

Hey all, this is the next installment of King of Champions. This time however, we are doing something different. I won't spoil that for now, though... obviously the very nature of this post has already done so. Still, I urge you to read the chapter before making your decision LOL.

This has been edited by HP-DG-AP-PN-RG-NR. He got it back to me this past week, but I wanted to push and finish ATP.

## **Chapter 2: Tournaments, Training, and Failures to Communicate**

Both of Chian's saviors were still asleep as the battle within the town ended. Several Hunters had belatedly arrived to help the Arc clan's response and now stood watch over the town or worked their way through the surrounding area, culling any Grimm they found.

Not to say this was a prepared response. This far out from Mistral proper, reaction teams were a catch-as-catch-can affair. With the rest of her family guarding the town, the most fearsome of the actively hunting Hunters was a blindingly angry Arturia. She arrived with a team of Hunters, terrifying the quartet too much for them to object to the senior from Beacon and well-known tournament champion joining them.

The Ice Queen was on a righteous tear, knowing she had been fighting in the Tournament when her brother had been in such danger. If there was a Grimm bug left alive within several square miles of Chian when she was through, it would be a very lucky bug indeed.

Regardless, within a few hours of this second wave of aid, the town was once more completely safe and started to take a tally of itself. And with the all-clear given, reporters and other vultures began to arrive. By the time that media circus truly started, however, Harry and Pyrrha had been reclaimed by their parents.

After that, their treatment differed greatly.

For his part, Harry stayed unconscious for quite some time. Thanks to how much he'd pushed his magic after having just gained access to it, Harry had exhausted himself and, more importantly, strained his mind and Aura (if there was a difference between Harry's Aura and magic, it was as yet unknown) to an unnatural level.

He slept for the next three days straight, and when he woke up for the first time, with Tia watching over him, the first thing he did was lay his hand on hers and use the phrases that Pyrrha had used with him to create an entirely a new unlocking ritual. *I know that being willing to sacrifice yourself has always been the bedrock of what Tia thinks makes a good hunter, as well as a desire to defend others. Well, that, and a willingness to tear Grimm into tiny pieces. We've felt her Aura respond to those words. Now, if we take that and use some of the format Pyrrha did with me...*

“For it is in sacrifice that we shield those weaker than ourselves. Unafraid of death, we become the defenders of humanity. With my arms beside you, rise to champion the world's hope, a paragon of courage and ferocity.”

A surge of Aura flashed out of him into Tia. As per usual when someone tried to unlock her Aura, Tia felt an answering upswell within her. But instead of seemingly crashing into two sides of an inner wall and subsiding, Tia felt something different this time, a kind of resonance deep within her. Harry's Aura interacted with Tia's, and suddenly energy erupted through her as Tia Arc found her Aura unlocked at last.

Unlocking his twin's Aura brought an equal surge of intense tiredness, and even before Tia began to look down at herself in shock, feeling Aura thrumming through her body for the first time, Harry's eyes had already slid closed. “Heh, well, that worked, at least...”

With the important bit out of the way, Harry allowed his thoughts to roam freely even as he succumbed to sleep once more. His last thought was on the fight and was a simple, extremely annoying fact. *Shit, I can't believe I forgot to ask for Pyrrha's scroll number!* Then he was back asleep, much to the chagrin of Tia, Arturia, and the rest of the gathered family.

Behind Tia, Hazel had turned from leaving the room once more when she had heard her son's voice. But she had only made it halfway back to his bed before Harry had finished speaking and now looked down at his once-more unconscious form, growling as she slowly clenched her hands. “OOOOH!!! Oooh, that, that boy! When he wakes up again, he is in for such a hiding!”

“You don't do hidings,” Tia answered, thoughtfully looking down at her still-glowing arm before smashing a fist at full strength into the room's outer wall. The outer wall of the treehouse didn't dent or anything. This was a room built by a family who routinely produced Hunters. But the quiet, unemotive girl should have broken her wrist at best, given how much strength she had put into that punch.

But there was nothing but a faint bit of pain in her arm as her fist rebounded, and Tia's small smile appeared as she looked over at the rest of the family. “Mmm.”

“Ok, how did Harry know that would work?” Magenta muttered, staring at her older sibling. She had come in with Tia, as it was their job to watch Harry at this time of day, but had been choosing a few books to read from the bookshelf when Harry had woken up. But she well knew about how much trouble Harry and Tia had been having when it came to unlocking their Aura.

“He probably didn't. But given the ‘mystery redhead's’ ability to unlock Harry's Aura, he probably thought it was worth trying,” Hazel groaned.

Being the first on the scene, Hazel and Violet had questioned the locals about the battle, although both were more interested in what had happened to Harry than the overall fight.

Taking it all together the Arcs had pieced together that not only had this strange girl – who had been going around with Harry incognito - had somehow unlocked Harry's Aura. Then in the course of the battle for the town, Harry had gone from having no Aura, and perforce no Semblance, to having an immensely powerful one. They tentatively labeled it Earth Shaper, as that seemed to fit the description of what Harry had been able to do.

As for the girl in question, beyond the fact Harry had used most of the hair dye left in the RV on her, the family quickly got a surprising name for her, Pyrrha Nikos. Much like Harry most Arcs didn't bother watching the Tournament when Arturia wasn't fighting, so Tia and Violet had not recognized Pyrrha without her armor and trademark crimson hair. But the locals had, and news of her involvement in the battle was already spreading like wildfire.

But as for the girl herself, unfortunately for Hazel, who very much wanted to thank the young woman who had helped keep Harry alive, she had been picked up within minutes of the battle ending by her parents. Since then, any attempts to contact her publicly known number had gone to a generic answering service.

But more important was the mystery of how Harry accessed his Semblance so quickly. No one on either side of Guld and Hazel's family had ever simply **known** their Semblance like that upon having their Aura unlocked, nor did they know of anyone who had.

Paul and Guld had even gone through what scant records the Arcs had, a task that had taken up the first two days of Harry's convalescence. While they had found several earth manipulation type Semblances, there was no record of someone just knowing their Semblance like that. The parents were left wondering if perhaps this was a sign of Harry's... original heritage. But even acknowledging that fact didn't help them find any records of anything similar. There were a few Earth control Semblances in the history books, but none of the users looked anything like Harry.

The family now had three mysteries to wrestle with while Arturia let out her wrath and Harry slept. How had Nikos been able to unlock Harry's Aura when they could not? How had he known his Semblance? And most recently, how had Harry been able to do the same to Tia so easily? They had known the key was the words, but to have some random Huntress in training do it when their entire family had no luck galled both parents as much as it strained their disbelief.

"Esp, \*hiccup\*, espically, s, since Tia an' 'arry ain't biolog, biol, **real** twins," Hazel slurred, slamming down another beer five days after the battle in Chian. Harry had briefly woken up that day and been able to tell them a little more about the battle from his perspective. Still, even he didn't know how he knew how to use his powers. But Harry did say he felt his Semblance went beyond simple earth manipulation, which just made it all the weirder. "Ish, it's Sparkly Aura Bullshitttt..."

Seeing Hazel look up at the ceiling and continue to grumble, Guld quickly reached across and took the next beer on her side of the table, placing it on his own, replacing it with a glass of water. While he did so, he made a mental note to himself. *I have to remember to talk to Hazel about enforcing some more rules about the kids sleeping in one another's beds. I know that we haven't seen any sign of them seeing one another as more than twins, and I know they've always been close, but still, they are a young man and a woman. If we're not telling them Harry's adopted in order to avoid a bloodbath, we still need to try and make certain they start to keep a certain distance now.*

Setting that thought aside, and not for the first time, Guld watched with anticipation as his wife finished one beer. She made a few more slurring pronouncements of how she was proud of Harry, and yet so annoyed with the impossible nature of what he had done, before bringing the glass of water to her lips. When the taste and sensation of water hit her mouth, Hazel spluttered, slapped the glass down to the table and glared across at her husband, who simply smiled beatifically at her until her anger faded. "Darn it, you always get me with that!" she muttered.

"It's not my fault you're a horrible drunk," Guld teased.

"I'm not a horrible drunk. I'm a very good drunk, thank you very much," Hazel retorted, but she did push away the last few beers on her side of the table across to the far taller, heavier man. "Not all of us are built like giant shaved Ursa, you know."

Guld chuckled and looked down at himself with an almost Zen-like expression of amusement and acceptance. But Hazel was serious and pressed him, speaking each word slowly, so they came out without any slur. Almost. "Seriously though, how are we going to explain this?"

"Well, thankfully, Harry and the lot of you could keep our names out of the news. We don't need those, those..." Guld scowled, unable to come up with a term nasty enough to describe his opinion of reporters and news agencies and had to settle on an old standby. "Vultures coming around! And no one was recording anything, nor were any Lighthouse students there beyond Tia at the very end. And no one was close enough to hear Tia talk to Harry before he conked out, right?"

When Hazel nodded, he went on. "Good, that means we can keep him out of the public eye until the family gets a handle on his Semblance. When Harry knows what he can do, we can ask if he wants to become known as the second savior of Chian or not. Personally, I think we should keep him away from that. I doubt he could handle it as well as young Miss Nikos seems to be doing."

The evening before, a few of the survivors had been on a talk show and spoke about the two mysterious saviors who had somehow beaten a Nuckalevee of all things. All of them had

recognized Pyrrha's combat style, and one of them had even been one of the fans there in Chian to see if they could meet her. And with that, the narrative of the battle had changed.

Invincible Girl saves town, Nuckaleeve, nearly unknown Ancient Grimm, slain by Tournament Champion and Invincible Girl and unknown young hero turn back the Grimm were just some of the headlines.

Victories against the Grimm like this, when they attacked small settlements away from Mistral or one of the other city-states, were few and far between normally. Adding in the Nuckaleeve, it was obvious the battle would come under media scrutiny. This was a legendary Grimm, a team killer, a Grimm known as the Horseman of Death for how smart it was and the fear its scream could generate, to say nothing of its combat skills. But it had been beaten, slain, while its accompanying horde of Grimm had been held off long enough for help to arrive.

And while Harry's anonymity remained intact, Pyrrha Nikos had not been so lucky. Or had embraced the limelight. From Guld's perspective, it was hard to tell, as the young lady in question had yet to make any statement herself, but her parents and PR personnel had, many of them, and had been involved in several interviews and even a talk show featuring several of the survivors.

"Agreed. That poor Pyrrha girl. She's be, been, bein' held up as da reason why Chian held out, 'ave you seen?"

"I haven't seen her actually come forward and agree with that idea, though, have you?" Violet spoke up from her side of the table, watching her mother with amusement. *So long as her clothing stays on, watching mom make a fool of herself is always a treat.*

Hazel shook her head, immediately regretted it, and tried to hold a finger up to tap the side of her nose knowingly, only to miss. "Nope. Issh ob'ious Nikos was dere under disguise. Found some o' the hair coloring shtuff from the RV. So Pyrrha could maaaasybe be the same girl that helppped Harry."

"But Pyrrha herself hasn't made any statement or anything. I wonder if she's still dealing with Aura exhaustion too?" Guld mused.

**OOOOOO**

The news that the Invincible Girl was part of the defense of Chian had spread like wildfire. Pyrrha's parents ran with it hard, bringing in more merchandise and endorsement deals than they had even before this. While Pyrrha had become an international celebrity after her second championship victory, this, on top of her third victory the year before, made her renown quadruple in a scant few days. It even got to the point that one of Pyrrha's matches in the Tournament was switched with another to let Pyrrha recover. This was an unheard-of piece of largesse when the Tournament was still in the middle-bracket stage.

All this despite the fact that Pyrrha herself was not taking part in the media frenzy. She had pushed her Aura so hard it had affected her physically, and like Harry was out of it for over a week.

When she woke up and stared up at her room's roof, the first thing Pyrrha said was, "Brothers curse me to darkness. I can't believe I forgot to ask Harry for his scroll number!" So at least the two were alike in how they responded to that disaster, even if their families' reactions to it could not have been more different.

This became clear later that day. After allowing their daughter the morning off, Bethany and Alexandros Nikos pulled in the PR team's cosmetics specialist, dressed Pyrrha up in her gladiator outfit, and had her out the door to an interview so fast it made her head spin. As she was pushed into the back of the family bullhead, Pyrrha protested this treatment mildly before asking after Harry. "You know, the young man I was fighting the Grimm with? He should have been discovered near where I collapsed."

"Him? We've heard reports from the other survivors about him, but no one's come forward to take credit. And none of the locals willing to be interviewed have even mentioned a name," Alexandros snorted mightily.

Pyrrha's father was a short man, squat with muscles, so much so he looked like a slightly larger than average dwarf from a fantasy novel, sans the beard. Although he did have a good handlebar mustache. Alexandros was a former Gladiator and tournament champion himself, although he had only ever won once. He had since become a well-known trainer, with his own daughter being his crowning masterpiece.

Which was how he saw it. Looking back on it now, Pyrrha wasn't certain when he had stopped seeing her as his daughter and simply seen her as a cross between a moneymaker and his ultimate creation.

Thankfully – even Pyrrha knew this was a good thing – Pyrrha took after her mother in everything but hair and eye color. Bethany Nikos was a tall, willowy woman. Several years Alexandros' senior, she had been a Huntress in her youth but had left that life to become a model before giving that up to mother Pyrrha. "I've looked into what happened, and the boy had a powerful Semblance, to be sure. But if he is unwilling to come forward, there might be a reason. Some issue with the law, or perhaps he comes from one of the settlements that have issues with Mistral? Best not to think about it, dear."

Pyrrha couldn't say anything against that. Harry hadn't mentioned any such thing, but it wasn't exactly unusual. Many of the smaller communities scattered across Anima resented the primacy of Mistral, a resentment fueled by the different societies represented by the various communities in Anima. Attacks like what had occurred on Chian were just part of the reason for that resentment. After all, if the smaller communities had to pay taxes (many called it tribute)

to Mistral, they should be protected. If not, and it was often not, then why were they paying taxes at all?

“But surely some of the other survivors mentioned it was Harry who planned the defense? He encouraged many of the locals to arm and organize to defend the town.”

“A few of the townsfolk mentioned that too, but again, if he isn’t going to come forward...” Bethany shrugged elegantly. She did everything elegantly. Pyrrha could not remember a time when her mother didn’t seem the epitome of grace and femininity. “Then more glory goes to where it belongs. You.”

But Pyrrha’s perception of her mother beyond that had changed dramatically over the years as she saw what that figure cost her. And what it cost Pyrrha in turn. She could not remember a time when her mother had cared more about Pyrrha the person rather than Pyrrha, the gladiatrix.

Pyrrha continued to protest that she wasn’t the one most responsible for Chian’s survival. Without Harry, she would have died, and the town would have been overrun.

Neither of her parents cared, nor, Bethany pointed out, did the public. “This mysterious Harry, with his suspicious skill with disguises - and don’t think we won’t be talking about that later, Pyrrha - is unknown and has not come forward. You are known, and it was you who slew the Nuckalevee.”

The older woman shook her head. “I would never have believed it without so many witnesses, but well done, Pyrrha. Still, this should have shown you that your idea of becoming a Huntress would be a ridiculous waste of your...”

“MOTHER!” Pyrrha growled, interrupting her mother in a way that Pyrrha would never usually do. “I am going to become a Huntress. I am going to go to Beacon. I have already been accepted and will not change my mind now.”

“We’ll talk about it later. We’re nearly there, and you need to go over what you’re going to say,” Alexandros interjected, although he was scowling as he did. “After that, we’ll be doing a commercial with Chantel.”

The rest of the day was like that: brief breaks while going from one place to another while spending the rest of the day in front of a camera. Pyrrha wasn’t asked often to tell the story of the entire battle from her perspective, as that had been in the news for days. Rather the interviewers wanted her impression of the Grimm, of slaying the Nuckalevee, and more importantly to many, why she had been there under disguise. Her response that she wanted to go around without dealing with her fans won frowns from everyone, but they couldn’t argue against it.

That night the Nikos family returned to their house, a large mansion set up on the topmost level of Mistral, the tiered city of Anima. There, the arguments began once more.

Alexandros and Bethany attempted to convince, cajole and even remonstrate with Pyrrha to get her to change her mind. She argued back hotly, saying that this had been something she'd wanted to do almost since she started training. She wanted to get away from the limelight, away from her fame, be treated like a normal person, or barring that, at least make friends, the memory of her time with Harry strong in her mind.

But her arguments didn't matter. They were simply waved aside, explained away by her young age or the silliness of thinking being a Huntress was a better life than being a gladiatrix. The idea she could make more of a difference as a Huntress was also ignored with an eye roll from Bethany. Huntresses didn't do good, they simply hunted Grimm, and there were always too many Grimm to make a real difference.

If not about going to a Hunters Academy, then at least she should go to Haven. Why go all the way to Beacon? "And you will obviously have to make allowances to come back for the Tournament. Making such arrangements will simply be easier from Haven."

Her meal going cold in front of her, Pyrrha stared at her parents and had an affinity. *I'm done. I am done talking about this. I am just done with these two.* Abruptly she stood up, pushing herself away from the table. "I'm done. I'll be doing my homework. I'm sure it's built up since I was comatose. Don't bother me, please."

"We're not done here, Pyrrha!" Alexandros barked while Bethany just stared at her daughter's sudden shift of attitude.

"We are. You have made it clear that you not only don't care about my opinions, but you don't care about my happiness or even me as a person. That is more than enough. You have control of my life until I turn eighteen next month. I'm sorry but after that, I am done with all of this, and both of you." With that statement, Pyrrha turned away, leaving her parents shouting after her.

**OOOOOO**

When he woke up feeling back to normal at last, Harry grumbled a bit, then, opening his eyes, saw Arturia leaning over him. The golden eyes that most felt were inhuman and cold were gleaming down at him, and he smiled up at her. Reaching up quickly, Harry threw off the blanket and pulled Arturia into a hug before she could pull back.

"It's good to see you in person for a change," he teased, although his voice came out as a croak. This took away from his teasing, alas.

"It is good to see you as well, brother dearest, but I could do without hearing about your throwing yourself into danger without me around to pull you back out," Arturia answered, trying to sound neutral and cold, but it faded quickly, and Arturia put her arms around Harry, feeling the hardened, toned muscles under his shirt as she allowed herself to nuzzle her head



against his. *My brother has grown into quite a catch... and I am still not certain how I feel about that.*

"It isn't like I tried to find trouble," Harry retorted. "And at least this time, there was an upside to it."

"Yes, you have your Aura now, thanks to young Nikos..."

"You aren't that much older than us, sis," Harry retorted, poking her sides, unsurprised that Arturia had heard who had unlocked his Aura.

Arturia blocked his attempt to tickle her with ease, pulling back a bit as she called over her shoulder that Harry was awake before turning back to him. "As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted. My fellow gladiatrix, the one who took my crown from me and who I will most likely face soon for another title, managed to unlock your Aura. A rather annoying coincidence." She then smiled slightly. "I will have to thank her some time. After I beat her into the ground, of course."

"Heh, and after you give her my scroll number," Harry quipped, causing Arturia to freeze. Thankfully, Harry realized how that could have sounded and quickly added. "Gah, no, wait, sis, I don't mean it like that! I just want to thank Pyrrha for her help in Chian. And er, it just felt like she needs a friend too. And since Tia and I don't have any outside of our family..."

"Hmph, you could call her public number," Arturia answered, pulling back from the hug entirely and sitting elegantly (Harry thought of it as flouncing at the moment) in the chair next to his bed. And utterly ignoring how efforts to do that very thing by Hazel had failed up to this point.

"Yeah, but that line is just that, public. I doubt it's even used by Pyrrha at all," Harry answered. "Think of how much trouble came calling when you won your second championship. It's made worse by the public persona she and her family chose to use. You have your Ice Queen guise, which scares people off. Pyrrha's Invincible Girl facade doesn't."

Arturia harumphed, then decided to deliberately change the subject. She knew she would give Nikos her brother's scroll number, but that didn't mean she wanted to keep talking about it or deal with the roiling emotions it was causing her. "Anyway, I hear you have an Earth Manipulation Semblance? And were able to use it right away?"

"Eh, something like that. We won't know if that's the full extent of things until I can get up and we can do some experiments," Harry prevaricated, wondering suddenly how much of his magic he should tell even his family about. *Heck, what will even work and not work here? That's going to take a bit of experimentation.*

"And speaking of experiments, your awakening Tia's Semblance was, while a good thing, could have been far better timed. As in, timed when you weren't in danger of dangerously

exhausting your Aura, Harry!” Hazel growled out from the doorway. Behind her, the rest of the arc family could be seen.

After several long minutes of hugs and convincing his younger sisters that Harry wouldn't die, Tia finally got her chance to hug her twin. She first smacked his shoulder in wordless annoyance at how he had knocked himself out again before hugging him tightly to her chest, Harry's face pressed directly into her breasts. “Glad you're ok,” she whispered, nuzzling into his hair.

Behind her, Hazel and Guld watched both of them closely but saw no sign of anything beyond embarrassment. The two of them looked at one another and nodded subtly. They would put off the discussion about Harry being adopted for now as there didn't seem to be any... issue growing there despite their familial connection.

This might seem a bit cowardly, but that was fine by them. *It's better to be cowardly than to open Pandora's box. I can all too easily see Tia and Arturia coming to blows over Harry if they realize he is not off the table romantically speaking,* Hazel thought sadly. *That could break up the whole family, or maybe force one of them away from the rest of us entirely if one or the other comes out as the 'winner'.*

As the Arc matriarch thought that, Magenta and Violet had started talking about the news out of Chian. “I've been watching for any picture or description of you 'cause I didn't want us to deal with a wave of newsies like we did when Arturia became Champion. But Nikos is being given all the credit. Well... not really, it's not like she's come out and said she single-handedly saved the town or something, but it's like none of the newsies care to ask any questions about you at all beyond mentioning you are 'dark and mysterious',” the family bookworm explained quickly, sitting on Harry's bed, with Violet behind her.

Tia had moved to Harry's other side, crawling over him and putting herself between the wall and Harry. This had let her chest graze his face, but Harry would not be caught dead admitting it or even looking bemused by the experience.

“Hah,” Harry laughed, putting an arm around Tia as Arturia sat on the bed by his feet, her own feet draped across his. “That's hilarious. Even when she was disguised, Pyrrha draws so much attention.”

“Actually, that's part of why Pyrrha's presence drew so much attention. That she had been disguised so well after she landed. I wonder how that happened, hmm?” Arturia murmured, poking Harry's leg. “Hmm, how, hmmm?”

“Yeah, that was me.” From there, Harry explained how he and Pyrrha had met and then been going around the town together. Hazel, Violet and the younger set of twins all thought this sounded romantic or nice, while Tia just nodded, wondering aloud what kind of spicy food Harry had come up with. Arturia, on the other hand, bit back a scowl with some difficulty.

“And as for the media, no. I’m more than happy with them not having any idea about me. Dealing with that with Arturia was more than enough. The only thing I would use my fame for is to get Pyrrha’s private scroll number, and I don’t see that happening,” Harry answered a question from Hazel.

“Oh-ho?” Arturia leaned forward, her face set in something like a teasing sneer, although there was something else there as well, wry concern, maybe? Harry couldn’t quite identify it. “Are you sure, that you’re not interested in my possible opponent for this championship, Harry? Betrayal, betrayal most foul, I say.”

“Gah, it’s not like that, sis, like I said earlier!” Harry grumbled, pushing Arturia’s poking finger away.

The fight, Harry’s Aura awakening, and subsequent use of his Semblance were much more interesting to Guld, and he questioned Harry closely on it. “Are you certain you just ‘knew’ how to use your Semblance?”

“Er... kind of? I’ve occasionally had these odd words and flashes of something in my dreams. So, when I had my Aura unlocked, I could kind of feel it ready to respond to me,” Harry said with a shrug, looking somewhat confused. *I can’t exactly tell them my mind’s from another world, now, can I?*

“I think I have a theory. We have long been attempting to unlock Harry and Tia’s aura. Perhaps those attempts have had an impact,” Samson, Evig Låga’s doctor and Guld’s brother, mused. “while those attempts weren’t enough to spark Harry’s Aura alight, his mind and body were still effected by them, leaving his mind more open to its connection to his Aura.”

Hazel snorted. “Feh, that makes as much sense as any other explanation, I suppose.” *And if Harry himself doesn’t know how it happened, I suppose all we can do is ignore the mystery, darn it.*

“Hmm, true. Indeed, given the dire straits Harry found himself in, we should all be thankful you were able to use your Semblance so quickly,” Guld agreed. “But we will need to test this Semblance of yours out quite a bit before we let you use it in public.”

Harry nodded, although doubted he would use his full magical powers in public for a long while. *A secret kept is an advantage later.*

To his side, Tia nodded. “Me too. I want to test my Aura and see if I can discover my Semblance.”

“I will help,” Arturia spoke up, causing her parents to look at her, mouths opening in protest, but she continued on, blithely ignoring their protests. “I have a few days off before my next match in the Tournament. What better way of spending it than with my two favorite siblings? Keep them home from Lighthouse, and I will train them both as hard as possible.”

“Ouch!” Rouge muttered.

“Yeah, I know when I’m not wanted,” Rose grumbled. “Just for that, I’ll root for your opponents from now on.”

“Bah, as if that will give any of them an edge over me,” Arturia shot back proudly.

“What about school?” Hazel demanded.

But to her surprise, Guld spoke up in favour of the idea. “Actually, that might not be a bad idea. Given what you’ve told us about your own Semblance, Arturia, you’re probably the best one to help train Harry in his. My own Silent Edge was almost automatic for me, and the visualization aspect is just as simple. Whereas yours takes both concentration and much more in the way of Aura. When you get to control, I might be able to help, but not before then.”

“Plus, it isn’t like we aren’t ahead of most of our classes anyway,” Tia observed softly.

Hazel scowled but knew that Harry and Tia hated going to Lighthouse and were ahead in their education. Despite their single-minded drive to become Hunters, neither had ever allowed their grades to slide past the low Bs. “Fine, but only after Samson gives Harry a full examination.”

Harry made to protest, but at his mother’s glare, he subsided meekly. Thankfully, this didn’t take long, and later that day, after a belated birthday party and so much food Harry felt bloated, he and Tia joined Arturia in the newly rebuilt training room.

“Alright, we will start with small for now. Show me the first Aura attack you created,” Arturia ordered.

That actually was a healing spell Harry had used on himself. But even now, Harry was uncertain how to explain away his powers. *Yet these two are not only family but are the closest friends I have besides. If I can’t trust them with all of the abilities I know I have, then who can I trust?*

“Ok, so... the idea that my Semblance is just an Earth Manipulation one is a bit... off. That was just the easiest thing to visualize. And given how many other things I can do, I’d like to keep some aspects of it secret, ok?” He questioned.

Arturia and Tia both nodded instantly as that made good sense, then Arturia watched as Harry lashed out with a cutting spell at the dummy, which collapsed into two pieces. “My Semblance is a bit closer to just, well, magic, really.”

Moving over to the dummy, Arturia leaned down, examining it closely and giving Harry an excellent view down her shirt. While Arturia was not as big up top as Tia, her breasts were very well-formed and perky, barely moving as she leaned down despite Arturia not wearing a bra currently. Harry stared for a split second before his self-control, honed over the past few

years thanks to Tia and Arturia, reared up, causing him to look away, acting as if he hadn't noticed.

"Interesting," Arturia mused, humming thoughtfully. "That looks somewhat like a mixture of my own Semblance and Father's Silent Edge. But..."

Feeling a bit mischievous, Harry gestured towards her. Arturia gasped as she found herself in the air for a moment and then falling into Harry's arms, who caught her in the traditional princess carry.

Arturia fought back an urge to blush, refusing to give Harry any satisfaction and simply staring up at him haughtily, her arms crossed over her chest. "Hmm, so cutting, levitation perhaps, and earth manipulation as well? Interesting. Now, if you would put me down, Harry, we can get a bit more scientific about this."

Still in Harry's arms, she looked over at Tia, who was calmly standing there, watching them. "And you too, Tia. This is not just about Harry and his Semblance, after all."

**OOOOOOO**

At the same time that Arturia was teasing Harry about her, Pyrrha sneezed into her upraised hand. She looked around, wondering why she had sneezed for a second, before hastily apologizing to the elderly gentleman she was speaking to. "I am so sorry, Headmaster Lionheart. I don't know what came over me there."

While the middle-aged man laughed off her apology, Pyrrha kept her normal fake smile on her face, trying hard not to show any of her inner thoughts. The past four days had not been pleasant at all. She'd been even busier than normal thanks to the amount of endorsement deals her parents had found for her after Chian, more than a dozen new ones. On top of training for the Tournament, and the one actual match she'd had in that time. *Which was just about as lackluster as all the rest of my matches, blast it.*

Pyrrha knew she was a combat junky, an adrenaline seeker of the first order. To have matches in the Tournament, where she faced older, more experienced opponents, be so easy was annoying in the extreme. *But I have to bear it. Remember Pyrrha, just another few months of this and then it is off to Beacon. Where I might make actual friends and...*

That thought brought her back to Harry. She had tried once to find out what happened to him, but Harry, his sister and their whole family had seemingly vanished amid the turmoil directly after the Grimm had been pushed out of Chian. And he had not come forward to accept any of the public response since.

That thought depressed Pyrrha further, as she wondered why until she remembered his disdain for her fans. *Certainly, if I had the chance to avoid further fame, I would do so.*

*Which rather brings my mind back to the conversation at hand.* As the elderly, mustachioed gentleman wound down, Pyrrha held up a hand. "I am sorry my managers thought that a personal appeal would sway my mind, Headmaster Lionheart. But my mind is made up. I will not be going to Haven. While I know Haven is an excellent school, it emphasizes personal combat and fighting human opponents. As such, I do not believe that it is the best choice to let me grow as a Huntress."

Lionheart made to speak, but Pyrrha continued, leaning forward, her normal smile slipping a bit into a frown. "And to be frank, I wish to go to Beacon to learn more than just how to kill Grimm. I wish to, to have an opportunity to start over as it were."

That caused the older man's eyebrow to rise in surprise, but eventually, staring at Pyrrha's determined expression, he sighed. "Very well. I cannot say I fully understand your reasoning behind such a choice, my dear, but I will not attempt to be more forceful in my approach. Just know that if Beacon turns out to not be all you want it to be, you will find a slot open for you in Haven."

Pyrrha nodded and then walked him to the mansion's front gate before heading to the family's limo-bull and yet another commercial. Within the bullhead, she found her mother and the makeup artist. Both tried to make conversation, but Pyrrha coolly ignored her mother, speaking politely to the other young woman until her mother, defeated, gave it up.

Throughout the trip, Pyrrha continued to ignore the woman's words and gaze. And staring at her daughter, Bethany realized that this would indeed be how it would go for the next few months. However, what to do about it and why Pyrrha was so adamant on this point eluded her. *She, she can't really believe that whole making a difference as a Huntress bullshit, can she? Can she?*

That thought and others would occur to Bethany and Alexandros over the next few months. The fact their own attitudes had helped to push their daughter away would not cross their minds until it was far too late to repair the damage done.

OOOOOO

Harry and Tia's experiments were extremely interesting. With their parents joining in when they had the time, Harry's Magic Semblance became known quickly, but Guld had more on his mind than just training Harry's Semblance, so he left that mostly in Arturia's capable hands.

With his older sister's help, Harry learned several interesting differences between this world and his old one. For one thing, attack spells fizzled out at longer ranges, as did all magic. Harry attempted to create a series of flowers for the girls made out of stone, and they barely lasted an hour before coming undone.

This seemed a hard and fast rule. Magic could not last longer than an hour regardless of type. Similarly, Harry's attempt to use runes, an area of magic he'd ever only had the barest bit of knowledge in, didn't work. The magic would simply not gather into the runes. Regardless, Harry didn't have enough knowledge of runes to tell if this was because this world lacked enough inherent magic to use runes or if these runes themselves just wouldn't work. Regardless, Harry decided that was a no-go.

Another no-go was the transfiguration of living things or conjuration of said. Harry attempted to transfigure a small rabbit and a bush and then use Avis's spell to summon up some birds. None of the spells took, simply fizzling out. They didn't sap his Aura either, but it was like the world itself rejected such things. Harry had thought about testing that rule on Grimm but decided against it for now. The Grimm were so wholly unusual and obviously **alien** that he was deeply concerned about their nature already, too much so to want to experiment on them thusly.

Conjuration as a whole seemed impossible to sustain, but that was ok, considering how Harry used it. But transfiguration, particularly the ground, stone or other inanimate objects, worked very well. Invisibility, Notice Me Nots, and so forth also worked but wouldn't last long, and they failed to hide Harry's presence from the emotion-sensing ability the Grimm seemed to possess on the one expedition Arturia took him on.

Aura could also inhibit mental attacks and even shield from direct assault. A stupefy barely registered to Arturia, and Harry's attempt to read her mind was blocked so hard it gave him a headache, much to her amusement.

Arturia also helped hugely in discovering which spells cost him more, both in terms of Aura and concentration. Visualizing some of the spells he remembered from his old world while Arturia attacked him in close range was impossible. Hunters and Grimm moved far faster than the vast majority of people in his old world, and there had been few times there that Harry had faced close combat. Most wizard-type warfare was at what Harry now thought of as mid-range, with a bit occurring at long. Getting their hands dirty was not a wizard's forte. This meant that Harry would need to be aware of the need to change his spell list depending on the circumstances.

Of course, they didn't just train Harry's Semblance. They trained his mind too.

Guld took over this area of his training, pushing him to think as a team leader, something Harry had already done and shown himself capable of in a crisis, and beyond. Guld even pushed Harry into a leadership role as an Arc in Evig Låga. It became accepted for Guld to send Harry to mediate disputes or train the local militia. This was a small core of young and old community members who had their Aura unlocked but who had decided the life of a Hunter was not for them and came back home to the small town.

And both he and Hazel helped in coming up with ways for Harry to hide the full breadth of his magical abilities, officially registering his Semblance as Earth Master, an earth-based manipulation type Semblance. This would explain all the known abilities Harry had shown in Chian, and so long as he kept from using his other skills, would remain a deadly secret against other humans if need be. After all, every Hunter and Huntress knew that the deadliest animal was the human one.

Meanwhile, Tia was put through her paces by Arturia, who mused one evening that the differences between Tia and Harry's Aura were profound. When Tia made an interrogative noise, the older girl elaborated. "Everyone's Aura lends itself to different things, although the science of it isn't well documented. My Aura, for example, is very well-rounded. It is both reactive to my will and passive, acting as a defense without prompting."

"Wait, Aura defends automatically." Tia objected. When it was just the two of them, she was willing to be more talkative than normal.

"Up to a point, yes. But under sustained action, Aura can fade. I know many Hunters who have trouble getting their Aura to defend them after a certain point," Arturia lectured, shaking her head. "Harry's is somewhat of that type. But given how his Aura powers his Semblance, that isn't a tremendous issue. Still, I hope he is paired with someone who can protect him. While Harry is skilled enough with the Arc family blade, his greatest impact on the battlefield will be with his Semblance. Magic like his... well, it gives me great pride to know that my little brother will become the next Goodwitch."

Tia smiled, understanding that Arturia was more worried about their brother than anything else despite how prickly she tried to sound. "And my Aura?"

"Hmm... your Aura seems to be almost entirely devoted to physical enhancement. You are far stronger physically than you should be, as we have long known, but now you are also extremely hard to hurt at all." Arturia snorted, gesturing down to the lance laying beside her on the grass as the two sisters sat on a hill overlooking Evig Låga. Well, originally, it had been grassy. Now, a large portion of it was torn and tossed about from their bout.

"Or do you think anyone could just walk through my Thousand Thorns? I've used that attack to massacre whole groups of Grimm, and you just charged straight through it. I'm almost tempted to use my other attack on you just to see, but I would rather not explain how you became wounded to our parents."

Again, knowing that Arturia was truly concerned for her, Tia leaned in, pulling the taller girl into a hug. "Thanks," she said simply.

"Hmph, it is an ill queen who would ignore the fact her actions could cause injury to those who follow her," Arturia smiled, wrapping an arm around her sister. "Still, I wager that the defensive nature of your Aura hints at what your Semblance could be. I wonder if it will be similar to Juggernaut or Knight?" she mused, naming the Semblance of one of the teachers at



Beacon and another senior before shaking her head. "By the way, did you finish designing your blade?"

"Mmm," Tia answered. "Two versions. One the shape I want, but no Dust based aspect. It will do for a few weeks while I build the real one. Heading to the blacksmith when we return. Is Harry still determined to use the Arc Blade?"

"That is an excellent plan, sister dear. And yes, Harry continues to want to only use the Arc Blade. Silly of him but given how the blade acts when he uses it to direct his Semblance, I cannot say it is without merit," Arturia chuckled. "After all, my own gear is much the same, my shield providing my normal long-range firepower, and my lance my..."

"No such thing as overkill, only dead and not dead enough," Tia quipped. Her face had its normal unemotional expression, but there was a faint twinkle in her blue eyes.

Arturia laughed, then bounced to her feet, pulling Tia up with her. "Come then, let us be off. Your blade will not create itself after all. Not to mention your Huntress outfit."

That Huntress outfit caused Harry a near stroke later that day. He had known that many Huntresses used sexiness as just another weapon. Heck, if you removed the chest plate, Arturia's outfit was something of the sort. But knowing that and seeing this were two different things.

*So, this is how I die,* Harry thought, his mind feeling almost calm as if reaching a conclusion long foretold., staring hard into Tia's eyes, not letting his eyes roam below those gloriously expressive blue eyes. *I'm going to die from keeping my horniness under control so much that my blood pressure causes my heart to burst. Sister, sister, she's your sister, you ass! Don't be a Pureblood!*

At seventeen, the promise that Harry had seen of Tia becoming a beautiful woman had proven true. Thanks to their constant training, Tia's face had lost much of its baby fat, becoming almost as regal-looking as Arturia's, and her chest had grown to exceed Arturia's slightly, something that annoyed the older girl since it was doubtful that Arturia would grow any further, while Tia probably would. And for some reason, no one knew why, Tia's skin was still that rich caramel color it had always been.

Her current outfit offset that color, being all in white. Pantaloons covered her legs, paired with black boots, while above that, Tia wore a long-sleeved white top cut to end right above where her breasts began, covering her large yet perky breasts entirely from that point up, yet showing off a lot of under-boob. The top covered her shoulders and neck up until right below her nose, with a zipper in front of her mouth that continued halfway down her chest. Tia could unzip it, but she didn't have it unzipped at the moment, which Harry's blood pressure was quite thankful for, allowing it to cover her mouth.

Tia had also added a few beads to a long braid on one side of her face but left the rest of her short-cropped blonde hair wild, something she and Harry had in common. And over her shoulders, lengthwise to her shoulders, was a sheathe for a large sword with a broad blade, although the blade was actually not a solid length of metal. Rather it was just the rigid outline of a blade with the center of the blade being empty. Below that was a full cross guard, set with a series of small ringlets.

This was the initial prototype of the blade form of her mecha-shift weapon. The final product would have a dust manipulation aspect to the center of the blade and the ability to shift the blade's form into a larger, broader blade.

Having seen the plans for the weapon, Harry was somewhat concerned about Tia's long-range skillset. But he knew not to throw stones since his own skills were mid-range at best.

At present, Harry's eyes were locked on the hilt of that weapon like it was a lifeline, the only thing keeping him sane. Yet when he spoke, his tone was its normal friendly, good-humored tone, none of his inner tension showing. "I see that you decided to go with a more simplistic version of your initial weapon for now."

Tia nodded, facing Harry, feeling something within her, a bubble of delight that she had come to realize was bound up in how Harry occasionally looked at her. Unlike Hazel, who was standing to one side of them, moving around Tia from all angles, Tia had caught how Harry's face had gone all red for a moment as he took her in before his self-control reasserted itself. It had been gone almost as soon as it appeared, and a part of Tia was impressed by Harry's self-control.

Why the fact Harry should be so amazed by her looks was important, Tia didn't quite understand. But she liked it. *I wonder if I should try and make him react more?*

"Hmm... the long sleeves should have something to tighten them up at the wrist. Pantaloon are alright, but you might want to think about carrying straps in your day pack. If you're going to be in thick woods, your pants might catch and tear. Silk and linen aren't as strong as old-fashioned leather leggings," Hazel pointed out critically. "And can I ask why the shirt goes up over your mouth like that?"

If a normal mother saw her daughter dress like Tia was, she would be apoplectic, but Hazel was a Huntress herself before becoming a mother and knew that while sexiness didn't matter when fighting Grimm, it did matter when fighting other people. Indeed, Hazel had raised her entire family on stories of how she had been taken advantage of when particularly stupid criminals, even a few ex-Hunters when they were too busy staring at her.

"For some reason I have noticed that when my mouth is covered by something I become somewhat more willing to talk. This way, even without Harry around to do my talking for me, I will at least be able to communicate," Tia answered, gesturing to her covered mouth and then to Harry, a twinkle in her eye.

Snorting at that, Harry nodded back, wordlessly saying he'd always be willing to do Tia's talking for her, while Hazel nodded thoughtfully. "That makes sense, I suppose. Beyond the earlier points I mentioned, I like it, dear. And I love the white color against your tanned skin! It really sets it off."

"Now, let's see how well it works in a combat scenario. Harry, are you ready?"

Harry grumbled but lifted the Arc blade in one hand and thrust out his other hand, creating a shield of energy in front of him for a moment. Shields like that would not last longer than a few minutes against Aura or Dust-based attacks, but for a spar, that was okay.

Tia pulled out her blade with a slight flourish, using one finger to pull it out via one of the ringlets on the hilt. Once the blade was out, she set it to twirling to one side of her, the odd blade's design causing a 'thrum, thrum' noise in the air. This kind of flourish was unlike Tia's normal style, and Harry looked at her quizzically, but Tia simply said, "Practicing for school."

He laughed, the words needing no other explanation, and then backed away rapidly as Tia charged forwards, pushing off the ground with a speed that had to be seen to be believed.

Tia slashed and attacked quickly, while Harry focused on defense, using his spells and speed to good advantage. He rarely even attempted to go blade to blade with her, knowing she was a good deal stronger than him, but his technique was slightly better, and he was far faster in terms of reaction time. His spells were also becoming faster now than they had when Arturia kicked him around like a football.

Meanwhile, Hazel made comments from the sidelines, pleased with how they were fighting. The only comment she made about Tia's outfit was that instead of ties for her wrists, Tia should look into gauntlets and boots with some Dust in them for surprise attacks. "If Harry can keep the range open, Tia, I think you would be in a world of trouble. And yes, I know that your weapon will incorporate Dust and so forth, but no Huntress or Hunter can afford to be a one-trick pony."

She then zeroed in on Harry, whose blasting curse had just gone off at Tia's feet, followed by a Flippendo that sent her flipping backward, although she sued this opportunity to kick out at him, causing Harry to grunt at the impact. "Speaking of Harry, if I see or hear of you slacking off in your sword practice now that you've got your Magic Semblance, I will come down on you like a brick house."

"Yes, mom," both the twins shouted, concentrating more on one another than on their mother. Tia smiled behind her collar as she saw Harry's eyes downwards a time or two. Tia still wasn't quite certain why she liked Harry looking at her like that where she had never noticed or cared about anyone else looking at her. But it was still quite nice.

That night, Harry had hoped for once to have his bed to himself to rebuild his mental control, if nothing else. Doing... anything else... wasn't going to happen. His mother continued

to insist on doing the laundry, and for another, Rose and Rouge believed that knocking was for other people.

Alas, Harry didn't get that. First, Rose was still terrified by how close the family had come to losing Harry. She had come to sleep in his bed every night since he woke up, and according to Hazel, it was only that the others had been watching him on rotation that had stopped her from doing the same when Harry was unconscious.

"You sure Rouge won't miss you?" Harry questioned as he and Rose finished brushing their teeth.

"Mmmm," Rose said, blinking up at Harry with the blue eyes of another common Arc trait. Rose, who was one of the shyest girls Harry had ever met, pointed to the side in the direction of the youngest's room. "She and Magenta will be up playing reading through Magenta's latest story. I don't like it much."

Snorting, Harry nodded at that, ruffling the younger Arc's hair, noting the feel of the loose braids she kept her hair in. "In that case, I suppose you'd like a story too?"

Nodding eagerly, Rose grabbed Harry's hand and pulled him along towards his room in the treehouse.

Moments later, however, just as Harry was going to join Rose in bed, the door opened to reveal Tia. "Er, hey, Tia," Harry gulped. Surprisingly, while Tia wore a onesie just like the one Harry was currently wearing, which covered her body, this did nothing to make Harry forget what that body looked like. *If anything, it somehow makes seeing her like this seem more personal and important. Damn it, Harry, what about don't be a Pureblood was hard to understand!?*

Unaware of Harry's inner monologue, she simply smiled her faint smile at him. Then, with a wink over his shoulder at Rose, she picked Harry up and moved back towards the bed, smelling his breath, knowing he'd already brushed his teeth. "I'd like my plushy tonight," she said as she sat him down on the bed, crawling in after him.

Harry thought about protesting but shrugged and enfolded both his sisters in his arms. "Fine, but you get to read along with us."

About half an hour later, Rose had fallen asleep nuzzled into Harry's side, and Harry used magic to send the book to the bedstand out of reach, then turn off the light. Small things like that were good to help build Harry's finer control, just as fighting his sisters or parents in close combat while attempting to use spells was good for his concentration.

Tia's hand moved from where it had been gently stroking Rose's hair as she put her arms around Harry, nearly crushing him in a hug, as she burrowed her head into his chest. "Thank you."

Harry looked at her quizzically, and she smiled up at him, one of her rare full smiles. “For unlocking my Aura. Without that, I would not be able to follow my dream. To become a Huntress to stand between people like Rosie and those who would hurt them. So, thank you.”

“Heh, what are brothers for, Tia?” Harry asked with a smile. “Really, it’s only thanks to luck and Pyrrha’s leap of logic that let me unlock my Aura, and it was her words that gave me the key to unlock yours.”

“Hmmm...” Tia murmured, still looking up at him with a smile, although internally, she was interested in thanking Pyrrha Nikos too. The girl hadn’t just fought alongside Harry but had done the one thing no one in their family had been able to figure out. “Still, I wanted to thank you, especially since it knocked you out again.”

Harry looked down at her and saw Tia looking up at him, although for once, it wasn’t those expressive eyes that grabbed his attention. Nor, to his credit, was it the feeling of her large breasts pressing into his stomach. Rather, it was her lips that grabbed his attention. And for a moment, it was all Harry could do to stop himself from leaning down and kissing his sister in a way that no brother should wish to kiss a sibling. *Fuck you, Harry Arc. You are not a Pureblood. Don’t you bloody do it.*

Instead, he leaned down, kissing her forehead. “Well, you’re welcome. And I’d say that was a price well worth paying, you know?”

“Hmmm...” Tia murmured again, although it was in a very different tone, and she poked his side hard with a firm finger before cuddling back in, kissing his clothed chest and then closing her eyes.

As normal, Tia fell asleep swiftly while Harry... Well, Harry had a bit more trouble.

Truly, when it came to moments like this with Tia or Arturia, Harry’s self-control was both a positive and the cause of his own issues. If he had shown any awareness of Tia as a girl, his parents could’ve caught on that certain problems were arising. With that, they might well have sat him down along with his siblings and told them all he was adopted. While this would have opened a dragon-sized can of worms, it would have at least allowed them some control and forced Harry and his older siblings to have some measure of modesty.

While they could tell Tia and Harry that they shouldn’t be sleeping in the same bed at their age, they couldn’t enforce that idea with Magenta, Rouge and Rose taking every opportunity to crawl into Harry’s bed. Which, that night, helped Harry quite a lot.

Arturia, at least, understood why it was a bad idea and so did not join Harry in bed all that often when she was home. But even she, a twenty-one-year-old girl who really should have known better without it being explained to her, didn’t care about the lack of propriety. The power of cuddles compelled even Arturia, the Ice Queen of the Arcs.

Not that this was the only way she could bond with her younger siblings.

The next night, after a long day's training, Arturia sat up rumbling in annoyance as she sat at the computer, typing in homework. On the screen in front of her, a large map was shown, with most of it covered in various markers designating concentrations of various Grimm types. This map and the program it represented were part of a class at Beacon. This class, simply called Leadership, taught the seniors how to lead in the field in various situations.

Currently, the problem was with team-based tactics. Arturia was tasked to create a strategy to fight the massive numbers of Grimm while also protecting a small convoy of Atlas-designed tracks moving through the badlands between towns in that cold, mountainous country. *By the Brothers, I hate problems like this! Guarding mobile targets is never pleasant. I loathe them in games, and I loathe them here. Why can't I give orders to the drivers!?*

Arturia looked up as a noise caught her attention and found Harry there, passing her and heading into the kitchen. She stayed silent until he came back, carrying a small tray of cookies and a glass of milk. She cocked an eyebrow inquisitively at him, and Harry simply shrugged. "Rose is feeling a little under the weather, and I figure cookies and a glass of milk will help her sleep."

"You spoil them rotten," Arturia observed, although there was no censure in her voice despite her words. After all, she also had been spoiled rotten by Harry more than once, and if he decided to not spoil one sister, who knew where it would stop?

Harry snorted in amusement at that, then looked at the screen, and his eyes lit up, so much they seemed to light up in the darkness of the room. "Is that a tactics problem?" When Arturia nodded, he beamed at her. "Fun. Hold on, I'll be right back."

Arturia cocked an eyebrow and then remembered that her father had been pushing Harry into expanding his leadership skills over the past few days. The story of how Harry had organized the defense of Chian had made both of their parents extremely proud, even more than Harry discovering his Semblance and fighting so well.

"A good Hunter can help fight a battle. A good Huntress can save lives. But a leader, a leader, Harry, can win a war and change lives for the better." Guld had said. Arturia, who had made herself such a leader despite what she knew was subpar people skills, agreed. "Hunters can win battles. Leaders can win wars, sometimes without even having to fight them."

Harry was as good as his word, coming back after handing the cookies to the twins and then pulling up a chair next to Arturia, studying the problem. "Hmm... what have you tried already?"

"Several different tactics," Arturia said grimly. "First, subterfuge. I've tried to both hide the convoy and my forces as we move across the map. But there are too many Grimm for the convoy to get by them all unseen. If I send my team forward to clear the way, the battle brings more Grimm, which wash over the convoy, no matter how subtle we are. If I head out, sneaking forward to take out the larger Grimm and thus destabilize the disparate types' ability to work

together, the rest of my team will be overwhelmed by the number of smaller Grimm ahead of the convoy to the point the convoy sees the problem and starts to be afraid. With that fear, the Grimm swarm.”

While Grimm rarely fought one another, the ability of various sub-classes of Grimm to work together was based on how many longer-lived or intelligent Grimm there were around the place. This was a scientific fact, proved on thousands of battlefields, just as much as the fact that negative emotions – hate, anger, and above all, fear, drew the Grimm like flies to a corpse.

“Third, the idea of trying to set up several killing grounds. But my team is too slow to then catch up with the convoy. It runs into trouble and becomes overwhelmed before we can get there. Second, I’ve attempted to use the guns of the convoy to create an impenetrable close-in defense. But by the time we are halfway across the map, you’ll note distances and time over here on this information screen, we’re nearly out of ammunition. And the Grimm are now aware of our presence. Eventually, we’re overcome.”

“That plan seems to be workable, but I must be doing something wr... wr... not correct with my plan,” Arturia ground out. “Certainly, it isn’t the kind of thing I’m willing to submit to professor Ozpin.”

“Heh, still having trouble admitting you too are fallible, mortal?” Harry teased, although he was scratching his head as he began to work the map's controls, changing the data displayed on the screen. “And Professor Ozpin?”

“He teaches seniors strategy and tactics, although more and more, I am wondering if he should also be teaching logistics. Every time I face a problem like this, the first problem I run into is running out of Dust or ammunition.” Arturia shook her head, a wry twist to her lips. “I know of a young freshman who uses a mecha-shift Gatling gun. I can only imagine the horror that team has to face to keep her in bullets.”

Harry looked over the weapons that Arturia and her team were listed as using, nodding slowly. “I think you might’ve put together a team that is a little **too** well-balanced.” Arturia’s brows furrowed, and he went on hurriedly. “What I mean is, while being well-balanced in terms of strategies, out in the field like this, you don’t really have to think about strategy beyond, as you said, the tactical level. In that kind of combat, having a strength to build around rather than simply being okay at everything is a good idea.”

“You... could be correct on that,” Arturia mused. “And even now, I might also be trying to do too much on my own... But in this case, I don’t see any of the others having the right mix of stealth and striking power to kill any more intelligent Grimm in the area.”

“Maybe not, but there is stealth, and there is stealth. Grimm aren’t people. They aren’t as smart as we are. But are these numbers accurate?” Harry pointed at the grid to one side of the map, tapping the various numbers shown there. “This many Grimm over the space of, what, two-hundred and ninety miles?”

“OH yes!” Arturia barked a laugh, shaking her head. “Just like our parents have told us, Harry. There are always more Grimm. Missions against them are more extermination missions than anything else.”

Harry fell silent for a moment, remembering how his parents had mentioned this fact several times. Indeed, their father had made that point more than once as they went to the Arc Butte, and whenever he and Tia trained with their mother, it was endurance, both mental and physical, that the older woman always said was the most important. *That and adaptation.*

Playing with the map for a few minutes, Harry came up with a somewhat simple plan. “You are your team’s heaviest hitter, right?”

“I have always been the team’s tank by a wide margin. Although hitting heavily hasn’t been one of my skills until recently when I discovered my Semblance,” Arturia said dryly. “The rest are all right at combat but not up to my weight class,” Arturia finished, stumbling over her words as she thought about how to describe the rest of the team.

They were somewhat, far closer now than Arturia’s team had been when they had been freshmen. But it was very clear that two of them were probably not going to make it as Hunters for very long, being in a romance that had all the earmarks of becoming permanent. And Arturia’s own partner had already announced plans to join the Atlas military. *Which is fine,* Arturia repeated to herself. *I don’t have a problem with that. We just need to work together for another few more months, then I can go solo.*

While many Hunter teams stayed together throughout their time as Hunters, most did not. Each city-state would then post requests to specific Hunters or post the specifics of a job on the Hunt-Net and bring in groups of Hunters to perform the job required. The Academies’ concentration on teamwork allowed the Hunters to work together despite often being complete strangers.

“And you were wrong before Harry. I didn’t put the team together,” Arturia finished.

Harry’s eyes narrowed. “Yeah, you’ve never actually said how teams are created at Beacon. And Dad and Mom are always tight-lipped about it too. Why?”

“Are you still intending to go?” Arturia asked in turn, not answering Harry’s questions.

Harry nodded firmly. “If I want to keep training my Semblance, having someone nearby who has a similar one is a must. I’m struggling a lot with using my magic beyond a few hundred yards away from my body and concentrating on multiple opponents, as you well know. You still routinely kick my rear across the training room,” He added, getting a laugh from Arturia.

“Then you will find out for yourself,” Arturia smiled. “I’m not going to be the one to break that social contract.” *And Harry should have much better luck with it tonight. While he isn’t as extroverted as the twins, or Saffron, he certainly has a certain amount of natural ability to make friends.*



That wasn't something that came naturally to Arturia despite her leadership ability. She knew she had a certain amount of charisma, but that didn't translate into being able to gather friends, simply acquaintances. Because to be friends, both individuals had to be able to open up to others, which Arturia had always had a problem with.

When it became clear that Arturia wasn't going to respond to Harry's questions on that score, Harry teased her about no longer wanting to help her, but Arturia simply snorted at that and pulled him into a hug that was half-hug, half-headlock until Harry admitted defeat. Normally that kind of rough-housing would have escalated, but it was late, and neither wanted to make so much noise they woke up their parents.

Turning his attention back to the problem, Harry asked slowly, "How creative can we be here?"

"So long as I write up what I'm doing in a separate file and then can somehow input the outcome of whatever combat scenario I envision, anything goes. But the program will stop me from doing so if I have the Grimm acting out of character, the materials aren't there, or many other things. What are you thinking about?"

"I think you're not making use of the landscape nearly enough. You only looked at the type of terrain and forgot that that topography might be describing other things. Look at this."

With that, Harry moved the mouse around, clicking on various places. From there, Harry and Arturia put together several noise-based ambushes in places where Arturia had not investigated the terrain well enough. While Grimm were attracted to fear and anger, they did hunt mostly through their normal senses. And there were places set well away from the convoy's route that could be used as excellent ambush points if the Grimm could be brought there away from the convoy.

Getting back to the convoy quickly before it could run into the next group of Grimm on its route was tough but doable. And without the other Grimm groups nearby, pulled away by the noise-makers, killing that group was easy enough. This plan worked until halfway across the map, where Harry had to change the plan to something else, using the topography differently, setting up makeshift walls here and there, explosive traps, and eventually a small killing ground to one side of the convoy's proposed route.

While the convoy followed the route on relatively flat terrain, Harry and Arturia worked to draw the Grimm down on themselves elsewhere by, again, using noise to draw the Grimm in.

As she watched Harry work on setting up this battlefield and the means with which the Hunters could then cut across the terrain to catch up with the still-moving convoy, Arturia's thoughts turned in a direction they'd had a few times whenever she was home from Beacon. Being away from home had brought Arturia into an entirely new social landscape, and there, Arturia had not instantly made herself the aloof Ice Queen she had been in Lighthouse.

Mind you, Arturia was still standoffish, only not to the same semi-regal, haughty dismissive level. But not to the extent that she had been previously. This was helped by the fact that most people in Vale didn't know of her past as a tournament champion. Her time in the tournament didn't really matter except when it impinged on her schoolwork. Her frequent absences simply made Arturia more mysterious rather than unapproachable.

Thus, over the years, Arturia had found a few men among her fellow students that were interesting enough when they approached her to allow the honor of dating her. Unfortunately, that was about all. After a few dates, Arturia would always find something lacking about the man's attitude, something about how he held himself or acted.

It had come as a shock when one of her teammates had mentioned idly, "You know, the way you spend so much time talking to your brothers and sisters, it's like you don't have any room or anyone else. I mean, Petal mentioned that you dumped Maroon when he objected to you cutting a date short so you could talk to your family that night."

Petal nodded quickly. "Yeah, and whenever you're out with boys, it's like you can't really relax around them too. And whenever you dump one, you always compare them to Harry somehow."

"I, I do what?" Arturia gaped at the other girls on her team while their lone male team member placed a set of large headphones over his ears. Nearly four years together had trained him well enough to know when the girls would soon be descending into the uncomfortable girl talk stage. "What do you mean, Cobalt?"

"Well, yeah. Remember last year when Char wanted to impress you on how well he could cook?" Cobalt answered

"Heh, he really was going the whole house-husband route. An innovative approach at least," Petal snickered.

"And you apparently kept comparing the food he would cook on your picnic dates to things Harry had made? He ended up breaking up with you." Cobalt continued before smiling wistfully. "Thankfully, he met that shrew Faunus freshman soon after. They are soooo cuuutee!"

"Right, but back to Arturia here. There was also that Fairbrand guy, the one who had to drop out a few months ago? Or Mattias Sheen?"

"Or Glenn Goodgrass?"

"Mind you, comparing them to your brother and breaking up with them because they can't meet that lofty goal is one thing, and I'm still annoyed you won't let me talk to him, Arturia. That's a bit too protective on your part. Yet it's still better than the dozens of kicks to the balls you did to that guy trying to act like a playboy, getting all touchy-flirty with you," Petal

snickered once more. "I still remember how the other boys were crying in shared agony. There's a reason no one has approached you since, Artie."

"DON'T call me that!" Arturia growled back. "And it is well they should! If they are going to attempt and be so forward with me the men here should know I do not appreciate it."

"Heh, they know that now for sure," Cobalt laughed. "But yeah, babe, you definitely have compared every actual boyfriend you've had, and even most boys you know, to your brother. Negatively too. You can't just keep holding the men in your life to some impossible ideal, you know."

"Bah! If I wish to hold the men who seek to court me to a high standard, it is hardly my fault when they fall short," Arturia shot back harshly.

But once her romantic hang-ups had been pointed out to her, Arturia could not stop her mind from occasionally examining why this issue had arisen. And she understood that in many ways, Harry was what she was looking for in a man. Handsome, although that wasn't really high on her list, extremely intelligent (which was), driven, with a good sense of humor and a down-to-earth nature.

Seldom had Arturia met anyone outside of their family that was driven as Harry and Tia were to become Hunters despite many years of dealing without having Aura. Moreover, Harry was not just strong but was highly intelligent, as shown in this little exercise.

As she watched Harry show what their father had gone to such lengths to expand further, Arturia had to smile somewhat wryly at herself. *Holding men to an impossible standard, am I? Very well, so be it. I have long been labeled a queen, and if one wishes to court a queen, one had best be the cream of the crop.*

With that, she began to put her own ideas, putting an arm around Harry's shoulder as she did, leaning in. When they were finished, Harry stood up, stretching and as he winked down at her. "Well, I think that's one problem done and dusted. It was fun. And you say they only start that kind of thing in senior year?"

"They have simpler ones for leaders starting at the freshman level, but I rather believe that you're going to overachieve in them, Harry," Arturia predicted dryly, saving her work to her scroll, sending off a copy to Professor Ozpin before hopping to her feet and following after him. "And with that, I think it is time for both of us to head to bed. I need to head out tomorrow morning bright and early to get to the arena for my next match, and then it's back to Beacon for me before I have to come back for the last match."

The idea that Arturia would lose her next match never occurred to her. It was simply an impossibility that could not enter her mind.

Harry wished her good luck anyway, thinking about asking Arturia to pass along his scroll number to Pyrrha again. But he decided against it. Arturia had already said she would at the

first opportunity, and once Arturia said she would do something, she did, no matter how long it might take.

A few days later, Arturia returned to the tournament circuit. She had one more match before she would compete against someone for the title of Champion this year. At the same time, Harry and Tia went back to school.

To anyone else, Tia looked normal as they sat through their normal, quite boring classes. But to Harry, she looked like an eager bundle of energy and was even occasionally glancing over at her nemesis. "Just don't break anything," Harry murmured to her as the final regular class of the day ended, and they started to separate, heading to their respective locker rooms.

Tia smiled her tiny smile, her deep, ocean blue eyes sparkling back at him mischievously. "I make no promises."

When the combat classes began, the teacher, as usual, asked for volunteers, but he was surprised when Tia raised her hand. While Tia and Harry always did everything asked of them, neither twin had ever volunteered before this. That was fine, considering that neither of them had Aura. *Although rumors are going around that Harry has somehow been able to unlock his.*

After a moment, the teacher decided he would believe that when he saw it. Until then, he would treat the two of them with the same amount of distance and thinly veiled barbed sympathy that he always had, hoping that the two of them would eventually realize how stupid they were to believe they could be hunters without Aura. "Yes, Miss Arc, what is it?"

"I wish to have a spar," came the normal monotone reply.

"Your brother, I assume?" The teacher asked, hoping against hope that was the case. That was what normally happened unless one of the other students was feeling a little vindictive. After all, as good fighters as they were, the Arc twins didn't have Aura. Any of his other students could simply wear them down despite a growing skill disparity between them and their fellow students.

Tia shook her head and pointed toward Mary. Mary guffawed but hopped to her feet, grabbing up her claw blades and clicking them into place on her overlarge gauntlets. The four shells loading into the bullet chambers of her gauntlets made an audible click-clack noise that rang through the training area ominously as the rest of the class began to chatter in the background. "Your funeral, you blonde bint!"

"Mary! I've warned you about that kind of language before. That'll be detention for you tomorrow!" the teacher barked, and the perennial bully acted as if she was cowed, not that anyone believed it. Yet, even so, the teacher nodded at the two of them, knowing if she didn't let them have a match, whatever issue had caused Tia to search out Mary would fester. And both girls were perfectly able to take events into their own hands outside of the classroom.

*At least this way, I can make certain Mary doesn't go too far. Perhaps a beat down will finally prove to these two that they don't understand how dangerous hunter work can be. "Go and get your weapons, you two. We're Hunters, and we do our talking with actions, not words."*

Moments later, everyone bar Harry was stunned when Tia came back in her Huntress outfit, complete with blade.

Seeing this, Mary shook her head and laughed, although it felt a little forced to a few of her coterie. "You think that a change of clothing will do anything to keep me beating you into the ground? Keep dreaming!"

Without a word, Tia reached up behind her shoulder, pushing her thumb into the small circular hole part of her blade's hilt. Tia pulled the odd blade out and twirled the large blade between her fingers before holding it out to one side. Despite the thing being equal to a claymore, Tia held it perfectly still, as if the blade weighed nothing at all to her.

Mary growled, crouching down, raising her fists, twitching her fingers to activate her claw blades.

"Hold!" The teacher growled. "Place your scroll in the Aura counter, Mary."

"Bah, I don't know why I even bother. It's not like..."

Once more, the class fell silent as Tia moved over to the input pedestal with Mary instead of waiting for her foe to do so. Still staring Mary down, Tia inputted her scroll into the counter.

Despite all the obvious changes to Tia and the near-certain possibility that something had changed with her, everyone in the class still assumed that nothing would happen. That there would be the normal ERROR: AURA NOT FOUND message whenever one of the twins was forced to do this. But then, her image appeared on the screen, showing a green edge surrounding it and the numbers 100%.

For a moment, the continuous chatter of the rest of the class fell silent. Then there was a communal shriek as Mary, and everyone else shouted, "Y, you have Aura!?"

Tia didn't bother replying, simply turning her back on her opponent as she walked away. Back in the arena, she took her position, standing as she had been before, her blade whirling in one hand.

Mary scowled angrily and moved to stand opposite the tanned girl. The instant the match began, the bully charged forward, firing out rifle rounds from her gauntlet in a quick succession of blasts. Tia blocked them occasionally, took the others, and then charged forwards, her Aura not even falling below 99% as the rifle rounds hit her.

What happened next honestly surprised no one. Harry and Tia were in the top ten of the class without Aura. With their Aura unlocked, there was no contest. There was a new number one, and she had just leveled a beat down on the old one.

Afterward, Harry and Tia were both somewhat annoyed, although not surprised, by how their classmates almost performed a one-eighty in how they treated the twins. They were no longer the two weirdos who thought they could be Hunters just because of their names despite not having Aura. Now everyone wanted to be their friends and be close to them.

This carried over into the romantic too. Whereas before, Tia had been quite popular with the boys despite her lack of Aura, this skyrocketed now as she wasn't just a girl they wanted to protect (the romantics) or show some kind of emotion (the perverts). Rather she had become a possible partner in their Hunter or gladiator careers. And because of that, the boys were far more open in their admiration of her and somewhat pushier too.

At the same time, much of the jealousy among the women had disappeared. Now it was replaced by the rest of the seniors and many of the younger set wanting to become friends with the new campus queen.

For his part, Harry had never been as popular with the opposite sex as Tia, and having that change so abruptly was way more off-putting than gratifying. It showed him how self-centered most teens were, reminding him very strongly of the Hogwarts Herd Mentality™ he'd dealt with so often in his past life. The boys also trying to befriend him were a little more acceptable, but not overmuch.

Seeing how shallow most of their peers were only worked to make the Arc twins ignore them all still further. That pushed the two of them even closer together at school, not that they had a problem with that. After all, both of them were incredibly busy outside of school. Tia continued to train with Hazel now, trying to unlock her Semblance, while Harry found his time taken up more and more with leadership lessons and even becoming Guld's spokesman and second when it came to matters around Evig Låga.

But this didn't mean the twins had no time to devote to the youngsters or possibly make new friends...

**OOOOOO**

"Thump! THUMP, Thump, THUMP!"

A rhythmic thumping noise filled the locker room that Pyrrha had been given for her day's match. The match was over now, although Pyrrha still stood there clothed in her normal outfit, her weapons peace-locked at her feet. The thumping was caused by Pyrrha's attempt to take out some of her frustration before she had to go out and once meet her so-called adoring public.

Another match, another person who had not given it his all because he believed his loss was inevitable. *Another match that couldn't get my blood pumping at all, a match that barely lasted five minutes, and only that because my parents asked if I could drag it out a bit.* Normally Pyrrha would not have done that, but in this match, she had not been able to stop a bit of her anger from showing.

The male fighter, a middle-aged man who had been a tournament contestant longer than Pyrrha had been alive, had barely put up any fight. He would no doubt even now be spreading rumors she was fighting during that time of the month because she wasn't as polite or self-effacing after the match as normally would've been and had smacked him down so brutally. Pyrrha was somewhat embarrassed by that, but not overmuch.

"All I wanted was someone to give it their all! To get my blood pumping. Is that too much to ask? Not someone who folded after barely a single series of exchanges," Pyrrha whined as she smacked her forehead against the locker door. "Now I have to go from here to several endorsement recordings, including one for women's clothing and another for that cereal I never even tried!"

Pyrrha shuddered at the thought of Pumpkin Pete's. "So much sugar. I'm glad I looked it up before I decided to try it."

After several more loud thumps, Pyrrha sighed, pushing herself away from the lockers, noting absently that her head had slowly dented the door. *I'll need to repair that, I suppose. Polarity can be useful for that kind of thing. I remember how many times I've had to repair my alarm's top in the same way.*

With a wry little chuckle at one of her most embarrassing secrets, Pyrrha calmed herself down, pushing her frustration, annoyance, and growing anger at how her life was not her own, slapping her cheeks with both hands. "Game face on Pyrrha. I have to go out there sometime."

Even as she thought that, Pyrrha had another thought, a fervent dream to go back in time and smack her younger self upside the head. *I wish with all my heart I had never allowed my parents to take over my public relations! My life would be very different if I could craft my own public persona, let alone the number of endorsement deals.*

Pyrrha consciously avoided the fact that actually, Pyrrha's own natural character had created the bedrock of her Invincible Girl name. She was genuinely as nice, self-effacing and polite as she always seemed. Combined with her extreme skills, youth, and looks, the bedrock of her current trouble had always been there. And while her parents were indeed milking her public persona for all it was worth, they had also protected her from others that would have done so.

The red-headed three-time champion looked up as the door to her locker room opened, feeling a strange sense of déjà vu for a moment. This feeling increased when Arturia entered, and Pyrrha's lips quirked into a smile for a moment. But before she could tease the older girl on

once more getting lost, Arturia looked over Pyrrha's shoulder at the locker that Pyrrha had been headbutting. A caustic eyebrow rose, and Arturia teased, "Hmmpf, is this some new form of aura training, Nikos?"

Trying to look nonchalant and fighting back a flush, Pyrrha shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I want to train myself as much as I can. After all, it wouldn't do to beat you when I am not at my best."

Arturia's lips formed a sneer as she looked back at the younger girl. But there was nothing personal in that expression, simply disdain at the idea that her loss was preordained. "If you even attempt to fight me at anything but one hundred percent, you will lose all chance of winning. Indeed, if that occurred, you would lose all chance of getting out of the fight without being humiliated."

In response, Pyrrha used her foot to flip her spear up into her hand from the floor, smirking slightly. "I fully agree. It is quite a pity we can't just jump right to our own match, isn't it and discover who could humiliate who?"

Arturia's next match was scheduled for later that day. The days the tournament broadcast shrank as the brackets did, spacing the tournament out longer between matches in terms of days to allow for rest and recovery. There would be two more matches for both of them before they would meet for the championship.

And Pyrrha knew that it would be Arturia. Or at least she prayed it would be. As the older woman had said, Pyrrha knew Arturia would give the match her all.

However, instead of continuing their badinage, Arturia shook her head and held out a hand imperiously. "As pleasant as facing you on the sands could be, that isn't what I am here for. Give me your scroll."

Blinking, Pyrrha obeyed before she realized she was doing so, then scowled and was about to ask why when Arturia thrust Pyrrha's scroll back into her hand. Looking at it, she saw that a new contact info had been inputted into the device, one with no name, description or image to accompany it. Looking at Arturia, Pyrrha cocked her head to one side quizzically. "What is this?"

"That would be telling. Allow me some amusement in this assignment. I rather believe it will be the only moment of joy I get today." shaking her head. "I have to go, but I will see you finals, Pyrrha Nikos. Do not dare lose to anyone but me."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Pyrrha murmured, still looking down at her scroll in confusion and then back up at the departing Arturia. *She isn't the type to tease me or anything similar, so, hmm... this could be her own contact information. But is so, why not just tell me? Indeed, why is she taking 'some amusement' from giving me this?*



Her thoughts stopped as Arturia paused in the doorway, looking over her shoulder back at Pyrrha. "One last thing. Thank you."

At that, Pyrrha blinked, wondering what Arturia would be thanking her for. But before she could ask, the other woman was out of the locker room, closing the door behind her, leaving Pyrrha behind to look down at the contact.

Regardless, Pyrrha didn't have enough time to look into it because just as she was about to click on it, a call came in from her manager asking her to hurry up. Sighing but feeling somewhat renewed from the oddity of the short meeting with Arturia, Pyrrha grabbed up her weapons and sped out of the room.

Late that night, with her homework done (even as a tournament champion, she still had homework), Pyrrha finally had time to call the number, feeling a flood of mixed interest and trepidation as she did.

While Pyrrha's mind returned to this mystery on and off throughout the day, she had not expected to see Harry and his twin sister Tia's faces appearing on her scroll after only two rings. "W, what, how did.... how does Arturia know your scroll number, Harry!? And how in the world were you able to disappear so well?"

Harry chuckled. "I mentioned I had a sister who was also a tournament fighter."

"B, but you don't look anything like Arturia!" Pyrrha stammered before falling silent. It was true Harry had said that, but Harry **really** didn't look anything like Arturia or any of the other Arcs who had been part of the tournament she had researched before her first bout with the older girl.

At that point, Pyrrha's good nature and regular personality reasserted itself. She smiled for real now, a wider, brighter smile rather than the fake smile she'd had on her face throughout too much of the day. "Regardless of Arturia's antics, it's good to see you again."

"Good to see you too," Harry answered instantly, flashing her a grin, while Tia merely nodded. "And sorry, but I wasn't about to throw myself into the hornet's nest that is public opinion. And thanks to everyone's fixation on you, I didn't have to. Most of the people interviewed from Chian don't even remember what I looked like; they were all concentrating on you the instant your fighting style was recognized."

"You don't have to tell me about it, or sound so smug," Pyrrha shook her head, although having Harry poke fun at her like that was extremely nice, frankly. She knew from their talks that Harry commiserated with her a lot on this, having had to deal with it with Arturia apparently, which made a good deal of sense now that she was aware of their connection. Arturia had quite a lot of attention and notoriety after Arturia had won her second championship at such a young age. But she had never embraced the limelight as Pyrrha's family had.

“Why did you volunteer the information that you were there anyway?” Harry asked. “If you hadn’t done that, the rumors you had been there probably wouldn’t have grown too much, even with all the first-hand accounts of seeing someone using your combat style.”

“My parents decided to make that announcement after they came to pick me up. That alone should tell you my feelings on the matter?”

“Oh dear,” Harry murmured, shaking his head. “You mentioned how much they enjoyed your fame more than you did. I didn’t think it would go that far.”

Pyrrha nodded, but then Tia spoke up for the first time, pointing at herself. “I also wish to thank you. You helped keep Harry alive.”

Pyrrha smiled back at the girl, but Tia’s expression didn’t change. She just cocked her head to one side and looked back.

Seeing that, Pyrrha giggled. *Oh dear, two sisters who are so cool and aloof seeming. Even though I get the impression Tia’s attitude is caused by a different issue, having to deal with two such sisters could be quite troublesome for Harry.*

Harry and Tia looked at her quizzically, and she shook her head. “I’m just wondering how much of your people skills you had to cultivate to compensate for two sisters who are decidedly not outgoing. To say nothing about the fact you said most of your sisters have you wrapped around their fingers.”

“I’ll never tell,” Harry laughed.

Tia leaned her head against Harry’s, and for a moment, a surge of jealousy went through Pyrrha before she beat it down. *They are twins. Of course, they would be close!*

This was not helped by Tia’s words. “Mmm. Always been close. Never going to change.”

“But Tia isn’t the only one who wants to say thank you,” a new voice said suddenly, and an older woman thrust her own head down into the pickup. “I’m Hazel Arc, this one’s mother. And we all have to thank you for helping Harry. Looking back, we honestly should never have let Harry out on his own. Arcs tend to attract trouble at the best of times, and Harry seems to have gotten a double helping.”

Pyrrha blinked, taking in the woman’s features. She was middle-aged but had the face of a model, with the same high cheekbones that Arturia and Tia had, black hair like Harry’s sown to her shoulders in loose ringlets, and a face made to smile.

As she did, Harry protested his innocence, but Hazel just looked down at him archly. “Did you or did you not suddenly run into an entire pack of Beowolves the last time you were out testing your new Semblance?”

“And the time before? You and Arturia were sparring beyond the town’s borders. You were attacked by a Dread Leo,” Tia added. A Dread Leo was a kind of panther-like Grimm found in the mountains of Mistral.

A third voice from outside the pickup added, “And when you and Mom went to pick up those generator parts with Old Fuldor, you walked right into a gang fight.”

“OH MY! I heard about that. Something about two gangs fighting over territory and choosing the wrong time to do it. They were interrupted by a Huntress,” Pyrrha exclaimed.

“That would be me, yes. Thankfully, I kept Harry’s help out of the police or news reports,” Hazel answered, snorting.

Harry pouted a bit but couldn’t argue with any of these points. “Okay, maybe I do somehow attract trouble.”

“Well, regardless, I should thank all of you for training Harry as well as you did. He honestly helped me just as much. Even if we are only talking about the Grimm assault, it was only together that we were able to slay the Nuckaleevee.”

“You’re nice, dear. Just know that you have the Arc Clan’s gratitude.” Hazel still seemed to pick up on her hesitance, though she didn’t follow up. “...Well, that’s good at least. For now, let me introduce the rest of my children. I’d also introduce you to my husband, but he’s out on a mission at the moment.”

First came two older girls, women really, the youngest in her late twenties. Then came a single blond girl with her hair done in twin drills going down her chest, large circular glasses on her face. She seemed almost disinterested in the discussion but was polite enough.

And then Harry and Tia were holding two young twin girls in their laps, causing Pyrrha to coo internally at how cute they were. While the one in Harry’s lap, Rouge, seemed to be a little awestruck, that didn’t bother Pyrrha. Children admiring her never did. People her age or older looking at her like this goddess of victory did.

And the other twin seemed to make up for Rouge’s shyness, her words coming out in a tumble. “I swear to the brothers I never expected to be sitting here talking to. Oh my gosh, you’re so cool. That jewelry store that made your hair tie is soooo good, and we love that cereal you’ve been endorsing! Pumpkin Pete’s is fantastic!”

“Oh dear,” Pyrrha murmured, biting her lip to keep from saying something embarrassing about wanting to pinch Rose’s little cheeks. “I, um, I really can’t honestly recommend it. While I know my face is plastered all over it, you should look up how much sugar is in that cereal before eating it. I know I did, and I would never honestly put it in my body if my parents hadn’t signed the contract.”

“I have,” Hazel growled darkly. “And that one box will be the only one bought in this house so long as I can do anything about it.”

Rose looked chagrined at the idea that her idol didn’t actually like the cereal she endorsed but moved on quickly, battering Pyrrha with question after question until Harry made her slow down. Bar Saffron, the others all popped in, talking to her, telling Pyrrha about what Harry had been up to since Chian, about themselves, and asked questions about Pyrrha, most of which, she was delighted to note, had nothing to do with the Invincible Girl or her looks. The tournament drew a lot of questions, but so did school, boys (much to Harry’s embarrassment, which Pyrrha laughed at) and movies.

Pyrrha basked in the homey nature of the call for a time, with all of the sisters trying to grab her attention as if she was some long-lost acquaintance or family member they wanted to reconnect with. There was no sense of putting her on a pedestal, no questions about being a champion, only the important things. Tia asked her questions about whether or not she was going to be a Huntress and why she would do that instead of continuing on with the tournament style and the future. As she said she would, Hazel cut in to add her own approval to the idea, and for some reason, Pyrrha found herself admitting to the older woman that her parents did not want her to pursue a career as a Huntress.

Hazel scoffed. “Who cares! If I cared about what my parents had wanted, I would’ve never met my Guld or married him. It’s your life to live, child, not theirs. Parents can teach you, and apparently, they can take advantage of you. But they can’t stop you from living the life you wish so long as you are willing to put forth the effort.”

Harry nodded firmly, as did Tia. “I’m going to Beacon this coming year too, and I’d find it annoying to learn that you wouldn’t be,” he said, winking through the pickup at Pyrrha. The scholastic year only had two more months, followed by another month off before the next school year began.

Pyrrha found herself flushing at the wink and grinning back at him as Tia added her own words. “Although, don’t be surprised if I challenge you to a fight. Arturia says you’re tough. I want to see it for myself.”

Pyrrha grinned back fiercely. “I’d welcome the challenge!”

“Oh dear, another combat junky, is it?” Hazel giggled, then kissed Harry and Tia on their heads, shooing the youngsters out, saying it was past their bedtime. Which it was by several hours.

“Are you free to meet up in person at any point? We figured out quite a bit about my Semblance, and I still owe you that explanation,” Harry said after the rest of the family had left.

However, Pyrrha shook her head ruefully. “I’m sorry, but no. I actually should be sleeping now. I have a **very** early morning tomorrow, and I am booked solid until the day before

leaving for Beacon. That includes my tournament matches, including it is hoped, I hope anyway, the championship match.”

Harry pouted a bit. “That’s somewhat annoying. Unfortunately, Tia and I are busy too. I need to develop my own combat outfit, and think about a long-range weapon.”

Tia shook her head, and Harry pushed his shoulder against hers playfully. “I know you don’t think I need that, but Arturia and our parents do. Maybe something simple and disposable? Or maybe I can see how good I am with a sniper rifle, cover all the bases: long, short and medium.”

“Your eyesight isn’t nearly that good, Harry,” Tia replied dryly. “Still, if you want to try, you can.”

“It won’t be a masterpiece like your Tiburon, but I also have to build up my mental toughness to use more semblance techniques. Concentrating on multiple people at once when one of them is in your face is really hard, and there’s also the work I’m doing with my dad.”

Pyrrha looked interested, and Harry shrugged. “I told them about how we organized the locals and...”

“There was no ‘we’ in that, Harry,” Pyrrha interrupted, letting herself be a little rude to get her point across. And quite happy she could be open to people who knew about her issues with her fame already. “That was entirely you doing that. It would never have occurred to me to get people without Aura to fight the Grimm or even organize the locals. I would have assumed the locals would do that. You’re a natural leader, don’t try to give me credit that I don’t deserve. Too many people are doing that already.”

Looking a bit uncomfortable, Harry shrugged. “I wasn’t trying to do that. I was trying to be modest, I guess.”

“Modesty is only good so far,” Tia opined. “Sometimes you need to own up to being awesome.”

Harry grumbled at that but nodded. “Anyway, we’re both extremely busy. I could probably talk our parents into letting us out of school for a bit, given our grades, but if you’re not going to be free...” he shrugged.

To this, Pyrrha could only nod rueful agreement.

“But that sort of brings me back to what I wanted to say earlier,” Harry changed the subject. “I had a thought about your fame. Whether or not you like it, you’re in the limelight now, and while your parents might have been the ones to create the Invincible Girl brand, you are still Pyrrha Nikos. How you act makes that role. So, you have three choices. One, you can run away from it. That will only work for so long, given the amount of fame you have.

“And that fame will grow if you beat our sister,” Tia added, her lips twitching up in an almost imperceptible smirk. “Not that I think you will.”

Pyrrha laughed, for even though she hated her fame and all of the public drama that came with it, there was a large part of the young woman who loved a challenge. “Arturia has already promised me to do her utmost. Regardless, you should not assume that I’m just going to roll over for her, whatever she might’ve learned at Beacon.”

Chuckling, Harry pushed Tia lightly with his shoulder, continuing his earlier words. “As I was saying, that’s one way of dealing with it. There are two other ways. You let it overcome you. You become what the people want to see, and I hate to say it, Pyrrha, but that’s what you’ve been doing.”

Pyrrha winced but understood his point. She had allowed her parents to control and dictate how she acted from almost the moment she started to gather a following. Part of that was because she really was as polite and gentle as the Invincible Girl persona was most of the time. But another aspect was that it was simply easier to go along to get along. “Well, with those two examples, I think I know what the third way is.”

“Right. The third way to deal with fame is to own it. Make it your own, break the mold and deal with the changes it will cause. But whatever you choose,” Harry said, smiling into the pickup. “Just remember you’ve got a few friends here rooting for whatever you do.”

Pyrrha’s shoulders straightened at that, and she smiled happily at Harry, a faint flush to her face before she nodded at him and at Tia before asking deliberately, “So Tia, have you awakened your Aura as well by this point?”

**OOOOOO**

Over the next few weeks, the nightly conversations with Harry and his family became one of the most important parts of Pyrrha’s day. Talking to the Arcs gave Pyrrha a window into the... not normality really, the Arcs were not normal by any means. But the closeness they shared, the down-to-earth nature of the clan, appealed to her greatly.

Not to mention the treehouse. Rose had insisted on giving her a tour. Pyrrha had watched as Harry walked through the treehouse, falling in love with its homey, welcoming and whimsical nature.

As her relationship with her own parents continued to sour, these discussions became even more important. Pyrrha found herself asking Violet and Hazel for advice, even calling Hazel on the Arc matriarch’s scroll on occasion, separate from her discussions with Harry. Tia too became a friend, the two of them bonding over their future as Huntresses, food, and talking about combat.

Meanwhile, Pyrrha’s next few matches followed a now-familiar refrain, with neither of her next two opponents. The Invincible Girl was simply too strong, so why bother going all out

against her and risk even further humiliation? It was a way of thinking that Pyrrha disdained, but with her conversations with the Arcs sustaining her, she kept that off of her expression, remaining polite and nice to the opponents as she defeated them.

Even her conversations with her parents weren't quite as prickly as before. Pyrrha simply went out of her way to avoid them as much as possible. But inwardly, Pyrrha kept on coming back to Harry's words. That maybe she should own her fame, change how the public perceived her rather than letting her persona dictate her actions. Heading to Beacon was a start, but her public image would follow her even there. Did she want that image to remain the same? And if so, how could she go about changing it?

Finally, the day came that Pyrrha had long been waiting for. A real challenge, a fight where Pyrrha's opponent would give her all.

Looking down at herself, Pyrrha made certain her armor was in place, her rifle working, shifting it through hit's three forms before running a hand up to her hair, feeling the small metal and gold hairclip there. Then she smiled and stepped forth onto the sands of the arena.

As she entered, the announcers began to announce the match. These were two men, "And in this corner, she is the three-time Tournament champion, the defeater of Grimm and men alike, rarely touched in the arena, and the slayer of a legendary Grimm, the dread Nuckaleevee. Going for a never before seen fourth championship, the Invincible Girl, Pyrrha NIKOSSSSSSS!!!"

Pyrrha held up Milo in its spear form into the air but otherwise ignored the roaring of the crowd or the announcers, staring across the sand to where her opponent would appear. And a moment later, she did.

"And challenging the Invincible Girl is the champion whose defeat started her rise. A two-time tournament winner herself, this young woman took two years off from the circuit to concentrate on learning to be a Huntress at Vale's Beacon Academy. Having returned, the Ice Queen has yet to show us anything revolutionary, simply dominating her opponents with speed, skill and a new weapon. Give a round of applause for the former two-time champion, the Ice Queen of the arena, Arturiaaaaaa AAAaaaaarcccc!!!"

From out of the other side of the arena, Arturia strode. No longer clad in simple traveling clothing nor, Pyrrha was surprised to note, did Arturia wear the armor she had worn before this. That had been a matte black, foreboding set of full plate covering her from head to toe. Instead, while her outfit was still black, it was formfitting leather armor with only a metal breastplate.

*Oh my, does this mean she knows or at least suspects about my Semblance!? Pyrrha thought with some delight. That would only make the fight to come all the better. And she is still using metal weapons, after all.*

The idea that Harry might have told his sister about Pyrrha's Semblance did not honestly occur to her. Arturia wasn't the type to take that kind of handout, and if he had, Harry would have warned Pyrrha in turn about Arturia's Semblance. That was just the kind of man he was.

Arturia wore a long cloak marked by fur, which dropped from her shoulders as she strode out onto the sand, not even glancing at the audience, her gleaming yellow eyes locked on Pyrrha. With the cloak gone, it was obvious that there was a thin gambeson underneath the rest of her armor, the material covering her neck and up to her cheeks in the form of triangles. On her head, she wore a crown of black metal. Open at the front, it rose in a series of jagged points, ending in two horns that thrust back and up from over her ears.

In one hand, Arturia held a long lance. Matte black, it had striations of red running like veins throughout its length, the blunt end above the guard looking almost like bone. The lance Rhongomyniad was a weapon Arturia had crafted herself and was as long as Milo in spear form, covering Arturia's arm back to her elbow, although the flaps of armor that did so could shift, letting the lance be used like a polearm.

On her other arm, Arturia's shield was a simple thick round shield that could fire out small-caliber bullets from several barrels set around the shield's edge. If it had a name, Pyrrha didn't know it and wouldn't have cared. Compared to the masterpiece of smithing that was Rhongomyniad, the shield was barely worth a mention.

"Fighters to the starting squares," one announcer bellowed.

Arturia and Pyrrha moved forward as one, their gazes locked on one another, green on gold, bodies tensed as they moved into two painted squares set into the arena's floor set two hundred paces apart. There, they bowed to one another before straightening quickly.

For a moment, the crowd fell silent, and then the announcers bellowed, "Begin!"

Before the word had even finished, the women raced to either side, firing as they circled around one another. Arturia used her shield, and Pyrrha used Milo set into rifle mode, watching as her shots were deflected by her opponent's shield or the guard of her lance even as she used Akuo to do the same.

The two of them danced around one another in the center of the arena. They kept their distance, for now, probing to see if they could get in a few lucky shots to start impacting their opponent's Aura.

After a few seconds, Pyrrha decided that wasn't going to happen. She charged forward, still firing as she went, before whirling away from a series of Arturia's shots, hurling her shield like a discus towards the other woman.

Arturia coolly blocked it with her spear, deflecting it upwards. But Pyrrha leaped upward, using the recoil from her weapon to arc through the air, grabbing her shield and coming down right in front of Arturia.



Rhongomyniad thrust forward, and Pyrrha drove it to one side with Milo having shifted it into its javelin mode. The two of them exchanged a series of blows neither giving an inch. Arturia, either deflected or barely moving enough for Pyrrha's blows to miss. Her footwork was incredible, and she danced around on the sands, her movements certain, but Arturia didn't leap about like Pyrrha did.

In contrast, Pyrrha's blocks and dodges were far larger, faster, showier, something Pyrrha noticed instantly. It also let her turn Arturia several times. She had the advantage of momentum but couldn't quite get through Arturia's defense. *Crud, is this how a Huntress fights? Arturia's playing the long game, and I am a bit too used to playing for a crowd. I might need to shift tactics...*

In return, Pyrrha was forced to subtly use her polarity power twice to avoid being struck. Thankfully doing so took barely any Aura, and Pyrrha was so good at using her polarity power in this manner that no one could notice it, not even someone as skilled as Arturia unless they were watching for it.

Arturia slid into a kick, forcing Pyrrha up into the air. She flipped midair, bringing her feet up and into a mule kick, but her feet were then redirected by Arturia's shield. A second later Arturia bull-rushed her, catching Pyrrha by surprise by having Rhongomyniad out of position to back up the sudden shift in tactics from defense to offense. Arturia's shoulder crashed into Pyrrha's chest, and Pyrrha found herself flying backward, a grunt of shock coming from her lips.

Rolling to a stop, the redhead instantly pushed to one knee, firing at the charging Arturia, forcing her to dodge. Her fast recovery allowed her to surprise Arturia, and several of the shots impacted her body. And as her fourth shot flew out, Pyrrha used her polarity power to guide the bullet, changing its trajectory slightly to bounce it off Arturia's side then back into the interior of Arturia's mecha-shield as she rolled to one side to avoid the fire.

That wrecked some of the mechanism of her rifle, and Pyrrha rejoiced. *Yes! I knew those lessons on trajectory and angles would come in handy!*

But Arturia simply shifted her grip on the shield, bringing the non-ruined barrels to bear, only to make a tsking noise as the rifle refused to fire. Like this, they paused, staring at one another. As they did, Arturia let her shield fall off her arm. The gun portion of it was useless now, and she would have to use only Rhongomyniad's guard to defend herself, but that was all right by Arturia.

"What an amazing exchange, ladies and gentlemen! The Invincible Girl hasn't been pressed this hard since, well, since she took the championship from Arturia three years ago!"

"Too right, Jim! Yet Arturia's experience isn't telling against the Champion as much as it has against her other opponents. They're fighting evenly for now, although the Invincible Girl doesn't have as much raw Aura as the Ice Queen."

“Indeed. Arturia is, as everyone knows, a daughter of the Arc family. This family of Huntsmen and tournament fighters are known as Aura monsters, Dave. If the match continues like this, with both of them landing smaller blows on one another, the Invincible Girl will eventually lose,” the second announcer, Jim, answered.

“I feel this match will be decided by who can evaluate their opponent best. Or maybe who has the greater number of tricks up their sleeve, eh, Jim?”

“Too right, Dave!”

Pyrrha didn't hear anything the announcers were saying. She was staring across the sand at her opponent, trying to get into Arturia's mind and think about what to do next. *I have a slight advantage in close range thanks to my Semblance, but Arturia is very tricky and can change her style on-the-fly. I wasn't prepared for that shoulder charge. I've never seen her use that kind of attack before, and I definitely do not want to get into a grappling contest with her.*

Across from her, the platinum blonde Arc was also analyzing the brief exchange. *She's good. The way she uses her power, which must be something like telekinesis, is very subtle. So subtle another opponent might well have missed it entirely. But this time, I spotted it.*

*And I think I can counter it although that mecha-shift weapon is a decided advantage against Rhongomyniad in terms of adaptability. Perhaps in the future, I should see to transforming Rhongomyniad into one like Father's spear. But I was too unwilling to let my weapon look like anything our family had used before, too proud and wishing to be seen as my own woman.*

As she thought that, Arturia heard Harry's voice in her head, saying, “pride goes before a fall, sister dear,” and Arturia's lips quirked into a wry smile.

Pyrrha matched it, and then they were both charging forward. Arturia was unwilling to use her trump card just yet, and no longer had another long-range option. Whereas Pyrrha was still coolly assessing things and understood that close combat was where she had her best chance in this battle.

As the crowd cheered, the two women clashed, Arturia using her greater strength and reach advantage to keep Pyrrha at a distance, no longer playing defense but using a mix of both. Pyrrha was forced to use her shield and polarity powers more often as she was pushed on the back foot, and it was with a start that Pyrrha realized Arturia's getting rid of her shield had been a strategic move. It allowed Arturia to move faster, occasionally using both hands on her lance and twirling it like a staff, which let Arturia block Pyrrha's blows and bullets. What few strikes got through barely made any impact on Arturia's Aura.

But Pyrrha wasn't willing to give up the advantage of her own shield, which as a simple shield, wasn't nearly as heavy or as fragile as Arturia's mecha-shift version. *If I want to regain an advantage, it's time to be a little tricky.*

She blocked one blow from her opponent and then used polarity to 'stick' her shield against the side of the Rhongomyniad, holding it there for just an extra second as she charged in underneath the lance's reach. Taken by surprise, Arturia couldn't react quickly enough, which allowed Pyrrha to slash at the other woman several times, causing her Aura to diminish somewhat.

But then Pyrrha was forced to dodge a knee coming up at speed, noting that Arturia's limbs had no metal on them thanks to her change in attire for this match. *Was that deliberate, or...* A second later, Arturia dodged around a slash from Milo, and her free arm came around, a punch crashing into Pyrrha's head so fast she couldn't dodge. This was followed by a kick that caught Pyrrha in her chest.

The blow sent Pyrrha flying once again and made her very grateful for her armor, such as it was. Aura could do only so much to soften a jackhammer blow to the chest like that, and she rolled once more through the sand, coming up with Akuo in front of her and Milo ready in rifle form.

Arturia smiled grimly, cracking her neck and shoulder, touching her side and chest. *"If this had been a match without Aura,"* Harry's voice once more was in her mind, *"you would've just lost! What happened to dodging!?"*

"Pride goeth before a fall indeed," Arturia mused, then smiled again at Pyrrha before charging forward. *But I am who I am, and I will not change my tactics at this point.*

"What an exchange, folks! For a moment there, it looked as if The Ice Queen was getting the better of the Invincible Girl, but she was just a bit too slow to pull back from a single blow, and that second was the only advantage the Invincible Girl needed."

"That might be correct, Dave, but look at their Aura," Jimmy admonished. "The Ice Queen still has over 90% of her Aura, whereas The Invincible Girl is down to 75%. The Ice Queen is indeed banking on her greater Aura. Look, it barely diminishes a fraction of a percent with every shot that goes home. And Pyrrha's out of bullets now too."

Of course, the blows going home against Arturia's Aura didn't just impact her Aura. Several of them smacked into her legs, slowing Arturia down as she entered lance range. Pyrrha shot forward, leaping up over the woman's hasty, off-balanced spear thrust, kicking out hard.

Arturia grabbed her leg out of the air, but Pyrrha pulled it out of her grip quickly, lashing out with Milo in javelin form, the tip stabbing into Arturia's shoulder. Pyrrha then twisted around, bringing her shield up and under a lance thrust from the other woman, stabbing forward with her spear shifted into a sword form.

Grunting, Arturia took the blow redirecting it with Rhongomyniad's butt end at the last second and then the two of them were once more going at it hammer and tongs. Faster and faster the two women moved as fist feet, and weapons crashed, blows were dodged, redirected

or taken, with Arturia pressing forward hard despite taking hit after hit. Her greater experience and style let her hit Pyrrha several times before Pyrrha started to adapt, using her polarity power more and more, although this did nothing to stop Arturia's fists.

This proved decisive as Pyrrha used her polarity powers to redirect a blow to one side. As she did, Arturia whirled into a roundhouse kick that took Pyrrha in the side, and Pyrrha cursed inwardly as she rolled with the blow.

*That blow hurt, darn it! My armor's not doing much, drat it. Form over function, yet another reason to stop listening to my parents!* Pyrrha grumbled internally, coming up with her spear ready to be flung. *I've an advantage in speed and my polarity powers, but Arturia has clearly worked it out. Still, I think... what's she doing now?*

Arturia had stayed put instead of pushing forward to keep the battle close, her spear twirling in front of her in an effective defense.

"Again, the Ice Queen's strength and Aura are proving difficult for the champion to overcome, ladies and gentlemen!" Dave shouted. "While her skill and abilities seem to be a match for the more experienced Arturia, this is still anyone's game."

"Anyone's game, my pert ass," Arturia grumbled, rolling her shoulder and wincing. Again, Pyrrha had astonished her. Her telekinesis power, if that was what it was, almost completely negated the speed and strength Arturia had built up at Beacon. *She's also getting better at dodging my unarmed strikes too, and has begun to change her style to be less flashy. That last exchange should have been in my favor. But instead, Pyrrha was able to dodge and redirect most of my blows and landed some telling ones of her own. However, Nikos is not the only one with a trump card. And I was able to get some distance too.*

With that, Arturia whirled Rhongomyniad above her head, then brought it down, pointing towards Pyrrha. Across from her, Pyrrha paused from where she had been about to hurl Milo forward, looking wary.

"I give you fair praise, Pyrrha Nikos. You have pushed me to use my trump card upon you, and I would urge you to surrender. I have no desire to permanently injure you."

Pyrrha laughed aloud, a tinkling sound that carried to the audience despite the shrieking and shouting that said audience was doing at the moment. "I'm sorry, but no, Arturia!"

Then Pyrrha's eyes widened as some kind of energy gleamed all around Arturia before concentrating into Rhongomyniad, the red veins within the weapon, dust of some kind perhaps, glowing with a fiery red. A second later, even as Pyrrha pulled Milo back to hurl it forward in javelin form, Arturia shouted, "Split the heavens and rend the Earth! Shine, Excalibur!"

As Arturia finished speaking, a large blast of pure Aura lashed out towards Pyrrha from the lance's tip, faster than she could dodge. It was all she could do to get her shield up in time,

and Pyrrha shrieked as the blast of pure force crashed into her entire body, hurling her backward like a mannequin until she crashed to the earth, tumbling end over end.

For a moment, there was silence, and then the crowd roared in shock and delight. “What was that, Jimmy!? We’ve never seen the Ice Queen using any technique like that!”

“That, it must have been some kind of Semblance, Dave! Amazing! As everyone knows, you don’t have to register Semblances in the arena or even as Hunters. And many a Hunter actually keeps their Semblance a secret because the unknown always gives them a leg up on their enemies. It looks as if Arturia was doing precisely that until this point.”

“Fantastic! And look at the damage it did. It only cost the Arc Gladiatrix 5% of her own Aura, bringing her down to 60%, and knocked Pyrrha from her own 70% down to just above 40%! A few more blows like that, and the referees may have to call the match.”

Pyrrha groaned, pushing herself to her knees and then to her feet, staring across at her opponent, her eyes wide. “What, what was that!?”

“When I named my spear, I chose the name from an ancient weapon of legend, the weapon of the world's ending. After I discovered my Semblance, Aura Burst, it seemed appropriate.” Arturia said, striding forward.

Once more, her body began to glow, the glow centering on her weapon in red pulses of energy. “I well know the mettle of you, Pyrrha. I will not give you a chance to recover.”

She thrust her spear forward again, and once more, the blast of pure Aura lashed out, with no words spoken. Again, Pyrrha got her shield up, but she could feel the shield actually warping underneath the impact, its edges bending, the metal flattening out further or just melting under the impact. Then she was sent tumbling backward again, hitting the far end of the arena.

Arturia stopped her advance in the center of the arena, still pointing Rhongomyniad at her opponent, looking up at the Aura gauges above them. She was still hovering around 70%, whereas Pyrrha was right at the edge of 15%, having done a slightly better job redirecting the attack’s energy that time. Surrender. You cannot win this, Pyrrha Nikos.” Arturia announced, her tone that of a Queen to a defeated but honorable foe.

Pyrrha shakily got to her feet, staring at Arturia. She stared up at the screen above her, which displayed their Aura reserves. And she remembered Harry facing down Grimm without Aura. She remembered how they’d fought, not only the two of them but also the farmers and townsfolk who didn’t have Aura.

Aura wasn’t everything. And Pyrrha Nikos, the girl who had longed to leap off the pedestal other people had erected under her, decided suddenly that losing like this wasn’t worth it. *I am not just a champion. I am not an untouchable idol. I am a warrior. And I would rather die than yield!*

Standing there proudly, she shook her head, shouting her challenge for all to hear. **“NO!** Aura does not make the Hunter. When your Aura is gone is when the battle truly begins!”

Still holding her javelin, Pyrrha got ready to throw it at a moment’s notice, before launching herself forward, ruined shield raised. *Wait for it, wait for it. You will have one chance at this!*

Arturia snorted but nodded her head respectfully. “Well said.” She thrust her lance forward again, the beam of pure Aura crashing forward once more.

As it did, Pyrrha hurled Milo in javelin form, but not toward Arturia. If she did that, it would simply impact the front wave of the pulse of Aura. Instead, she hurled it upwards, angling to have it come down towards her opponent.

Arturia had blinded herself with the pulse of Aura, it being too wide and too tall for her to look around at the same time. Thus she didn’t see this move.

A moment later, Pyrrha dove forward, angling her shield up over her head as she landed flat on the arena's sand. The next instant, Pyrrha cried out in pain as the bottom of the beam shaved away practically all of her Aura down to nearly nothing and broke her arm, shattering her shield. *Please let me have enough Aura for this!*

As the blast ended, Pyrrha popped to her feet, tossing her shield to one side, ignoring the flare of agony this caused her. Weaponless, Pyrrha charged forwards into hand-to-hand, even as the announcer shouted, “Match over, match over! My god, Pyrrha must not know her Aura’s depleted! Someone get in there and...”

That was as far as they got before Pyrrha reached out with her polarity powers grabbing her spear out of the air. At the same time, she used it on herself and Arturia, pulling Pyrrha across the last few feet between them almost instantly, Milo turning into it’s xiphos form.

Arturia’s eyes widened, then Pyrrha was on her, slashing at her, stabbing and thrusting. “Clever girl!” *Gah, I have no time to use my Thousand Thorns!*

Despite her surprise, Arturia still had far more Aura than Pyrrha. She battered aside the younger girl’s blows, returning one that opened up a gash along Pyrrha’s broken arm, causing blood to fly, but Pyrrha wasn’t stopping. The two exchanged several more blows as proctors appeared from the doors into the arena, racing forward.

Just as Arturia had gathered enough of her Aura to use her second Aura-based attack, Pyrrha beat her to the punch. She reached forward, using the dregs of her Aura to power her polarity and using it in a way she had never thought of before meeting Harry. She reached out, feeling the iron in her own blood, grabbing it out of the air and redirected it to splash into Arturia’s eyes.

Now blind, Arturia stumbled back, her Aura attack sputtering out, the red veins in her lance returning to normal. As Arturia stumbled, Pyrrha kicked out hard, catching the other woman behind the legs, dumping her to the ground.

Then Pyrrha was on her, her javelin again shifting into xiphos mode and thrusting downwards. Arturia tried to bring Rhongomyniad around in a sideways blow, but Pyrrha was already on top of her, sitting on Arturia's chest, her knees pressing down on Arturia's arms. All Arturia could do was bring her lance up to smack side-on into Pyrrha's head with no real power behind the blow thanks to her position on the ground.

Grunting in pain, Pyrrha brought her sword down, stabbing down toward Arturia's neck, holding it just above the jugular. Aura or no, if she thrust forward now, she could kill Arturia if she could put enough strength into the strike. "YIELD!!" Pyrrha shrieked.

Arturia was finally able to blink the blood out of her eyes and stared up at the redhead above her. She saw the blade at her throat, knew that any attempt to buck her off would fail. She saw the blood pooling down Pyrrha's arm. And Arturia saw the look in those jade eyes, the hard, fierce light there.

That sight caused Arturia to smile even as Pyrrha's blood dripped onto her face. *So, Pyrrha's fire isn't just for show, is it? I suppose I can approve of that.*

Then Arturia slowly raised the hand holding Rhongomyniad before letting go, the lance toppling to the sand next to her. With that same hand, she tapped down on the sand of the arena once, twice, thrice, the staccato beat echoing out into the silence of the arena. "I yield!" she shouted in a loud, clear voice, the shout halting the judges who had raced into the arena.

They stared at the tableau in front of them as the crowd, stunned silent a moment ago by the sight of Pyrrha's charge, leaped to their feet, and began to chant as the two announcers screamed out the winner. "NIKOS, champion, NIKOS, champion, champion!"

Hearing that, Pyrrha gasped, then fell to the side, utterly exhausted but victorious. And somehow, as she lay there gasping, Pyrrha knew she would never consider herself just a gladiatrix again, nor just a Huntress. She was something more now. *I might be a champion, but I am a warrior, first and foremost. Always. And if they wish to put me on a pedestal, the public will know me as **that**, not the invincible, untouchable girl.*

Arturia slowly rose to her own knees, looking at her opponent. "Magnificent, Pyrrha. Keep that spirit, girl, come what may, and you will go far."

Pyrrha smiled wanly at her, then blinked in weary surprise as Arturia leaned down. Helping Pyrrha to her feet, Arturia held the redhead's hand into the air to signal her victory.

OOOOOOO

In Evig Låga, Guld had decided to make the championship match the culmination of small celebration. It coincided with the end of the school year for the elementary school, which let out three months earlier than the distant Lighthouse Middle School Tia and Harry went to. This let the kids help around the town in various way during harvest season.

This had worked quite well. Now, all around the Arc estate dozens of small groups had partied, talking, eating and watching two movies, a children's movie and an action film before the championship match. The movies and the match had been projected up onto a huge screen, the kind you could find in a drive-in theater.

"Well, that was a thing," Hazel chuckled, shaking her head. "I knew Arturia was good, but Pyrrha was just as good!"

"Hmm... I can tell both of them could pass as Huntresses right now. Not top tier maybe in the case of Nikos. Pyrrha's style is a bit too flamboyant. And I'd say that Arturia still needs a bit of help in terms of her pride driving her in combat." Guld mused. "All in all, easily the greatest Gladiatorial match I've ever seen. I'd willingly work with either of them in the field today."

Saffron, home for the weekend, smirked looking over at the kids, trying to shout over the tumult. "What do you think Harry? Sad your sister lost, or happy your possible girlfriend won?"

While her parents began to laugh, her comment went unheard amongst the cheers and shouts of Harry and the rest of the kids, who included many of the other kids in Evig Låga. But even if he had heard it, Harry would probably not have responded. To his eye, who actually won didn't matter much. He'd wanted Arturia to have a good fight, and to show how much stronger she was now than she had been before. And as for Pyrrha, he had wanted to see her start to break the mold.

From his perspective, this whole fight was a win. Something he would be sure to tell both of them later that night when he called them up, one after another.

**OOOOOO**

Several months later, Tia was walking around the city of Vale, feeling somewhat annoyed, although as usual that did not show up on her face. As she walked, she ignored the whispers from young men and more than a few older men commenting on her exotic looks. According to the whispers and the two men who had attempted to accost her, here in Vale tanned skin like hers wasn't normal, especially paired with blonde hair.

Tia couldn't care less. She had arrived earlier that day and had hoped to have the entire day and most of the next day to explore the city with Harry. But their father had held Harry back, the two of them busy with a final project back in Evig Låga. Tia didn't know what that project was but trusted it must be important for their father to mess with their schedules like



this. Yet they hadn't been able to switch both tickets to a later flight on Bullhead Internationale, which were notorious for being very inflexible in terms of such things because they had such tight schedules.

And a monopoly on civilian/non-Hunter international civilian transport. If you wanted to travel, you had to use BI. Their motto was, 'The Only Way To Fly'.

Regardless, this meant Tia was on her own. She had wandered aimlessly for a few hours, spending much of that time in a bookstore and befriending its owner, a middle-aged Faunus named Tuckson. He had seemed surprised at how pleasant she was to him, but Tia didn't think much about it. Now, after stopping to eat something, Tia was once more shopping, only this time, much more purposefully than her search for books previously.

After all, she and Harry both needed Dust. The entire family had used up their stores of it and a lot of what they could get their hands on in the past month working with the rest of Evig Låga's militia. *Not*, Tia thought happily, as she entered a store that advertised Dust and weapons, *that I regret the activity. Harry's thoughts on that little valley were spot on, and now Evig Laga will have its own source of Dust. Only Fire Dust admittedly, but that is arguably the most useful Dust for the civilian community at large.*

She moved through the store, first speaking to the man up front, explaining in terse sentences what she wanted, becoming, somewhat appalled at the local prices for Dust. *And here I thought that prices back in Mistral were bad.*

Yet the elderly man was somehow able to fill out most of it, although it would take him some time to find the amount of water Dust Crystals that Tia wanted to.

Tia was fine with that, and moved down the aisles, picking out various things and placing them in her bag. One lesson that her parents had made doubly certain all of the kids understood was to always have backup plans and supplies. There were some things here in this gun shop/Dust store that Tia hadn't seen back in Evig Låga, or even on shopping trips with their mother into Mistral. At least, not so inexpensively.

She paused at the magazines, taking one of them, flicking through it thoughtfully. While she was devoted to her Tiburon, that didn't mean she couldn't appreciate other weapons.

A barely heard musical riff caused Tia to turn to look to one side, blinking at seeing the young girl standing there. She wore a long red cloak, crimson really, lined with black with the hood pulled up over her head. The sides of large headphones were visible underneath as large mounds to either side. She was short, coming up to around the bottom of Tia's chest. Her face, under the hood, looked young, but focused, a wide smile on her face as she flipped through the magazine for guns, specifically sniper rifles and long-range mecha-shift type weapons.

As if she felt Tia's eyes on her, the girl looked up, blinking, and Tia smiled her very slight smile back gesturing to the hood and nodding in approval. The girl blushed rosily, and hurriedly

looked away, reminding Tia very strongly of her own younger sister Rose, who was easily the shyest in the family.

For her part, the young girl, whose name was Ruby Rose, glanced at Tia out of the corner of her eyes under her hood, shaking her head internally. *Good grief, she's built like my sister! Maybe a little taller, maybe a little broader in the shoulders? And tanned, and well she's got short hair and the idea of Yang staying standing still like that is kind of impossible, late. So maybe there aren't too alike outside of their chest size,* Ruby thought, giggling to herself. Regardless, it had been nice of the older girl to say she liked her cloak. *She looks like a Huntress, but she doesn't have a weapon on her, and she isn't dressed like one either. Weird.*

It did not occur to Ruby that most Hunters and Huntresses did not go around in their Huntress garb when not on a mission. Tia was wearing a pair of tight-fitting jeans and a blouse, open up top slightly. Of course, given her build, it only needed to be open up slightly to tell Ruby Tia had a chest just as large or even larger than her big sister, Yang.

Moments later, Tia was back at the front of the store, paying for her order when the door opened. She looked up, one eyebrow rising in sartorial amusement at the men who entered. All of them wore suits, but most wore what she felt was a generic suit: black pants black coat, red undershirt black-tie. *Rouge would give them a six out of ten, I feel. They look good, but are far too alike.*

They also held weapons, guns or swords. Several rushed through the store, sensibly making certain there weren't many people within, while others remained at the front and two moved over to the pipes which brought Dust out of the containers at the back.

With them however, was another man. He wore a red-lined white suit buckled sleeves, long black pants and black shoes. A small gray scarf was stuffed into his breast pocket and he wore black gloves, presumably to not leave any fingerprints behind. On his short cropped red hair, a black bowler hat with a red band sat at a rakish angle. In one hand he held a cigar, in the other a cane with a curved top.

The bowler hat, Tia decided, was a nice touch. She had gotten into fashion while creating her Huntress outfit, and this color scheme was quite nice. Beyond that observation though, she ignored the criminals in favor of calmly putting the items she had purchased into a bag.

"Now now," the man in the bowler hat said waving his staff airily. But Tia saw the telltale signs of a rifle's muzzle at the bottom of the cane. "Don't hurry away on my account, my dear. You see, I am afraid that your timing could've been better for your shopping trip, as we are robbing this place, including you."

Tia showed no change of expression at this pronouncement but moved away from the register, only to stop as the bowler man waved his cigar at her admonishingly while two of the

men moved to bracket her front and back, their weapons raised to touch her back or stomach menacingly. "None of that now. Let's all calm down and don't do anything stupid mmm?"

Nearby, Ruby was completely unaware of these events until one of the part-time crooks tapped her on the shoulder. When she turned, he mimed taking her headphones off.

Ruby did so, blinking at him in confusion. "Yes?"

"I said drop the magazine, hands behind your head!"

Ruby blinked, staring at him. "...Are you... robbing me?"

"Yes!"

"Huh..." Ruby nodded thoughtfully, and then activated her Semblance, blasting forward to crash the butt end Crescent Rose crashing into the man's chest, hurling him into his fellow crook and sending both of them flying towards the front of the store.

They landed there, breaking the small tableau there, and the lead crook stared down at them, shaking his head sadly. "Really? You are worth every penny I didn't pay for your employ. Truly."

Ruby appeared then, Crescent Rose turning into its side form, before she paused, staring, and scowling somewhat. *Drat! I should've transformed Crescent Rose into its rifle form and taken the shot from where I was before.* She couldn't swing at the man holding the nice girl hostage, without hitting her in turn, and if Ruby was wrong about the girl having Aura...

The man in the bowler hat sighed, then gestured towards Rose. "Isn't it past your bedtime little girl?"

Ruby pouted. "My bedtime is eleven o'clock thank you very much!"

"Ten," Tia said instantly, looking at the younger girl who gasped, staring at her.

"How did you know?" She exclaimed.

"I have little sisters. They would never answer that question correctly." *Not even Rose.*

The man in the bowler hat chuckled, but he hadn't taken his eyes off of Ruby since she had appeared, and his weapon, had been raised into a guard position. "Now, I don't want anyone to get hurt. I'm just here for the Dust. Everything else stays where it is, including this elderly gentleman's money. Don't make it any harder than it has to be."

"Harder? What does that mean?" Tia asked, her lips twitching slightly, a hint of tooth appearing.

"\*sigh\*, if I must spell it out, you're a hostage my dear, your life a guarantee against Red's good behavior," Roman said, his gaze flicking away from Ruby to her even as he spoke

though, a feeling of unease was suddenly growing in him. The tanned girl's lack of expression or any kind of response was throwing him off.

The man threatening Tia from the front might have felt something off as well, since he raised his blade, pressing it into her neck, just shy of what he must have thought would draw blood. But Tia simply nodded, her chin actually tapping against the metal of the blade. "That is what I thought you meant. But you see, there is a problem with that."

With that, Tia raised a hand, and gripped the blade that was pressed into her neck, grasping it in her hand while her other hand came up in a punch, shattering the blade. As the man stumbled back, the guy behind her slashed at her back, doing nothing. Her passive Aura was more than enough to take such hits.

Reaching forward, Tia grabbed the arm of the man with the broken blade hurling him through the nearby window with no apparent effort, ignoring another slash at her back. "To take me hostage, you would have had to actually be able to threaten me."

Ruby broke out of her shock at that point, charging forward. But the chief thief reacted just as quickly. A flare went off from the tip of his cane, blinding both Tia and Ruby, along with the man's own followers, although he had pulled his bowler hat over his eyes before the flare went off. A second later he was out the door, shouting out, "Retreat boys! Live to thieve another day!"

Blinking her eyes free of the light, Tia charged after the leader crashing into and through the door as if it was newspaper, grabbing the sword flicking towards her head, and tossing the man wielding it the air to crash into a wall on the opposite side.

Ruby was just as fast to dispatch her own opponents. Once outside she flashed around the street, the flat of Crescent Rose crashing into the men who had fled out of the store sending them sprawling. She also dodged incoming fire using the recoil of the rifle to bounce around like a mad jack rabbit. Seeing that, Tia nodded in some approval at the girl's skill. *She is quite good with the weapon. I thought it was oversized at first, but given how she uses the recoil, that isn't an issue.*

However, dealing with the rabble had allowed Roman to escape, shimmying up a fire escape to a nearby rooftop.

Ruby gasped. "He's getting away!" With that, she raced after him, ascending to the rooftop faster than most people link, but not fast enough. The robber had already boarded a bullhead that had touched down on the rooftop, and was in the sky already. Pointing his weapon back at Ruby, he shouted, "End of the line, Red! And with a finger, fired a special explosive round towards her.

Tia, who had climbed up after Ruby, flung herself forward, barreling Ruby to one side, but she needn't have bothered. A shimmering shield of some kind of energy appeared between

the explosion and the two girls, different from the shields that Tia had seen Harry was, but similar in effect, blocking out the explosion. As the smoke of the explosion cleared, a woman stood there. Tia estimated she was middle-aged, perhaps a bit younger than her mother, and had eyes and hair that almost made Tia think she was a distance relative. Her face and outfit, complete with glasses, giving her a strict school mistress look.

This was not helped by the riding crop she was using to direct her Semblance. The bits of roof that had been damaged by the explosion formed up into some kind of spear, which the woman gestured towards the Bullhead containing the bowler-hatted man.

He shot it to pieces, but the explosive material and Dust from that simply gave the woman more material. This was made worse when Tia ripped out a large air-conditioner from the roof of the building. With a grunt, she hurled it towards the retreating Bullhead this caused the older woman's eyes to widen, a scowl on her lips. Yet her annoyance at this interference didn't stop her from using her power to grab at the item in the air, using her power to toss it even faster towards the Bullhead.

Inside the Bullhead, the thief had warned his partner of what was coming and taken over the controls of the Bullhead. Now a woman wearing a mask, with long dark brown hair and wearing a dress that looked woman's eyes widened at the sight of the large air-conditioner, but she still gestured, and a great of fire Dust nearby was tossed out, smashing into the air conditioner, sending it spiraling to one side the treating Bullhead.

This saves the Bullhead, although the explosion did toss it sideways, causing it to careen into the top of the buildings. But Roman was a good enough pilot to keep it from completely crashing, with Ruby, Tia, and the as-yet un-introduce woman staring after them.

"I should've brought my weapon along," Tia muttered.

"Oh my gosh, I knew you were a huntress!" Ruby bounced up and down, "what is your weapon like, can I see it?"

Tia blinked at her, then shook her head. "I Just said I don't have it on me."

But Ruby wasn't listening. Instead, she had zoomed over to the older woman, a notebook in her hand. "C, can I have your autograph?"

"You two will be coming with me," the woman ordered instead of answering Ruby's question.

Ruby nodded agreeably, while Tia crossed her arms. "Why?"

"To answer for your actions tonight of course," the woman shot back blinked as Tia flicked open her scroll. "What are you doing?"

“Calling my parents, so they can get me a lawyer. I’m a huntress training, the last I looked stepping into help during a crime is something that is not only allowed, it is encouraged,” Tia answered in her normal monotone, her expression still not changing.

Something that was kind of freaking the watching Ruby out a bit. The tanned girl seemed nice, but...

“Perhaps where you are from Miss...”

“Tia,” Tia said, staring back at the older woman without any fear, or indeed anything else in her expression. “Tia Arc. And you are?”

This seemed to take the woman aback, but she nodded. “...Perhaps I did come along a little too harshly Miss Arc. You are of an age where that would be true so long as it was a crime in progress. But this one...” she went on flicking her riding crop towards Ruby, who squeaked like a mouse, racing behind Tia and peering out behind her towards the older woman. “Is most decidedly not.”

Tia shrugged. “She should still be applauded.”

“As for my name, I am Miss Goodwitch.”

Tia calmed down at that, and she nodded politely to woman. “Sorry. I know your name, and that you were blond, but that was the only description my older sister gave me.”

“Yes, your older sister does tend to overlook the small things sometimes. Still, while she was one of our more troublesome students, she was also one of the most promising.” Glynda Goodwitch allowed a smile to appear on her face. “I trust that you will live up to the mark she left?”

Tia nodded again and Glynda had to stop herself from frowning at the girl’s lack of reaction. That had been in the notes from Lighthouse, but Glynda hadn’t really believed the note on how unemotional Tia could seem.

“Regardless, I will need to take in for questioning.”

Tia looked at her thoughtfully, then nodded, and turned slightly, reaching down and ruffling Ruby’s hair. Ruby squawked, and batted her hand away, pouting.

Rolling her eyes, Glynda indicated that Ruby should probably call her father. “And tell that reprobate Tai-Yang that you are far too young to be allowed out in Vale this late at night! If Roman Torchwick had been more willing to stay and fight, you would no doubt have been defeated by him with or without Miss Arc’s help. He is an ex-Huntsman, one of our most devious of students.”

Ruby pouted even harder at that, while Tia looked a little dismissive, it was really hard to tell. Regardless neither of them protested further, and with Glynda chivvying the two of

them along, they moved through the streets, leaving behind the police. The police had finally responded to the sounds of a battle and had arrived to clean up the area at least. They did slow down at one point when Tia called a halt upon noticing Ruby staring longingly at a cafe, buying miss Goodwitch a herbal tea, which she seemed to take some pleasure in, and a pile of cookies for Ruby along with milk.

“I see that while she hasn’t given you a description of me, Miss Arc, your sister did tell you something about my tastes,” Glynda mused. “Although if this is an attempt to butter me up, it will not succeed.”

Tia nodded, and Glynda’s lips twitched once more into what could charitably be called a smile, and then they were at the police station. There, Glynda reported what had occurred, and requested a room to question the two younger women in. At first this went smoothly, but when the police tried to take Ruby scroll away from her along with her weapon however, Tia stepped in, glaring imposingly at the officers, her arms crossed as she stood in front of the younger girl. “Is there some law here that make you want to keep a young girl from calling her father?”

That got Glynda’s attention where she was talking to one of the policemen, and she looked over frowning. Looking around, she sighed, realizing the problem. Many police in Vale and indeed most cities resented Hunters. It was policy and a societal norm that only Hunters had their Auras unlocked. But this meant that criminals, who often had the same advantage – not following societal norms was part of being a criminal after all – could only be handled by Hunters. This left police as a decidedly second-string institution.

But while Glynda knew of their resentment, she refused to indulge in such. Her riding crop slapped out, making a loud cracking noise as it struck the table in front of her as she growled, “I will have no foolishness here. Allow the girl her scroll and weapon back. Although, Ruby, I trust you won’t try to do anything rash with a weapon?”

Ruby’s wild headshake reminded Tia of a bubblehead she had seen once and moments later, the three of them were in a small room. Tia and Ruby sat to one side of the desk, watching Glynda pace around as she asked the two to recount the night’s events. She went into detail how many people were there, what Roman had said, and if he had hinted at what he was stealing Dust for.

When she was certain she had wrung all the information she could about the incident, Glynda sighed. “Normally Miss Rose, your involvement in this would constitute a small misdemeanor. Regardless of your intent, you were part of the destruction of private property, and you are not a huntress, nor of an age to even start training at Beacon Academy just yet. You too miss Tia, would be normally given a slap on the wrist for this. Most particularly the destruction of that air-conditioner you threw at the Bullhead Roman escaped in. You both must learn that sometimes, it is better to not use your power if you cannot predict what will come of it.”

Tia nodded. "I'll pay for it."

Just then, the door open, an older gentleman walked in. "I don't think that is necessary, Glynda. Surely, the owners have some measure of insurance that will cover the damages done during an attempt to capture a criminal."

Tia took in the man, who she did actually had a much better description of than Glynda. At the same time Ruby squealed out the man's name. "Headmaster Ozpin!"

The bespectacled man smiled, nodding his head towards them both as he sat down across from the two young as he sipped from a large mug of something aromatic. Glancing at Tia for a few seconds, then turning his full attention onto Ruby, cocking his head thoughtfully to one side. "You have silver eyes..."

Tia looked at him, and then decided it was time to release some of her stockpile of humor. She looked over at Glynda, one eyebrow rising. "Does he know he sounds like a pervert when he comments randomly about some young girl's eyes? I am just happy he is not alone with her right now."

The headmaster's poise took a hit then, as he blinked, coughing on his coffee, while Glynda snickered a bit, shaking her head. "You'll have to forgive Professor Ozpin, he's not used to dealing with underage children, so isn't quite aware how some of his comments can be taken."

"Oooh, while that really did sound kind of creepy, I'm not a child! I am a Huntress in training! My Uncle Qrow taught me how to be badass, and then I made Crescent Rose! Which is just the awesomest weapon ever, it lets me go Swoosh, and flash, and bam!"

"So you are, Miss Rose." Ozpin recovered some of his poise, smiling at the younger girl. "It is not every fifteen-year-old middle-schooler who can fight off a number of gangsters, let alone help in forcing a well-known Hunter-level criminal run away."

Ruby blushed, while Tia just wondered where all this was leading. *I'd like to get to bed soon.*

Ozpin went on after taking a sip of his coffee, without spitting it off out this time. "And as for you, Miss Arc. You were able to lift the aforementioned air conditioner into the air and toss it like a medicine ball. Is that part of your Semblance?"

"Sort of. It's a biproduct," Tia answered, making no move to elaborate further.

"Hmm... well, you'll be pleased to note that your weapon arrived at Beacon earlier this morning. I look forward to seeing it in action, although, I am surprised that your brother isn't here. He is supposed to have quite a fascinating Semblance," Ozpin mused, sipping at his coffee once more. "I have been hearing some interesting rumors coming from Anima..."



Ozpin was not just the headmaster of Beacon Academy, and among his many hats, he had access to a small... rumor mill, so to speak. And for the past three months, rumors had abounded that a town in the far north of the continent had begun to expand, bringing in Faunus and humans alike, and creating a larger safe zone free of Grimm.

Beyond that, there was something pinging his instincts when he looked at Harry Arc's application. What that could be, he didn't know. Perhaps it was the frequent absences in the past few months? But whatever it was, there was something off about Harry Arc, and Ozpin wanted to know what, hence the little hook he had attempted to get Tia Arc to speak up about what she and her family had been doing.

Most would have been filled with the idea of bragging about their recent activities. But Tia didn't even notice what he was doing, let alone was filled with any wish to keep talking, and Ozpin ruefully gave that up as a lost cause. The notes about her communication issues were also well noted, although, as he believed it was perhaps an overabundance of trust in her twin to do the talking for them.

With that avenue of inquiry shut down, Ozpin turned his attention to the real reason why he was here: securing the next generation of Silver Eyes. "But back to you, Miss Rose. Clearly, your skills put you well ahead of the curve for your age group. So, I have a simple question for you. Do you want to go to Beacon?"

End Chapter

You all see what I mean by doing something a bit different here? We just skipped over a decent chapter's worth of world building. Or did we? That is up to you.

So, would you like to see more of the world building? In which case choose: I want to see what Harry's been up to for the past three months. Harry centric, tiny bit of romance, several OCs, combat, comedy.

Or would you rather I get on with the canon storyline? For that, choose: I want to see the Beacon Adventures start. Character interaction, first impressions, bit of combat, romance, heaps of comedy.

**THIS IS NOT A CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE!!!**

The world building events will still have happened. They will just be alluded to or shown in short flashbacks rather than fully written out. I am curious to see what aspect of the fic draws my readers the most.

This poll will also **not** be weighted. It is a pure numbers poll.

