**Chapter Seventy-Eight**

I blocked the barrage of sword stabs with my shield, taking them directly as they slammed a staccato beat into my defenses, bringing my own sword up as soon as they let up, but I narrowly missed my opponent as, after an odd pause where I thought I’d taken her off guard, she twirled back, resetting her stance, before hesitating then darting forward once more into a lunging stab, which I sidestepped, angling my shield to divert her momentum, slamming the pommel of my blade into the back of her head as she stumbled, sending her flying forward.

“*Damnit!”* Weiss swore, turning and glaring at me, one hand going to the back of her head, though her anger was clearly directed internally. “Why do we have to do this stupid training?”

“Because stabbing people doesn’t drain your Aura?” I offered with a smile. “Also, you *have* gotten better. It’s just I’ve gotten a *lot* better. Then again, we’ve done this once every couple weeks, while Pyrrha’s been training me every couple *days*.”

The heiress frowned, “That hardly seems fair.”

“She’s my *partner,*” I shot back, “Or are you saying you *haven’t* been picking Ruby’s brain about ways to either make Myrtlenaster better, or add a secondary piece of kit to your loadout.”

“I. . . haven’t,” the white-haired girl replied, glancing over to Ruby, who was sparring with Ren, the soft-spoken boy darting around her, keeping the mini-reaper from effectively using her scythe, his twin bladed pistols much better at close-in work, which the tiny team lead needed practice dealing with, just as her rapid, spinning attacks were something that *he* was having trouble consistently dodging, the small girl setting up patterns, then breaking them, catching the Mistralian boy off guard. “Should I?” my sparring partner questioned, looking at her rapier, almost worried.

*“Yes,*” I stated with authority. “Your sword might be fine, but you still lose your blade almost as much as *I* do, and you need a backup, since you’re lacking in natural weapons,” I explained, clicking my claws, which made her frown, then sigh defeatedly. “Now come at me, there’s something. . . *odd* in the way you’re fighting, but I can’t put my finger on it.”

The Atlesian nodded, readying herself, darting in, sword low, coming up in a blisteringly fast slash, but it was so *incredibly* obvious, it was easy to meet it with my shield, forcing her weapon back down, leaving her open as she took a step to recenter herself, and then paused once more, but I let it pass, watching the girl, getting a slight trickle from **Martial Talent**, but it kept stuttering, like a buffering video.

Weiss moved again, twirling around, spinning about on her left leg, sword coming up for my neck, but a single step backwards let it pass by, the girl twirling again *without* hesitation, this time slashing for my leg, which was also dodged, the third twirl starting to come high, before dipping down again. *This* one I caught on my sword, pushing it back, which the girl had seemingly been waiting for, twirling back in the *other* direction, in an incredibly dance-like manner, posting her right leg to tighten her reverse spin into a lunging stab that I stepped *into*, letting the tip of her rapier bounce off my breastplate as I punched the girl square in the nose.

Shocked, she stumbled back, **Martial Talent** pausing, and I took another step forward, but didn’t swing, as she slashed to try and stop a blade that never came, my **Talent** activating for just a moment, cutting out as she over-corrected and left herself even *more* open, once more hesitating. Bringing my sword up this time, I gave her a firm *poke*, just enough to set off her Aura, and she pulled off a textbook parry-and-riposte, *so* textbook that it was incredibly easy to move around, and I laid the blade of my longsword against her neck, her stab having missed me completely.

“You practiced that spin thing, haven’t you?” I questioned, starting to see the issue.

Frowning, and looking more than a little dispirited, Weiss gently used her rapier to push away my longsword. “Of *course* I have,” she spat. “Not that it helped.”

Turning away from Weiss, I turned my attention to Pyrrha, who was sparring with Nora, the ginger cackling as she swung about like a demented top, hammer spinning this way and that, as the Gladiatrix seemed to effortlessly weave around theValkyrie’s attacks, only my time spent with my partner letting me see how she was *actually* having to work to deal with the other girl’s chaotic style.

The red-haired Mistralian deflected Nora’s swing with her shield, spinning away, extending her sword into a spear that slammed into the ground, using *that* as an axis of rotation to duck under Nora’s follow-up blow and get close, retracting Miló into a short sword and slamming it into her opponent’s chest, draining the other girl’s Aura. Nora, meanwhile, took the blow and threw herself backwards, lessening its impact, but also using the force of it to flip over, almost in a complete somersault, Mahnhild practically *whistling* as it came up from below in a hundred-pound steel uppercut that my partner barely avoided, throwing *herself* backwards, but doing so in such a controlled manner that it looked like she meant to the entire time, having already started to move as Nora did, likely seeing the counter coming.

The ginger-haired girl flew back, landing on her feet a few yards away, and started to charge when I called out, “Pyrrha! Nora! Can you come here for a sec?”

My girlfriend glanced over, still keeping an eye on her sparring partner, but the unpredictable girl just changed direction, charging up to me as if to attack, screeching to a halt at the last moment and asking, “Sure Jaun-Jaun, what’s crackalackin’?”

“Yes Jaune?” Pyrrha questioned, making her way over more sedately.

Looking at my partner, and as seriously as I could, I stated, “Weiss is the anti-Nora.”

*“Excuse me?”* the white-haired girl demanded, then considered my words. “Actually, I’m alright with that.”

“Checks out,” the ginger nodded.

Trying not to laugh, the gladiatrix asked, “In what *way*, Jaune?”

“Nora, have you ever spent time practicing moves?” I inquired, and the girl nodded. Realizing I needed to be more specific, I clarified, “Not on targets, just doing the same thing, over and over again?”

The hammer-wielder’s expression screwed up in confusion. “Why would I ever do something like *that?* It’s not like whatever I’m fighting is gonna stand there and let me hit ‘em. Though it would be a *lot* easier if it did,” she added, thoughtful.

“Then how did you ever *practice?*” Weiss demanded, almost offended.

“By fighting stuff. Ya know, Grimm, Bandits, Grimm, Guards, Grimm, and sometimes Grimm,” Nora shot back. “How’d *you* learn, princess?”

Sniffing arrogantly, the heiress folded her arms. “I had the best tutors money could buy!”

“Can you get a refund?” the ginger inquired innocently, but smirking slightly at the other girl’s outraged expression. “And Renny and I never had money for that kind of thing. Heck, sometimes we didn’t have money for *pancakes!* Or food in general. So we just figured stuff out ourselves!”

It was a little jarring, as the girl admitted that fact with pure uncaring happiness, and, glancing at Weiss, she was clearly caught off guard as well.

Pyrrha, thankfully, swooped in, seeing where I was going as she commented, “Ah, I think I understand, Jaune. You are saying that Weiss has polished techniques, but she uses them individually, while Nora does not have *techniques*, per say, but has a *very* strong command of the flow of combat.”

“Uh, *yes, that,*” I agreed, connecting more dots. “It seems like Weiss uses attack patterns like how she casts spel, er, like she *Dustcasts*,” I corrected, having to remember that, while I called her a ‘squishy wizard’ in my head, that had *very* different connotations here on Remnant. Looking to the girl in question, I asked, “That spin thing, you planned for what to do if I dodged or blocked completely, right?”

“I *did*,” she admitted, frowning, thinking hard. “And I *hit* you but. . .”

“But didn’t account for my armor to deflect the blow, because most *Grimm* don’t have armor like that?” I questioned, seeing the problem fully.

“*Some* do,” she argued, but before I could point out that’s why I said *most* she added, “But, the ones that Win- the ones that one of my trainers could summon with her Semblance were usually Beowolves, and when practicing against *human* opponents they did not wear any. I was informed that a *true* Huntsman has no need of armor,” she stated, not haughtily, and was clearly doubted the words even as she said them.

Pyrrha idly tapped her sword against her greaves, looking unimpressed, while *I* was remembering the opponent Weiss had fought in her trailer, which I’d seen *before* I came to this world. Having gotten access to an encyclopedia detailing *all* of the common types of Grimm, and most of the uncommon ones, *none* of them looked anything like the steel-armored behemoth she’d taken on. The fact that it had *steel armor* alone was enough of a clue that something fucky was afoot, and, if I was correct, it had actually been a *Geist*, one that was possessing an almost comically large suit of armor.

Which, given Weiss’ fighting style, was quite possibly the *worst* opponent she could ever face.

Which, given what little I knew of the girl’s home life, meant she was supposed to *lose.*

Likely, she had been trained specifically *to* lose that fight, but had, by the *barest* of margins, past the point her Aura had broken, to the extent that the next hit she took would be *lethal*, still managed to secure victory. And that took some *serious* courage to pull off. Because of that, I didn’t take offense to the unintentional slight, instead observing, “Clearly, whoever told you that was *lying.*” Reaching over, I tapped the metal frame that ran along Nora’s jacket, which, while it almost seemed to emphasis her. . . *assets,* would still work for armor otherwise. Also, with the way the girl fought, going for her unarmored breast was a *trap*, all but guaranteeing a hammer to the head for your trouble.

“Huntsmen clothing also often hides armor within it as well,” Pyrrha added. “Your partner’s father was armored, and while our professors do not wear it while *teaching*, Oobleck’s coat moved as if it was far heavier than it should be, indicating either small plates or metallic thread was used in its construction.” When I shot a surprised look her way, not knowing her to be so knowledgeable about such things, she just smiled, chiding lightly “One does not win in the Colosseum by striking armored targets where they are *protected*, Jaune.”

“Fair enough,” I replied, looking back to Weiss, who was clearly *not* okay with this revelation, or more likely the fact that someone had clearly mislead her, likely someone she trusted, with something so obvious that, once she didn’t blindly believe them and had the proof pointed out for herself, it was almost insulting. “So, uh,” I started to say, hesitating, not sure how to go about this, not knowing *who* had lied to her, and so was unable to tailor my response.

“Sucks when someone lies, doesn’t it?” Nora offered, with all the tact of a rampaging Ursa. “You get used to it, but the first couple times are the *worst.* First couple dozen. They’re all ‘I’ll pay you for that job’, and ‘You can sleep here for the night, and ‘You’ll be safe’, and ‘I’ll come back for you’, when that isn’t true, like, *at all.”*

“Uh, Nora?” I questioned, concerned. “Are you okay?”

The smile the ginger gave me was broad, but with just a *hint* of something else at the edges. “Perfectly fine, Jaunerooni! A little hungry, but what else is new?”

“You want me to make dinner after this?” I offered, knowing the girl preferred my cooking to the mass-produced food we got from Beacon’s cafeteria.

She perked up, an honest smile spreading across her face this time, which only highlighted how *fake* the previous one had been. “Can it be pancakes? Can I help?”

“S-sure,” I replied, glancing to the other two. Weiss was looking at her teammate like she’d never seen her before, while Pyrrha just seemed. . . *regretful*, which was something I’d have to ask her about later.

“*Wahoo!”* Nora cheered, turning towards her partner. “*Hey Rennie!”* she yelled. *“Jaune’s gonna show me his flapjacky ways!”*

The boy glanced her way, asking, “Wha-” which is when Ruby slammed her scythe into his chest, twisting it at the last moment, striking him with the base instead of the blade, which *still* sent the boy rolling, head over heels, though he turned his roll into a jump that put him back on his feet, one hand reaching up to work the shoulder that’d been hit.

“*Sorry!”* his team lead apologized, the small girl looking chagrined.

Nora froze, “Uh, *oopsie?”*

“It’s fine,” Ren said, to both, his black hair seeming to grey for a moment, before returning to normal.

“So, Pyrrha, can you work with Weiss?” I questioned, changing the subject. “You’ve got a *lot* more experience handling this stuff than I do, and I want to see how I measure up against Nora now that I know what the hell I’m doing.”

Seizing on the opportunity, my partner nodded, “That’s a wonderful idea, Jaune.”

Leaving the two of them, I returned back to where Nora had been fighting my girlfriend, feeling compelled to tell the girl, “You know that *I* don’t lie, right?”

That got me an amused look from the manic girl. “You tell everyone you’re a *dragon*, Jaune-y boy.”

“That’s because I *am* a Dragon, with a capital D. There’s a difference,” I replied, smiling.

“Uh *huh*,” she shot back, clearly not believing me. “Well as long as you aren’t lying about the pancakes, *Mr. Dragon*, we’re good.”

“Please, I might be a Dragon, but I’m not a *fiend,*” I gasped melodramatically. “I’d never lie about *pancakes.”*

That got a barking laugh out of the girl, who, without warning, twirled and sent her hammer on a collision course with my head. I barely dodged, getting my shield up to deflect the blow, as she tried to angle it down to follow me, coming forward with a stab of my own, which she deflected by spinning her weapon, catching the edge with its handle, whipping the bottom of Magnhild up to catch me in the chin, but I jerked back, not *quite* able to pull off the move like Pyrrha could, but still good enough to get out of the way, and focused on the fight, which was going to be hard enough there was *no* room for talking.

**<DR>**

“Okay, run me through this one again,” I sighed, looking at the girls standing next to my desk. “How did two *freshmen* get put in charge of planning the *entire Vytal Festival dance*?”

“Headmaster Ozpin obviously recognized my superior skill and taste,” Weiss sniffed.

“She offered to pay for half,” Ruby added.

*“Hey!”* the heiress objected, then drooped at my look. “Alright, *maybe.* But my skill and taste are what made him accept in the first place!”

I looked over to Yang, who was leaning against her desk, the girl looking *anywhere* but at me. “Okay, sure, but why is it you and *her,* then?”

“What’s *that* supposed to mean?” the pugilist demanded, glaring at me for a moment, before looking away once more.

I sat on my first response of ‘Exactly what I said. Unlike *you* I’m truthful,’, as, while it would make *me* feel better, it wouldn’t help the situation. Instead I looked to Ruby, asking, “Is your family secretly rich too?”

The mini-reaper shook her head, informing me, “Oz told her she needed someone cooler to help.”

“I’m *cool,*” the ice-wielding girl insisted, in huff, while I nodded.

“Oh. okay, yeah, I get it now,” I agreed, getting a surprised look from the blonde girl.

“R-really? Yang asked, unsure.

“Weiss has experience with high society events, right?” I questioned, and the white-haired girl nodded. “Well, this *isn’t* a high-society event, it’s a school dance. The competitors are all Huntsmen Academy students, which means they’re going to be looking for different things. Things that *Yang*, as the child of a Huntsman, and as someone who’s frequented locations that teenage Huntsmen would go to, even if some were of *ill repute*, would know intimately.”

At my statement, my ex was amusingly caught between a smile and a frown, replying with a, “Yeah. . .” that started confident but trailed off as she seemed to understand my implications.

However, my focus was on Weiss, *not her*, so looking the heiress’ way I waved towards the party girl, explaining, “She’ll pull it to be more nightclub-y, while you’ll keep her from going too far, while you’ll pull things to be more proper, and she’ll keep it from getting *stuffy.* Perfectly balanced,” I smiled, “as all things should be.”

There was a moment of silence before I realized that I’d gotten sidetracked from what had started this entire conversation. “But, uh, why are you two telling *me* about this?. I get I have *some* talents, but interior decoration *really* isn’t one of them.”

“We want your help,” Weiss stated. “Doing it ourselves is going to be a *mess*, and you have particular. . . *talents* that would help.”

“*Dust*. She wants you to make Dust,” Yang stated, watching me.

Pyrrha, sitting at the next desk over, winced, “We have been busy lately-”

“I don’t mind,” I replied, glancing back to my girlfriend, “Unless you were planning something?”

The redhead smiled, oddly happy. “No, it’s fine, Jaune.”

“Great!” Yang stated, “We’re gonna need Fire and Ice Dust-”

“Can’t do Fire,” I interrupted. “Or Wind, or really anything *other* than Ice. Don’t know why.” Though I had some guesses.

It was hard to describe, but, after working with that crystal we’d found in the ruin so ancient *Oz* hadn’t know about it, it just. . . clicked. I ***knew*** Ice. While working with Wind, I could kind of get a handle on it, enough to Dustcast with it, to shape its expressions a bit and mold it with my Flame, but others-

“You made Earth Dust,” Weiss offered, snapping me out of my thoughts. “And Fire, when you held off the Tide.”

“Okay, I don’t feel *comfortable* making Fire Dust,” I corrected, frowning, “But, Earth? When?”

The look the white-haired girl gave me said she didn’t believe me, but she read *something* in my face and hers turned thoughtful. “That first day. When you fought everyone. Which, looking back on it, was *most* unusual.”

“I’m a Dragon, *everything* about me’s unusual,” I shot back, Pyrrha chuckling behind her hand, but, trying to remember what Weiss was referring to, I came up blank. “And, can you be a bit more specific?”

“You turned the floor *orange*,” she pointed out, as if it was obvious.

Ruby lifted a hand, like we were in class, taking a moment to realize she could just talk. “Uh, Weiss? The floor in that room was already orange.”

“No, it was *terra cotta*,” the heiress disagreed.

Ruby fiddled with her scroll, bringing up a picture. “Uh, Weiss? Terra cotta’s a shade of *orange*.”

“Well he turned it a *different* shade,” her partner stated, annoyed. “It’s a very *distinctive* orange, as opposed to Terra Cotta, which, fine, *‘is orange’*, but it’s not the *same* orange. It’s more brown, while Earth Dust is more vibrant, but not as orange as an orange. They’re *completely different colors,* and I don’t get why *you* don’t get that!”

Interceding, I held up a hand, then realizing I was doing the *same* thing Ruby did, and put it back down, but I got their attention, which, thinking about it, might have been what my fellow team lead had been going for. “So, apparently this is why *Weiss* is the one arranging the dance, because I didn’t spot the difference either, but, well, Dust is *kind of her thing*, so I believe her. I just. . . don’t know how I did that,” I told her. “Sorry.”

“Perhaps you could contrast the Ice Dust with *actual* fire?” Pyrrha offered.

Yang perked up, fist pumping, “Yeah, Red! That sounds awesome!”

Weiss, meanwhile, frowned, “Pyrrha, do you know how much of a *hazard* that would be?”

“We’re Huntresses, we can handle a little danger,” the blonde disagreed.

“I don’t think Headmaster Ozpin would be fine with some idiot like Cardin *accidentally burning down the building,”* the white-haired girl shot back.

Ruby, a little hesitantly, suggested, “Could you put it, like, behind some glass? That way you could see it, but you couldn’t stumble into it?” Both party planners turned to stare at her, and she shrank, squeaking, “or not.”

Yang grinned, “Rubes! That’s-”

“Brilliant!” Weiss completed, both girls taking a second to look at each other, surprised. The heiress, suspicious, stated, “It’d help with temperature management, keeping it from getting *too* hot, especially if we flank them with Ice Dust crystals.”

“And it’d look *really cool*,” the brawler stated, with equal wariness. “Like, if we etch the glass a bit, it’ll get caught in the designs, with, like, hidden images and stuff.”

There was a moment of *really* odd tension between the two girls, before Yang commented, “I guess you’ve got *some* cool ideas, even if you’re a total nerd.”

Harrumphing, Weiss looked up and away, sniffing, “And, despite your brutish plebeity, you might have a certain artistic flair. Why, *exactly*, do you want a fog machine?”

“Because they’re *awesome!*” the brawler stated, then taking a moment to think, added, “And they’d add a kind of mystery to the entire thing. Like, not *everywhere*, but at the entrance. So people walk in and it’s like, wah, *I have arrived at someplace cool!* Why *doilies?*”

“Because they’re *proper!”* the heiress affirmed, continuing as well after a few seconds, “And because they’re a way to add decoration without the extra logistical cost of getting custom-made tablecloths, furniture, and the like. They’re complex, yes, but I’m aware of a few companies that could source custom designs quickly and effectively. And they’re best used sparingly, to fade into the background and only be noticed a little, as opposed to being the main pieces of decoration.”

Again, both girls stared at each other, Weiss finally admitting, “I suppose a few more. . . *theatrical* effects could be incorporated into my, into *our* plans.”

“And maybe some fancy-shamncy stuff would class up the place. I’d say *we’d* be enough, but have you seen team BRNZ? Their Huntsmen outfits are just streetclothes!” Yang complained.

“I *know*, right?” the heiress agreed. “And MDDN’s even *worse.* It’s all just vague staff uniforms without any sort of flair at all! I expected *better* of Atlas Academy, but it only shows I was correct in coming *here* instead!”

Both girls walked out the door, clearly going *somewhere*, their scathing assessments of the clothing choices the other teams had made slowly fading away.

“I, uh, what happened?” Ruby asked, as confused as I was.

Shrugging, I replied, “I have no clue. But. . . Yang and Weiss are friends now?”

The small girl looked horrified, “But, but Weiss is supposed to be *my* friend!”

Pyrrha, unable to contain her mirth, laughed, getting a hurt look from the mini-reaper. “I am *sorry*, Ruby, but people can have multiple friends. It *is* allowed.” Shooting me a mischievous look, she added, “After all, Jaune is *my* friend, but his also yours, aren’t you Jaune?”

“I, yes?” I questioned, both confused at where the gladiatrix was going with this, and why that was even something that needed to be *asked*. At seeing the young girl’s oddly vulnerable hope in response to my statement, I had to remind myself that, while she seemed fine, *everyone* on my team had their own issues and traumas. The girl in front of me was just willing to talk about them, *unlike her sister.* “Sorry, I thought that was obvious. *Yes*, Ruby, I consider you a friend.”

“*And*,” my partner stated gently, “While we have not had cause to talk, I see no reason *we* could not be friends as well.”

“R-Really?” Ruby asked, incredulous. “But you’re *you* and I’m, just, well, *me.*”

I frowned at that, “And you’re pretty cool. Bahamut is an *awesome* weapon system, and has helped me a lot. I’d be hard pressed to make something like it if I spent *years* working on it, and you slapped it together in your free time.”

“Indeed,” Pyrrha agreed, as she helped build up the girl’s self-worth, the lack of which I’d missed, but my lover hadn’t. “And, as a Dragon, our Jaune *knows* his treasures.”

That got a laugh out of the mini-reaper, “He’s got you doing that too?” Frowning a little, the girl said, “But, Miló and Akoúo̱ are already *really* good, and I’m not sure how to add onto them without changing how they handle. And you’re *really* good at handling them. I mean, like, *of course you are,* you’re ***you.***”

“No, you’re right,” the gladiatrix agreed. “I don’t need a redesign, like you did so well with our Jaune’s weapon. No, Jaune and I were looking into something else I could use. Jaune?” she prompted.

I blinked, unsure, before I realized what she was talking about, and to say we were ‘looking into it’ was being a bit too generous. I’d done a few feasibility tests, and they’d been promising, but, with Ruby’s help, it’d actually *really* accelerate things. It had just been that, with how much she’d *already* helped me, I hadn’t wanted to ask, but at the small girl’s hopeful and interested look, I realized I should’ve at least *checked.*

“Oh, okay, so, you know Pyrrha’s Semblance?” I questioned.

“Yeah, Polarity,” Ruby nodded, gasping, eyes going wide. “Oh, you want to make a *flying* sword or two for her to use?”

“One or two, *dozen,*” I corrected, grabbing my notebook and opening it to some rough sketches I’d made and value testing I’d done, the weapon nut practically teleporting to my side in a rush of petals, almost plucking the notes I’d made from my grasp, before she held herself back, reading them over my shoulder carefully.

“*Ooooh!”* my fellow team lead practically squealed in excitement. “She can do *that much?* This. Is. *Gonna. Be.* ***Awesome!”***