." Arturia hesitated for a second, then asked in seeming reluctance, "And I suppose the rest of your team did including your partner, Nikos? When were you going to tell me that you had partnered up with my rival? I'm hurt."

She put her hand on her chest as if mocking the very idea, but Harry could read her like a book even through his current confusion as to what about her appearance was different.

Arturia really was a little annoyed. "It's not like I'm going to spout your secrets to her, Arturia, and I thought you liked Pyrrha anyway."

"I do as a fellow warrior, and a fighter. That is a far cry from believing that she is right for my little brother. Either as a partner, or, according to the twins, a girlfriend."

"Well, that kind of thing goes two ways, I'll admit. I never thought any of the boyfriends you described to me that you had here in Beacon were right for you. But still, you can at least let me make my own mistakes there," Harry teased.

Arturia blushed a little at Harry's words, pleased for some reason that Harry couldn't quite understand before she shook it off. "Nonetheless, I would've liked to hear it from you, Harry. And I reserve the right to give her the old 'hurt him you die' speech."

Harry laughed at that, but then realized what was so strange about Arturia's appearance that had grabbed his attention. "Arturia Arc, are you wearing makeup?"

"The girls decided to try their hand at it. As they were preparing to try it on one another, and on a protesting Magenta, I stepped in to keep the peace. Eventually, I ceased to look like a clown, and Violet came in to teach them some of the finer points. I have to admit that the final product looks quite good. At least I think so. Don't you?" Arturia asked, raising a hand to run it through her hair in a self-conscious gesture that Harry had never seen from her before.

It was honestly quite fetching, something that Harry stuffing it into the locker marked 'Pureblood nonsense' in his mind, willing it away even as he replied. "I would say it's amazing how it actually added something to perfection, as you are normally drop-dead gorgeous, Arturia. But that wouldn't be something a sibling could say. So I'll simply say it looks good on you, and whatever guy you are trying to impress is a lucky man." He then grinned, trying to push through an uneasy feeling from his stomach at that thought. "And if it becomes serious, I'm definitely going to be giving him the same speech you want to give, Pyrrha."

"No, and that kind of flattery wouldn't be appropriate between siblings, would it?" Something in Arturia's tone caused Harry to pause in confusion and she smiled at him. "At any rate, I have to go Harry, but I did want to check in with you and make certain you were looking forward to seeing me as much as I am looking forward to seeing you... And Tia of course. Give our sister my love would you? And I will see you Saturday."

Harry nodded, saying he would, and Arturia cut the connection leaving Harry to stare at a blank scroll screen for a few seconds, wondering about the strange tone in Arturia's voice for a moment there before setting it aside along with the scroll as Pyrrha came in, dressed for bed. With a smile, he flipped open the covers, letting her slide inside, snuggling against him as he pulled it over her chemise-clad body.

With a wave of his hands, the lights turned off and he closed his eyes, breathing in the sweet scent of freshly showered girlfriend as she mumbled about how nice it was to have a

boyfriend who didn't have to leave the bed to turn off the lights. Harry snorted at that, as he began the process of falling asleep, still wondering about why Arturia had been wearing makeup for some reason.

OOOOOOO

And so the week passed, until Saturday arrived. That morning, still unaware of certain revelations that had occurred in his family, Harry smiled at Ren, clapping the other young man on the shoulder. The two of them had tried to spend more time on their own occasionally during the week, becoming closer friends because of it. In this, they had actually been helped by the large TV that Weiss had donated to the townhome on the assumption that Team RWBY would be allowed to use it.

It turned out that Harry was an absolute fanatic for flying games, and Ren quite liked civilization management games. Both of them enjoyed one another's genres enough to be able to switch off whenever they were able to use the TV, as well as the games the girls enjoyed. Indeed, all of them had cheerfully agreed that at least one night a week should be game night, but Harry put his foot down on any kind of penalty system for losing. Almost all the girls had agreed with this, with Sung-Sun, Ruby and Weiss still being incredibly embarrassed by the whole 'lose-n'-strip' debacle. Nora was the only one who wasn't, but Ren sat on her each time she threatened violence when the others didn't let her play her beloved zombie shooters.

Bonding over games like this was a startlingly normal teenage way of building friendship with someone else Harry had ever done in either of his lives. But perhaps because of that, he enjoyed it a lot.

"Hold down the fort for me, yeah?"

"Absolutely. When will you be back though, you never said," Ren asked quizzically.

Judging by Pyrrha's nod of agreement, he wasn't the only one who wanted to know the answer to that one and Harry had to blink for a moment, before realizing he really hadn't explained his plans in full for the day. All his team knew was he had two meetings in Vale. *Bugger.* "Ah, well, I've got the two meetings, with a brief break between. But I should finish in time to do some shopping and get back by five. You all know Arturia's coming in to visit, and I'm planning to cook for her, obviously." He laughed. "You do not want that girl to be hungry. Ever."

"OHHH, what is the Dark Queen's favorite meal then?" Nora asked excitedly, bouncing up and down in place. "Besides the blood of her enemies anyway."

"I will have you know that the blood of her enemies is only her favorite drink. Even made into a smoothie it isn't nearly as filling as you would expect," Harry shot back causing all three to laugh. "No, she actually likes fish dishes. And they have a few fish here in Vale that I've never cooked with before coming here, so I was hoping to try some. Maybe something simple, but done elegantly? I'll decide when I get to the fish market."

Elsewhere on Beacon, Blake looked up, staring out into nowhere, her ribbon mysteriously twitching. "Someone, somewhere just said fish and meal in the same sentence."

The hidden Cat Faunus was nearly beamed in the side of the head by a blow from Weiss's Myrtenaster for her troubles, while nearby Yang shouted at her. "Girl, get your head back in the game! I refuse to let the pintsize pair beat us again."

Grumbling, Blake turned back to the partner versus partner fight, shaking her head in annoyance at the sudden burst of whimsy that had come over her, still wondering where it had come from.

"That sounds grand. Although it is a pity that you can't move back dinner time so your sister and I can have a bit of... exercise..." Pyrrha joked. Although she was only half-teasing given the dangerous tilt of her head and the thin smile on her face.

Harry rolled his eyes at her, then leaned down and gave his girlfriend a kiss on the lips, ignoring Ren and Nora's quick presence, which was quite difficult considering Nora let out a loud whoop as she watched them. Harry eventually pulled back, leaning his forehead against Pyrrha's as he whispered, "Be good, okay? I don't want to have to send either of you to your rooms tonight when we sit down to eat together."

"Does that mean that Arturia is just going to join us? You're not making something for just you and your sisters?" Nora asked shrewdly, "I would've thought that you would just want it to be Arc family time."

"Actually, I think I'd really like Arturia to get to know all of you, including you, Pyrrha. While the two of you know each other very well in terms of combat styles, you've never actually spent anytime together."

"This is the part where you tell me Arturia, the Dark Queen, known to everyone involved in the tournament as cold, controlling and demanding, is actually as cuddly as Tia and more emotionally outgoing? Because I don't think I would believe it," Pyrrha snorted, although she didn't actually object. "And I will be just as good as she is."

"Good. My sister isn't the type to throw out taunts, particularly not when there's food involved in the future. Just don't get between her and the meal that's all. Swear to the Brothers, there were times growing up when I was afraid I'd lose a hand when I reached for something close to her plate," Harry laughed, shaking his head fondly at the memories. "And no, I'm not going to tell you that. But Arturia is slightly warmer than you might think, and she has a very droll sense of humor. In fact, you and she might get along quite well, Ren."

Nora's eyes narrowed at that, and Pyrrha laughed, shaking her head. "Now you're going to try to set Arturia up with someone? I'm sorry, but I can't see that working out."

Ren's eyes widened at that, and Nora's hands began to clench as if they were holding the shaft of Magnhild.

Thankfully, Harry simply laughed at the suggestion. “Hell no! I can’t honestly see her dating anyone really. She has extremely high standards, and as far as I know isn’t really looking for relationship.” *And I’m just going to ignore the part of my brain that is wholeheartedly happy about that, or about the fact that Tia turned down that guy trying to flirt with her yesterday by simply ignoring the moron. I’m their brother, I’m supposed to assume that no man is worthy of their attentions,* Harry told himself, trying to ignore the part of his brain that didn’t want either to be involved with men for much less familial reasons, shoving it into the ‘Don’t be a Pureblood box’ in his mind, willing it away.

“Just like Tia then?” Nora asked, calming down and speaking about the same incident that had come to Harry’s mind just then. “I thought Randolph was going to bust a blood vessel when she just walked away utterly ignoring his attempt to talk her up after class. Honestly, the guy wins twice in a row against Norman and Vladimir and he thinks he’s all hot stuff? Ugh.”

“To be fair, the matches were quite interesting. His Solid Air Semblance is quite fascinating,” Ren demurred, before Nora looked at him and he sighed. “But I will say that he did come off as quite heavy-handed in his attempt to flirt with Tia. And the fact that he could not keep his eyes on her own was quite telling.”

Both Nora and Pyrrha snorted at that, although they could hardly blame Randolph for looking at the time. Not only was Tia taller than the young man in question, but she was the chestiest of the freshman class, or even most of the other grades. Only Yang and Mila came close, and not by much. If either girl was the type to be jealous of another’s looks, seeing Tia walking around the shower area naked would definitely have caused some disharmonious feelings, to put it mildly. Thankfully, neither girl had much to complain about in the looks department, although Ruby, Weiss and Sung-Sun, who while svelte had very little in the way of curves, had a time or two been depressed watching either Pyrrha or Tia or Yang walk around the locker room.

And the less said about some of the other girls comments the better. *If Harry knew half things some of the other girls say about Tia behind her back, there would be blood in the streets,* Pyrrha mused. *Yang and Mila’s convinced the rest of us it’s just normal cattiness, but I don’t know. Some of the things they’ve said, well if they were about me, I would be demanding satisfaction on the sands.*

Harry snorted and waved them off. “Anyway, I have to get ready to go. What are you all doing this morning?”

“Nora and I have a meeting with Ruby and the head of the Smithy this afternoon. But this morning, I was going to go over to the training grounds for a bit. Martina and a few of the others asked for some demonstrations of spear work yesterday,” Pyrrha answered, breaking out of her thoughts about how women seemed to like to cut one another down with words far more than with swords.

“And me and Ren are going to play tennis!” Nora announced excitedly, once more bouncing up and down. “I still can’t get over how many different fields and sports areas Beacon has! It’ll be fun.”

“Only so long as you keep your promise of not trying to whack the tennis ball so hard it leaves an indent on the Tennis Court, Nora. Or explodes on impact. I’ve seen you do both,” Ren warned jokingly.

Nora scoffed. “It only happened once Ren, let it go!”

“Just like my hair, once was enough,” Ren gently patted her shoulder. “Still, you’re right that it should be fun.”

Harry was up the stairs a second later as Nora latched onto Ren like a sloth, lifting him into the air and squeezing him so hard that Harry imagined he could actually see his friend’s soul leave his body for a moment. *If I didn’t know they liked one another, I’d almost feel sorry for him right now. Almost.*

Not an hour later, Harry was ready to go dressed in a good business suit, both his scroll and a folder under one arm with the trade agreement he’d worked out with his father for the sales and local distribution of the minds fire dust. He ignored to the oohs from his team, and the cat calls from Nora especially, giving them a thumbs up as he headed out the door. “See you guys at five.”

OOOOOOO

Unfortunately for the best laid plans of mice and men, Arturia had transferred to another earlier flight in order to make the flight with Guld. The two of them were arriving at three thirty instead of the six that Harry had been told about when Arturia had first told him she would be visiting.

Guld was there because he had decided he wanted to be the one to break the news of his adopted status to Harry. He wasn’t looking forward to it, but he hoped that eventually Harry would come to the same opinion as his daughters all had. Even the initially absent Saphron had agreed, that whatever else, Harry had been raised with them, and that made him an Arc.

That, and Caliburn anyway. Guld fully intended to emphasize that when they spoke about just to head off any possibility of an existential angst from Harry. Close or far, blood or no, he was an Arc.

The family patriarch was also along to stop Arturia from doing anything that anyone would regret later. *Well, scratch that thought, I’m hoping to keep the number of things she does that people are going to regret later to a minimum.* Guld mused as he watched Arturia passed through security at the international arrivals in Vale well ahead of him. They hadn’t been able to get seats together on the flight despite their Hunter IDs.

I honestly don't know what is going to happen when she sees Harry, or when we tell Harry and Tia about his being adopted. I fully assume that one or both are going to act like typical Huntresses when suddenly realizing someone else has something they want, I just hope that they don't target one another. Nothing against Nikos, but she isn't my daughter, and I have to prioritize here. And... I honestly can't predict what Tia will do. She probably won't care, but if she has any kind of libido, and I still couldn't tell you if she knew what sex was, or if it at all interested her. But if it does, then...

Ahead of her father, Arturia waited impatiently for him to pass through security, ignoring the looks she was getting, be they unabashedly appreciative, or wary of Arturia in her Huntress outfit. Both she and her father had decided to dress in their Hunter garb, both because she was used to wearing it, and because one never knew when Grimm would appear.

This had proven to be quite prophetic, as the international flight had been attacked by a group of Grief Gulls on the way over from Anima. The flying Grimm that rode the thermals over Remnant's oceans were not as numerous as Nevermore tended to be wherever they could survive, but were bigger and tougher, attacking anything they happened to spot that wasn't Grimm. The ship's automatic weapon systems had dealt with many of them, but some had tried to close, only to find the two Arcs had made their way out onto the roof top of the Bullhead, from where they dealt with the aerial threats easily, and better, so quickly the passengers barely had time to feel fear, let alone for more Grimm to gather in response.

But Arturia's mind wasn't on what had occurred on the trip over as she waited. No, her thoughts were on Harry, and the future. A future that she hoped to spend beside him. *I have spent the better part of three years denying my emotions, denying my attraction and feelings towards Harry, that now that I realize I can act on them, it is all I can do to not scream in frustration for every moment denied me. But I must keep it inside, I must be calm. My parents were correct when they mentioned how this might be awkward, but I **must** make Harry see, see that he and I are...*

"I'm done," her father's voice interrupted Arturia, which was frankly a good thing. Her mind had been about to go down a rabbit hole that it had been going down with startling repetition for the past week whenever she was alone. The memory of that video call on Wednesday had not helped matters at all.

She nodded at her father, and they wound their way through the receiving area, and out to the pickup point for Beacon, finding one of the schools' bullheads waiting there as normal. The school had two bullheads, and one of them was always waiting at either Vale or the school itself, making for an easy, smooth transition in either direction.

The two of them sat next to one another, looking out the windows as Guld began to reminisce about his time at Beacon. Despite his and his wife's issues with Ozpin, he had enjoyed his time in Beacon along with her and their teammates. Although it had been the death of one of those teammates after graduation that had fully turned them away from Ozpin, making

many of the memories bittersweet.

When they arrived in Beacon, Guld smiled, looking around and shaking his head slightly. "The place really hasn't changed much since my days. Still, I suppose as visitors we will need to check in with Ozpin or whoever is handling that at the moment."

Rolling her eyes at the scowl on Guld's face, Arturia shook her head. "Considering you let both myself and Harry come to school here Father, I really don't understand what issue you have with the headmaster. I will admit he enjoys acting mysterious and all-knowing a little too much for my taste, but that is a minor complaint."

"Your mother and I very deliberately did not mention the reasoning behind our issues with the man. We wanted you and Harry in turn and even Tia, if she bothers, to make your own impressions of the man. And I want to talk about them now. Just suffice to say that Ozpin, your mother, and I view people and the world in very different ways."

Arturia hummed at that, and the two of them stopped in at a small office set to one side of the bullhead's landing zone. There they signed in as guests, and Arturia greeted Professor Oobleck, who was on duty for the day. The man was happy to see a former student, but thankfully Arturia had never truly got into his class overmuch, and the man had been hired after Guld had graduated so the two Arcs were able to move off quickly.

Walking back outside, Guld asked, "So, do you think we should search for Harry first, or Tia? It is such a pity that he and Tia didn't get on the same team. And would it kill Tia to message us? Honestly, when you kids leave home, that doesn't mean you were supposed to completely cut off all contact."

Rolling her eyes, Arturia upbraided her father gently. "You know about Tia's communication issues. She's just not very good at it, whatever the type you're talking about. The occasional picture and caption she sends has been most expressive, especially when in conjunction with Harry's longer communications you've told me about. Indeed, wasn't Tia there most of the time when you've talked to him? You're not missing much."

"Perhaps, but a father can afford to be a little more protective about his daughters, surely?" Guld mock-whined.

"Not in our case I think, considering how badly we outnumber you menfolk," Arturia drawled back, and her father chuckled. "In any event, I think we should look for Harry. The professor was kind enough to give us the address of the townhome Harry and his team were given and I think that is a much better idea than trying to search out Tia on a day off. Even I can't predict where she might be if she isn't with Harry."

In actuality, Tia and her team were out in the woods nearby. Not as part of their punishment, but because Sung-Sun had wanted to run them through a few training exercises, and had wanted to add some more realism to it, that being real Grimm in this case. The Grimm

population of the forest where Initiation had occurred, hadn't built up very much since then, but there were still a few of them around to hunt down, which was both pleasant and therapy for Apacci and Mila. The two faunus had not been enjoying life recently given how much Sung-Sun was pushing them to bring their grades up.

It was a learning experience for all save Tia, who covered the various plants that they had covered in Professor Peach's course. Since much of the information from the thankfully recovered professor had gone in one ear and out the other on all three of the others, even Sung-Sun, this was very necessary. All three were city folk, and Sung-Sun was a Vacuan. In her words, "I'm still thrown off by all the green everywhere. I've never seen anything like it, not even in the few hydroponics gardens back in Vacuo."

Shrugging, Guld admitted that probably did make more sense, and the two of them made their way deeper into the campus, heading towards the other end of it where the townhomes resided. However, fate decided to intervene in this. Or rather, Ozpin. He had spotted the two Arcs arriving via the security cameras and as they walked, Guld's scroll went off. "Hello Guld. To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?"

"Family business, Ozpin. Nothing to do with you. Or hunting or Grimm in general," Guld answered dismissively.

"I see. I will not inquire further then. Unfortunately, Hadrian is not on campus at the present moment, nor is young Tia. Ms. Arc is on a trip with her team into the nearby Woodlands. They should return sometime soon, but Mr. Arc I believe is due back late this evening." Ozpin answered, causing Guld to scowl in annoyance before going on. "Nonetheless, I would be a poor host if I did not ask you to stop in and have a cup of coffee with me. I got in a particularly good Vacuan blend recently. And you know that Glynda is no connoisseur of good coffee. I would appreciate a second opinion."

The Arc patriarch snorted, but internally sighed. He knew that Ozpin would continue to probe, the man always wanted to know about anything unusual that happened around him, and especially about interesting Hunters and Huntresses. *And I know all too well how persistent he can be, just as much as he is good at manipulating people.* So he decided to head things off now. "I'll be there in a moment." Closing the scroll he looked over at his daughter. "Arturia, go on without me. I need to speak to the Lord of the Clocktower."

Arturia snorted at her father's droll tone, but waved him off, continuing on her path towards where the townhomes were. Although she had heard Ozpin's words, she wanted to try her luck to see if anyone was home. *Getting to know this Ren and Nora pair would be interesting, and if a certain redhead is there, then...*

A few minutes later, Arturia was near the center of the academy's grounds when she was recognized by several of her former underclassmen. None dared to try and get close to her however, such was her reputation, until one particular young woman spotted her and instantly

shrieked out, "Arturia!?"

Arturia blinked, looking over and frowning in confusion at the woman who was dressed like some kind of fashionista for a moment. Then recognition dawned and she nodded her head once to the younger girl. "Coco, correct? The one with a parent in the clothes industry. I see you are still in the habit of dressing to impress."

"I could say the same for you, er if in a different way," Coco answered, trying hard not to blush as she stared at Arturia. The older girl had been a senior when Coco was a freshman, and something of a schoolgirl crush for the brunette. There was something about Arturia's cool, aloof beauty that just set Coco's pulse to pound. "But what are you doing here? Are you going to become a teacher's assistant or something? I know Professor Goodwitch is always muttering about needing one."

"No. Even it was on offer, I am not one to enjoy paperwork or teaching." *While I may stay in Vale, that is not the same thing as staying on here is a teacher. Teaching my little brother and little sister one-on-one is fine, teaching a class? No.* "Instead, my father and I are here to see my younger siblings."

She didn't go into why, as there was no point, and many of the students around them who had noticed Arturia or at least heard Coco's shriek were now staring at her in some fascination.

The rabbit faunus standing next to Coco gently trod on her foot for a moment, helping Coco through her blushing embarrassment and suppressed arousal at seeing her crush in her relatively new Huntress outfit. This consisted of a tight black under-suit that hugged her body like a second skin from ankle up to her neck, ending with a stylized design that hugged her neck and cheek in a diagonal pattern, although it left much of her toned, hardened stomach bare. The oversized hole ended just above where her breasts began, leaving a delightful amount of under boob for any brave enough to look.

Over this Arturia wore armored greaves, armor around her upper chest and arms, designed to look like the scales of a dragon. This too left her stomach bare, although Coco seemed to remember that Arturia had a chest plate that she would wear there if she was expecting trouble or fighting in a place that cut down on her mobility. Her platinum blond hair was short cropped but well-cared for. On it was a crown that looked almost like a tiara made of black metal shaped into various spikes which sat above her ears and at the back of her head instead of the front.

"Ou, um, well, that makes some sense," Coco blathered, trying hard not to stare at that glorious under boob. *Damn it, she doesn't have as much as her younger sister, but mmf if it doesn't look just as good!* "A, although if you are going to stick around, I'd love to pick your brain for tactics and strategy. I'm still having trouble with full team tactics, although our synergy is great."

“Perhaps,” Arturia said, both dismissive and noncommittal, although in her interest in Arturia, Coco didn’t seem to notice. But whatever answer to this Coco would’ve made, was interrupted as Pyrrha walked around the corner of a building in the distance.

She and Arturia caught sight of one another at the same time, and both of them froze, before Arturia slowly marched towards the younger woman, ignoring Coco’s continued words. Staring back at Arturia, Pyrrha hefted her weapons lightly, still carrying them from her earlier exercises, her eyes suddenly lighting up with a fierce competitive delight. “Arturia! Harry did tell us that you were coming in this evening. But you’re here early. That’s just grand! I can think of several ways we can spend our time...”

In any other circumstances Coco, and avowed lesbian, would’ve wolf-whistled at that or offered to join the two of them for some fun. However, something in a Pyrrha’s tone, the stance that Arturia had taken told her that was not what either girl had in mind. Indeed, there was such a tension in the air that she began to back away, her eyes widened slightly.

“Oh shit,” muttered one of the students nearby, and it was with a start that Coco and her partner Velvet remembered that Pyrrha, the self-effacing, kind young freshman girl who was always willing to help anyone with their training was also known as the Invincible Girl for having claimed the Mistral Gladiatorial championship four times in a row, beating out Arturia, the Dark Queen not once, but twice. That the last time they’d fought in the championship match, and while Pyrrha had eked out a win, she had come away scarred, while Arturia hadn’t.

The tension was practically palpable in the air, and all of the students around them began to back away rapidly. Nearby, Benjamin Redfall, the only leader beyond Coco in sight, hastily grabbed at his scroll to call Professor Goodwitch. “Professor, you need to come to the southern extension on the main Belt Trail, heading towards training centers ten and eleven. There’s going to be a bloodbath!”

Before Professor Goodwitch could reply, Pyrrha and Arturia had closed the distance between them. But much to the chagrin of Benjamin and several of the other watchers, although the tension was still there, neither of them went for the weapons on their backs. Instead, the two women exchanged firm hand clasps, and if they were trying to crush one another’s grip, none of the watchers could tell.

“... Never mind, it seems as if the Invincible Girl and the Dark Queen actually have some restraint...” Benjamin muttered.

“I was going to ignore your words as some kind of joke Mr. Redfall, but what do you mean Arturia Arc is back on campus!” There was a sound of someone using her scroll from the other side of the call and Benjamin very carefully did not react to the silent hiss of “Damn it Oobleck!” That was heard a moment later. “I’m going to head there now. Hopefully neither of them will have done anything untoward before I arrive. If they do, try to keep any bystanders from getting run over.”

Breathing a sigh of relief that Goodwitch hadn't wanted him to try and get between the two Huntresses, Benjamin answered in the affirmative and hung up, continuing to watch. In the background the rest of the students began to whisper and mutter, some even pulling out scrolls to take pictures.

But Arturia and Pyrrha did not notice this, instead concentrating fully on one another. The two of them are still gripping one another's forearms, and as Arturia looked down at Pyrrha's body, she had to nod in approval. "I see you wear the scar I gave you with pride. Good, one should never be afraid to show one's scars, they add character."

"Does that mean that you have scars of your own, or are you asking me to add to your character?" Pyrrha shot back, the two women gripping one another's arms harder at what back in the arena would have been a simple low-key taunt. Pyrrha would probably not have normally indulged, she never had before as trash talk was somewhat beneath her and had never matched the persona that her parents had crafted for Pyrrha in the arena. But something in Arturia's grip and her looks had brought it out of her.

There wasn't anger there, not really. There was a harsh appraisal and something that Pyrrha would never have dreamed of thinking could come from someone like Arturia: jealousy. Beyond that however, there was something else, something which had been between them from the moment that Arturia laid eyes on her that had Pyrrha's hair nearly standing on end. A magma-deep determination to do... something? Pyrrha no idea what.

"If you wish to try, you'll get your chance. I understand that you are going out with my brother. And while I do not doubt that you might have won Tia's approval in order to even get close to him, you have yet to win mine. Or that of the rest of my family I suppose."

Pyrrha nodded slowly, still wondering where the jealousy was coming from as well as the other emotions, although after a second thought she decided to put the jealousy down to Arturia being a bit of a bro-con, as she had heard the term called. Considering that Tia was most decidedly such, Pyrrha had looked it up and now she wondered idly if she was going to have to deal with five more iterations of this kind of challenge. *No, wait, I know the twins approve of me. And I doubt magenta is the type to get in my face about such things. So perhaps only two more times? And only Violet trained as a Huntress before becoming a farmer.*

Nonetheless, there was only one response to this question. "And how exactly would I go about doing so?"

"I believe you know the answer to that one," Arturia drawled, her yellow eyes gleaming as she stared into Pyrrha's eyes. The two of them were of a height, with Arturia perhaps an inch taller than Pyrrha, but that was all.

Pyrrha met Arturia's blazing eyes without flinching. Indeed, her own eyes began to gleam and she pulled her hand out of Arturia's grip to gesture to one side, her other hand still holding Milo, Akuo strapped to its forearm. "Well, we can use one of the training areas I

suppose or if you think that would be to... limiting, there is always the cliffs and the forest beyond.”

“The second one definitely sounds best. Let us be off. And if you win a third time against me, you will prove yourself worthy of being my brothers girlfriend. If not, well...”

A part of Pyrrha shook its internal head at that, and wondered if she should be reaching out to Harry to somehow defuse the situation. That same part of Pyrrha wondered again about the edge to Arturia, that deeper emotion that was seemingly driving her determination.

Longing perhaps?

But the bigger part of Pyrrha’s mind simply ignored that segment, practically drowning in battle lust at the moment. “Lead on. You have gone to school here before after all.” Then in a somewhat automatic attempt to make small talk, she went on. “Oh, on that note, can I ask, was professor Port as...”

“Oh yes. He very much was ‘as...’” Arturia interjected as Pyrrha paused, trying to find kind words to say about the bombastic self-aggrandizing professor. “Still, he gets better as the year goes on, and if you can listen to his stories, he does sprinkle them with some interesting points about Grimm. And might I say I like the fact that you enlarged your shield? If you are trying to be a proper gynaíka Spartiátissa, you need a larger shield. I would also say get rid of tossing your javelin entirely and use an actual long spear, but I’d prefer not to fight a battle I cannot win.”

On this surprisingly cordial exchange, the two of them walked off, leaving behind the scattered students, all of whom quickly got on their scrolls, telling their friends what was going to be going down, and following after the two former gladiators in a mob.

Soon, the two of them were at the cliff, and still ignoring their followers, Arturia pulled out her weapons as Pyrrha did the same. The two of them were separated by several of the squares that had been used to launch the students during initiation, now turning to one another.

At that point, a problem arose. Neither of them knew how to operate the springs or whatever it was underneath the metal panels to launch them forward. For a moment the two of them simply stared at one another, then Arturia’s lips quirked slightly, and she turned, leaping out over the cliff face, not even looking behind her.

Pyrrha’s eyes widened, but she was quick to follow. Using her polarity powers on her shield, she sat on it almost like a plate to lower herself gently to the ground.

Arturia hadn’t, instead trusting to her ability to grab passing tree branches to slow her descent and her greater Aura. When Arturia landed she created a small crater, but was already waiting by the time Pyrrha came down, whereupon Arturia began the fight with an “Excalibur!” before Pyrrha was even on the ground.

But Pyrrha was waiting. She quickly hopped off of her shield to one side, letting her shield be hit by the strike and sent careening away, before pulling it back to herself with her polarity powers and charging. Before the shield could arrive, Pyrrha was already firing at Arturia, who blocked the strikes with her own shield. Seeing that shield now, Pyrrha realized it had gone through some changes since last time Pyrrha had seen it.

After the battle against the Dread Wolf, Arturia had decided to discard her old shield, and was now using a kite shield to go along with the magnificence that was Rhongomyniad. It wasn't a weapon of any kind, simply a regular shield, much like Akuo at present. But it was large thick shield, and the tip of the kite shield, the point that settled into the ground, was quite sharp. Pyrrha found this out to her cost when it nearly embedded itself in her sternum before she could dodge.

She used her polarity powers to push it aside, but still took a grazing blow causing Pyrrha to hiss in annoyance and become very grateful that she had been wearing all of her armor while she had been teaching spear work to some of the other students. *I get the feeling this is going to exhaust me far, far more. Good!*

With a vicious grin on her face, Pyrrha's javelin shifted into a sword, and she went lance to sword with Arturia, the two of them exchanging blows as Pyrrha got in underneath Arturia's guard. The butt end of Rhongomyniad blocked two of her strikes, but one got through, before she had to duck away from a punch as Arturia tossed her weapon negligently into the air. Before Pyrrha could try to use her polarity powers to hurl it away, a kick caught her in the stomach, sending her sprawling. She rolled with it, coming up with her javelin poised and shield in front of her, only to find that Arturia and grabbed her weapon out of the air, and was now coming down towards her. "Thousand Thorns!"

Pyrrha redirected the strike wide, then dodged as the energy thorns still shot out from the ground everywhere. Her return kick nearly sent Arturia to the ground, but she rolled away, using her shield to block Pyrrha's follow on bullets.

Now standing well apart, the two of them exchanged grins, and then charged, crashing together. The sound of thunder was heard all the way up on the top of the cliff and elsewhere in the forest.

OOOOOOO

Apacci and Mila blinked, before Mila brought her weapon down on a Beowulf, then turned in the direction of the sound they'd both just heard. It was coming from back towards the cliff face, the direction the group had just turned their track through the woods toward.

Team GART had a pretty productive morning, but there was only so much forest any of them could really stand. *Well, bar Tia, who doesn't really care one way or the other. Damn, going on two months in, and I'm still not used to how hard to read that girl is. Is she enjoying yourself, is she annoyed at me? If I couldn't see her eyes, I couldn't read her at all, and even*

then, I barely understand her. Damn freaking emotionless doll... Mila knew it wasn't Tia's choice to be the way she was, but even then, she didn't like it.

But Mila knew they would still be going if Sung-Sun hadn't twisted her ankle and then banged her shoulder and head into a tree as she fell. Sung-Sun was now on Tia's back, with Mila and Apacci ranging out around them in slow circles. That Beowulf that Mila had just dealt with was the first she'd seen since they'd begun the trek back, and had come from directly behind them.

From one side Apacci came out of the woods, looking at Mila. "I'm not the only one who heard that, right?"

"Heard what? Remember that you two have far better senses than myself or Tia," Sung-Sun reminded them from the tanned Arc's back.

"Like metal crashing on metal, **really** hard," Apacci muttered, staring towards the noise. "Honestly, it kind of reminded me of the times Nora or Yang've fought Pyrrha in class. That really, really loud series of sounds that make ya wonder if you're in the Smithy." *And I have to wonder why Blake Belladonna always covers her ears like the rest of us Faunus... And why the hell her last name sounds so familiar to me. Weird girl, and a bit of a cold fish too given how she always waves me off.*

"Perhaps some students came down into the forest to work out their frustrations with one another?" Sung-Sun mused. It was an open secret that all of the training grounds were carefully monitored, and that going too hard or too far in any of them would bring the wrath of Goodwitch down on your head. Something that, regardless of grade, all of the students were terrified of. Which was just good sense in Sung-Sun's opinion.

Tia hummed thoughtfully behind her turtleneck, looking at the two Faunus, but neither of them had any further information to give. The sounds however were continuing and it was now clear that whoever was out there was going at it hammer and tongs.

"Let's go over there and see what's going on," Sung-Sun ordered. "The way that noise is escalating to the point that I can hear it probably means that whatever is going on is somewhat serious, and I don't think any of us want any of our fellow freshmen involved in whatever this is when it gets back to the professors."

Her teammates all looked at her askance, most particularly Mila, although even Tia did so, turning her head to look over her shoulder. "Seriously? We aren't exactly even in any position to do anything about it if there is something serious going on. You've got a sprained ankle, Apacci and I are out of ammo, and it isn't exactly like we've got the high moral ground, you know."

"Nevertheless, let us be off. I don't want us to try and stop whatever is going on, just be on hand if it brings in the Grimm," Sung-Sun said, smiling a little as she gently tapped Mila on

the shoulder, her other hand rising to her mouth to hide her smile. "Mush, Arc."

Wordlessly Tia marched on, with Apacci and Mila ahead of her.

Moments later, they came out into a new clearing in the forest. And by new, they meant that it was still being made by the two combatants in the center of the clearing. Numerous trees had already been smashed to ribbons, furrows along the ground had been created, and in several dozen places large energy spikes that looked almost like thorns had punched out of the ground creating an area several hundred yards wide.

Having seen the glimmer of the pink and purple energy through the woods, Tia had already known what she would be finding, and was unsurprised to see her older sister there. Battling Pyrrha was also not exactly outside the bounds of what she had expected. Ever since she had learned that Arturia was coming to school, like Harry, Tia had assumed that Pyrrha and Arturia would be battling it out at some point during her stay. *Heck, you could say it was inevitable. As much as I like both of them, Pyrrha and Arturia are among the most prideful women I've ever met in their area of expertise.*

But as she watched, Tia came to the realization that this seemed a little more violent than she had anticipated. *Although you can tell by the smiles on their faces. Both of them are enjoying this. Not that I can't see the point.* Like her older sibling and twin, Tia was a bit of a combat junkie, so completely understood the vicious grins on both combatants' faces even as she wondered about the edge she could somehow sense in Arturia's style.

"... What exactly are we watching?" Apacci muttered, moving to crouch behind a tree so as to not draw attention from either of the combatants. His dear faunus instincts were telling him that he was in the presence of two predators, and it would be a very bad idea to draw their ire towards him.

"That's the Dark Queen, right? I remember seeing her match with Pyrrha, and several of her matches as champion," Sung-Sun murmured. "My father was hugely into watching them." *Although I will refrain from mentioning how he always thought it was very stupid how the local criminals in Mistral had never gotten into the betting circuit.*

"Are they trying to kill one another, or is this just how former gladiators roll?" Mila quipped, making no effort to hide, instead simply leaned against the nearby tree.

"Good question. Tia?" Sung-Sun inquired. "You're the only one that knows your sister. Is this normal for her?"

"..." Tia said nothing, simply watching, her eyes narrowed very slightly, and an equally slight frown invisible under her turtleneck. There was indeed something wrong with her sister. She was taking this very, very seriously, even more so than she had the match that Pyrrha had beaten her in. *Is it bruised ego, or something else?* She kept silent, simply watching and the rest of her team quite as well.

Above them on the cliff face above, lots of people were also watching. Most had also brought out their scrolls, using the magnifying aspect of their scrolls to watch the action as close as possible. Many were lamenting the fact they couldn't post it directly on the interweb, Beacon's network stopping that from occurring.

That was, until Glynda arrived. Nor was she the only adult to arrive on the scene, having run into someone that she hadn't seen several years in person as she ran towards the cliff. "Guld, I presume that you are here to visit Harry and Tia for some reason?"

"That's right. And Arturia is here too. Which is why we are all racing right now," Guld looked a little worried at that, and that was enough for Glynda to quicken her pace. The site of nearly 2 dozen of their students gawking down into the forest from the cliff face annoyed her greatly, and she growled out, "ladies and gentlemen, I realize it is a Saturday, but surely you all have something better to do than gawk?"

Many of the students flinched, but few turned away from the show below. Growling again, Glynda followed Guld as he parted the students ahead of him like a battleship going through water. When they reached the edge of the cliff, they could look down into the battle below. Glynda immediately made to intervene, but Guld's raised hand stopped her. "Wait for it," the Arc patriarch ordered. "It's nearly over."

"While Arturia is no longer my student, Ms. Nikos distinctly is," Glynda growled back. "If she is hurt..."

"Just watch. There are... reasons this fight needed to happen. Trust Arturia to not go too far," Guld answered, not turning his gaze away from the battle below.

"Those words would be more convincing if you didn't look worried," Glynda pointed out, but Guld didn't reply, simply staring down at the battle.

Pyrrha's new tricks with carrying needles and ball bearings hadn't fared so well when against Arturia. It took a lot more concentration than she was used to, taking it away from her hand-to-hand battle against Arturia, who was not only as fast as her, but had a slight reach advantage and was much stronger.

Only a few such attacks had gotten past Arturia's shield, but dozens of them were scattered around the battlefield, and occasionally she could use them to disrupt or distract her opponent's own attacks. Arturia's skill with her overpowered attack 'Excalibur', had also grown leaps and bounds since the time they had faced one another in the arena, and her Thousand Thorns strikes were also coming almost continuously whenever Rhongomyniad's tip touched the ground.

This let Arturia dictate the range with each clash, and Pyrrha vowed to do better with her Semblance in the future. It was only her polarity powers and weapons keeping her in the fight now, And Arturia had quickly shown she understood Pyrrha's Semblance, overpowering

each strike so it was harder to push off target.

Pyrrha gasped as she felt the air driven out of her lungs by a blow from Arturia's kite shield. Her armor dented under the blow, and she was hurled backward into and through a tree. She rolled as she struck, her hands pointing out in either direction, grabbing at several of the nearby ball bearings and hurling them at Arturia from different directions.

Arturia's shield dented from the superfast strikes as if it had just been peppered by a shotgun shell at close range, and she grunted from several hits to her back and sides. But her own Excalibur strike flashed out, and it was all Pyrrha could do to roll to the side and avoid it as another furrow was torn out of the forest.

Then Pyrrha was flipping to her feet and charging forward grimacing as she knew her Aura was nearly to fully depleted by this point. Whereas Arturia was an Arc. Even with her overpowered Semblance Pyrrha doubted that she was in the same position. *She's just going to outlast me at this rate! Just like before, I have to get close and keep it there regardless of her Thousand Thorns technique.*

Arturia met her charge by thrusting her shield out at the last instant, negating some of Pyrrha's forward momentum, and knocking her very slightly off balance. Rhongomyniad lashed forward, catching Pyrrha on the arm, and numbing her arm from the elbow down, causing her hand to spasm and release Milo. But a kick to the side of Arturia's leg as Pyrrha flailed caused Arturia's attacks to stumble, the follow-on strike missing, before Pyrrha dropped to her knees and charged forwards in a low tackle, getting one of Arturia's legs and heaving her to the ground. Her shield's edge came down but then Arturia left her weapon to fall, her hand flashing behind Akuo, grabbing at Pyrrha's forearm.

A moment later however, Arturia was the one pinning Pyrrha, the older stronger girl overpowering Pyrrha's attempt to break away. *Drat it! Mistakes have been made!*

An attempt to launch Milo from the side into Arturia was blocked by her tower shield, but Pyrrha then used her polarity powers to tear the shield off of that arm as if she had launched it from her forearm. The kite shield flew so fast it imbedded itself in a nearby tree.

The same thing happened Arturia's lance, but Arturia hadn't even bothered trying to retrieve it. Instead, simply pinned Pyrrha down to the ground with her weapon hand, raising her now empty other arm in preparation for a punch.

Two strikes caused Pyrrha to go groan in pain, and to realize that her Aura really had been almost gone her instincts on that score proving all too accurate. She was now going to have one heck of a shiner, and Arturia realized the match was over. She wasn't strong enough to throw Arturia off, and had no more Aura to use her semblance.

With a sigh, she closed her eyes and leaned her head back, shaking it from side to side on the loam floor of the forest as another blow took her in the chest. "I yield!"

For just a moment, Arturia looked as if she was going to keep on punching Pyrrha, something that caused Pyrrha's eyes to widen. But then, the look in Arturia's eyes subsided, the angry lioness reining in her darker emotions.

"No..." she murmured, almost too low even for Pyrrha to hear from underneath her. "No, this will not have changed anything. It, it only has made me feel better." *Killing her wouldn't solve any issues, it would simply cause bad blood between me and Harry, I need to understand that from the start. Now, I need to convince Harry that he and Pyrrha aren't right together, and that he and I are.*

With that, Arturia slumped off of Pyrrha, rolling to lay out on the forest floor beside her former opponent. "I accept. A part of me wishes I wouldn't, but simply removing you from the equation in this manner would be a very bad idea," she said in a slightly louder voice. "It did however allow me to clear my head a bit. And for that, I thank you."

"Um... you're welcome?" Pyrrha half-questioned, half-groaned, turning on her side to stare at her former opponent. For a moment it was almost like they were lovers laying out on a bed together, a thought that Pyrrha quickly dismissed with a wry snort through bloody lips. "I am just going to lay here and assume I know what you're talking about."

Arturia snorted a laugh as then winced a little. Just because she had won didn't mean Pyrrha hadn't gotten in her own shots, and her armored form was badly dented in several places. *If that one shot Pyrrha took at my knee had been any harder, she might well have hurt me enough to pin me in place. That would have made this whole battle much harder.* "You'll learn about it soon enough. For now, well fought."

Above them on the cliff face, Guld and Glynda, breathed a sigh of relief although Guld was still staring at most aloof daughter in some trepidation, whereas Glynda was simply relieved the fight was over with before she had to intervene regardless of what Guld thought. Around them, everyone else on the cliff were cheering or groaning depending on, which drew Glynda's attention away.

"If you can deal with those two, I have a few punishments to deal out," she grumbled, before turning to the audience and yelling in a louder voice, "ladies and gentlemen, the show is over. And all of those of you who decided to place bets as if this was some kind of public event, come see me. We're going to have a long talk about inappropriate behavior and why Beacon has such a thing as sanctioned matches rather than this wild disturbance!" *Especially considering how vicious that fight was. Someone should have tried to stop it right away!*

Down below, Arturia found herself being lifted up from behind, and pulled into a light hug, before being tossed over a familiar shoulder. She laughed then even as she attempted to give the world's most awkward hug. "And hello to you too, Tia. But might I say, this is most undignified."

"Don't care. It is efficient." Tia said, before reaching down and likewise hoisting Pyrrha

onto her other shoulder, having handed Sung-Sun over to Mila.

Nearby, Apacci collected their weapons, staring at the two of them in some all and not a little bit of fear. He had thought he'd known what Pyrrha was capable of, but her new techniques and her Semblance had come as something of a horrible surprise. And Arturia was just terrifying. The amount of damage they'd done to the forest was proof of that, let alone how badly they'd battered one another. *This damage must cover at least a mile! And in every damn direction. Brothers!*

"No, Tia, put me down. I at least can walk on my own." Arturia announced, smirking over at her opponent.

"I don't know," Guld said having landed nearby with the same ease his daughter had at the beginning of the fight and walking to within talking distance. "Considering I was thinking about taking you over my knees and giving you a spanking, Arturia, the way that Tia is currently holding you is perfect for me. What possessed you to fight Pyrrha so viciously?"

Arturia didn't answer, but smacked Tia on the back, indicating she should let her go. With a shrug Tia did so, looking down at her sister and then over at her father in some confusion. She'd expected Arturia, but not their father, and now was getting a niggling sense that there was something wrong. Nor did Arturia answer their father's question. "What is going on?"

"... We'll tell you and Harry at the same time, it's not something I want to repeat. And I would prefer it to be without anyone else around." With that said, Guld smiled at Pyrrha, reaching out to shake the younger girl's hand, her own hand disappearing into his large mitt. "Pleased to meet you Pyrrha, my son's told me a lot about you, and I understand you've met my wife several times via scroll. Although this is the first time I think you've met me."

"I believe we were introduced once Sir, but you didn't really talk during that conversation," Pyrrha answered, smiling brightly at the father of her boyfriend through the number of bruises on her face. One half of her face was a mass of rapidly purpling bruises, her lips were already swollen and there was another mass of purple right where her neck met her collarbone. "Pleased to meet you. Although I too am wondering what is going on that brought you along with Arturia. From what my boyfriend has told me, you don't get along with Professor Ozpin."

She didn't notice Arturia's teeth clenching at Pyrrha's use of that term. Tia did and made a questioning hum under her turtleneck as she looked at her older sister.

"I don't," Guld answered, grumbling a little under his breath as he remembered the earlier mild probing that Ozpin had subjected him to. Ozpin had bluntly refused to answer much of his questions, but that hadn't stopped Ozpin from trying to get some information out of him about what was going on in Anima. Guld had eventually been forced to give him up just a bit, enough to inform him that Evig Låga was expanding, but nothing else. "It's family business,

miss. My son might tell you afterward, but only after I talked to him and my daughter here.”

That made Pyrrha more curious, and she looked at Arturia’s face for a second, which had flushed very slightly. A blush and a look of... Longing maybe? *I’ve seen that look on Ruby a time or two when she is looking at weapons magazines. But what could Arturia want that is that important. What in the world is going on here?*

OOOOOO

That was a question that Harry would have dearly liked an answer to as well later that day.

Harry had finished the pair of meetings he was scheduled for that day, coming back with an agreement for Rhajiv Dust Distributors to buy Evig Låga’s Fire Dust locally, whereupon they would resell it throughout the city. That was followed by an agreement with the headset company he had wanted to deal with that Nora had discovered. Both of those had put a smile on his face.

The news waiting on his scroll from Ren, Nora and Pyrrha that not only had his sister arrive earlier than he had expected, but that his father had done the same and had something to speak to him about and Tia about was not such good news. Indeed, for some reason it filled him with trepidation. Had someone in the family been hurt? Was there some problem at the mines? Did Saphron call off her wedding? Questions as to what this news his father brought filled Harry, and it was with quite a lot of unease that he made his way through the Academy grounds.

He was surprised to see Nora and Ren heading the other direction. “Where are you two off to? I was looking forward to having some help with dinner Ren.”

Ren shook his head, but Nora answered for them both, hanging off her friend. “Your dad requested the two of us make ourselves scarce for a bit. He has something he wants to talk to you just the two of you.”

“Ah, that’s what the message I saw on my scrolls said. I just didn’t realize he was going to kick the two of you out for the night. You don’t have to go if you don’t want to, you know. My family and I can go somewhere else instead,” Harry protested, despite the fact he had picked up the food needed to make a meal he was certain Arturia would like.

“Nope. He gave us some money when he asked us to make ourselves scarce, and there’s a special going on at the local zoo that I want to see anyway. Better to go tonight than tomorrow,” Nora chirped, while Ren simply shrugged. Harry had gotten better at reading Ren and knew that shrug meant that he was happy enough to go along with Nora, and that he trusted Harry to tell them if anything serious was going on.

Nodding, Harry wished them well, and then continued on his way back to the town home.

Despite his trepidation about what Guld had to tell him, or why he was here at all, Harry had to smile when he saw Arturia lounging in the main sitting room of the townhome. He set his grocery bags down, and when she moved towards him to greet him, lifted the older girl into a bear hug, grinning. "It's good to see you. Even if you should've told me the real time you were coming in. And it's good to see you too, dad."

"Oh, I see how it is, always second place in my son's mind," Guld smiled at his son, although his humor hid a faint concern at how long the two of them held a hug before Harry set Arturia down. Tia came over then, looking through the grocery accepting a sideways hug from Harry and Arturia both and returning it quickly. Pyrrha looked on as well, smiling faintly at how close the family was, although something in Arturia's expression, something in those strange yellow eyes of hers was giving her some confused vibes.

Moreover, Guld's smile was also making both Pyrrha and Harry frown a little. It wasn't a normal smile. It looked more like a grimace and a smile rolled into one. Like he knew something was coming up that he wasn't looking forward to.

Still, Harry ignored that for the moment, instead staring at Pyrrha's still somewhat bruised face. Her Aura lent itself to healing a bit, but the beating she'd taken in fighting Arturia was still visible. "What the hell happened to you Pyrrha?"

"Er... do you really have to ask?" Pyrrha answered, while Arturia looked apologetic reaching out and patting the other girl's shoulder as she took her seat one more.

"Ah... so you did fight one another. I had such high hopes there," Harry lamented, heading into the kitchen and pulling up his sleeves, having already the best himself of his dress jacket and tie. "Still, you're both in one piece which I suppose is the best I could have hoped for despite my pleas this morning..."

Pyrrha had the good grace to look somewhat abashed, and looked down at her lap, twiddling her thumbs together as she remembered Harry's words to her several hours ago. Then what she felt was a great idea went through her mind and she quickly pointed over at Arturia. "Arturia started it!"

"I...I..." The Dark Queen spluttered, before slumping. "I suppose I did, yes. I will take that on the chin, I suppose." She then smiled thinly over at Pyrrha. "Still worth it to get a win though."

Harry shook his head, debating how to punish Arturia for a moment before setting it aside in favor of dinner, speaking over whatever reply Pyrrha might have made. "Regardless, you're going to have to wait at least a half hour for food, guys and girls. Sorry to say, but the meal I had planned isn't exactly a quick one."

"It doesn't matter Harry. We're not here for the food, we're here to talk to you and Tia. There's something you need to know. Something you both need to know," Guld announced,

ignoring the faint growl coming from Arturia's stomach.

"And doesn't that just sound ominous? Are you sure you don't want to wait until after dinner though?" Harry asked, trying to hide his unease at Guld's tense, stern tone.

"Forget the food!" Guld growled, practically ordering Harry out of the kitchen. "There are more important things to discuss right now."

The older man waited until Harry rather reluctantly joining them, with Tia following him then looked at Pyrrha. "And this is something that should really only be discussed with family. I realize you are going out with Miss Nikos here, but that relationship is still quite new, and I don't think it would be appropriate for her to be here for this."

"She isn't just my girlfriend, she is my sworn shields," Harry said firmly. "And I think that at least a portion of that duty means she'll keep my secrets, right?"

"Of course," Pyrrha answered, answering far more seriously than Harry's almost whimsical tone. Like Harry, she felt this conversation was going to be serious one, but unlike Harry, she didn't have any inbuilt desire to use humor to try and defuse the situation.

"..." Guld looked back at Pyrrha then over at Harry, before sighing, muttering about, "damn stubborn brats! Where the hell did all of them get that stubborn streak, I swear!" Under his breath.

Since this question had such an obvious answer, none of the three younger Arcs answered with anything beyond a shake of their heads, sitting around the table with Guld having automatically chosen the head of it for himself. Pyrrha sat next to Harry, still eyeing Arturia with some suspicion, something about the way she was looking at Harry making her inner woman rise up, take notice and prepare to do battle. Why, she didn't know, but Pyrrha was certain she wasn't looking forward to discovering the answer.

For a moment as they sat, Harry watched his father struggle with whatever he was going to say. This was not easy to say for Guld, and he wondered if maybe it had been a mistake. Maybe he and his wife should have sat on Arturia, forced her to wait until Harry and Tia came home for break? But he shook that thought off quickly. It was unbecoming of him, and he doubted that even together they would've been able to keep Arturia contained. He was still worrying about what would happen here once Tia and Harry knew the truth, but hopefully Arturia had gotten her anger out earlier against Pyrrha.

But now that it came to it, Guld was **very** reluctant to get it over with. But there was no easy way to say it, and Guld decided to just rip off the Band-Aid. "Harry, Tia, there's no easy way to say this. We, Hazel and I, we haven't been entirely honest with you. About, about you Harry."

Both Tia and Harry were looking very confused at the moment, and Guld barreled on quickly. "When my wife was pregnant, we went to a hospital in a town who's name I can't

remember. When we were there, the defenses of the town fell thanks to the mayor being a bastard embezzler, and the hospital was attacked. So badly that a fire started somewhere inside it, somehow. We still have no idea, most of us were busy helping the defenders hunt the Grimm down in the city while Hazel was giving birth.”

Realizing he was about to start rambling, Guld cut himself off and breathed in deeply, noticing that Harry was frowning now, while Tia’s eyes were slightly narrowed, and she had crossed her arms, a sure sign of growing confusion and worry to anyone who knew her.

“Anyway, the fire quickly got out of control. I was doing a final sweep of the hospital to help anyone who had already escaped, and I found a baby left behind. A young baby boy. I brought them out of the hospital, and introduced him to my wife, and to little Tia. Both of whom fell in love with the little guy.” He looked at Harry squarely, whose eyes had widened at his words, while Tia’s hand had come to rest on his squeezing hard. “That little guy was you, Harry. You were adopted. We, your mother and I, we raised you as our own from the start, and your adopted status has never bothered us at all. But the time never seemed right to tell you about it, and...”

He stammered to a halt as Tia and Harry simply stared at him. Tia’s eyes were as wide as Guld had ever seen them, and her hands were clenching and unclenching on the table. Pyrrha too was looking astonished, but her eyes suddenly narrowed, and she swung her head around like a turret to pin Arturia in place. Arturia looked back and allowed a small smile to appear on her regal face, causing Pyrrha to hiss in anger looking between Arturia and Harry, and then, with growing worry to Tia.

For his part, Harry was simply staring at Guld, looking shocked, but also thoughtful, while internally he was not as completely blindsided as his twin. *But she isn’t my twin, is she? Damn, but that is sooo strange to even think! But I, I can faintly remember the fire or at least heat being the first sensation in this world before my mind faded into baby-dom. It was way later when my adult mind started to reassert itself. And come to think of it, I suppose having Death be able to do something to a living baby as it’s being gestated or whatever it is would be kind of strange, magically speaking. But, but to be told this now?! I’m not an Arc but no, wait, that makes no sense!*

As that thought occurred to him, Harry spoke up quickly. “Wait, but that can’t be! What about Caliburn? We’ve been told our whole lives that the family blade can’t be wielded by anyone who isn’t an Arc!”

“It’s certain you have some Arc blood in you, yes, that ah, that threw us too. But the simplest answer is often the right one, and in this case, perhaps your real father or mother was an Arc or descended from some of the arcs who have left Evig Låga over the generations. It doesn’t have to be wielded by someone of the direct mainline after all. And there have been numerous Arcs who have left over the generations. Heck, my uncle left, and my grandfather’s sister, along with several others.”

“Ugh,” Harry raised his hands to his head, squeezing his head lightly while Arturia very deliberately reached over the table and touched his hands, pulling them away from his head and looking into his eyes solicitously. “It was a shock to me as well. As well as your other sisters. I cannot believe it is any easier for you, Harry.”

“It isn’t. Why, why did you wait so long? This is...” Harry shook his head, looking up now, his eyes hot and angry. “This is something we should all have known about when we were younger!”

“Would it have changed how you act towards one another? Would he be any less of a brother to Tia, Arturia or the others?” Guld asked.

“Okay, maybe not, but it wouldn’t have been so much of a shock and there wouldn’t have been so many...” Harry shook his head, still massively off-balance mentally but still able to clamp down on his words. Pyrrha shook her head in turn, squeezing his thigh underneath the table, while glaring a little at Arturia, now very certain what was going on with her.

Tia too reached over to Harry, pulling him away a little from Pyrrha much to her chagrin and Arturia’s into a sideways hug, leaning her head against Harry’s. “You’re still Harry,” Tia said simply. “Twin or no, that doesn’t change.”

Slowly Harry raised his hands, and put his arm around Tia, hugging her tightly to him, kissing her forehead gently. “Yeah, okay. This is, this is a major revelation. And not a pleasant one. And I still want to know why you waited so damn long...”

“I have to admit, both your mother and I, for a time we just didn’t care. You fit in so well, you and Tia were nearly inseparable from the second you saw one another. Indeed, the first smile she ever had was for you, when I held you out your mother outside the hospital, little Tia raised her arms and smiled at you. Arturia and the others all doted on you and well we were afraid for a time that telling you would drive a wedge between you, and then when that became obvious it wasn’t going to happen, we sort of... Forgot or, or didn’t really forget, but decided it didn’t matter.”

“I can understand that when we were younger. But when we hit puberty would have been a **great** time to tell us!” *Holy hells, would it ever! All that embarrassment, all that internal drama, how badly I had to overextend my self-control, the embarrassing moments. If I had been able to tell Tia that we weren’t really related, then... then what? Do I really think that Tia would’ve cared? Arturia maybe, she is older and more mature about that kind of thing, but Tia? No chance.* Harry internally corrected himself, almost snickering aloud at the very idea that Tia would’ve cared one way or the other. *Hell, if I had... best not to think about it.*

“Yes well, there we would have, if we had spotted any issues going on, but you always seemed so happy to sleep with your sister, and we didn’t notice any untoward reactions or anything going on so we put it off again, and then it sort of slipped our minds.” *That, and we were worried about a bloodbath between Arturia and Tia, but I don’t think I need to mention*

that. Not given what happened earlier between Pyrrha and Arturia, and the looks Arturia and Pyrrha are exchanging right now.

Harry became aware of the looks Arturia and Pyrrha were sharing a long as well, and quickly extends one arm to take Pyrrha's hand in his, squeezing it gently while sending a gently sardonic smile over at Arturia completely disarming his older sister. With that done, Harry gently turned back to his father, his eyes hardening. "I can't say that I am happy to hear about it now. But why do I get the impression that you would still be putting it off for a while?"

"Because they would have," Arturia announced with a shake of her head and a glare at her father. "Indeed, they were waiting for you and Tia to come home for break at the earliest to tell you. While Father and Mother both said that it simply slipped their minds, I think it is a bit of cowardice on her parents' parts. I cannot blame them for it, but I do not like it. Many things would've been simpler, more certain and..." Arturia blushed, looking away from all of them then back to Harry, her Golden eyes almost shimmering, and her face shifting from its normal regal sardonic look to a more vulnerable one. "And perhaps better and more pleasant as well. Especially for one such as I."

Pyrrha growled low in her throat, her shackles rising. *I fucking knew it!* So incensed was she that Pyrrha was able to curse in her head without even noticing.

To one side of this drama, Tia had also been utterly shocked by the revelation of Harry's origins. She had quickly stepped up to help Harry, but internally, Tia was dealing with a lot of turmoil. Of course, she didn't show this on the surface, and instead silently began to work her way through the turmoil inside her head even as she showed Harry her support. And as she did, many of these strange emotions and feelings Tia had been having since she first saw Harry and Pyrrha together that morning after their date were no longer so hard to understand. *I, I was jealous. I was jealous of Pyrrha being with my... with Harry in a way I wasn't. That is... Both petty I think... and yet understandable. Harry is my... I have called him my other half in my head many times, but that can mean much more than I thought. I love Harry, I have always loved Harry, but knowing now that we are not close family... Does that love **change**? It does not diminish, but can it change type?*

As Arturia began to speak to Harry, Tia thought about that. She thought about doing the things she had seen Harry and Pyrrha do. Kisses on the cheek and forehead were cast aside, Harry already did those things with her and vice versa, and Tia enjoyed them. But what about kissing on the mouth, or Harry hugging her in that special, close way he did with Pyrrha? Feeling him hug Tia when both of them were naked or something similar? Tia thought about that, and thought about the look in Harry's eyes when he sometimes looked at Pyrrha, merged with the look he gave Tia normally.

Tia found those images good. **Very** good. Yes, Tia decided. *I rather would like to kiss Harry like that. I rather would like him to hug me like that. I want to be with Harry as Pyrrha is.*

Someone else might have noticed why that was a bad idea. Someone else might have known that socially speaking a man who dated two women at once were called two-timers, and it wasn't a good thing. That the idea of sharing Harry between them would be entirely impossible. Perhaps they would even have known that love between a man and a woman was supposed to be one to one, or going from being twins to being lovers would be highly unusual.

Tia was not that sort of person. When it came to social cues, social mores, and caring about what other people thought, she marked the box 'N/A'. The idea that Pyrrha would be annoyed did occur to Tia a little, but she decided that they could deal with that later. Right now, there was another question that needed to be answered. *Does Harry feel the same way towards me? If he is attracted to me, then the love we feel for one another can change.*

Thinking about it, Tia remembered several times where they had been sparring when Harry looked away, or when he couldn't look away. When Harry was forced to remember Tia was a woman at some random moment, like when she first tried on her Huntress outfit, or when she forced him to bathe with her. When his expression shifted in a way that gave Tia thrilling chills up and down her spine, a feeling Tia now had a word for: arousal. Both in terms of what those looks made her feel and what they implied with Harry.

So Tia felt that the answer was yes, Harry was attracted to her. But she wanted to make certain.

While Pyrrha began to growl deep in her throat at what Arturia was saying, Harry was staring at his older sister, confusion, shock and a lot of other emotions going through him. That confusion did not diminish when he felt Tia removing her arm from around his shoulders. Instead, she reached up and gently touched his cheek, turning his head towards her. "Tia?"

Instead of answering, Tia reached up and pulled down her scarf, allowing the others to see her mouth as it curled into a smile. It was a small, almost shy smile as she looked at Harry, the hand she had touched his cheek with moving up to run through his hair, her aquamarine eyes locking on his emerald ones, nearly swimming with emotion.?

Harry couldn't help it. It been able to read Tia like an open book for most of their lives, and now, now he could see the sudden understanding and hope there, the realization of what they could become, and above all, the love. Not just the love of a brother for a sister, but the kind a woman fell for a man. As he saw that look, Harry found his eyes going down to her lips, which Tia slowly licked a bit, wetting them and when he looked up, saw that those eyes had begun to show even more emotion, a joy, like a fire stoked by his interest.

Okay, so I wasn't the only one who was fighting with attraction all these years. Yet even with that revelation, it was the realization of those emotions and Tia's eyes, and the soft tender look and Arturia's that woke Harry up to the reality of what was going on here. But it isn't just physical attraction, is it?

He then began to laugh quietly, almost self-deprecatingly, and Tia's smile widened,

knowing that her Harry, (a phrase that in her mind sent a thrill through her body, completely overpowering the previous phrase of 'her twin') had understood what she was doing, what she was feeling now. But then he shook his head, and slowly turned back to the other people are on the table, his chuckle drying out as he became serious once more.

Guld and Arturia had watched this, Arturia with something like a resigned acceptance and even a hint of amusement in the curling of her mouth. "You and Tia have always been able to communicate so eloquently, Harry."

Her father on the other hand had watched this with growing concern, now looking between all three of the Huntresses as if they had transformed into so many lionesses, and he was present for what would be a feeding frenzy that would quickly turn into a battle royale. *Oh God, this is going to be even worse than we feared! Tia doesn't give a damn about Harry going out with Pyrrha, and Arturia is more than prepared to use force to oust her. And Pyrrha certainly doesn't look as if she's willing to go quietly... is, is the cutlery in the kitchen humming?*

In point of fact, the cutlery in the kitchen was humming, slowly shifting and being pulled up into the air from where it resided, slowly shifting to point toward the two female Arcs. Pyrrha had reached out subconsciously with her powers and was now ready to throw everything close to weapon-shaped at both put Arturia and Tia. Now she grabbed Harry's arm, and pulled him away from Tia, causing him to turn to her.

Seeing the glare on his girlfriend's face, Harry gulped, any thoughts of speaking up dying unsaid. *Tread lightly Harry old boy, tread very lightly...*

"I'm sorry," Pyrrha said in the most cold, angry tone of that Harry had ever heard from her, giving the words she spoke the lie they were. "But I get the impression that this conversation has now turned from speaking of Harry's origins to speaking about emotions and possible emotional connections you two may feel towards him. And in this realm, I have a say as well! In point of fact, since Harry is dating me, I have a greater say than either of you."

"Agreed," Harry said hastily, much to the chagrin of Arturia, while Tia just nodded, as if that was obvious. While that reaction calmed Pyrrha down, Arturia stared at her for a moment, her brows furrowing in confusion, even as she tried to fight back the instinctual anger and possessiveness that had come over her at Pyrrha's simple words. Coupled with the way that she had flung one of Harry's arms over her shoulders and was now snuggling into his side, it all shouted 'mine' to the older girl, which she was not pleased to see.

But Tia, who Arturia had honestly been prepared to also fight for Harry, had agreed with it, causing Arturia quite a bit of confusion. And when after a few seconds she opened her mouth to say anything, her stomach decided to voice its own opinion. It growled, low and hungry, and Arturia blushed faintly, placing her arms over her stomach and looking away from everyone.

Harry and Guld were very happy to interrupt things, and Harry quickly hopped to his

feet. From his feet, he looked at the three girls, then at his father. But if he had hoped for any help from the older man, all he got in return was a shrug. That was the universal man-sign for you are on your own, and Harry was very displeased to see it. *Dammit, throw me in the deep end why don't you!*

But Harry knew that this was a problem that he and the three young women who had a claim on his mind and heart needed to sit down and talk about. And frankly, Guld didn't have anything to add to that conversation. Plus, Harry had an easy out for getting rid of him. "Just for that old man, no dessert for you. Why don't you call up the family, so we can get this all over with? I'm certain you can figure out how to connect your scroll to the TV. Meanwhile, Arturia, if you would mind helping me in the kitchen?"

Of all the three girls, Arturia was the one who was best at cooking, so despite her being a guest, this made sense. Pyrrha could chop things, and Tia stir, but Arturia actually had a very good sense of taste and had perforce been cooking for herself ever since she had begun to travel the world as a Huntress. Take out and fast food could only take you so far after all, especially if you had to keep in Huntress level shape. Even Arturia's metabolism wasn't that good.

"What are we making?" Arturia agreed readily, still rubbing her stomach with one hand as she stood up to follow Harry into the kitchen.

Pyrrha stared after Arturia, before switching her jade gaze onto Tia. The smile that he had been wearing ever since she removed her scarf was still there, and she had made no move to pull her scarf back up either. She now reached out and patted Pyrrha on the shoulder, as if to calm her down. The motion only partially worked, but Pyrrha sighed and reined in her anger, possessiveness and jealousy. *Harry is not an item I can control; he is not my possession. This, this emotional quagmire is something that we will all need to work our way through. Although I am very annoyed that Harry hasn't immediately shut them down, I can... unfortunately see why he hasn't. Blast it. Couldn't he be just a little less of a good, gentle man, and shut them down hard? For me?* Pyrrha snorted at that, some more of her anger fading, and she took a moment to go to the bathroom and have a very quick shower, changing into her nightwear before coming back down.

By the time she was back, Hazel, Rouge and the rest of the Arc clan had been gathered in the sitting room in the Arc home. This included both uncles who were looking somewhat sheepish, having known of course about the secret of Harry's origins, but having never said anything, nor having even pushed his parents into the same thing. Indeed, they had done so for their own reasons, which was why both of them were sporting light bruises on their heads from Hazel currently.

This drew Tia's eyes quickly, even before the rest of the clan had finished greeting the group in Beacon, and she asked bluntly, "Why are you two bruised?"

“Never you mind dear,” Hazel nearly ordered, glaring to the side and both of her brothers-in-law. “That’s just proper punishment for acting in a way they shouldn’t have.”

Of course, this didn’t have any real impact on Paul. The self-avowed eternal bachelor simply grinned cheekily at the Arc matriarch, before he looked back through the scrolls camera currently being used to connect the two separate group of Arcs. “So, any blood spilt yet? My money is on Arturia if it comes to a straight up fight. That girls the most stubborn of all of you, and I think the most tactically minded, even in this arena judging from some of the books I’ve seen her purchase over the years.”

From where she was already filleting one of the fish that Harry had bought, Arturia flushed hotly at that, while Tia was simply confused.

Magenta cut in at that point, although in the background Violet had grabbed her uncle and pulled him into a noogie, which he only mock threatened to try and break out of. “Uncle Paul and Samson actually made bets on which sister would try to ‘claim’ Harry when his real origins came out.” She paused then, her affronted tone segueing into a worried one as she looked at Harry, who was now in the kitchen almost out of sight of the pickup from the TV. “Harry? It, this, it doesn’t, it doesn’t...”

“It doesn’t change how I feel toward any of you,” Harry quickly answered, leaving the kitchen, and gesturing the now-returned Pyrrha to help Arturia chop things. This was a sign of trust in both girls, a sign that he assumed the two of them would be able to control whatever jealousy they were feeling towards one another in order to get along in the kitchen.

And as Harry spoke to his family, reassuring Magenta, Rouge and Rose that he still saw them as his little sisters, and knew that he was still an Arc, and that would never change, Harry’s hopes in this were well-founded. The two most combative of the trio of young women stared at one another for a moment, and then Arturia whispered out a set of instructions, and the two of them got to work on different parts of the meal Harry wanted, prepping all of the ingredients. “Harry has a much better sense of taste then myself, but he did inform me of what he wanted with the sauces at the very least. He wants to create a caper ketchup and some fresh tartar sauce.”

“I understand tartar sauce, what is a caper ketchup?” Pyrrha asked quizzically, her brows furrowed.

“A kind of sauce I presume made with capers in the same manner fresh ketchup is. That’s about all I can tell you. Obviously, whatever Harry makes it will be delicious.” Arturia said with all the firmness of someone declaring that the sky was blue or the sun would rise tomorrow.

Arturia nodded, and for a moment, the two of them were united in solidarity on the opinion that Harry’s cooking was among the best either of them had ever tasted.

Meanwhile in the background, Harry had remonstrated with his mother and his uncles and father about keeping his origins a secret for so long. “It wasn’t a good idea, in fact, I’d go so far as to say it was an act of cowardice. Emotional cowardice to be sure, but still. You should have told us before we hit puberty.”

“We agree Harry, but, well, it was awfully hard for us to figure out a way to sit down and tell you about it,” Hazel admitted. “We were so concerned about your reaction, about everyone else’s reaction, we let our fears get in the way of what should have been common sense. You are still our son whatever else, that is the most important thing.”

Most important between us you mean, Harry reflected, shaking his head as he deliberately did not look at Tia or Arturia. “I understand that. And I am proud to be an Arc. I’m proud to have lived with this family, to be related to all of you. I just would’ve liked to know where I stood before getting it dumped on me like this.”

*If I had known about this, if Tia and I, or Arturia and I, had formed some kind of relationship before I met Pyrrha, would anything have changed there? Yes. I wouldn’t have been so attracted to her if I already had someone I was in a relationship with. And now? Now this is going to cause me issues. But my overall goals remain the same, my overall plans remain the same. And whatever happens between the four of us, it is going to be decided **by** the four of us. We don’t need the peanut gallery around for that.*

“Regardless, I think there is some punishment in order here,” Harry mused, then looked at the twins. “Rouge, do you still have that large book of pranks you were making? I think our parents and indeed our uncles here have all suddenly volunteered to be guinea pigs.”

Tia laughed, a bright clarion call of sound while Pyrrha snorted, having had a conversation with Rouge at one point while Harry had to go to the bathroom after she called about pranks. Rouge was extremely outgoing, and greatly enjoyed pranking other people and completely idolized Pyrrha.

Beside her, working with a mortar and pestle, Arturia murmured, “Cry havoc, and let loose the pranks of war,” causing Pyrrha’s snort to turn into a giggle. Which was hastily replaced by a frown as she stared at her rival.

As Hazel and Guld continued to apologize and his uncles turned white, Arturia glanced over at Pyrrha, staring at her, grabbing the bull by the horns. “I’m sorry this has happened. But I will not say I am sorry for feeling the way I do towards Harry. I love him, have loved him my entire life as a brother, but once we hit puberty, that shifted. I fought it first subconsciously. I didn’t even realize what I was doing until a friend here in Beacon pointed out to me how I was always comparing my boyfriends to Harry. Then I was consciously shoving aside, knowing it could never be. But now? Now that that door has been opened to me? I will go through it, and I will not give Harry up. Not unless Harry does not feel that way towards me.” *And judging by how he looks at me and Tia, I don’t think that’s going to happen.*

"I understand that. But I am with Harry now, I have a relationship with him now. One both of us have been greatly enjoying. I am not going to give up my place by his side. Both because of that, and because I gave him my Shield Oath!" Pyrrha exclaimed, trying to keep her voice down. "I was attracted to him well before I learned about all of his goals and dreams for the future, how much he was involved in the changes to your hometown, to finding those mines of yours and planning what could be made from that foundation. When I heard all of that, I could not help but give him my oath. To fight against the Grimm in such a way, to force humanity to grow again? That is the greatest goal a Huntress or Hunter could ever have."

Arturia had of course heard of the Shield Oath before, and indeed far more in depth than Harry had, given how much more time she had spent in Mistral. She was shocked that Pyrrha had given Harry that Oath but could see the younger girl's point. And she truly was sorry that Pyrrha was caught up in all of this. But that didn't change anything, really. "I will not try to push you entirely out of Harry's life, but can you honestly say that you love him? I can."

"I can safely say we are moving in that direction!" Pyrrha growled out. "And you are forgetting that Harry might not feel that way towards you. There is a vast difference between loving someone as a brother and loving someone as a boyfriend. That kind of leap cannot be made so quickly."

Arturia's nose wrinkled up in a way that Pyrrha had seen Tia do a time or two. On Arturia it wasn't as cute as on Tia, but it was devastatingly attractive looking for some reason that Pyrrha decided not to look at too closely. "I don't think that boyfriend is the right term. It seems too trite. Significant other perhaps? It certainly has the right tone to it. And you are correct, the final decision will be Harry's." She said this in such a way that she knew where Harry's choices would go, but the look on her face showed a little more inner turmoil than that.

After all, Pyrrha was not the only adversary to Harry's heart. And while Arturia knew Pyrrha had occasionally shown signs of realizing that Arturia was a woman, but that was a far cry from wanting to act on it.

Having left behind the family talk, the 'other adversary' had been walking up behind the women as they worked in the kitchen, and now interjected herself into the conversation. "I love him too, Arturia, Pyrrha. And I'm not going to try to take Harry away from you, Pyrrha. Or even demand you two break up. I just want to have what you have."

While Pyrrha puzzled that out, Arturia looked over at Tia, sadness flashing through her. "Does that mean you and I are in competition as well, sister dear? I will not give up, even to you."

"I don't want to compete. I think that's stupid," Tia said bluntly, and Pyrrha was somewhat amazed. Tia was now speaking so clearly, so concisely and she had yet to pull up her scarf. That more than anything else told Pyrrha that Tia was serious, even as she held up her scroll, and began to play a little song on it. "There is another solution."

The song was the Socialist March, an anthem for a short-lived movement that had tried to take control in Mantle several hundred years before the Colors War. Some of its thinking about how to combat Grimm via controlling people had survived to help cause the Colors War, but the movement hadn't survived the reality of Remnant for very long.

Why Tia was playing it was something that went above Pyrrha and Arturia's head for a few seconds, before Arturia got it. "Wait! You mean we can all..." She lowered her voice, looking over to where Harry was finishing up with the family back in their hometown.

Given the time zone difference, it was quite late there, and Hazel refused to let even Magenta stay up for very long this point. The others might well have stayed on, but everything important had been said by this point. Harry was still an Arc; he was still going to treat the rest of his family like family. That was all, save Hazel, cared about. She was concerned about the quartet, but really had no idea how to solve that tangled knot, and just hoped that everyone would come out of it with their hearts relatively intact.

Certain now that even Guld wasn't able to overhear them, Arturia hissed out, "Do you mean to say we should... Create a community farm so to speak? Or a group ownership?"

Tia's lips crinkled and she shook her head, while Pyrrha drawled out, "Since Harry is an individual rather than an object, that doesn't quite make much sense to me. What exactly are you saying, Tia?"

"Sharing is caring," Tia simplified her thoughts quickly, then turned away as Pyrrha gaped at her.

Still with jade eyes wide, Pyrrha looked at Arturia. "She, she cannot... no... she isn't serious, is she?"

Arturia, the proud, haughty dark queen, was staring between Tia and Harry, her face showing far more shock than Pyrrha had ever seen her before. But as Pyrrha continued to look at her, that shock segued into a thoughtful look, with Arturia tapping a finger against her lips then looking back at Pyrrha. "It would solve all our problems..." *I wouldn't have to fight Tia in any way, and be with Harry. Win-win, even if I have to put up with Pyrrha... which, setting my jealousy aside, isn't that horrible a thing.*

"It would stop us from fighting openly perhaps, but that is not the same thing as solving all our problems!" Pyrrha growled out.

Arturia had to concede the point. After all, a slice of apple, while still being part of the pie, rather than nothing, was not as good as eating the entire thing, as Pyrrha was now.

Realizing her mind was now coming up with very strange analogies, Arturia said nothing, simply smiling at Harry as he joined the two of them in the kitchen while Tia moved over to engage their father in a discussion.

At Harry's gesture, Pyrrha joined them, making room in the kitchen and leaving Arturia and Harry to cook by themselves in the kitchen. The two of them moved around one another seamlessly, having cooked alongside one another before. And when it came time to taste test a few of the bits of the meal, Arturia was easily on hand, smiling at Harry, in a way that set his pulse to racing.

It really should bother me more than it does. That this announcement, that I really am not their brother has... created so much turmoil, that I now can't deny what I've been feeling towards Arturia and Tia. But I've been fighting that attraction for so long, it, it is actually something of a relief to know that I really wasn't being such an incestuous asshole. And that the two of them seem to feel the same way to me is amazing in a way, and uplifting even more. But I'm dating Pyrrha! And I have no intention of setting her aside for either of them.

Harry frowned as he cooked for once, trying to think of the best way to tell his sisters that these particular ships had sailed. He really, really did not want to hurt their feelings, but there was no way he was going to let Arturia or Tia try to muscle Pyrrha out of the relationship. With her oath to him, that would only cause very bad feelings down the road, and he wasn't going to do it.

Yet even so, the companionable silence as he moved around Arturia, the gentle touches of hip against hip, or the brush of her hand on his was extremely pleasant. He couldn't deny it, but he kept his relationship with Pyrrha uppermost in his mind as they continued to cook, and finally, once he had the extremely light batter on the fish prepared well enough to his satisfaction, sent Arturia out to join the others, while Tia came in with Pyrrha to grab the utensils and everything to set the table as he finished frying the fish.

Soon, he was carrying several plates to the table, smiling at the others even his father, who he was still quite annoyed with despite his promises that this changed nothing earlier. Because to be frank, when it came to Tia and Arturia, it changed **everything**. "So, knowing that fish is Arturia's favorite meal, I have decided to experiment with one of the varieties they have here in Vale that we can't get in our hometown. So here we have Pan-fried bream, cockles, sandfire greens, confied chips, tartar sauce, and caper ketchup."

The smell hit them all as he removed the top off the large server and Arturia's stomach wasn't the only one that rumbled hungrily. Hearing that, Harry smiled widely, setting aside his concerns about the conversation to come for now to just enjoy having two more members of his family there with him. Two months apart wasn't all that long in the great scheme of things but had seemed longer.

The conversation around the table was at first dominated by praise for the cooking, and Pyrrha exclaimed several times that caper ketchup was amazing, asking why she had never heard of it before. Eventually, it segued into training, with Guld giving Tia, Harry and Pyrrha tips, with Arturia chiming in occasionally. Arturia then explained about the battle at the mines in greater detail than she had previously to Harry in their first discussion about that, as well as

the training the militia men were doing continually.

The fact that Pyrrha knew everything going on with their hometown brought a nod of approval from Arturia, despite the internal acknowledgment that the two of them had yet to figure out exactly what was going to happen here. Harry obviously had the last to say in everything, but Arturia had to admit that Tia's proposal was intriguing.

Eventually however the meal was done, and Harry looked over at Pyrrha who was talking quietly to Arturia now, describing something with her sword in apparently, while Arturia was nodding, then seeming to explain something with her fingers as if they were feet. Tia was finishing off the last of her own meal, eating slower than the others as normal, and then he looked over at his father. "I think, that Arturia, Tia, Pyrrha and I need to, to discuss the ramifications of your little revelation that. You have a place to stay in Vale?"

"Arturia and I got rooms at a hotel yeah. You sure you don't want me here is referee?" Guld asked. *It's like a train wreck, it's horrible, but I don't want to look away. And I am still very concerned about what is going to happen here. Please, Brothers, let my children make a choice that allows them all to remain family.*

"No. I don't think this is a conversation that we need an onlooker for. And you're still in the doghouse Dad, so you're not getting any dessert," Harry answered primly.

Guld sighed, then stood up, looking down at Harry then over at his daughters. "I'm proud of you. I'm proud of the man you're becoming, of what you have already done and what you are pushing towards in the future. I'm proud to call you my son, Hadrian Arc. I'm proud of all three of you, each in your own way. Whatever happens, both in the future and between the four of you now, that won't change. I just ask that all of you remember that everyone else here has feelings and emotions. Don't say anything designed to be hurtful, look at this issue calmly and rationally, and with empathy towards your fellow women as well. Understood?"

Harry smiled as he thanked Guld for the words, while Arturia and Tia simply smiled, both of them nodding then looking at one another. Pyrrha left out for a moment, caught that look, and then was brought into it by Tia looking over at her, holding up her scroll suggestively. Pyrrha balked a little, but knew deep down that it might well be the best solution. Any attempt she made to keep Arturia away from Harry was doomed to fail. She had seen Harry and Tia together for several months now, and knew Harry would never push them away with whatever happened. It would always be a place in his life for both of them, a very large place. Pyrrha had learned to adapt to that over the past two months, and Tia had learned to never push into Pyrrha and Harry's time together either. *If Arturia is willing to do the same... I won't like it. I think it is a little... Not immoral so much as bizarre frankly, I dislike the fact that it would cut down on time between Harry and I even more. But if the difference is that or looking like the bad guy for not being willing to compromise? I can only hope that Harry really has pushed past his attraction to the two of them. Or else whatever he says it isn't going to change what's going to happen.*

Guld left, with Tia going with them in order to go and grab a change of sleepwear, deciding she would be staying with her brother that night. Meanwhile, Harry pulled out dessert, and began to put the final touches to it. He'd prepared and frozen it the night before, and Pyrrha tried not to salivate as she looked at it out of the corner of her eye from where she was doing the dishes while Arturia cleared the table.

When Tia came back she and Arturia disappeared up the stairs for a moment, leaving Pyrrha and Harry alone for the first time since his father had dropped the bomb on him.

Pyrrha instantly set down the plate she was cleaning and moved behind him, hugging him tightly. Harry turned, not saying anything as he put his arms around Pyrrha in turn, leaning down to kiss her. That kiss quickly turned ardent as Harry tried to wordlessly show his support for Pyrrha, the twosome only breaking off as they heard a door open above them and Arturia quietly talking to Tia about something.

Pulling back, Pyrrha shook her head slowly. "What are you going to do?"

"I, I'm going to tell the truth. And I'm going to hopefully try to clear up this mess. I'm with you Pyrrha, I'm not going to break up with you or whatever you might be worried about. My sis... Arturia and Tia will just have to understand that as much as I love them, and as bad as it is to say, attracted to them, that I'm not going to end our relationship for either one of them," Harry stated, sounding concerned before shaking his head and going on firmly. "And that I will not let any of you start fighting over me. I'm not an object, I love both of them too much and like you too much to let any of you hurt one another over me."

Hearing that, Pyrrha sighed faintly and very sadly. Knowing that Harry was willing to set aside his love for Arturia and Tia for her warmed her heart, but at the same time, knowing that he had been attracted to his 'sisters' before this hurt a bit. Knowing that if Harry had known they weren't related (or rather, not very closely related anyway, there was still the issue of Caliburn after all pointing to Harry having Arc blood) he would probably already have been going out with Arturia or Tia before they met hurt.

But there was nothing Harry could do about that. And hearing him speak like this? Well, it meant that perhaps Tia's thought about sharing being caring might be the best way forward.

Coming down the stairs, Arturia, who had asked and received a set of sleepwear from Tia – which was quite large on her in various irritating ways - quickly began to help Pyrrha with cleaning, while Tia moved into the sitting room and began to push chairs together, so they could sit closer together without the small tea table in the way. Soon, all of them were sitting down, their feet so closely knocked together whenever they moved, their shoulders rubbing as they shared the dessert that Harry had prepared.

Like Pyrrha, Arturia greatly enjoyed chocolate, whereas Harry and Tia preferred more fruity desserts. So Harry had prepared a chocolate gateau with thick cherry sauce, and cherry flavored spun sugar.

However, as he listened to the humming approval from all three girls, watched them lick their lips, and then the spoons, Harry gulped and fought desperately to keep little Harry from rising to attention. *Mistakes have been made*, he thought with a shiver. *I so did not need that on top of everything else messing up my thoughts at this point.*

Harry was about halfway through his desert when he began to speak softly. "I, this revelation really hits me hard. Not because I'm going to treat the rest of our family any differently, as I told them before. But because as Arturia began to point out before we started to cook dinner, I, I have been attracted to both you Arturia and you Tia on numerous occasions. I fought that feeling every time it came up. Like you, Arturia, I knew it was wrong to feel that way. But that didn't stop me from doing so in the first place. I would **never** have acted on it, and now? Now even with the revelation, I'm with Pyrrha."

Harry looked up, staring at both his sisters one after another. "I'm not going to set my relationship with Pyrrha aside to somehow choose one of you to date. I know our relationship's relatively new in comparison to my connections with you and Tia, Arturia, but that does not mean it is any less valid. The two of us actually had a discussion on this point a few days ago, and both of us are very pleased with the direction we're going in our relationship and hope to build it into something more stable and possibly more permanent going forward. I am not willing to set all of that aside to acknowledge these feelings between us, and in so doing make the other girls angry or sad. I just won't do that."

"I can give those emotions voice, Harry. I love you," Arturia answered simply her smile the most sunny, joyful expression that Harry had ever seen there bar when she was playing with the twins when they were babies. "I have loved you as a woman does a man for years, despite my best efforts to fight against that emotion. You are everything I look for in a man: you're funny, intelligent, driven, strong, caring. You're handsome and you can cook as well, both of which are major bonuses. As I told Pyrrha while we were prepping the ingredients before, I can no longer close the door on those feelings now that there is a way forward. And you know that Tia feels the same."

"I do." Tia set aside her desert, licking the last of the chocolate from her lips before leaning forward into Harry's personal space. She pressed her forward into his, ignoring Pyrrha's semi-heated glare from one side. The smile that then appeared on her face was both whimsical, and tender to the point where it nearly melted Harry's heart when combined with the look in her eyes. "I've been dealing with feelings of strange jealousy and longing ever since I saw you and Pyrrha together. And like Arturia, I can't shut the door on my feelings towards you. I don't want you and Pyrrha to break up, I think you are an incredibly good team together, an incredibly powerful partnership, and sometimes when I wasn't feeling so strange about it, seeing you together actually made me happy. Knowing you had found someone like Pyrrha. But that doesn't mean my feelings have gone away or will disappear. And I think you have the same feelings for both of us."

“But, but...” Harry began, looking away from Tia’s alluring eyes to Pyrrha. She smiled sadly at him, taking his hand and squeezing briefly. “But it doesn’t matter!” Harry said, pushing through the haze Tia’s act had put him in thanks to that little support. “I can’t... I won’t...”

“Then don’t.” Tia said simply, moving away from Harry slightly and looking over Pyrrha, reaching out and putting her own hand on where the two of them were holding hands. Seeing this, and realizing the analogy that Tia was going for, Arturia also leaned forward and placed her hand on Tia’s as Tia continued. “Don’t choose. Simply say.”

As if suddenly embarrassed by all the talking she had done today, Tia leaned her head forward, burrowing her chin and the bottom of her face into her scarf. She looked down almost demurely if such a word could be applied to her.

Harry gaped at her, then over at Arturia, then down at his hands realizing what they were trying to say. “What? That’s not, is that even but what about...”

“At this point, what society will say does not matter. At this point what our parents say does not matter. You know they will be happy for us regardless, especially considering how little blood has been shed. I will admit that this is not my, my first choice,” Arturia admitted. “But I also understand how unfair it would be to both you and Pyrrha to try and force my suit against your wishes, and how badly that could go for everyone involved. I am thus willing to, using a horrible metaphor, have a slice of the pie rather than be locked out of the kitchen entirely.”

Harry blinked, staring at Arturia then asked Tia, and finally over to Pyrrha.

Before he could speak, she answered his unspoken question, with a faint frown and a shake of her head and shoulders. “I am in much the same boat as Arturia. I know that you simply could not shut your sisters out, Harry. Am I pleased to share your romance type affections, no. But I’m not willing to try and force you to push them away. I’m not willing to become the bad guy in this scenario, I suppose.”

She smiled wanly. “And who knows, Tia has become one of my best friends after you Harry. I would do anything to stop her from being hurt, and you know she would be badly hurt by any attempt on your part to push her away, nor could either of you set aside your now changed love. Perhaps Arturia and I can build up that same relationship. To the point where we do not feel jealous of your time and are truly a group. It is possible. It will take a lot of work from all of us, and I am certain that there will still be moments of jealousy and arguing about dates and so forth. But I think that in the long term, this is a solution going forward.”

Harry’s eyebrows had risen with each sentence Pyrrha used, and by the time she finished they were almost disappearing under his wild mop of unkempt hair. Pyrrha idly noted that he had tried to comb it that morning, and wondered how long it had lasted before returning to its normal appearance. As she watched, he raised his free hand up to run it through his hair, looking at all three of them one after another. “The basic male portion of my

brain wants to jump on this chance. The rest of me is telling me this is a little too good to be true, and really does Pyrrha dirty.”

“It probably is, and... it does,” Arturia admitted, also looking over at Pyrrha, her golden eyes gleaming with gratitude. “As Pyrrha said, there will still be arguments and issues between us. But we are, at least at this point, willing to try and enter this relationship because we are all in love with you. As such, your time will be the deciding factor. You will be the one to call the shots I suppose. And do not care about society at the present moment. Do not care about our family. Simply look at us, tell us that this is something you can live with. Tell us what you feel towards Tia and I and Pyrrha. That will be enough.”

That made sense, but still Harry hesitated. He understood what Arturia was saying, but finally admitting to something he had suppressed for so long was really hard, as was the fact that they were asking a lot of Pyrrha. *Damn it, but Pyrrha's right, I can't push them away, and if I can't push Arturia and Tia away, could I just ignore the feelings I have for either of them, could they do the same? But Why isn't Pyrrha objecting to this more? Is it just because she doesn't want to fight about it, she doesn't want to be a bad guy?*”

“It isn't because of my oath, Harry. I, I genuinely think this could be the best thing going forward.” Pyrrha murmured, seeing his inner turmoil. “It warms my heart to know why you're hesitating, but while I am compromising more than the others, and am giving up more, too, one of us would have to in order to make everyone happy. So long as I continue to stand beside you and...” she smiled suddenly over at Arturia and Tia. “And continue to be with you first in every way applicable, I will agree to this.”

Arturia scowled at that, but said nothing while Harry still looked badly torn about this, staring around him awkwardly wondering if this was really happening or some weird fever dream.

Tia as was her wont decided to cut through the awkwardness with all the subtlety of Tiburon cutting through a Creeper. She leaned once more into Harry's personal space and didn't stop. Instead, she pressed her mouth against Harry's in a quick, but tender kiss. Harry gasped, but started to almost instantly kiss back, his eyes slowly closing as Tia's did, his arms going around her practically pulling her out of her chair and into his lap as she kissed him back, humming deep in her throat at this new sensation.

Watching this, Pyrrha was surprised that she didn't feel nearly as jealous as she had thought she would when going back and forth with Arturia. Seeing Harry and Tia together had more often caused her to smile rather than be annoyed with Tia taking up his time before this. Now watching them kiss, there was something so tender and loving about the way they held one another it warmed Pyrrha's heart. It was also one of the sexiest things she'd ever seen, right up there with a naked Harry coming out of the showers with just a towel around his waist, if in a very different way.

Eventually Tia came up for air, and smiled down at Harry, saying simply, "I've got my answer."

Harry nodded dumbly, and then as Tia got off of his lap, looked over at Pyrrha, making certain again that she was truly happy about this. She just nodded her eyes wide and staring, biting her lip, a blush on her face as she continued to watch as Harry turned to Arturia. Arturia stared at Tia and Harry, her eyes wide and face showing far more color than normal. But it wasn't anger, so much as shock and embarrassment which segued into the same semi-soft feelings that Pyrrha had been feeling. She was slightly jealous that it wasn't her Harry was kissing, and yet she could not deny the connection between her sister and Harry anymore than she could her own connection to Tia.

Her eyes widened as Harry leaned over, taking the initiative this time. She froze as Harry leaned into her personal space, pausing a centimeter away from her mouth, his breath whispering out on her lips. Then Arturia was lunging forward crossing the distance, a near-desperate hiss of "YES!" leaving her lips. The two of them kissed, their lips moving against one another, as Arturia fought back the urge to whimper in delight at finally, **finally** achieving something that only her darkest dreams had allowed her to even think of before the revelation about Harry's origins came out.

The kiss was slightly different than Tia's. Tia's kiss was almost experimental, having never kissed anyone before like this. Arturia was slightly more experienced, having had boyfriends before. She quickly began to control the kiss, and Harry let her, simply getting used to what she liked to do and enjoying the sensation of kissing Arturia, just as much as he had Tia a second ago or Pyrrha in the kitchen.

When they pulled back, he breathed out the words that both Tia and Arturia had been waiting for. "I love you. I love you both so much, this is like, like my darkest most sinful dreams realized, and a part of me still can't believe that this is really happening. But..." He sighed then pulling away from Arturia, and moving over to Pyrrha, lifting her up out of her chair for a second and then as she squeaked a bit in surprise, sat down before pulling her back down onto his lap, looking into her jade eyes earnestly. "But I have been attracted to you from the moment I saw you, Pyrrha. And I have loved being in a relationship with you. Like Tia said, I think you are the best partner I could have. And I'm not setting that aside."

Very firmly he reached up and pulled Pyrrha down, not that Pyrrha was protesting. Instead, she was smiling in victory before their lips met, and she quickly deepened the kiss, opening her mouth and letting her tongue quest for Harry's. It was a much shorter kiss than the other two, but far deeper because of this. And when they pulled away, there was a trail of saliva connecting their mouths for a moment before Harry licked it away. "I would not want to set that aside either Harry, and as I said before, if this is the best way forward for all of us to be happy, then let us take it. Let us take it and, and damn the consequences!"

Pyrrha blushed as Harry and Tia both laughed, while Arturia looked a little confused

until Harry explained how rarely it was that Pyrrha ever cursed. Whereupon the Dark Queen said, “Yes, well, this is a very appropriate moment for it.”

Harry made a gesture with both of his hands as they fell away from Pyrrha and Arturia and Tia moved to his sides, leaning in. Pyrrha did the same, resting her head on top of Harry’s, one hand going through his hair as the other gently reached out for Arturia’s short, cropped hair. Arturia glanced at the hand, but quickly nodded her ascent, while Tia did her best to hug both Pyrrha and Harry.

The four of them sat there in silence for a time, simply snuggling, wondering how this was going to go. Then the door to the town home opened, and Ren and Nora came in. Both of them stopped, staring before Nora began to vibrate excitedly in place, shouting, “cuddle pile!” and charged forward.

Behind her, Ren sighed, but followed his friend forward, looking at Harry quizzically. “Why do I think there is more than a simple cuddle pile going on here?”

Harry sighed and began to explain as Arturia was introduced to Nora wondering internally how all of this was going to work out in the long run, and what the future held for them all in general.

End Chapter

Okay, so this chapter helped to begin the multi-relationship part of the fic. This is going to be quite different than most of my other fics, since the girls are not interested in one another. Pyrrha might become interested in Arturia or Tia, but the sisters are not interested in one another at all, only Harry. Similarly, they all have a lot of other demands on their time, Arturia won’t be allowed to live with them, and their romance-time is going to be severely limited. So very unlike most of my other stories, there will be flareups, jealousy and issues between them, which will only slowly subside over time. I might even have Nora and Ren try to push Arturia and Tia away in favor of Pyrrha. Still debating that point. Regardless, it’s not going to be smooth sailing, but in the end it will be worth it.

This chapter also marks the end of the training montage scenes. With this I’ve shown the basis for much of the later skills and abilities Harry and Pyrrha will show, along with their tactics and hinted at the various weapons and changes there. This means I can stop showing practically anything to do with classes! Combined with the multi-relationship part starting, I can start to really push time along and the various plots, both my own and canon! WOooo!

