Chapter Forty-Four

The maps in Remnant I’d seen, I was coming to realize, were more. . . *representational,* than accurate. The one exception to this rule being the world map, which Atlas had apparently put together with a concerted national effort and much technological dick-waving.

While its reasons may have been petty, their map did help, as the maps of Vale produced by the city itself were blatantly impossible. By their measure, the city of Vale was *enormous,* spread out over thirty miles, or more, when it was ten at most. Furthermore, it suggested that Beacon was *right* up against commercial and residential districts of the city, instead of over twenty-five miles away, the city only able to be seen due to the extreme height Beacon sat at, atop a cliff bearing several grand waterfalls, thousands of feet tall above sea level.

The city of Vale sat on the opposite side of the enormous lake those waterfalls fed into, which, on a clear night, could be easily seen, but, according to the maps of Vale that the city put out, that lake *didn’t exist*. No, Beacon appeared to just be another district in the city of Vale, despite, in reality, being its own separate territory in *every* way that mattered.

*Then again, that might be the point,* I mused, glad Body Defense had cured Jaune’s seasickness, as well as his motion sickness, as our ‘ferry’ made the *day long* trip to the island of Patch. Again, by those same maps, the trip should’ve taken half an hour, tops, and the island itself should’ve been *half* the size of the city of Vale’s residential district, when, the longer this trip took, and the more I thought about it, the less sense that map made.

Except, in an odd way, it did.

To map makers that wanted to diminish the territory not under their control, Patch was drawn as tiny, just as Beacon was shown to be another district of Vale. In retrospect, if Patch had truly been that small, it shouldn’t have been able to have its own primary combat school, with huntsmen teachers and everything. Also, if it had been that small, then Ruby should’ve *never* been jumped by a sizeable pack of even newborn Beowulfs, when they *should’ve* arrowed in straight for nearby population centers.

But, no, as Ruby continued to talk to Weiss about her home, Patch was apparently *enormous*, with several smaller towns throughout, and the *city* of Patch sat on the east coast, where Signal was located, opposite of Vale. Vale, the city, was still certainly bigger, and from what I’d heard Atlas was an order of magnitude larger than *that,* with eighty percent of the nation’s population in one city, technically two.

Regardless, Weiss’ complaints about Ruby being a country *rube* seemed more and more and unreasonable, and I *just* got the pun there. *Ugh, I’m spending too much time with Yang,* I thought, glancing over to the blonde who was discussing something with Pyrra, the brawler shooting me a sunny smile when she noticed my gaze.

I smiled back, and rested in my seat, looking around at the rest our little party. Ruby was here, obviously, and bugging an annoyed looking Weiss. The heiress, when she’d heard Pyrrha and I were going to spend our summer vacation with Ruby and Yang, had decided to invite herself along. “I need to see what podunk backwater you came from, so I can finally understand why someone like *you* was accepted at *Beacon* of all places, two years early!” were her exact words.

Regardless, if Weiss *really* hadn’t wanted to come, she wouldn’t’ve, and if she’d found Ruby’s descriptions of her home as annoying as she acted like she found them, the white-haired girl would’ve long ago told her team lead to shut up.

With over half of us going, our resident hammer-wielder had started to get antsy, until Pyrrha had prompted Ruby, who in turn asked if Nora and Ren would like to come as well, and they’d jumped at the offer. Well, *Nora* had jumped at it, Ren had merely nodded calmly, thanking his team lead for the invitation.

That had just left Blake, who, when Yang had asked, had answered noncommittally, saying she was “busy” and “Maybe wanted to head home.” Now, *I* knew that was an absolute goddamn lie, but, to be honest, I couldn’t be bothered to call her out on it. She *was* part of the team, but whenever we had to work together, she always made sure to pair off with Pyrrha or Yang instead of me. The first few times could’ve been accidental, but after several *weeks* of it, well, I might be stupid at times, but I wasn’t *that* stupid.

And, again, if I’d cared, I’d have probably confronted her about it, but from what I’d seen in the first few seasons, and from what I’d heard of her actions later, I really didn’t. Theoretically she was the calm, book-loving, intellectual type, but her actions all screamed ‘can’t control my emotions’, her accusations by implication of my abusing my position as team lead not helping either.

I’d honestly expected her to reach out to me, the only other ‘Faunus’ on the team, but instead she’d stared at me when I slept, though, thankfully, she’d stopped doing that lately, and otherwise ignored me when she could. My offer of help with academics had been turned down, and while she’d interacted with me during her team-wide lessons on 3D movement, or if she absolutely had to in class, the girl didn’t engage in any small-talk with *me*, specifically, unless I started it. And even then her answers were short, curt, and practically screamed, ‘I don’t want to talk to you’.

So I hadn’t.

Needless to say, when we were all getting on the Bullhead that’d take us *directly* to Vale’s docks, arranged by Ozpin to bypass anything the Winchesters might have set up, I was *also* the only one not surprised when she met us there, her own suitcase packed.

“Thought you weren’t coming?” Yang had asked, confused.

“I was free,” the catgirl had shrugged, turning and boarding without another word.

So, the gang was all here, the black-haired girl standing by the railing and watching the waves, Nora looking at the horizon expectantly next to Ren, Ruby ‘annoying’ Weiss, and Yang discussing something with Pyrrha, while I just leaned back, half in the sun, glad that Aura protected against sunburns, and relaxed.

After that last lesson with Ozpin, I had been tempted to call upon that spark of *other* that was, apparently, *Magic,* but had resisted. Similarly, I’d kept my word and not told anyone else about it, not even Pyrrha, but only because, as far as I could tell, it didn’t matter. I mean, it *would* matter, but right now any magical talent I had was weak, fledgling even, and as such I could ignore it.

I was well aware that *Jaune* should not have Magic, but *Oz* did, and Soul Talent meant that, as long as I had either an opponent or a trainer who possessed a supernatural skill, I did too. Just like Martial Talent, the better someone was, the faster I learned, but the short, five sentence description of it left a great deal of ambiguity.

Aura, for example, was named specifically by the Talent, but would I only gain talent utilizing *my* Aura, something that I’d *absolutely* been picking up supernaturally quickly, or could I get the Semblances of others as well? I had yet to figure out my *own* Semblance, after all, so I wasn’t sure what I was going to do if I dissolved into prismatic rose petals, started making clones, or even formed glyphs of my own.

The look on Weiss’ face, if I asked if we were related immediately after I formed my first Glyph *would* be hilarious.

Regardless, talking with Pyrrha, I was already as good with my Aura in a lot of the standard ways, like strength enhancement, as someone that’d been training theirs for *years*. She was still better than me, and Ren was better than *both* of us in the more esoteric uses, like creating force-fields, but the progress I’d made past the reflexive ‘not the face’ damage mitigation, basic environmental adaption, and enhanced regeneration, was phenomenal for a normal person.

When I’d worried that my growth might attract more attention, my lover had just laughed, and kindly informed me that my growing skills were one of the *least* attention grabbing things about me, but that it also could be explained away by my ridiculous reserves, as a larger pool of Aura to pull from meant I could practice for longer.

Regardless, the Talents I possessed meant that, while I learned at a frankly *ridiculous* rate, I wasn’t going to be pulling any kind of Taskmaster ‘Seen you do it once now I can’ shenanigans, but, given that we still had three months left before shit went down at the Vytal Festival, that *should* be enough.

Already, the others on my team, except maybe Blake, had grown leaps and bounds in their combat capabilities, and we’d only grow even stronger in other ways. At least, in part, because of the fact that I’d been feeding the girls gallons upon gallons of my enhanced blood. It *was* going to improve them, eventually, but to be honest I hadn’t noticed any difference.

They’d been using their Aura more actively, which translated into more general strength from Aura enhancement, they’d been practicing, which meant they were faster to use their Aura, and with their using their Aura more actively meant they’d been getting better at *using* their Aura in the first place, patching a lot of holes in their defenses when they reacted like a normal person, and not a superhuman warrior. Nothing about that screamed ‘Draconic Power’ to me, but, given how long it took, maybe it was subtler than I was expecting?

Either way, I was going to keep on giving them it, and I was also going to be prepared to act just as surprised as they’d be if they suddenly tripped over some threshold and ‘powered up’. I just hoped it’d wait until *after* they finished breakfast, so the connection wouldn’t be *terribly* obvious.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Blake perk up, and then immediately pretend she hadn’t. Following her line of slight, I saw a bumps on the horizon, confused until the captain announced we were twenty minutes away from Patch. As I watched, the bumps rose higher, and higher, and I realized they were distant *mountains*. And Vale pretended it was smaller than a *single* one of its districts?

Was this just a me thing? I could pull on Jaune’s memories, and while *he’d* thought the Vale map had looked right, the boy had been. . . kind of an idiot. Getting up, I made my way over to my lover, who, tellingly, stopped talking and looked up at me with a guileless, “Yes, Jaune?”

“So, I looked at the maps of Vale, and Patch looked tiny, like, a few miles across tiny. That,” I pointed towards the slowly growing mountains, as more and more emerged from the horizon, “doesn’t look tiny. Is this one of those ‘everyone knows’ things?”

Yang looked at me confused, “What maps have you been looking at, Light-Knight?” I brought the map up on my scroll and showed it to her, causing her to laugh, getting everyone’s attention, and Pyrrha took pity on me.

“Jaune, that’s. . . that’s not how big Patch is,” she informed me.

“Well, *duh,* but it was on the map!” I complained. “Who puts things that are the wrong size on maps!” At least on the maps of America, Hawaii and Alaska usually had little boxes around them to indicate they weren’t to scale, since the latter, if mapped out to the contiguous US, would extend from one edge of Texas to the opposite end of California, and Alaska was just half the size of the rest of the map combined. “It wasn’t even something we went over in class.”

Weiss, who’d wandered over, hmmf’d scornfully. “That’s because it’s *basic Geography*.”

“Then why didn’t *you* teach us?” I shot back.

Before she could offer her rebuttal, Ren noted, “Maps are often incorrect. It’s something that caused us problems.”

“Yeah!” Nora agreed, holding finger and thumb two inches apart, “It looks so short, but takes *sooooooo* long!”

The heiress turned on the ginger, narrowing her eyes in a ‘how can you be so stupid’ gesture that went right over the hammer-wielder’s head. Huffing, she turned back to me. “But you got an A in Oobleck’s class. How did you not know this?”

“Because *those* maps were in our books,” I replied, embarrassed. “*This* was the map of ‘Vale & Patch’ that was our textbook!”

“Because it was *obviously-”* the girl started to chide, before catching herself, folding her an arm over her chest as she pinched the bridge of her nose with the other, muttering, “*home schooled and no schooled. I knew I was getting the best. That meant a lot of people* ***weren’t****.”* Weiss sighed. “All right. I’ll add it to my syllabus.”

“So,” I said, changing the topic. “Yang, Ruby, you’re the ones that actually live here. Is your Dad’s house in the city of Patch, or one of the smaller towns?”

Both girls exchanged glances. “Um. In Patch. Kind of,” the mini-reaper hedged.

I exchanged a glance with Pyrrha, as we’d asked if we could come, and the sisters had said yes, so I’d assumed they’d handled logistics. I was getting the feeling that I’d assumed wrong. The gladiatrix turned to the blonde, “Yang, your father *does* know we are coming. Doesn’t he?”

“Sure he does,” the brawler smiled, laughing a touch nervously. “You told him, right Rubes?”

Rather than accept being thrown under the bus, her sister replied, “But, I thought *you* were going to tell him!”

I glanced to her, then to Weiss, who looked *just* as exasperated with her team leader as I was. *I can’t believe they forgot to check*.

“You’re the one who’s a team-lead,” Yang argued.

“You’re the one who’s older!” Ruby argued right back.

“*Team lead,*” Yang stressed.

*“Older,”* Ruby stressed right back.

“JUST CALL HIM, YOU DOLTS!” Weiss yelled at both, who blinked owlishly at the heiress, then at each other.

“You do it, you’re older,” Ruby commanded.

“Nuh-huh,” Yang disagreed. “Commanders have to do stuff like this. You’re in command. You do it.”

Ruby turned to me, “Jaune! You’re a team lead too! *You* do it!”

I cocked my head to the side. “You want me, a random guy your father doesn’t know, to call him and ask if I can come over in less than an hour for spring break with his daughters?” I asked.

“Yeah!” the tiny redhead nodded, wilting slightly under my stare. “*Oh.”*

However, Ruby, despite her leadership position suggesting responsibility, *did* have a bit of a point, and I turned to her sister. “Yang, I asked *you* if we could come over, and *you* were the one who said we could. That means, even if you delegated, it’s *your* job to make sure you were right. Just like if I promised you something would get done, and then never followed up to make sure it did, you’d be mad at *me*. We’re in scroll range. *Call him.*”

My fellow blonde pouted, but I just stared, waiting. “*Fine,*” she sighed, rolling her eyes and pulling her scroll from her hip-pouch, dialing a number. “Hey dad!” she greeted. “Yeah, Rubes and I are coming home for school break. Yeah,” she replied, her father’s words inaudible. “Today. It’s only a few hour trip. Yeah. Hey, would it be okay if some of our teammates come with? Most of ‘em aren’t from Vale. Oh, just a few. No. *No.* Would I do that? Okay, yeah, but I’m not going to do *that*. It was one time!”

Putting her hand, on the receiver, she looked at us. “Guys, we can’t have any keggers at my dad’s house.”

“I’m sorry, *what?*” Weiss demanded, offended.

“Oh *nooooooo,*” I replied, deadpan.

Yang gave me a thumbs up, going back to the phone. “They said they won’t. ‘Kay, thanks, we’re getting on now, see you tonight!” She hung up. “We’re good, we just have to wait a few hours in town, since we, uh, ‘just left’.”

It was early afternoon, and we’d left shortly after dawn, which meant we’d be pulling in at *sunset*. “Did you need to lie?” I asked.

“Yeah,” she shrugged, and I sighed, *harder.*

“Fine. Okay, let’s talk logistics,” I stated, not liking the inauspicious start of this vacation. “There’s *eight* of us, is there even room for that many at your house? Also, Ruby, what did you mean by your house being *kind of* in Patch?”

The small girl grinned. “We live *near* Patch. Like, half an hour away. If you run. With Aura.”

“You expect me to *run?*” Weiss demanded.

“We’ll carry you! Like we normally do!” Nora offered, and I had to wince as our resident Schnee *was* getting better.

Holding up a hand, stopping Weiss from firing back, I continued my interrogation, “Okay, that covers my second question, but not my first. Can we all fit in your house?”

Under the group’s attention, except for Yang who was looking anywhere but at us, Ruby squirmed. “Yay camping?” the mini-reaper offered.

“Do I look like someone that *camps?*” her partner practically hissed, advancing on the quaking girl. “You idiotic, unthinking, laz-hey!” she yelped as I picked up the Schnee and deposited her behind me. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Being a leader, since *someone* needs to,” I said, shaking my head. “Remember when you thought you should be in charge, Weiss? Here’s why you’re not. Don’t insult her, figure out a plan,” I said, staring at white-haired girl, who matched my gaze for a moment, before looking away and ‘hmmf!’ing once more.

“Okay, we’ve got time,” I said, nodding to Yang. “And we’re going to need housing while we’re here. I’m flat broke, so I can *actually* go camping, if need be, but we should find a place with rooms we can rent for our time here.”

“Jaune, I can handle our team’s rooms,” Pyrrha laughed.

Weiss glanced over to Ren and Nora, pronouncing, “And I suppose I could handle mine.”

*Huh. . . I didn’t expect that.* “Okay, in that case we’ll get there, find some place to stay, take a look around, and acquaint ourselves with the town. Then when the *second* ferry shows up, we’ll just say we’d booked the rooms ahead of time, dropped our stuff off, and headed over. Or we could, just, you know, *not lie to your dad the first time most of us meet him?”*

“Nah, lying’s totes the way to go,” Yang disagreed, Ruby nodding in agreement, and I just sighed once more.

<DR>

The city of Patch was. . . nice. Really nice, actually, with a warm current keeping things on the east side of the island rather comfortable, though I was told the western side was a bit colder, and in winter everyone got a little snowed in if they were any distance from the coast. While the ‘city’ was a bit built up, the town was rather sprawling, with only the smallest, most perfunctory of walls at the very, very edge.

“It’s because there’s no Grimm,” Ruby explained, when I asked.

“No Grimm?” I echoed, *distinctly* remembering the girl taking out a sizeable Beowulf pack in her ‘trailer’. From Port’s class, I knew the Grimm she’d killed were effectively newborns, lacking any armor whatsoever, as weak as Grimm could *get* and still be of the same type.

“Well, no *real* Grimm,” she corrected, which told me *nothing.*

Turning to Weiss, the girl pulled herself upright in offense. “What makes you think I know what this simpleton is trying to say?” At her full, 5’3” height, it wasn’t that impressive. “Fine, I know what she’s trying to say,” the Schnee admitted. “You know how Grimm just. . . appear?”

I nodded. It’d been covered in Port’s class, that Grimm were omnipresent because they were effectively source-less. Or, the opposite, really, in that they *constantly* crawled out from the earth, through countless caverns that dotted the land. They didn’t do so in large enough numbers to track them easily, thank god, but several hundred years of Huntsmen trying to stop the scourge wholesale had found baby Grimm, singly, in pairs, and very rarely more than that, emerging from hidden tunnels.

The tunnels seemed to be naturally forming, except for the fact that they *kept on appearing*. Collapsing the tunnels would eventually lead to more tunnels forming in other places, and sitting on them to kill the Grimm as they surfaced caused them to ‘dry up’, *while more tunnels still formed in other places.*

Expeditions down had been made, but most never returned, and those that did brought back wildly different reports. Some found nothing but a normal cave system, some found *masses* of baby Grimm, who, upon sensing the shock and fear created by their discovery, had swarmed the explorers, and some expeditions had gone down, and *down,* and ***down,*** having to eventually turn around because they were getting lost, or running out of supplies, or were jumped by fully formed Grimm, some of them Alphas.

And *every* expedition of the last type resulted in a Grimm Tide shortly thereafter.

“To start with, Patch is too small,” Weiss told me. “Grimm appear, but there’s enough people that they’re pulled in right away, and handled by Huntsmen and Huntresses easily.”

“And that’s what dad does!” Ruby added with a smile. “We live away from stuff, so we’re in range, so Grimm come for us instead of Patch, and then we’re like *Bam! Pow! Blam!* And no more Grimm!”

I frowned. “Wait, and you lived there since you were a *little kid?*”

The mini-reaper winced. “Yeah. Mom was around, for a while. And, like, the young Grimm are *really* dumb. So you can run away, and climb a tree or something, or just go inside, and you’re *fine.* And we were in school when dad was, so if we were home, he was too!”

*Except for when you weren’t* I thought, having remembered, though I couldn’t recall if it was first or second hand, Yang almost getting them *both* killed while looking for Raven.

“How are you still alive?” Weiss demanded.

Nora shrugged, “Same way we are?”

“That’s not an answer!” the white-haired girl disagreed.

Pyrrha put a hand on the heiress’ shoulder. “I think she means they were careful, until they were strong enough to fight.”

“So, Patch manages aggro really well?” I asked, trying to get back on topic.

Weiss took a deep breath, and nodded. “If you want to put it idiotically, yes. But it only works because there’s enough people. And the Grimm that show up here are unusually weak. Beowulfs, some Nevermores, and the occasional Ursa. No Shelobs, or Brucha, and certainly no Triclops. And because it’s an island in the middle of nowhere, they can’t chain-pull, like the continents can,” she declared, naming the phenomena were one Grimm attack caused enough negative emotions to pull more Grimm, which caused more, and pulled more, until everyone was dead.

“But what about Aquatic Grimm?” I asked. We’d covered them, briefly but they were rare, which is why non-gated ports could exist at *all*. “Wouldn’t having so many people draw them in from the deeps?”

The Schnee shook her head. “No. The ocean around isn’t deep enough, and, as you know, amphibious Grimm, the ones that live in the oceans instead of rivers, are extremely rare. It’s not an issue, and, if it is, they can call Vale for help. A Bullhead can be here in an hour, and the locals can hold out that long.”

“And we don’t get Alphas,” Yang shrugged. “So, it’s no big.”

Looking to Weiss, the girl nodded, and I had to ask, “Then why don’t more people live here? It seems perfect!”

Ruby smiled at the praise of her homeland, though her expression dropped when Weiss uttered two sentences. “Resources, warfare, and politics. Patch has none of them.”

“Um,” Nora asked, raising a hand, “Isn’t not having war a good thing? I mean, I like a good scrap as much as the next gal, but sometimes sleep is good.” We all turned to look at her disbelievingly. “What? Fight Hard, Party Hard, Eat Hard, Sleep Hard!”

Yang high-fived the Ginger, and the white-haired girl rolled her eyes.

“So, there’s no iron or dust mines here, which means they can’t field an army, which means that, politically, they’re ignored?” I asked, and our ad hoc instructress nodded. Looking around this place, I tried to see it through the lens of Jaune’s experience in a farming town, and picked out things I would’ve otherwise missed.

It was nice, but the ground looked rocky. If it extended out into forests, then mountains, you might be able to get some farms going, but, compared to the mainland, it would be easier to grow crops to the south. In the valleys that Jaune was used to, walled off by natural barriers of mountain ranges, where winters were mild, but so were the summers, or to the far east of Vale, where river deltas made the ground fertile. Compared to that, this place was sub-optimal for any kind of mass food production.

From my *own* experiences, filtered through what *I* knew, without access to Dust, the normal technological development that might occur in places like this would never get off the ground. It had the harsh seasons that seemed to spur on technological development, without being *so* harsh that it slowed things down as people just tried to survive, but the rules governing societal patters here were a bit different, as Weiss had been happy to explain. At length.

What that all meant was that this place was. . . *safe*. Practically custom built to be the starting zone, if this was an MMORPG, but it wasn’t much more than that.

“I can see why they made it tiny on maps,” I muttered, getting a pout from Ruby. “Not because it isn’t important, but because it’s just not *dangerous*.”

That mollified the girl, and we arrived at the hotel that Weiss had found. It *was* rather nice, but I’d barely walked in the door before the woman behind the counter told me, “I’m sorry, we’re full.”

I hesitated, letting the others in, and Pyrrha took the lead, commenting, “I’m sorry. Your scroll-page said you had vacancies.”

“You’re, you’re Pyrrha Nikos!” the woman commented, surprised, and my lover hid her grimace. “Of course we have vacancies!”

Blake paused, having been following us at the back of the group, and stared at the woman behind the counter. “But you just said you were full,” she challenged.

The receptionist paused, glancing at my horns, then back to Pyrrha. “I’m sorry Ms. Nikos, I didn’t realize he was your assistant.”

“*Assistant,*” Blake echoed, hackles rising.

“It’s alright,” Pyrrha said, waving it off, and dragging attention away from the increasingly angry Faunus-in-hiding. “You’re not the first. We’re looking for four rooms, two doubles, two singles, for the next two weeks. Would that be alright?”

The racist beamed. “Of course! Here are your keys. You can have your Faunus bring your luggage up.”

“Your ***Fa***-” was as far as Blake got before I stepped on her foot, and she froze, Pyrrha taking the keys and negligently tossing them my way.

I caught them, *and* the look my lover sent me. “Prepare our rooms, Jaune,” she commanded imperiously.

“Ye,s Ms. Nikos,” I nodded gruffly, practically dragging Blake with me as we headed towards the stairs, up and out of sight. Getting to them, I opened up one of our rooms, practically tossed the cat girl inside, making sure no one was watching, and closed the door behind me. “Cool it,” I told her.

“Cool it? Did you *hear* what that human said?” Blake demanded.

“Why do you care?” I asked in return. “We’re here to get some rooms to stay in. That’s all.”

Blake looked at me like I was insane. “She’s a racist!” the girl declared, as if that was the end all and be all. “We can find another place to stay! We *don’t* have to give her money!”

“How much is our time worth?” I questioned instead. “Because we can either deal with a racist, and get on with our day, or we could make a scene, like you were about to. I’d like to believe that Patch is better, but we’re in the nicer part of town, and I didn’t see a lot of Faunus. Did you?”

The ex-White Fang fighter froze, clearly not having noticed at all. “But. . . Yang’s not racist,” she argued, though she sounded unsure of herself.

“Yang’s *not*,” I agreed. “Yang also isn’t *from* this part of town. She’s from the *woods*. So we could stay here, and I get some shade thrown my way, *oh nooo*, or we go looking for a Faunus-friendly place, wasting our time. *Priorities*, Blake.”

The girl frowned. “Don’t you care? Don’t you have any *pride* as a *Faunus?*”

“No. Not when it comes to this. And don’t get offended for me on my behalf,” I rattled off, the girl recoiling from my words. “I’m here to hang out with my team, and see where my teammates grew up. If you want, maybe we could go to Menagerie over winter break. Might be nice.”

Blake froze at my casual suggestion, finally demanding, “What makes you think I’m from Menagerie?” I flicked her bow. “*Hey!”* she hissed, pulling back a step. “Don’t do that! And just because I’m a Faunus doesn’t mean I’m from Menagerie. *You* aren’t.”

“Are you from Menagerie?” I asked drolly.

“That’s not the point,” she replied quickly. “You’re okay with this?”

I shrugged. “Yes? I don’t like it, obviously, but *I’m a dragon*. Unless idiots get in my way, I don’t care. So, are you going to throw a tantrum and get us kicked out *after* Pyrrha’s already paid, or you gonna keep that bow on, sleep here, and then *never come back here in your life?*”

Hearing people coming up the stairs, I glanced around, to see that we were in one of the single rooms. “This one’s yours, unpack your shit, I’m gonna go do the same, and let’s all get lunch.”

I made it to the door, before Blake finally whispered, though it carried, “This *isn’t* *right*.”

“It’s not,” I agreed. “But that doesn’t make it worth fighting. If someone tried to hurt you, any of you, I’d kill them, but rude people are a universal annoyance. If I stopped to burn them all, I wouldn’t get *anything* done.”

<DR>

After we’d unpacked, we left to get lunch, Yang and Ruby both trying to apologize once we were out of sight of the hotel, never having to run into that kind of thing their entire lives living in Patch.

“You’re human,” I shrugged. “It makes sense you wouldn’t see it. But there’s more to this place than the fancy-shmancy areas.” I could practically *feel* Blake wanting to object, but the cat got her own tongue. “Show us the areas that *you* would hang out. Besides, we’re here to see your house, and your dad, and from what I’ve heard of him he won’t care at all that I’m not human.”

Yang smiled, “Yeah, but he might care that you’re. . . *horny*.”

“Well, I’ll try to keep it in my. . . hair?” I more asked than said. “Yeah, that sounded better in my head.”

“How ‘bout giving me yours, and I’ll tell you how I sound,” the party girl teased, and even I had a moment of confusion, before I realized what she meant, shot her an unamused look.

Ruby frowned. “I don’t get it.”

“You don’t want to,” I told her, causing the girl to frown harder, before turning a narrow-eyed, suspicious glare on her sister, who grinned unrepentantly.

We’d wandered around a bit afterwards, eventually noting that the evening ferry pulled into port, and headed for the city walls. Rather than *run* all the way back and forth, we rented a truck, which I ended up driving, having to flash my psychic paper as a ‘license’. I’d honestly forgotten I’d had it, purchased before I was even Jaune, until it appeared it my hands, like my Stamp occasionally still did, and I’d shown it to the owner of the rental agency.

Pyrrha had given me a raised eyebrow, and I’d returned with a look that promised I’d explain *later*. Thankfully, I *did* know how to drive a car, finding myself as being the only person in the party that *could*. It turned out that everyone else was used to being driven, was used to walking, or was Yang, who had her own motorcycle, which was still in a garage in Vale.

Driving down the main roads, it was pretty easy going, and I noticed the occasional dirt path, Ruby eventually pointing one out. From there, I had to slow down a bit, but didn’t see so much as a single Grimm the entire way, pulling up in front of an honest-to-god log cabin, though one that was two stories, and one that looked to be the *definition* of Cozy.

As I did so, I saw a man leaning in the open doorway, dressed in beiges, browns, and mustard yellows. The blue-eyed man, with pale blond hair, gave me a measuring look, pushing off and slowly starting to approach.

“Dad!” Ruby cried, taking off in a burst of rose-petals, slamming into her father with enough force that she *should’ve* taken him off his feet, but he spun around, exactly once, and took another step forward.

“Hey there, Petal,” he smiled down at his daughter. “How’d visiting your sister for the weekend before school started go?”

The tiny team lead paled. “Oh, um, well, I, I skipped a grade? Or two? And got into Beacon? Yay?”

The man laughed good naturedly. “I know, Ruby. The Headmaster called. I just wish *you* had told me first.” He looked up as Yang approached. “Been takin’ care of your little sister?”

“*Duh*,” Yang scoffed. “You been getting’ by without us?”

“All the free time. It’s been terrible,” her father remarked, and while it was a joke, there was a bit more to his tone. “So who’s all this? You said teammates, but, aren’t you on the same team?”

“Oh, uh, *no*,” Ruby said, smiling up at her dad with forced innocence. “I’m the leader of my team! It’s Weiss,” she said, pointing out the girl, who curtseyed. “Ren, and Nora.” The laconic boy nodded, while the ginger-haired girl waved enthusiastically. “And together we’re team RRWN!”

“Team Lead?” the blond man smiled right back. “I’m so proud! Are you your team’s leader too, Yang?”

Yang laughed awkwardly. “Oh, um, no. Hey everyone, this is my dad.”

“Call me Taiyang,” her father greeted us, a warm smile on his face. “Thanks for keeping my little girls safe.”

“Daaaaad,” the older teenager whined, sounding very much like her younger sister. “I keep them safe tooooo.”

“Of course you do,” Taiyang replied indulgently. “So who are your teammates?”

“We’re team ABYN. This is my partner, Blake,” Yang said, the girl offering a half-wave. “And Pyrrha Nikos,” she continued, the redhead nodding with a smile, “you might’ve heard of her. And this is Jaune Arc, our Team Leader.”

“Hello,” I greeted with a nod, but the blonde brawler wasn’t done.

“He’s my boyfriend!”