

I can't draw and am fully aware of the need for actual world-building.

And here is the second HP offering for the month. Please thank [HP-DG-AP-PN-RG-NR](#) for his quick work on this.

Chapter 3: Renewed Friendships and New Meetings

Harry yawned, looking at his father and the mine foreman through bleary eyes. "This is the last one, right?"

The foreman, a short but heavily built badger Faunus, snorted, nodding his head. "Seeing as we're four stories down and we can see the end of the tunnel, yes, we're nearly done."

Nodding, Harry moved forward, placing his hands on the wall of the mine shaft to either side between markings left there by architects at some point earlier that day. From his hands, Harry cast a transfiguration spell. He did so without words or gestures, simply imagination and touch. *I have come a long way with my magic, but I still have a ways to go before I get back to where I was on Earth. To say nothing of my combat style.*

Shaking that thought off, Harry concentrated on his current task, and within a second, the rock and dirt under his hands began to shift into metal. The change was not superficial. The stone of the tunnel Harry turned into metal in a circle around for several yards in every direction out into the ground surrounding the new Fire Dust mine. This was to give the tunnel more stability and act as a security door just in case. Underground Grimm were not usual around here, but that species was unpredictable.

There were security doors like this every two hundred feet throughout the mine, and every layer had an even thicker security door connected to the next one. Plans were also in place to create small fallback supply caches on each level in case the surface was lost, although that would be a last-ditch move, and at present, the locals didn't have any supplies for those caches.

Pulling his hands away, Harry admired his work for a moment, then looked over at the mine foreman, nodding his head. "Done."

The mine foreman gestured another Faunus forward, whose bat-like ears marked him as a Bat Faunus. His name was Rasputin Violette, and his employment as a geologist was one reason the whole Fire Dust mine concept had gotten off the ground in the first place. His uncle's family had lived in Evig Låga for decades, and he had come looking for work. Upon meeting him at an event in the town, Harry figured out instantly that farm work was well below what his degrees in seismology and geology demanded, and he and Arturia had set out on a wide-ranging survey of the area around Evig Låga, going as far out as five days in every

direction, escorting Rasputin as he worked. They had found indications of Fire Dust, and now, months later, the mine was a reality.

Rasputin tapped the walls here and there with a kind of sonar device, his ear pressed against the raw earth of the tunnel, then nodded firmly, trying hard not to look at Hadrian Arc in awe, knowing the younger man didn't like that. "It's solid."

At the foreman's grunt of satisfaction, other workers moved forward and began setting up a metal doorway there. In form, this looked almost like the kind you would find in a submarine, a screw hatch. The hatch would be secured into place in the metal casing that Harry had created, becoming strong enough that no subterranean Grimm would ever be able to break through it.

And thank goodness that Grimm who can actively dig are super rare. And even if they break through elsewhere, the early warning systems Rasputin came up with will warn of it, and the various doors will still slow them down enough to evacuate the mine, Harry thought, clapping Violette on the shoulder. The bat Faunus smiled back but didn't turn away from his work, pulling out a large laptop-like scroll and setting it down on the ground of the tunnel, going to work on it quickly.

With another grunt, the foreman left Rasputin and the work team to it, exchanging a high five with the leader of the team, a somewhat obese human with powerful forearms, who was much the same age as the foreman. The badger Faunus waved his arm at Guld and Harry, then led the way back towards the stairwell leading upward.

"And Franklin is positive that there is no other underground cave system we might accidentally bump into? I fought in Mountain Glenn over in Vale, and fighting Grimm in a tunnel is no joke," Guld grumbled.

Another grunt was his reply, and Harry chuckled, hoping to lighten his father's mood before it could get too dark. Mountain Glenn was a touchy subject for the older Arc. "If I am translating 'gruntese' correctly, Sunflash says Rasputin's positive. And that if he and his subordinates turn out to be wrong, Sunflash will be finding them in a dark alley somewhere to discuss their error with them."

Another grunt segueing into a chuckle told Guld and Harry what Sunflash thought of Harry's response. *Not, Harry reflected, that I am wrong. There's a reason we were able to convince Sunflash to come and work with us, and that has only fifty percent to deal with his being a Faunus. The rest is that he's bloody stubborn and aggressive to go along with it. Well, the Schnee's loss is our gain.*

The three of them were quiet for a time as they made their way up from the fourth floor of the mine to the first, where three dozen humans and Faunus worked on the sides of the tunnels all around them. Fire Dust, easily the most useful of the Dust types on the civilian market – it was the source of power for heaters of all kinds, among other things - was already

being mined here in sufficient quantity that Evig Låga would be self-sufficient in terms of Fire Dust within a month.

This meant they would mine enough in a month to supply the town's needs for a full year, with a reserve left over. Within two months, they would have a surplus and Evig Låga would be in a position to start selling to the rest of Anima, in particular Mistral. *Trade means money and resources, which will create more jobs and a larger population. So long as we can keep that growth under control, keep the criminal side of things from getting out of hand and keep on with the social structure we have created, we can really start to expand.*

Exiting the mine, Harry quickly closed his eyes, blinking rapidly under the sun's bright glare, surprised to note that it was only evening. "I thought we were down there for longer."

"Yes, well, that's what happens when you're pushing your Semblance to its utmost time and time again." Guld chuckled, and he and Harry stayed there until their eyes adjusted, waving with squinted eyes at several people who greeted them by name, including a few guards moving around the place.

These were not the typical guards that could be found in Mistral or Atlas or even Vacuo and Vale. Because they, like the miners, had their Aura unlocked. Of all the changes on the societal level that Harry had pushed for, that was the one that had garnered the most pushback. But while most farmers back in Evig Låga still did not have their Auras unlocked, his argument that the people out here at the fire Dust mine, nearly two hours away by bullhead – 135 miles away - from Evig Låga, which was the closest source of help, they needed their Aura unlocked. That had made far too much sense for anyone to argue against barring it simply not being done to have normal people have their Auras unlocked like that.

Of course, Harry thought as he followed his father towards the center of the mine area, not everyone who wants to have their Aura unlocked could actually do it. Occasionally they ran into people like Harry and Tia, people whose Aura needed specific words or phrases to ignite. Still, enough people did, and Krell and the other blacksmiths did us proud with the weapons too. They aren't personalized, not built to mecha-shift, and most can't use Dust rounds, but they will be effective despite that on the defense.

The wall around the mine zone was another marvel, one Harry could personally take some pride in. It was five stories tall and 20 feet at the base, which went another story straight down. Steel beams provided further stability, aided by wide swaths of metal nets spread throughout the wall's granite. The overall design was like that of a star fortress like that Harry had seen in history books. He and a team of designers had come up with that basic design, and Harry had spent nearly every waking hour for a month raising it.

And it was guarded by a growing number of guns. Normally those cannons would have cost an arm and a leg and would have brought Mistrali, perhaps even Atlas and Vale's attention. Despite the threat of the Grimm, none of the three more civilized city-states liked the

idea of their smaller tributary towns having so many guns. That was what Hunters were for, after all.

But Guld and Paul had somehow gotten most of their guns through the black market in Vacuo. It had been grossly expensive, and a lot of the Fire Dust from the mine's second month of operation would be set aside to pay off that debt. But it was well worth it, in Harry's opinion. *If we can keep the Fire Dust flowing, then we can start to expand our borders. The **whole corridor** between here and Evig Låga is incredible for terrace-based agriculture, so long as we're careful about it. We would only lack a source for various metals and can trade for that! Evig Låga can become a new, albeit small, city-state like Mistral. Even more importantly, we will have proven you can reclaim land from the Grimm.*

One thing that had appalled Harry in Remnant was how few attempts there had been to reclaim land lost to Grimm. It was as if once lost, humanity simply assumed that the Grimm were too strong for any chance at reclaiming it. That, and the general attitude towards Grimm appalled Harry. The general public viewed them as just a thing to be feared and avoided that they couldn't really be fought against, like a tornado or hurricane, a force of nature. He understood the why of the second far more than the first but felt they tied into one another. After all, the more land you cede to the enemy, the less you have to fight over the next time. And the more you treated the Grimm as just a force of nature, the less you cared about fighting them.

His impassioned pleas on that point, the idea of seeking out and utilizing other natural resources near Evig Låga, had been the start of this project. A project, Harry knew, that without his ability to transfigure things permanently would never have gotten off the ground. It would have been too expensive.

Changing people's views about how Grimm could be fought had been just as important. *You don't need Hunters to man a wall. You need them to break up the enemy and make certain that you know if a Grimm migration is coming in the first place. What you need to hold a defensive position is people with their auras unlocked and lots of long-range weapons.*

"Hadrian, Guld, over here." Turning in the direction of the voice, Harry was unsurprised to see the ex-Mantle soldier Cherry Vermouth. Despite his... unfortunate first name, the man was a thoroughgoing soldier, and after interviewing him, Guld and the Council of Evig Låga had decided to make him in charge of security here at the mine.

Harry and Guld moved over, clasping hands with the man began without preamble. "We've got the mortars set up, and the parts for the first dozen automatic machine guns finally arrived." Those guns come through official channels, meaning they arrived slower than the ones Guld and Paul had hunted up in Vacuo. "Do you want to check out where we put them?"

“No, I trust you to know where they should go.” Harry shook his head quickly, replying instinctively. He didn’t even look at his father, who smiled faintly and remained silent at his side. “We didn’t bring you in just so we could look over your shoulder, Cherry.”

Snorting, Cherry thanked Harry for the vote of confidence but still insisted on showing him around the wall, never mind the fact that Harry had been the one to erect the darn thing. Still, Harry didn’t argue, talking shop with the man and saying hello to several soldiers around them. These were a mixed bunch. They came from Vacuo, from other towns around Anima and Soliditas, although for the most part, the men from Soliditas were Faunus, eager to get away from the blatantly racist society of their homeland.

Faunus under the regime of Atlas, which had replaced Mantle, could do one of two things to escape the near-societal level of racism there. One, they could flee, or two, join the military. But if they joined the military, they would eventually face several untenable choices, boiling down to keeping the status quo. While Ironwood was apparently death on racism within the military ranks and generally seemed to be a military dictator in all but name, he didn’t seem able or willing to truly try to change the society of his homeland.

And as for Vacuo, the problem there isn’t just the Grimm but also the desert itself. Vacuo couldn’t sustain a large population, so people were always moving away from the desert kingdom.

Standing near one point of the star fortress, Harry stared toward Evig Låga towards the north. It was well out of sight, of course, but Harry, Tia, Arturia, and their parents had hunted along that route so much over the past few months that he could picture it in his mind’s eye. *An outer tower here, a wall there, and some antiair guns and mortars on platforms, and we can protect that area. We can reclaim it from the Grimm, a lane ten miles wide and more than a hundred long. That would be a real victory against the Grimm, the kind that hasn’t been seen since well before the Colors War.*

He was called back to reality by a nearby argument, which Cherry was already moving towards. Following him, Harry found it was between a group of miners and some service personnel. After briefly listening to the argument, Harry smoothly interjected himself into the conversation, getting everyone to calm down quickly. There was bound to be friction at the start of any great project like this, but Harry refused to let it go too far. And as he worked, other people came forward. Some just greeted him by name, having gotten to know Harry over their work at the mine complex as it grew out of nothing. Others wanted him to get between arguments like the one had just interrupted. This was pretty much the same work he had been doing over the past few days while waiting for Sunflash to mark out the places he needed to be security doors and reinforcement in the mines.

Guld watched all this from the sidelines, very deliberately not taking part. This project was almost entirely Harry’s brainchild. It had been Harry to convince the Evig Låga council to try it, and it had been Harry’s powers that had enabled them to do something like this. And it was

Harry's force of personality and charisma that had gathered so many people willing to join their growing community. His vision for a greater future. And Guld felt that it was only right, as the real leader of this project, Harry to get used to the responsibility, as he had done as Guld pushed him forward.

It's going to be difficult to keep the work going when he goes off to Beacon. I wish I could've convinced Harry and Tia to not go, and not just because I don't trust Ozzy further than I could throw his clocktower. But he's right that he needs to go, and that's why Hazel and I have been interviewing so many secretaries and communication specialists lately. And as for Harry, I can't deny that Goodwitch will teach him how to conserve his reserves and fight more effectively with his Semblance than anyone in the clan can. I just hope that they won't be there the entire four years that the Hunter academies believe is necessary. I know Arturia is champing at the bit to take Harry and Tia under her wing as her apprentices, and that way, we could keep him and Tia here in Evig Låga.

As he thought this, the Arc patriarch's eyes slipped down Harry's waist to where the arc blade rested. The sword was called Caliburn, and looking at it now, Guld chuckled dryly, the sound unheard among the noise of the mining camp all around them. *The sword of the King indeed.*

One of the many reasons that Guld and his wife had generally speaking 'forgotten' that Harry really wasn't their son was because of that sword, the Arc family blade, Caliburn. Caliburn had been part of the family longer than the family had been named Arc. No one really knew how old it was, and any attempt to reforge or examine the blade had failed. No forge's fire, not even those Semblance or Dust assisted, could even heat the blade, and never, not once had it ever needed a whetstone. It was truly a legend, up there with a few other weapons passed down through families across Remnant.

It was also an observed fact that Caliburn could not be wielded by anyone not an Arc. If someone had a large enough Aura pool, they could lift the sword. But they wouldn't be able to use it in battle, as to them, it would still weigh quite a lot, growing heavier with time. It was the combination of Arc blood and Aura that allowed someone to use Caliburn. This was something that they had centuries of observable history on.

But Harry, a foundling, could not only pick Caliburn up, but he could wield it better than anyone Guld had ever seen, including his father and grandfather and their whole generations. And it worked with his Semblance too! Hazel believed this meant that Harry had some Arc blood in him. Maybe his mother or father had been a long-lost cousin? There had been a few times this or that Arc had left the family, even in the generation preceding Guld's.

This was as good an explanation as any and really the only one they had. The family just didn't know anything about how Caliburn chose its wielders beyond the blood connection. And in Harry, it had found someone not only an Arc but whose leadership abilities and vision had

made old Varnathus, the bibliotekarie (librarian) of Evig Låga, remind Guld of the meaning of Caliburn's name.

And thinking about that aspect is great to take your mind off the one thing you and your wife need to do, Guld old boy, the father of eight remonstrated with himself. You and Hazel have yet to sit Harry and the others down and tell them that Harry's adopted. Mind you, waiting seems to have worked with Arturia. She has been in relationships and doesn't seem to cling to him as much as she once did when she's around. Magenta, who was definitely developing a crush on him at one point, also seems to have understood that a brother and sister should have some distance between them.

But Tia is still a question. Given her issues with expressing herself, it is very hard to get a handle on what Tia thinks, but I know she still sneaks into his bed sometime and has shown no interest in other boys whatsoever. Yet I haven't seen any sign of interest toward Harry either. And Harry's certainly giving all the signs of being interested in young Pyrrha. So maybe we have dodged a bloodbath by waiting? And Harry is certainly mature enough to understand and see we still love him as much as we would if he was one of our own. So, we just need to do it, right? Right?

"Hey, old man! Enough woolgathering!" Harry's voice jolted Guld out of his thoughts, and he turned to his son with a scowl. But Harry simply gestured over his shoulder with a thumb, uncaring of the glare his father was giving him currently, while around him, the small crowd dispersed, Harry having dealt with the various issues they had brought to him. "The Bullhead is here, and we need to get going. Remember I need to be in Mistral in time to catch the international flight, Dad."

"Right, right! Sorry Harry, just thinking. Let's get going," Guld answered. *And maybe on the way, I can finally figure out a way to tell you and the others the truth without it causing too much in the way of family drama.*

He didn't. And was still remonstrating with himself even as Guld bid his son farewell as he went off to further his education as a Hunter.

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Tia leaned her head back, closing her eyes slightly as the bullhead began to circle Beacon. Sleeping in a strange place had not been fun without her portable plushy, but at least she'd gotten all the shopping she and Harry wanted to do. *Including some new bras for me. I would've preferred to have Harry around to give me his opinion. It is always fun to see him stutter and blush. But at least they fit. That is getting harder to find back home.*

"...I just want to be a normal girl with normal knees," came Ruby's nearby voice, arguing with her older sister Yang, causing Tia to open her eyes and pay attention to their conversation.

When they first met, Tia had initially thought Yang might be some long-lost cousin of theirs, given her blonde hair and body type. Since then, her general attitude had done nothing to dissuade Tia from that idea, although the way she had left Ruby in the lurch last night to go clubbing apparently had not won Tia's approval.

"Ruby, I hate to tell you this, but you are special! Not every girl gets invited to Beacon two years early." Yang ruffled her little sister's hair. "If you wanted to be a normal girl, you would have stayed at Signal and not been here with your awesome big sister."

At that logical argument, Ruby could say nothing, and Tia interjected, "Besides, all knees break the same."

Nearby, an orange-haired girl wearing a pink skirt looked around suddenly, interrupting her discussion with a young man with a streak of pink in his otherwise black hair. "I sense a kindred soul. A fellow breaker of knees is nearby! Ren, we must find him or her!"

In response, the young man groaned, shaking his head slightly from side to side and praying that Nora was overreacting. The last thing he could deal with was a Nora clone around the place.

Yang looked over at Tia, thoughtfully cocking her head as she did so. Tia was a tiny bit taller but also bustier than Yang, something Yang would've thought impossible from someone their age before meeting the other girl. But despite how alike in body type they were, Tia was very much not like Yang at all in personality. Indeed, like Ruby, Yang had some trouble with how blank Tia appeared emotionally. *Still, she stood up for Ruby, which makes her a good person in my book.* "What was that?"

Tia stood up from her chair, stretching slightly, causing Ruby to become annoyed as she was now stuck between two blonde giants, whose giant boobies were eye-level to Ruby. The sight itself didn't bother her so much, but the fact she was so short compared to both girls did, and she scowled, stepping to one side to not be between them before looking up at the blonde who wasn't her big sister. "Er, I like the sentiment, especially considering how we met, but what did you actually mean, Tia?"

"Technically speaking, every student here is special. Regardless of your age here, you'll just be another student," Tia explained, lips twitching into a faint scowl. *I should never have spoken up. I dislike talking so much. Harry, I need you...* she whined internally but pushed on. "You have proven that you deserve to be here. But now, you will have to continue to do so. To be the bee's knees because Beacon demands nothing less."

All this was said in Tia's normal monotone, causing Ruby to frown internally even as she nodded. After nearly a full day of exploring fail alongside Yang and Tia, she was no closer to figuring out what Tia might be thinking or feeling than when they first met. Everyone that Ruby had ever been close to always wore their emotions on their sleeve, whereas Tia didn't have much emotion at all. *I want to be her friend, but I can't tell if she's just hanging around me*

because she sees me as a little sister, and I sooo do not need another big sister, or because she actually likes me or not. I can't just ask, I mean, I know I'm socially awkward and all, but even I know that would be a bad idea.

"In other words, no matter how you got here, you belong here, and you're going to have to show them. No more being just normal," Yang said, ruffling Ruby's hair again. "And you'll have to work on getting to know other people."

"Ugggggghhhhh..." Ruby groaned. "Why can I just get to know their weapons? That's easy! People are too, too well, people, you know?"

Tia nodded, then thought of a surefire way to get Ruby's mind off her troubles. "You mentioned weapons before. Would you like to see mine?"

Instantly Ruby began bouncing up and down, hopping from one side to the other as she stared up at Tia. "Oh, can I! Wait, I don't see any weapon on you? And there's no way you can be hiding any kind of weapon in that outfit."

With a faint smile, Tia turned back to her chair, reaching under it and pulling out a long thick box. As she did, several men around them looked in her direction, staring at her rear as she bent over. As Tia was still wearing a pair of tight jeans and a blouse that had several buttons undone, revealing several inches of her caramel-colored bust, many continued to stare as she straightened up, opening the box and handing it over to Ruby.

Yang noticed this and instead of commenting on the weapon as Ruby began to, pointed it out. "Don't look now, my fellow blonde, but you're getting some lecherous looks. You want me to scare them off for you?" She asked, glaring at a few boys who were too blatant about their ogling of Tia and herself.

Tia looked up from where she had been listening to Ruby pointing out how Tiburon should have a different kind of Dust crystal near the hilt to give Tia more versatility. She looked around, cocking her head to one side. Seeing the problem, Tia shrugged. "They can look as much as they want."

That caused Yang and Ruby to blink as it did not match the impression they'd been getting of Tia since meeting her. Seeing that, she shrugged again and elaborated, another faint scowl crossing her features at how much talking she was doing. "I do not care about them. They are nothing. Background. I am uninterested. I may start to care if they prove themselves strong and can become friends, not before."

This caused an instant reaction from several of the boys, who began to do muscle poses, winking at her, but Tia had already turned away, looking back at Yang and Ruby. True strength had very little to do with how big your muscles were. If these boys did not realize that already, they would remain background to the fourth daughter of Guld and Hazel.

“Has anyone ever called you an odd girl?” Yang asked, snickering at the boys’ reactions and Tia’s blatant putdown.

Tia shrugged again as if to say yes, but that it also didn’t matter to her. This caused Yang’s snicker to become a chuckle, but before she could speak again, they were interrupted by a hologram coming on nearby. It was one of several scattered throughout the bullhead’s interior, and each of them drew crowds quickly. At first, it was showing the news, but a moment later, it changed to a real-life hologram of Glynda Goodwitch, the same woman that Tia and Ruby had met the night before. Ruby had described her well enough that Yang recognized her, and she nodded in respect. “While I don’t exactly agree with the whole time of peace thing, I have to give her points for style. She’s sexy yet scarily stern at the same time. That’s a hard line to walk.”

Tia’s lips twitched, and she decided to speak up again, somewhat proud of herself for doing so. “Roman’s picture in the news was funny. It looked like he gained 30 pounds.”

Both of her listeners snickered at that, and all three turned to look out the window as the bullhead began to near the ground.

When they exited the Bullhead a moment later, Ruby began to run around after some of the other people who already had their weapons out, almost tossing Tia’s aside, having become somewhat bored - although she would never have said that aloud - by Tiburon. Looking around at the crowd, Tia saw signs set to one side and turned, heading to the back of the Bullhead where they were unloading luggage, leaving Yang to curtail Ruby’s weapons-induced eagerness.

When she arrived, she easily spotted her luggage, a huge duffel bag half her size, full to bursting. So heavy was it that two of the Bullhead’s crew were struggling to move it from the cargo area to a nearby trolley. However, when she reached forward, she was interrupted.

“Here, babe, let me get that for you.” A man maybe a foot taller than Tia smiled smarmily over at her, moving over to pick up her luggage. He had dark orange hair, a cocky expression, wide shoulders, and was currently wearing somewhat generic-looking armor. He had a large mace clamped magnetically to his armor on his back.

The man went on to say his name, but Tia wasn’t listening. She simply pushed his hand to one side, easily hefting the bag out of the arms of the two men gasping to move it. Resting it lightly on her shoulder, Tia turned and left without even looking at the man who had attempted to show off.

Behind the hot blond, Cardin Winchester tsked irritably before shaking his head. *Gotta have some kind of strength Semblance, damn. Wish I’d known that before. Fuck, I must’ve looked like a loser.* He shrugged philosophically, turning away to grab up his own luggage. *Well, I suppose there’s always initiation.*

Leaving the area the Bullhead had landed in, Tia was about to follow the directions to where they should drop off their luggage when she heard the sound of an explosion nearby.

Looking around, she saw a small cloud to one side, and blinking, Tia decided to investigate. When she got there, Tia found Ruby laying on the ground in the middle of a shallow crater, staring up at the sky, her face a mask of sorrow. That mask disappeared when Tia leaned over her, reaching down. "Are you okay?"

"No, I'm not all right! Oh, that made me so irritated! So, I ran into this rich girl's luggage right, and she gets all in my face and..." Ruby continued to speak as Tia hefted her up into the air, holding her by her hood for a second before Ruby got her feet under her. As she did, Ruby's words came out faster and faster as she explained a series of mishaps and miscommunications that had resulted in her going boom.

Apparently, from what Tia could understand, Ruby had run into a seemingly very arrogant woman with white hair and another girl who acted 'all mysterious' and aggravated the rich girl further before both left Ruby behind after she caused the aforesaid boom by sneezing and setting off a small canister of Dust the white-haired girl had been waving around. If that happened before or after the mysterious girl showed up and left, Tia wasn't so certain on.

Still, Tia let Ruby get it all out of her system, then when she wound down, asked, "Feeling better?"

"...A little bit," Ruby admitted breathing in deeply and seemingly pushing aside the last of her annoyance and sadness. "But where did you go?"

In response, Tia simply hefted the bag she still carried on her shoulder as if it weighed next to nothing, causing Ruby to glance at it before shaking her head and deciding not to wonder what was inside it. That would seem a little rude, and frankly, the bag looked heavier than Ruby herself, and she had no desire to find out if that was the case. *Man, what is it with blonds being so strong? I wonder who would win in an arm-wrestling contest?*

The two of them stood there awkwardly for a moment, then Ruby gestured to one side. "Er, can I walk with you? I, um, don't have much luggage, but I'd like to explore a bit."

When Tia nodded, Ruby grinned, skipping along next to the taller girl. Again, they fell silent again, although this time, it wasn't nearly as awkward as the last. And eventually, Ruby realized there was a topic they hadn't discussed since meeting up again that morning, although Tia had mentioned it a few times throughout the day. "So, er, tell me about your family. You've mentioned sisters and a brother a few times, tell me about them. Er... are they anything like you, or do you think they are more like Yang or me?"

At that, Tia turned to look down at Ruby, a smile crossing her features. It was small that smile, but it was an incredibly warm expression, accompanied by a gentle, loving look in her

eyes. Ruby nearly stumbled, staring at how much emotion that tiny smile somehow conveyed. *WWWoood, so much for her being unemotional!*

Not noticing Ruby's reaction to her smile, Tia pulled out her scroll, pulling up an image there. "This is my family. First is Harry, my twin..."

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"...And as you were a minor, your parents could sign all these forms for you. However, since you say they did not take your understanding and consent into account, that does give us some loopholes now that you have turned eighteen," A very elderly male voice said to Pyrrha as she looked down at her scroll, smiling her normal somewhat plastic public smile at the man whose image was there. He was a lawyer in Vale, part of a firm that operated there and in Mistral. After getting advice from Hazel and Saffron Arc, she had decided to go out and find herself a lawyer completely unconnected to her parents, her previous management firm, and indeed one whose clients had rarely had anything to do with the tournament circuit. "But if it comes to that, it will probably go to a full trial and be basically your word against that of your parents."

"How likely is that?" Pyrrha asked worriedly.

"Not very likely," the man answered instantly. "You aren't looking to get back any of the money that your parents made off the previous agreement, and simply by turning eighteen and becoming your own legal guardian, we can easily argue that the contracts are null and void going forward from that point. If you had continued to act as if you had agreed after turning eighteen, you would have shown a willingness to continue with the previous agreement. As you didn't, that's not an issue. Indeed, any arguments to the contrary are specious at best. We just need to prepare our defense against them, which, while time-consuming, is straightforward enough. The public outcry, however..." The old man smiled somewhat wintrily. "We cannot do much about."

Pyrrha winced and asked the lawyer a few more questions about their defense, what she needed to do when she would need to be available to give dissertations, and how to deal with the demands of her managers and parents. She wasn't willing to cut her parents entirely out of her life, so the idea of getting a new scroll here in Vale whose number they couldn't discover wasn't appealing. But she knew they would try to bring in her former managers to pressure her further.

Not to leave Beacon, her parents had finally acknowledged that they had lost that fight. Rather, they wanted her to continue with her various endorsement deals and everything else. Which Pyrrha very much did not want to do.

That conversation lasted for a few more minutes, by the end of which, the Bullhead Pyrrha was on, had finished circling around Beacon, waiting to be allowed to land. She ended

the conversation politely and sighed, taking a moment to think about the public fallout from her announcing that she would be leaving Mistral for Beacon in Vale

The majority of Mistral seemed to see it as a betrayal. The idea that the four-time champion winner, the only gladiator to ever win four tournament championships, had decided to leave the country was completely unacceptable to them. It was as if Pyrrha had insulted them to the very core of their being by doing so. Luckily, some people were also saying she was going to Beacon because of how well Arturia had fought Pyrrha in their last championship match. That Pyrrha was going there to hopefully become even better than she had been before returning in triumph to the tournament circuit.

They were living in a pipe dream. Pyrrha had cut off not only her managers and her parents but had already indicated to the tournament officials that she would not be returning at all, let alone next year. She had no desire whatsoever to continue that life. Beacon would be a fresh start for her, a step away from the permanent, from her controlling parents and their complete lack of understanding, and from her previous public persona.

Admittedly, quite a bit of my public persona will stay, including the color of my armor and its general appearance. And I am still uncertain how to go about, well, acting differently in public than I normally do beyond... what did Harry call it, 'take no shits attitude'? While crude, I rather like that. Yet that is one aspect. What about letting people see me beyond my adrenaline-junky status? For a moment, she thought of that but drew a blank and sighed. Well, hopefully, my fame won't chase me here so badly.

Exiting the Bullhead, Pyrrha looked around thoughtfully, hoping that she had enough time to explore a bit before orientation. As she did, Pyrrha was gratified to note that most people around her were not giving her any second glances. Hmm... so I really am not as noticeable if I don't wear my normal outfit and have my hair down. Fantastic. *Maybe I really can make a break from my fame here!*

She smiled at that, moving away quickly, and staring around herself avidly at the famous Academy before an explosion caused her to turn her head in confusion. Moving in that direction, Pyrrha crossed through a small parkway that had several different paths leading to and from some of the outer buildings. Here, Pyrrha spotted two individuals moving along another walkway, one of which she recognized easily. She had seen her face hundreds of times over the past three months. "Tia!"

Hearing her name, the blonde turned and spotted Pyrrha. She instantly moved in the redhead's direction, but to Pyrrha's surprise, when she smiled and held out a hand, saying, "good to see you in person for once," Tia did not stop. She instead ignored the hand and pulled Pyrrha into a hug.

Pyrrha blushed, as did the shorter, somewhat younger-looking girl who had followed Tia. But Pyrrha found herself returning to hug anyway, laughing despite her embarrassment. "And hello again to you too, Tia. What brought this on?"

"I told you I would give you a hug last week when you called us," Tia answered, squeezing her once more before stepping back. Her own expression, despite the affectionate tone and action she had just done, was still flat and almost unemotional. "But don't think my sympathy for your issues back in Mistral will make me go easy on you when we spar."

Pyrrha scoffed, taking the teasing as implied and thumping her fist against Tia's chest bone, although she was touched by the sentiment. Pyrrha had called Harry in tears about her last confrontation with her parents and their attempts to try and control her once more. Not once had they tried to bend. It had all been about how she was disgracing them and Mistral as a whole by leaving her tournament career and that they knew what was best and she was being a foolish girl. They had gone from wheedling to begging to condemning, all in one conversation until Pyrrha had locked herself in her room and wrecked the lock on her door with her Semblance.

When she called, Harry and Tia had both been there, and seeing her in tears helped as best they could. Hazel had also joined in at one point, and her words and soothing voice had helped immensely, but the twins had helped the most by simply giving as much support as they could.

"As if I would ever want that," She answered Tia's words. "Besides, I'm very interested in sparring with you and Harry. You've both been saying that you have been training and growing stronger, but neither has said anything about your different styles beyond a few teasing hints."

"Knowledge is power," Tia quoted her brother, her lips twitching for a moment.

Pyrrha giggled at that before turning and asking Tia to introduce her to the young girl who had followed her, picking up her massive duffel as she did, having dropped it to hug Pyrrha. "This is Ruby. Ruby, this is Pyrrha," was Tia's simple introduction. There was no last name or mention of her being a tournament champion or anything or the Invincible Girl. Which was just perfect in Pyrrha's mind.

She held out her hand, shaking Pyrrha's as she asked excitedly, "HI, I'm Ruby Rose. Since you were talking about sparring, what weapons do you use? Do you have them on you? I have Crescent Rose if you'd like to look." Ruby's interest and mouth had worked together to overcome her shyness, and she seemed to pale as she heard what was coming out of her mouth.

But Pyrrha took it in stride, smiling her normal, public smile at the young girl, grateful Ruby hadn't recognized her. "I'm afraid I don't. As I came in from the international flight this

morning, I sent my Huntress gear ahead as I crashed in a hostel to get over bull-lag. But tell me, how did you and Tia meet? I know she isn't the most outgoing sort."

Ruby muttered something about that being the truth on her breath, while Tia just shrugged her shoulders and said simply, "We stopped a robbery."

"Could you unpack that for me, please, Ruby?" Pyrrha asked while Tia fell silent, pleased to have Pyrrha and Ruby around to speak for her. Ruby did so, but as she finished speaking about how Tia had been held at sword point, Pyrrha began to laugh, looking over at Tia. "My word, but you Arcs do seem to find trouble when you're let out without minders. And why do I get the impression that you're the kind to have trouble find you as well, Ruby?"

"That's only happened a few...dozen times," Ruby pouted, shaking her head. "And most of that is Yang's fault anyway." She nodded firmly, going on piously, "She's a bad influence. Would you believe she's tried to take me clubbing?!"

Chuckling at that, Pyrrha asked Ruby if she was looking to be on the same team as her sister despite that, Tia or perhaps one of her other friends. At that point, Ruby's actual age and the fact that she was here due to professor Ozpin inviting her came out, skipping some of the story. That alone was fascinating, of course, although Pyrrha was not certain she would have extended the same invitation to Ruby in the professor's place. After all, being good at combat was not the same as being mentally mature. *I should know. I rather doubt I would count as being mature given my lack of various life skills outside of combat.*

"But I'd prefer to be on a team with Tia, I think. Yang is awesome, but she's my big sister, and I'd either be smothered, carried around like a trophy, or get up to a lot of trouble. Tia is much more mellow. Or... or maybe you?" Ruby asked shyly. That tall redhead seemed quite nice, although Ruby felt she had seen Pyrrha's face before for some reason.

Tia did not respond to this, having her own desires as to who she would eventually partner with but seeing no reason to say it aloud. That changed abruptly, however, as Pyrrha chuckled, shaking her head. "Having two trouble magnets on the same team might be a bit much, although, like you, I have no idea how teams or partners are chosen here in Beacon. They keep that a secret for some reason. As for my being your partner, while you seem quite a nice Ruby, I'm sorry. I already have a partner in mind. Although I'm surprised he hasn't already arrived, I'm certain he will get here eventually."

Understanding instantly who Pyrrha was talking about, Tia's eyes narrowed, and she glared at Pyrrha. Tia was in no way willing to give up her position as Harry's partner, not in any way, shape or form without a fight. Not even to Pyrrha, who she quite liked. Harry was **hers**, her brother, her twin, **hers**! "Challenge accepted," she ground out one of her favorite lines.

Pyrrha smiled at that, instantly understanding what Tia meant but not taking it personally. Instead, she linked arms with the other girl. "We will have to see. Come what may, I

don't want it to change our friendship." Her voice ended somewhat weakly, but Pyrrha instantly felt Tia's response to that, the other girl leaning into her in a sideways hug.

Believing she had just somehow stepped on a landmine, Ruby hesitantly suggested they keep walking, and the trio began to make their way towards the area where they had been told to leave their luggage for a few amenities.

As they walked, Pyrrha reflected that while Tia was not as emotionally outgoing as most people, that didn't mean she was unemotional entirely. Instead, she showed her emotions in a very different manner. *Their way of thinking is also a little off, but she is still a fun girl to talk to.* "Do you think you will show us your Semblance during initiation? I am very interested in seeing it, given what you and Harry have said about it."

"Oh, what's your Semblance? You said that your superstrength is just a byproduct of it, right?" Ruby asked quickly, eager to move on from... well, whatever the heck that moment just then was. *Ugh, grown-up girls are so weird. It almost looked like they'd fight, but now it looks like they're friends again. Are they talking about Tia's brother? Ugh, boys.*

"Kind of. Hard to explain." Tia answered succinctly. "And maybe."

Pouting at the complete non-answers from Tia, Ruby looked to the other girl for an explanation. "Translation, please?"

"I'm sorry, Ruby, but I have no idea what it looks like either. All I know is that it is strong and is supposed to heighten her endurance. That, and the name they gave it."

"Giving a Semblance of a name?" Ruby asked, frowning a bit. "Aren't most Semblances just given designations or descriptions? I mean, my speed Semblance is just that, a speed Semblance, I don't call it Quickstep, or Zoom or anything." She stammered suddenly, waving her arms wildly. "I mean, I never did that even when I first got it. That would be weird, right!?"

Ignoring Ruby's minor freakout moment beyond a light giggle, Pyrrha shook her head. "From what I understand, the people at Harry and Tia's old school were quite quick to give her a label, but instead of trying to fight it, Tia simply let it stick or changed it a bit? I've never been very clear about that."

"Harry changed it," Tia answered, with something like pride in her tone. However, she felt she had done enough talking today and fell silent, wishing she had something to hide her mouth.

Again, Ruby looked at Pyrrha, deciding needing a translator would probably be a theme with the blonde girl. "Her Semblance was called Horrible Belle, spelled with an 'E' at the end, like an old-time Mantle lady of a certain age group and societal class," Pyrrha answered. *Considering the Arcs are so important to Evig Låga, that is quite appropriate. Even if they are about as far removed from high society, let alone Atlas's, as I could ever imagine.* "I understand

it was meant as both a taunt and an insinuation on how pretty Tia is. Harry then shrank it to Harribel.”

“... It sounds both strong and kind of scary. Do you think we can stop someplace so you could show it to us right now?” Ruby was both eager to discover anything about her new friend she could and hoping that maybe if they stopped to let Tia show them her Semblance.

Tia shook her head, and Ruby began to give her the Puppy Dog eyes, but Pyrrha, steadfastly looking away from the shorter girl, turned back to a previous question. “Where is Harry, by the way? You never said.” Tia explained with a few words, stating he had been kept back in Evig Låga by their father. Pyrrha frowned, still willfully looking away from Ruby’s soulful gaze at Tia, who apparently had developed an immunity to the dreaded secret attack of little siblings everywhere. “Hmm, in that case, do you think we can call him? He shouldn’t miss orientation.”

Tia frowned at that, nodding her head. “It will be expensive, though.”

“I’ll foot the bill. We’ll use my scroll,” Pyrrha answered instantly, and she pulled out her scroll, with the two of them leaning against one another, holding the scroll in front of them while Ruby paused, wondering if she should just leave.

The scroll was picked up before the diminutive reaper could decide, and Harry’s face appeared there. He had been frowning, but when he saw who was calling, his eyes lit up, and a wide smile appeared. “Pyrrha, Tia! I’m really glad you found one another. Do you have time to talk? I have about two hours free before the next international flight, unfortunately. It was delayed a bit due to a flock of Grimm crossing the route.”

Both girls smiled back in their own way at Harry as Pyrrha teased, “That’s a shame. I am looking forward to seeing you in person for once.” Despite their best efforts, their schedules simply hadn’t allowed them to get away. Pyrrha hadn’t had a single day entirely to herself ever since she won the fourth championship, and Harry had been insanely busy as well. He had occasionally gotten a way to Mistral but never with enough time to set anything up. The fact that Saffron, his mother and even Magenta and the twins had been able to do so made it even more annoying.

“I am too,” Harry said, his smile widening as she winked at her. “I want to see this new armor you’ve been bragging about and maybe show you that a simple sword can beat out a mecha-shift weapon no matter how well made.”

While Ruby hissed like a teakettle at that to one side of the girls, Pyrrha laughed. “We will have to see, won’t we?”

Seeing the smile on Harry’s face, Tia felt an annoying feeling in her stomach as she watched his interaction with Pyrrha. It was a feeling she had not felt before, and she didn’t like

it. Thankfully, the feeling disappeared as Harry turned his attention to her, and Tia felt her lips quirking into a smile.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t travel with you, Tia. Setting up the mine just took too long.” He shook his head, then smiled at her again. “But enough about me, what have you been up to? Were you able to get all the shopping you wanted done?”

At that, Pyrrha laughed. “She seems to have gone shopping, although she had an Arc-style adventure doing it. And made a new friend.”

With that, Pyrrha pulled the scroll away, twisting it slightly so that Ruby could also get into the pickup. She did so somewhat shyly, waving her hand meekly as she looked at the boy on the other end. At first, besides her righteous anger at Harry’s comment about a sword being a mecha-shift weapon (nothing could beat Crescent Rose, after all), Ruby had kind of felt like she was intruding on a private moment, but she hadn’t been able to figure out a polite way to back away. Now she was stuck here, but Harry’s welcoming smile put her at ease. “Er, hello. I’m Ruby Rose.”

“You found a girl whose last name is the same as our little sister? Rather ironic,” Harry chuckled, cocking his head to one side. “But how exactly did you meet my sister, and what kind of Arc-style adventure did you two have, Ruby?”

Blushing a bit at the attention, Ruby once more found herself telling the story of what she and Tia had meant, although this time, she went into a lot more detail and wasn’t interrupted. She spoke about the fight from one end to another, complete with hand chops and various noises, which Pyrrha’s scroll dutifully recorded, both Pyrrha and Harry becoming enthralled by the full tale.

When Ruby finished and nearly collapsed, having forgotten to breathe for a moment, Harry whistled, shaking his head. “Well, it does seem as if you had an eventful time they are in Vale. I’m sorry I missed it, although I don’t know what our parents will say if you take up Arturia’s crime-fighting tendencies, Tia.”

Tia rolled her eyes at that, remembering the incident Harry was talking about. Arturia had been shopping in Mistral for a new bed for her room during one of her infrequent trips home from Beacon the year before. She had been accosted by a group of thugs and had then proceeded to beat them up, their immediate superiors in the local criminal hierarchy, and then eventually went on to destroy a bar used by the local gangsters as a place to fence their illegally gotten goods.

“And where is the Dark Queen?” Pyrrha asked, using the latest name the pundits had come up with for Arturia, causing Ruby’s eyes to widen, and she whispered, ‘so cool...’

“Arturia is in Soliditas at present, leading a mixed Hunter force. Apparently, one of Atlas’ farming communities has been attacked recently, and they want to nip any worse trouble in the

bud. And she is no doubt beating down any attempt to recruit her. Honestly, you would think they would learn,” Harry chuckled ruefully.

“Oh dear, I hope she doesn’t destroy another forest,” Pyrrha murmured, although her lips quivering with suppressed laughter gave her the lie.

“So cool!” Ruby squealed.

OOOOOOO

Arturia sneezed, scowling as she shook her head, her shield hand coming up to wipe her nose delicately with a finger. *Is someone talking about me, or half at his typical weather somehow gotten through my Aura?*

To the attacking Creepers, it must have looked as if Arturia wasn’t paying them any attention, and they snarled as they charged forwards across the snow. However, they soon learned the folly of this thought as she thrust forward with Rhongomyniad, the tip impacting the ground in front of her. “Thousand Thorns!”

From the ground in front of her, hundreds of thousands of large vines seemingly made out of Aura appeared, bursting out of the ground within a wide angle around her towards the Grimm. These vines were tipped by thorns, red like the vines they pulsed with color. They stabbed into several hundred Grimm, slaying or incapacitating the vast majority of them. The few who could dodge this assault died to cover fire from the other Hunters currently working with Arturia.

“Soldiers, pull back to the walls,” she ordered crisply. “Keep firing at the mainmast of Grimm. Hunters, stay where you are. Droids... keep firing.” *I may not like the tin men as it further removes people from the Grimm threat, but they do have their uses.*

Out of the forest surrounding the farming community, the horde of Grimm continued to pour even as the defenders fell back, the living soldiers retreating into a defensive position set up around the community as the robots stood their ground with programmed courage, laying down a suppressive fire on the Grimm that had hundreds of them falling. Above them, Bullheads armed with cannons fired on the massive flock of Grimm in the air, which Arturia and her impromptu team had already thinned out earlier that day.

It looked like the defenders were being hard-pressed, with many of the robots wrecked in the next few moments. However, to Arturia, this was just another day at the office.

Another set of brambles created by her Aura crashed out, slaughtering still hundreds more Grimm, and behind them came the true weight of this assault. Instead of creepers, there were Beowulf’s, several local Grimm varieties, and leading the charge was a huge, apelike Grimm. This was a Beringel, a deadly, dangerous Grimm known to be both exceedingly tough and strong.

Staring at it thoughtfully, Arturia let it close halfway across the blasted, thorn-encrusted field, gathering her Aura. Then she thrust Rhongomyniad forward. “Shine, Excalibur!”

The blast of raw power flashed out from her, incinerating several of the Grimm between herself and her target before impacting the lower part of the monstrous ape. That Grimm had a single chance to scream out in rage and fury before its upper body disappeared, incinerated by the blast of condensed Aura.

With that, Arturia turned away, stomping through the snow back towards the trio of local Hunters she had joined as they put down the last of the Grimm that had reached the row of robots.

As she looked at them and the local army commander, Arturia allowed a scowl to cross her features, staring at them with all her cold hauteur. “I will have to have words with your general about what missions he thinks he needs to request my personal help for. This was pathetic,” she barked. “Utterly straightforward, utterly **boring**.”

“Well, I mean, there was that giant Grimm?” One of the Hunters, a local one trained in Atlas Academy, said hesitantly.

“Who isn’t nearly as dangerous as you might think, considering it has no long-range capability to speak of and is landbound. It cannot even leap very far,” Arturia responded, using information she had claimed from her time at Beacon. “Take it out from long-range with enough firepower or send one of your Bullheads after it with a bomb. It is neither fast enough to dodge nor fast enough to close the distance if you have the tactical acumen of a monkey!”

The three local Hunters flinched backward, one of them muttering about how it was true that the Dark Queen deserved her name. The local commander also flinched but didn’t retreat, smiling tremulously. “Well, I suppose it’s a good thing then that the general has requested your presence back in Atlas once we’re done here....”

If he expected this to appease Arturia, he was grossly mistaken and watching her eyes narrow as she crossed her arms, he fell silent, quailing a bit under her glare.

“If this is another attempt to recruit me into your army, I am going to express my displeasure most violently with the Tinman and his porcelain bodyguard,” She growled, causing all four of her listeners to shiver in fear before she turned, tromping off towards the Bullheads as they began to settle down on the ground, idly using her shield gun to slay a few stray Grimm at the edge of the forest without a thought. *Today is the first day at Beacon, isn’t it? I wonder what Harry and Tia are up to? Hmm... when did Beacon allow visitors again?*

OOOOOOO

The call to Harry was interrupted by an announcement coming out of a nearby public announcement speaker, saying there were only ten minutes before the orientation speech began. This caused Ruby to panic, staring all around her until she saw a small sign indicating the

direction of the auditorium. She hastily grabbed both of the older girl's hands, dragging them along, causing them to look at one another, a smile on Pyrrha's face and amusement dancing in Tia's eyes even as Harry looked away, feeling a little sick by watching the speed the group was traveling via his scroll.

Soon they were at the auditorium, where Ruby was greeted by a shout. "Hey Ruby, over here! I saved you a spot." So saying, Yang paused, her brows furrowing as she looked at Pyrrha, recognizing the Invincible Girl at once. Still, she didn't say anything, not just yet. *I'll needle Ruby about maybe having a famous friend later.*

"That's my sister. It was nice meeting you, and I'll see you both later, okay?"

Tia gave Ruby a thumbs up. "Kick her for me."

That set Ruby to giggling even as she raced away through the small crowd to where her sister was standing.

This left the other two girls behind, and with twin shrugs, they took their scroll and moved to one side of the auditorium. There they almost hid in the shadows, which suited both well enough, if for different reasons. Tia just didn't care, whereas Pyrrha was happy to avoid anyone attempting to find her. A few people had been looking at her when they entered, especially her red hair and the scars on her arm. *I wear my scars with honor, but I must admit that they do make me a little more recognizable than I already was,* the four-time champion admitted ruefully.

Semi-hidden in the shadows, Pyrrha leaned against the wall, with Tia moving in close, leaning against her side. Pyrrha smiled and put an arm around the other girl's shoulders, reveling in the open affection as she smiled down at her scroll, where Harry was still looking back at them, obviously bored waiting in the airport back in Mistral. *Harry seems to have been right on the money when he said that Tia is a cuddler.*

Not that Pyrrha had any issue with this. Indeed, she knew herself to be somewhat touch-starved. So this was really nice. As was talking to Harry again, something the two of them continued to do even as they settled in, waiting for the speeches to begin. Harry told her more about what he had been up to while Pyrrha spoke about her training, and Tia just listened, reveling in being able to not talk for a bit.

The conversation only halted when Headmaster Ozpin and Professor Goodwitch took the stage at the front of the auditorium.

"Do you want to watch?" Pyrrha whispered before turning the scroll so that Harry could see the stage.

"Glynda Goodwitch..." Harry murmured under his breath before adding, "she is the real reason why I initially wanted to go to Beacon. It wasn't just about following in Arturia's footsteps. I'm hoping she can help me get better at conserving my Aura when I use my

Semblance. I've got a lot of Aura, but even so, efficiency is the thing." He smirked, and somehow Pyrrha could feel it despite not seeing it. "It's the difference between making a few feet of stone and a few walls with the same amount of power."

"True, I'm hoping for some help in that area myself. I want to train myself in using more of my Semblance at a time but also retain the subtlety," Pyrrha answered, while Tia grunted agreement, the sound almost not carrying to Harry via the scroll thanks to it having been turned to look at the stage. "And you still owe me an explanation about how quickly you could use your Semblance, Harry."

That was the one thing that had never come up in conversation over the past few months. For most of that time, Pyrrha had simply been too happy to have friends, indeed, to almost develop a surrogate family in the Arcs to really want to push things. After that, it simply never came up in conversation. But the mystery of Harry being able to instantly know what his Semblance was and use it in combat to such a great degree still confused her whenever she thought of it.

"We'll make a date of it," Harry answered, still trying to get a read on Ozpin and Goodwitch as the professor demanded silence with a single swish of her riding crop.

He had already decided to come clean about his past life to Tia, Arturia, and Pyrrha, at the very least. Arturia because she had already cottoned onto the fact that Harry showed a grasp of tactics and combat far greater than he should have. Guld and Hazel had done the same, but they had put it down to simply his training and inherent talent. But Arturia had trained with Harry far more closely and far more regularly than either of his parents had. Tia probably wouldn't care. To her, he was simply Harry, an important and indispensable part of her life, much like Tia was to him. Pyrrha was the only one he was on the fence about, but she was right, he did owe her that explanation, and Harry knew by this point he could trust her to keep his secret.

Behind the scroll, Pyrrha blushed hotly, biting her lip to keep from squealing aloud in delight, while Tia felt that odd feeling in her stomach again. "T, that sounds amazing to me. I will hold you to that."

Blinking, Harry realized how his choice of words could be taken and was about to open his mouth to state that hadn't been what he meant before closing it slowly. A thoughtful look crossed his features, unseen by either of the girls. *Why not? Why not indeed. We're not strangers. Indeed, we're quite close. I know Pyrrha well enough to call her one of my best friends and even trust her with my secret. I also think she's one of the nicest and prettiest people I've ever met, in this life or my last. So why not see if we could be more? Nothing ventured, nothing gained.*

At one point, Harry had wondered about the morality of getting into a relationship in this new life of his. After all, he had been transferred into Remnant when he was in his mid-twenties. Technically, he was in his forties.

But in that time, he had zero practical dating experience. Ginny and their tent had given him some experience in the carnal side of things, and that relationship might have grown into more in time, but it hadn't been given a chance. Since then, none had dared get close to Harry save those who wanted to use him, so Harry had gone through his past life without romance. And frankly, before that, he had been grossly naïve and uneducated. So, Harry felt it was a bit of a wash, really, and had tossed out the idea of simply adding his ages together.

At least this time, I know something about relationships in general, if not dating in particular. Although Saffron will be so annoying about this when she finds out. Aloud, he said, "I will try to live up to your expectations," causing Pyrrha's blush to deepen before the headmaster began to speak.

His eyes flicking around the auditorium, Ozpin began. "I'll... keep this brief. You have traveled here today in search of knowledge. To hone your craft and acquire new skills, and when you have finished, you plan to dedicate your life to the protection of the people. But I look amongst you, and all I see is wasted energy, in need of purpose, direction. You assume knowledge will free you of this, but your time at this school will prove that knowledge can only carry you so far. It is up to you to take the first step." {direct quote}

Hearing this and watching Ozpin walk away without another word, Harry slowly shook his head as Pyrrha turned the scroll back to herself and Tia. Meanwhile, Glynda took over, making a few announcements about the general rules prospective students would have to follow until tomorrow when initiation would begin.

"That was... Indeed, very brief," Pyrrha murmured, wondering what to think of what she had just heard.

Beside her, Tia just looked confused, wondering what the hell the point of that was. *Magenta wrote a better stirring speech than that when she first started writing.*

Harry chuckled darkly. "You really were brought up in the 'if you can't say something nice, don't say anything' school, weren't you? To my mind, that was pathetic."

"I wouldn't put it that strongly," Pyrrha said slowly, all but admitting that she actually did agree that as an orientation speech that had left much to be desired.

"I would. Most of the Hunters here have probably just gone to school, maybe gone on a few controlled hunts. They won't be as experienced as us, you with your tournament experience or me and Tia with the experience we built up going out on hunts with our parents and Arturia. Because of that, they won't have found their true motivations. That's what that speech is about, finding their own motivation. But I will wager it will have gone over most of

their heads entirely. Ozpin could've done a lot of things. He could have warned them, rallied them against the Grimm, or just outright told them it was up to the students to motivate themselves. But that? That was just basically telling them to become adults right now. And that he didn't care enough to help them do so. Hell, he even walked away as if they were worthless, whatever they thought of his words. It is very stupid to assume that the nonverbal messages he sent weren't just as important as his speech."

"Well.... then it's lucky we already know our motivations. To become stronger and protect humanity," Tia spoke for the first time since Ruby left, shrugging her shoulders. The motivations of others mattered little to her.

From anyone else, that kind of line would've sounded corny beyond belief. But Tia put such strength into the words, such certainty, that Pyrrha could only grin at the girl, holding out a fist for her to thump while Harry smiled. "Well said."

OOOOOO

From on top of the stage, Ozpin watched the various reactions to his speech from the small side entrance to the stage as Glynda wound down. His eyes flicked to the silver-eyed Ruby, standing with her sister and, oddly, Weiss Schnee of all people. He wondered idly how that meeting had come about before flicking his gaze towards one of the shadows in the room, instantly spotting Blake belladonna hiding there. *She is awfully shy of putting herself forward for someone so wishful to set aside her past and remake herself. It seems she lacks conviction, or perhaps confidence?*

He took in the rest of the crowd instantly, seeing the young Winchester boy, who had already gathered a group of followers – problematic perhaps, but not an issue he should be bothered by - and a few other students who would no doubt either die tomorrow in the initiation or amount to nothing in their Hunter career. Far too childish, arrogant and flighty, they had all simply ignored his speech, not even trying to think their way through it.

After so many centuries, the immortal Oz had developed a discerning eye that could see which Hunters would be assets going forward and which would simply be able to do their job. Young Ruby would certainly be an asset going forward, not just because of the power of her silver eyes but the training that Qrow had given her, and he could tell she had understood some of his message at least. Similarly, Yang could be the next Tai. *And Ms. Belladonna... hmmm... a catalyst perhaps? Pun intended although that will be determined by her conviction and actions.*

A small smile on his face thanks to his inner pun, Ozpin's eyes flicked towards where Tia Arc and Pyrrha Nikos were. If asked, he would be hard-pressed to say which he found most interesting, the girl with the amazing transformational Semblance or the four-time champion.

Oddly enough, the two girls were standing side-by-side, looking down at a scroll in Pyrrha's hands. *Interesting, I would not have expected them to know one another. Perhaps a friendly rivalry, given Arturia and Ms. Nikos's past interactions? And what they are doing with*

that scroll? Whatever it was, he could see a smile on Pyrrha's face at least, whereas even Ozpin could not read anything from Tia's expression from this far away.

And Hadrian Arc has yet to arrive, just as we were warned in that extremely terse message from Hazel. That is a pity on many levels, both that Hazel and Guld still distrust me and that I still have not yet discovered what the Arcs are up to around Evig Låga. Only interesting reports about Harry's Semblance, none substantiated. Beyond that, Anima is one of the more chaotic nations as it is, which hides much from Lionheart and his contacts. Yet some of their moves... Ozpin internally shook his head, setting that thought aside. Regardless, it will be very interesting to meet Hadrian Arc, he mused. There are several mysteries I wish to clear up, and hopefully will be able to do so in the meeting.

OOOOOOO

After exploring the campus for a bit and getting a somewhat, in Tia's mind, mediocre dinner, she and Pyrrha, along with the rest of the crowd of would-be freshmen, were shown to changing areas and were allowed to pick up their sleeping gear, separated out from the rest of their luggage. "I had wondered why the information brochure told us to pack a sleeping bag, although I feared it was something to do with initiation. I have to confess that my woodcraft skills are next to nonexistent. What about you, Tia?" the redheaded champion said as she finished pulling on the top of her pajamas.

This was a simple two-piece, large on her, so large that her body nearly disappeared under it, and it was complete with a hood, which she pulled up over her hair and face with some difficulty. Still, she wouldn't trade it for anything. And not just because of the anonymity it offered either.

Next to her, Tia finished pulling on a large one-piece pajama complete with large fluffy feet. Indeed, quite a bit of it looked fluffy, and Pyrrha could not stop herself from reaching out and feeling its fabric. Tia allowed this, her eyes lighting up a bit as she too felt the fabric of Pyrrha's pajamas, smiling very slightly in an almost conspiratorial manner. "Comfy?"

"Oh my, yes! These have quickly become my favorite pajamas, although admittedly, I don't normally have the full hood up like this," Pyrrha laughed, shaking her head. "It's one of my favorite gifts. The only one that is better is Harry's."

"MMm." Tia hummed, her smile widening just a fraction, becoming far warmer, as her eyes seemed to gleam with affection as she looked down at her pajamas. Then she turned away, leading the way out of the changing area as she answered Pyrrha's earlier question. "We've gone camping. I can't cook, but I can easily make up a campsite and hide a fire. And if it is for initiation, we'll have Harry do the cooking."

"Whichever one of us he pairs up with, I think that sounds grand," Pyrrha teased, getting a snort from her companion. Neither girl had forgotten their semi-peaceful competition.

Exiting the room, the two bypassed an area where most of the boys had set up. Already a few of them had begun bragging about what they would do during initiation or what they had already done and the size of their weapons and girls. Several were roughhousing, trying to show off for the girls while others were picking targets for later flirtation.

Even though she heard all this, Tia couldn't care less. For her part, Pyrrha was grateful for her hood as she heard a few of them talking about how the Invincible Girl was supposed to be here. And with that came other comments.

"Man, I don't know what would be better, knocking Nikos off her pedestal or being her partner! Heh, in every sense of the word, man. I mean, have you seen her body?!" Was one of the least offensive, although it was followed by "Beyond the scar on her arm anyway."

That last caused Pyrrha's eyes to narrow and her hand clenched in her long-sleeved shirt. Normally these days, she didn't bother wearing a sleeve at all on that arm, being very proud of the scar that Arturia had given her. But it would have ruined her attempted anonymity tonight. *Pathetic. If you cannot see the worth of these scars to me, then I doubt you would be worth my time to talk to, let alone befriend. Your friend who just mentioned my ass, though, will certainly make the acquaintance of Milo. Still, at least my reputation is good for some things. Only a few of these idiots think they have any chance with me. They are just an extremely vocal minority.*

Nearby, Yang had just finished teasing her sister about writing an actual letter to her friends back in Signal rather than simply calling them when she spotted Tia and who she supposed must be the redhead she spotted earlier. Tia, at least, was extremely obvious with her tanned skin and short-cropped blonde hair, despite the outfit she was now wearing. *I suppose that Nikos wants to go incognito tonight. Maybe she's not used to being around so many boys? Or just doesn't want to be mobbed. Probably a mix.*

Yang fought with herself for a moment, wanting to have some fun, but she decided against outing the girl. "Hey, Tia! Over here." She waited until the two had come over, dropping their sleeping bags together on the far side of Yang and Ruby towards the outer wall of the auditorium before going on. "And what the hell are you two wearing anyway? I mean, they are kind of adorkable, just like Ruby here. But come on, girls. You're eighteen, and I know you've got rocking bods," Yang teased. She even added a wink towards Pyrrha, whose eyes widened under her hood, even as she knelt beside Ruby, smiling at the other girl.

Tia shrugged, pulled out her scroll, and held it out to Yang. It was the picture she had shared earlier with Ruby right before Pyrrha appeared, showing her sisters and Harry. "They were made by Rose and Rouge, the twins in that image. I promised to wear it, and it is super comfortable."

"Mine as well," Pyrrha murmured, trying to keep her voice down. *While I eagerly look forward to letting my new persona out, tonight is not the night for it. And I would rather like to have Harry here to help me too.*

She and Tia had talked with Harry for another hour after Ozpin's strange speech. At that point, he'd had to board the international flight, which obviously did not have scroll coverage. Harry had promised to be there for initiation before telling them both to have a good night's sleep and that he loved Tia, something that had set Pyrrha's stomach to churn in jealousy until she saw the adorable little smile it brought to Tia's face. At that point, her stomach had settled down, and Pyrrha had soothed herself that it was no doubt normal for twins to be that close.

Yang looked at the picture, then laughed. "Yeah, I can see that, although..." She looked at the picture, locking on Harry before smirking up at Tia. "Who's the brown-haired boy, your boyfriend?"

"No, my twin." Came the response, causing Yang to blink before she shrugged. She was used to family members not exactly looking like one another after all.

She turned to Pyrrha, smirking a bit. "And what about you? Is that your regular nightly fashionwear, or is it just for tonight? I can imagine a lot of people would be somewhat thrown off by that."

Pyrrha gulped a bit, realizing that Yang, unlike her sister, knew who she was. But she didn't seem in any rush to shout it out, so Pyrrha answered gamely, "While I would prefer to wear a little bit less, I have to admit that these are still sinfully comfortable. And like Tia, my current pajamas were made for me by the Arcs."

"Huh, so you're a friend of the family then? I've never heard of them before," Yang answered, stating that she wasn't certain who the Arcs were in relation to Pyrrha. But then her eyes widened. "Wait, Arc?! Like Arturia? Grah, I can't believe I forgot her last name!"

"Yes. Although I met Harry during a completely unrelated event. When he gets here, that whole story will come out, but for now, suffice it to say that afterward, Harry reached out to me and vice versa, and well, I found the entire family just amazingly welcoming and warm." Pyrrha glanced over to Tia as she spoke and smiled as Tia pulled her into a hug, laying her head on top of Pyrrha's hood-clad form for a moment.

"A warmth I sincerely needed, " Pyrrha went on as she leaned against the other girl in turn. Part of her wished that it was Harry she was leaning against, but considering that he had already offered to take her out on a date that would come in time. For now, Tia was a very cuddly substitute.

"And does Arturia know you're friends with the rest of her family? I always thought that the two of you were huge rivals," Yang questioned, her voice low. "At least that's what the tabloids reported."

“You believe the tabloids?” Pyrrha giggled, causing Yang to concede the point before going on. “Rivals, yes, but there’s no hatred between us. I would say we are not near as close as I am to even Hazel, the matriarch of the Arc clan. But there is no anger or animosity there.”

“Ha, the more you know,” Yang murmured, while Ruby simply was cocking her head to one side as she listened, before Yang grinned, a slasher kind of grin causing Ruby to eep and back away slightly, turning to reach into a bag nearby. “Regardless, I’m looking forward to seeing if the hype is real if you know what I mean.”

“I hope I live up to your expectations,” Pyrrha accepted with a smile.

At that point, their conversation was interrupted by Ruby, who held up a deck of cards. “All right, at least I have something here that could be fun.”

“If we are playing any kind of card game that revolves around reading your opponent, I have to refuse,” Pyrrha answered instantly, pulling away from Tia to poke her gently in the cheek. “This one’s poker face is unbeatable.”

Ruby pouted a bit at that, her pout deepening as Tia simply nodded sagely. “How about something more complicated then? Which doesn’t involve bluffing? Our dad taught us a lot of card games.”

Seeing the other two girls nod, Yang smiled proudly, swinging an arm around Ruby’s shoulders. “See, sis, I knew you could make friends here!”

“I made a friend in Tia the other night, and Pyrrha is well....” Ruby floundered, looking at the redhead. “No offense, but I met you through Tia, so it isn’t like I made you a friend on my own, you know?”

“I understand, Ruby. But I do hope you consider me a friend,” Pyrrha answered quickly, fighting back a grin. It seemed to her that the young girl would need as many friends as she could get a once school started, and Pyrrha had so few friends she was eager to add another to that shortest of ledgers.

Ruby smiled at that, and Yang pulled her into a hug. “See what I mean, sis? However you got them, friends are friends. Now, let’s have some fun. I mean, this is your first big slumber party, you know? We should try and make it memorable.”

“We have to get up early for initiation tomorrow, Yang. Besides, I don’t think dad would approve of all the boys,” Ruby grumbled, even as she opened the deck of cards and began to deal them out.

Yang smirked, looking over at the boys, watching one of them lift another up above his head while another got a fourth into a headlock. Nearby several of them were wrestling around, as roughhousing or showing off was the name of the game. It was a very thin line with

boys. "I know I do." She grinned, looking over at Tia and Pyrrha. "What about you two? Any of the boys interest you?"

"No," Tia answered easily, shrugging her shoulders.

Yang's words had carried through a momentary lull in the background noise, and several boys turned, looking towards them or cocking their ears in the direction of the two blondes. Seeing this and eager to have some fun, Yang quickly followed up. "Oh, why not? Do you have a sweetheart back home?"

Rolling her eyes, Tia leaned down to pick up her cards, not even glancing toward the boys any longer. "Because for all their muscles, they are weak."

Yang guffawed at that as a few of the nearest guys got angry, but none were willing to pass the semi-official divide between the girls' and boys' sides of the hall. Hearing their grumbling, Tia looked up, staring at them, her face its normal bland, unemotional look, while Yang simply smirked challengingly at them, crossing her arms under her chest to emphasize her chest just that little bit more.

Beside the two blondes, Ruby and Pyrrha both crouched down in their hoods, sharing a commiserating look.

Eventually, the boys turned away, but before the card game could begin, Ruby looked to the side, blinking. "That girl..."

The other girls looked at her and then over at the girl Ruby was looking at, and Yang asked, "what's up?"

"It's that girl from earlier, the one who kind of helped me with Weiss," Ruby murmured.

Yang smiled at that, hopping to her feet and grabbing Ruby up. "Come on then, let's see if you can make another friend."

Tia and Pyrrha looked at one another but did not try to follow. They instead watched from afar as Weiss Schnee showed up, getting into a shouting match with Yang. "Oh dear, I've met her twice before at societal functions, and I didn't think she was that mean-spirited," Pyrrha murmured, having trouble speaking ill of someone else no matter how slightly.

Tia cocked her head to one side, staring at the other girl. "Another girl allowed in early?"

That caused Pyrrha to giggle, shaking her head. "No, she's our age despite how she looks. As I said, I've met Weiss at societal functions before. Obviously, we're not close, but she is a well-spoken and well-trained girl if... well, as you can see, arrogant and far more typical of the rich and nobility than you Arcs."

Tia looked at her, cocking her head to one side. "We are not nobles. We defend Evig Låga. We do not live off of its produce or whatever nobles do."

“And yet you do rule it,” Pyrrha demurred, shifting backward and opening her sleeping bag, sticking her lower half inside. Not that it was really needed. *I love these pajamas!*

“We rule it by the grace of the people. We started Evig Låga. We have not become rich on our neighbors’ backs,” Tia grumbled, looking as if she would be pouting were Tia anyone else.

Pyrrha laughed at that, saying that she believed Tia, but from an outsider’s perspective, there wasn’t much difference. “I’m not saying that’s a bad thing either. I’m simply saying that is how it could be perceived.”

Tia scowled very slightly, but then the nearby lights went out. A series of voices protested, but glancing at her scroll, Pyrrha realized it was already pushing 11 o’clock. She showed it to Tia, who nodded, and Pyrrha could hear rustling from one side of her, the other girl getting into her own sleeping bag. Nearby a few voices also pointed out the time, and people started to turn in. Pyrrha smiled as she closed her eyes, *thinking that despite the long conversation with my lawyer, today has been quite a good day. I hope this starts a trend.*

OOOOOO

Harry groaned as he got out of his chair in the Bullhead that he had taken from the international airport to Beacon. The flight from the airport to Beacon wasn’t much but on top of the international flight? Harry had often wondered in his past life how people could sit for so long without their bodies rebelling utterly, and he was no closer to finding a solution to that question in this one.

Looking at his scroll, Harry saw that he had to meet with Ozpin and Goodwitch first to explain his missing orientation. Luckily, the brochure they had all been sent to their scrolls also included a map of the Academy, and he quickly picked out the clocktower where the headmaster had his office. Announcing himself at the entrance to the elevator, Harry was told to come up and soon found himself walking into the office at the top of the clocktower, where Goodwitch and the headmaster waited for him. The headmaster was sitting behind his desk, looking down at his scroll as he sipped from a large coffee mug, while Glynda was near one of the windows, looking out over Beacon as she looked from it down to her scroll.

As he entered, Glynda turned around, her eyes piercing Harry from behind her glasses, and Harry found himself coming to attention slightly. *Good grief, Arturia described her piercing glare, but that is a far cry from feeling it yourself.*

“Mr. Arc,” the woman stated rather than questioned. “You are late. I hope this is not a sign of things to come, should you pass our initiation.”

“Yes, ma’am. My apologies for arriving so early today rather than yesterday. I had some familial duties that my father needed my help with.”

Glynda nodded at that, but it was not she who answered verbally. "So, Hazel told us," Ozpin stated. "Yet she did not say what familial duties those were."

Harry looked back at Ozpin, mindful of his parents' concerns. Neither of them liked Ozpin much.

But "I can't put my finger on it, kiddo, there's something off about him. Not that he's deceitful or up to something more ambitious than being a headmaster or anything like that. There's just more to him than meets the eye. I don't know what that could be, but he sure as hell isn't sharing," Guld said at one point.

Hazel had even more succinctly. "Ozpin always makes you think he knows more than he's letting on and more than you would be comfortable with. I trust him in a fight, and I trust him to teach kids, but I don't know if I trust him more than that. He's got secrets, and I don't think they're the good kind."

With that in mind, Harry looked at Ozpin and had to frown at what he saw there. Ozpin was looking back at him, or rather, looking **through** Harry like he was wondering what made Harry tick. This and his semi-mysterious atmosphere also put Harry's backup, reminding him somewhat of Dumbledore when he wanted to act all-knowing and wise.

Despite that, Harry answered easily enough, although with the barest minimum of information. Ozpin's surface similarity to Dumbledore had put his back up. "Evig Låga recently allowed several miners and other refugees from Atlas to settle within our borders. Housing them and finding them all jobs has been an ongoing project, one we've recently solved. But the solution simply placed more demands on my family's time. We're done now, and while I am a student, my entire attention will be on becoming a better Hunter."

"Well said," Glynda murmured.

Ozpin also nodded, although that didn't give him any more information. Why had one of his contacts in vacuo seen Guld there purchasing cannons in bulk? Why was Evig Låga suddenly in a position to open its metaphorical doors to more settlers? Where were they getting the land? *And why do I, when I look at you, see the eyes of a far too experienced man looking back out at me from such a young man's face, Hadrian Arc?*

For now, Ozpin set that observation aside. "In your admission letter, you asked to become a semi-apprentice to Professor Goodwitch due to your Semblance? Your Semblance is labeled as earth manipulation, which, while powerful, does not seem to require more specific training from Glynda."

Harry looked back at Ozpin for a moment, then shrugged slightly. *Of my secrets, my actual Semblance isn't much of one in comparison. Especially not considering how Arturia can use her Aura to do so many things back in my old world would seem magic and Ms. Goodwitch's own Semblance.*

He turned to Glynda, holding out his hand and suddenly producing a glass rose, holding it out to the woman. "My compliments, professor."

Glynda blinked, then hesitantly reached towards the glass rose, taking it in her hand, while Ozpin very carefully did not cry out in shock or let any other sign of surprise appear on his face. *That is magic! Or, or is it just an extreme version of the telekinetic Semblance?*

Glynda held the glass rose up this way and that then looked back at Harry. "This is something like conjuration, correct? I confess, Mister Arc, that while I can do something of the sort, it takes me a good deal more concentration. Nor is my telekinesis up to simply conjuring something like this out of thin air. I could create it from glass, but..."

"I need assistance learning how to mix sword fighting and using my Semblance simultaneously. I also need help in finding my balance, so to speak? Making my Semblance less Aura intensive," Harry explained quickly. "I have learned quite a bit of what my Semblance can do, I simply call it Imagination, but large-scale usage drains me insanely. That little trick, for example, won't last more than a few hours and took about four percent of my total aura. My family and I have tested that kind of thing before."

"I see..." Glynda murmured, her tone thoughtful. "In that case, yes, I can help you. I initially ran into the same problem with my Semblance, and I imagine the same mental exercises and meditation will help you. Although I am surprised that you even noticed the drain. The Arc family is known for having monstrously large Aura reserves after all."

"Which should tell you how badly the drain of some use my Semblance-based attacks can get," Harry admitted. "I officially called it earth manipulation because that is the easiest way to use it. But I want to branch out, so I need more control."

This was somewhat true, although the cost was not to the extent Harry was making it seem. Attack spells tended to drain him a bit, as did conjuration, although the limits in terms of duration and range still bugged him. But thankfully, transfiguration didn't drain him much, outside of large constructs like the wall around the mine, and transfiguration of non-living matter was permanent here in Remnant. While controlling the amount of Aura he used better would help, what Harry still needed more of was getting used to juggling short-range combat with his use of magic. But control would give him that concentration as well.

"Very well. I will allow time for one-on-one instruction. Do not expect that to be every day. As the instructor for the combat classes and Deputy headmistress, I already have a lot on my plate. Nor should you expect special treatment," Glynda said, although she was setting the glass rose down on Ozpin's desk gingerly, looking somewhat pleased with the gift, despite knowing it would not last very long. While Harry had obviously not meant it as anything more than a display of his Semblance, it was a fascinating gift.

"I would never ask for special privileges, professor. And any help you give, be it in person or by books, I will cheerfully take," he replied.

“And what kind of combat styled are you wishing to mix with this?” Ozpin inquired. *Does he not know what his magic is, or is he still hiding things? Hiding the full scope of his abilities, perhaps? Or perhaps he truly doesn't know what he is capable of. In that case, maybe I should push Harry in the right direction? Only once I am certain of his character, however. Regardless, it is a powerful Semblance and could do an incredible amount of good if directed properly.*

“The Arc blade and four-barreled rifle set into a bracer,” Harry replied instantly. “I submitted the caliber of my bullets along with the rest of the paperwork. As for Caliburn.”

“On the one hand, that's rather good. Far too often, students only specialize in one range or another, and with a sword and a rifle like that, you have all your bases covered. On the other hand, mixing it with your Semblance will be slightly difficult...” Glynda murmured, with Ozpin agreeing, although he had started a bit at using the name for the Arc sword, like a man who had a mystery suddenly solved.

“You're telling me. I've won only two bouts of every five matches with my twin, even with my Semblance. I can win if I can keep the range open, which I can't in the training room in Evig Låga. But if I can't, none of my current attacks can slow her down enough to give me an edge,” Harry scowled. Most of the matches were very competitive, but Tia's Haribel semblance allowed her to tank most of his combat spells, and unless he could somehow immobilize her and keep her so or keep the range open, she would eventually just break through his defenses.

“Then we know what to work on first, don't you, Mr. Arc?” Glynda asked, smiling faintly, watching the younger man nod his head ruefully. He seemed a willing sort, at least, with none of the arrogance she had feared to see thanks to the power of his Semblance. That was extremely gratifying.

Ozpin's thoughts were along a slightly parallel line. Harry was confident. *Not arrogance, but the tried confidence of someone who has seen quite a bit of combat. And not the kind taught in Hunter schools like Lighthouse.* He also seemed to have a kind of charisma, and Ozpin could tell he had willpower in spades judging by how he stood and how he looked back at Ozpin, simply looking into his eyes. Few were able to just stared back at him like that.

“Regardless, unless you want to fight on an empty stomach, I suggest you head off. Your weapons will have been delivered...” Ozpin took a moment to look down at his scroll, and Harry's beeped in his pocket. “You were just sent the locker number for your weapons. Good luck, Mister Arc, and I hope to see you among our students in the following days.”

Harry nodded to him and then to Glynda before leaving.

“My word... That is the most fascinating Semblance. Matter creation and transfiguration,” Glynda murmured. “He could be even stronger than me given enough training.”

“At the very least,” Ozpin murmured. Glynda looked at him, but he didn’t say anything for a few moments before murmuring, “I wonder how good he and his sister really are? We know that some of the other initiates will blaze through our initiation trials. Perhaps we should test these freshmen more rigorously than normal.” Glynda stayed silent and watched her employer for a few moments until he spoke again. “If you could ask Port to join me, I have a few requests for him...”

OOOOOOO

Following Ozpin’s suggestion, Harry used his scroll to head straight to the cafeteria, although he did have to pause for a moment, staring along a path that would take him to Beacon’s library. That was another reason Harry had decided to come to Beacon, one that he hadn’t really discussed with anyone. That he wanted more information on the Grimm, more information than he had gotten in classes at Lighthouse or even with his family.

Where do the Grimm come from? How do they spread? Harry had asked those questions before and gotten no clear answer that wasn’t steeped in mysticism. Mind you, he reflected with a snort as he continued on, given I was sent here by a personification of Death, that doesn’t mean those answers are wrong. But I really would like to know more about them, and, perhaps more importantly, why the use of Aura is so limited and several other mysteries about Remnant in general. Hopefully I can find some answers here when I couldn’t back home or in school.

That thought took him to the entrance to the cafeteria, which he found nearly empty as most incoming students had already eaten and were off preparing. *Good thing I took the time to change my under-clothing before I got here. I’ll need my armor and weapons, but that’s it.*

He was also somewhat annoyed at the lack of good food. Even simply walking along the buffet, he could tell that everything there was kind of... generic. Nothing unusual. Nothing bad, but nothing great either.

Despite the lateness of the morning, Harry wasn’t the only one there. A few other students were around, including one orange-haired girl sitting in front of a giant stack of pancakes, eating them for the time. Next to her side, another young man sat, dressed in an Asiatic style, a flowing green qipao with black leggings. He had black hair, except for a single streak of pink, and was sitting with a certain Zen-like calmness in the face of the young woman’s manic movements.

More importantly, there was a kettle of tea in front of him.

With that as his target, Harry took his disappointing bacon and cereal and sat across from the twosome. The girl glared at him for a moment, pulling her pancake plate slightly nearer to her, but Harry simply chuckled, shaking his head. “Good grief, and here I thought I would never meet another person who could eat like my big sister. On the other hand, she would be eating everything instead of simply pancakes.”

“Don’t mind Nora. She is simply single-minded regarding certain things, like pancakes, breaking the knees of her enemy, and explosions,” the young man answered with a faint smile.

“Duly noted. But would you mind if I had a cup of tea? I can’t get going without one in the morning, and I need it even more after getting no sleep last night. I’m Harry Arc, by the way. How do you do?”

“Certainly,” the other young man gestured to the teapot and watched as Harry poured himself a cup. “I am Ren, and this is Nora. I don’t think I saw you last night. Did you come in with another batch of inductees?”

“No, I’m on my own. Unfortunately, I had to stay home until the last minute doing some work.”

“Ah. Will you continue to work now that you’re here? I have been personally wondering about getting a part-time job myself. I have not seen anything in the student handbook about them, but some more lien is occasionally necessary,” Ren murmured, watching Harry pour himself a cup of tea as he finished his own.

Beside him, Nora looked a little guilty for a moment before thumping her shoulder against Ren. “If you get a job, and it needs heavy lifting, I’ll volunteer!”

“I am afraid it wasn’t that kind of a job,” Harry murmured, shaking his head. He didn’t want to admit he got a stipend from the Arc accounts at the moment. That would seem a little too much like rubbing it in the faces of two people who might be having trouble with money, given the guilty look on Nora’s face. “Personally, I am more interested in the living arrangements here. And cooking for myself.”

When he mentioned the word cooking, Nora’s look of guilt disappeared instantly, and she scarfed down several more pancakes so that she could look over the remainder directly at Harry rather than around the side. “Can you make pancakes? Ren makes the best pancakes. Maybe you can learn from a master, then I would have two boys able to feed me the food of the gods!”

Harry glanced over to Ren, who simply smiled back as if saying, ‘just go with it.’

“Yes, I can cook pancakes, along with many other things. Hopefully, I’ll be able to show you both eventually. Today though, we don’t have much time for that.”

“True. Are you prepared for the initiation? You did say you didn’t get much sleep?” Ren asked solicitously.

Harry smiled at that but shook his head. “It wouldn’t be the first time I’ve had to fight on too little sleep. Besides, as Hunters, we’ll have to deal with much more than simple sleeplessness out in the field.”

“Wise,” Ren murmured as Nora returned to scarfing her pancakes down.

Even with his good manners and talking to Ren, Harry was finished well before Nora was since she went back for seconds at one point during the conversation. By the end of the conversation, though, Harry had decided that Ren would make a very good friend and that Nora, if she could learn not to speak with her mouth full, would likewise be fun to be around.

But for now, it was time to set aside such thoughts. *Time to get your game face on, Harry. And, see if I can find Tia and Pyrrha. Now that I've had time to think about it, I'm wondering if it was a good idea to suggest Pyrrha and I go on a date. A part of me is extremely happy with the idea. Another part is saying it's a little too soon despite the fact we've been talking for so many months. And that going out with Pyrrha might hurt my relationship with Tia. Still, I said it and will stick by it, come what may. I won't let it damage our friendship or my closeness with Tia. I won't!*

Soon Harry set those thoughts aside as he reached the armoring room. There, Harry found his locker near the entrance he had entered, thankfully. He opened the locker and found his weapons and armor, smiling faintly as he pulled out the first piece. This was a solid dark brown painted chest plate with shoulder pauldrons that would cover his upper arm.

Each shoulder pauldron was painted differently than the rest of the armor. The right shoulder pauldron, which was Harry's dominant hand, was marked with a gold cross on a dark blue background, with the cross ending in a sharp point. The same dark blue was painted on his other shoulder, along with three small golden gryphons rearing on their hind feet and words in the Remnant equivalent of Swedish in gold lettering, which read, 'Ljus och mörker hos oss'.

Next was a pair of large bracers, the color matching the rest of Harry's armor. Both were mecha-shift weapons. The one on his left arm shifted into a small buckler. The right housed his multi-barreled rifle. It had four barrels, with the magazine on the outside of the arm and could be set for single-shot or rapid-fire through various arm twitches.

His legs were also armored with black and brown painted greaves. On his back, he wore a cloak of dark blue, complete with a hood. The whole look had been designed by his mother, with consultation with several others in Evig Låga, including an old man who acted as the town historian and librarian. He had been the one to come up with a golden cross on the shoulder idea as a last-second edition the day before Harry and Guld had left for the mine, and Harry hadn't had time before leaving to question why. It reminded him of the Swedish Imperial flag. *It would be very weird, but I can't say I dislike the design. Calls out to the Gryffindor it does, even if the color is wrong.*

At his side, Harry buckled Caliburn resting his dominant hand lightly on the hilt for a moment, then flexed his body this way and that, making certain the armor had settled right and there were no loud noises. A second later, he flexed his forearms. At this command, the shield came out, then the rifle portion of the other bracer popped up into firing position.

The action was smooth and silent for both, and with a smile, he loaded the magazine into the rifle bracer, reflecting with amusement and not for the first time that ties armor was very different in terms of functionality. While Huntress armor had to emphasize form over function, allowing them to use sexiness as just another weapon, guys didn't. Few women could be distracted mid-battle by a handsome guy, except maybe if the guy was going completely au natural.

"Now that is what I call stylish!" A female voice said from behind Harry, and he turned, cocking an eyebrow at the speaker only to blink. *Good grief, another blonde? Is my destiny in this life to be surrounded by them?*

Whatever Yang had been about to say faded as she looked into Harry's eyes, biting her lip. *Yummy! Holy hell, emerald eyes and that face... Mama definitely likes.*

"I like the hood," Ruby said, smiling at Harry somewhat shyly, her hand touching her own.

"I see you are a lady of class as well, Little Red," Harry teased gently, bowing from the waist towards her, causing Ruby and Yang both to laugh.

"Funny, handsome, and with some style, that's three hits in a row, big boy. My name's Yang, Yang Xiao Long. What's your name, hot stuff?"

"Hadrian, Hadrian Arc, although most call me Harry," Harry said with a smile, holding his hand out to shake. "I don't suppose you've seen my sister around here, have you? Or a redhead she might be hanging out with?"

This was answered almost instantly by two powerful, tanned arms going around his chest from behind and a somewhat muffled, "Harry."

Turning, Harry chuckled, hugging his sister back just as tightly. Two and a half days of not being around someone you had spent literally every day of your life with, going as far back as you could remember, had not been fun. "Tia. Missed you."

Tia hummed happily, and Yang laughed, pulling Ruby into a hug before she could get away. "Aw, see, that's some real family closeness there. Aren't you glad you were able to come to school here with me now?" *So, this is the oft-mentioned brother, huh? Damn, but those eyes are killers in person.*

"UGHHH, Yang!!!" Ruby whined, causing Yang to laugh. While Harry and Tia looked on in amusement, their arms still around one another.

While she and Pyrrha had found their lockers together near the other side of the armoring room – a gender-neutral area where people kept their weapons and armor, if they wore any - Tia had gotten ready very quickly then left Pyrrha to look for her brother.

Tia didn't wear armor, much like most huntresses. But she and Pyrrha had talked about this several times over the past few months, and Pyrrha understood that Tia was probably the last person to actually need extra armor. Her body was so durable that even with next to no Aura, Tia had been able to apparently tank a punch from her father.

This, unfortunately, had left Pyrrha alone, and within minutes Pyrrha found herself accosted, for a given value of the term anyway.

"Hello, Pyrrha. It's excellent to see you here. I had heard that you were coming to Beacon. I must say, hearing that was the final straw in my own decision to come here. I looked for you last night but didn't see you anywhere."

"Hello, Weiss. Yes, I decided to come to Beacon several months back," Pyrrha answered with an internal sigh, although she noted with some pleased surprise that Weiss didn't even look one set the scar on her arm. *That speaks well of her, regardless of her interaction with Ruby and Yang last night.* It amused her that Weiss obviously had not realized who she was until she had finished changing into the under-clothing she wore under her armor.

She began pulling on her armor, putting her greaves on first. They hadn't changed much, although they came up to her knee. And there was a hidden spring within that produced a small but very sharp point. Her boots had changed too. They were the same in style and color. Bronze just looked good paired with red. Pyrrha could admit her parents had gotten that right, at least. But she had gotten rid of the high heels in favor of a flat bottom. Her skirt was longer than it had been as a gladiatrix, coming down to her knees with a bit more to spare. Underneath, she also had several small canisters of iron filings on her outer thighs, which she could use her polarity powers to manipulate, creating armor plates or anything else she wished.

Her chest plate had also been changed. Gone was the style that only covered her upper chest and a strip down her front, with the obvious cleavage. Now it was a full back-to-back chest plate, with only a slight hint of breast. On one arm, the arm she wore her shield on, she also wore armor up to her shoulder, completely covering the arm and even the back of her hand. In contrast, her other arm, which Arturia had cut into, was entirely uncovered, showing the ragged scar there.

Overall, Pyrrha now looked like a real hoplite rather than a sexualized version, and Pyrrha was more than fine by this. It took her longer to get ready, but that was an exchange she was more than pleased to put up with.

She was nearly finished when Weiss finally got around to asking the question she had been steering the conversation toward. "So, Pyrrha, have you decided who you would like to partner with?"

"Well, I...." Pyrrha began only to be interrupted by a very welcome voice.

“I’m sorry to say, Snow Queen, that if you are asking to dance with Pyrrha, you will have to get in line.”

Pyrrha turned away from Weiss, a real smile replacing her formerly plastic one, as she saw Harry standing there before biting her lip as she took him in. Oh my yes! He has put on some muscle since I saw him in person. I wonder what he looks like under the armor? She had seen Harry in a bathrobe, if only his upper chest and face, but even that had become a screen capture that she was very guilty about keeping.

Before she could say anything, however, Weiss also turned in his direction, glaring up at the taller man. “Excuse me?! We were having a private conversation that doesn’t have anything to do with you, Scruffy. And do you really think that **you** match up to Pyrrha Nikos?” Weiss sneered, looking Harry up and down. “A four-time tournament champion, undefeated at her school Sanctum and in the tournament itself?”

“I know precisely who she is,” Harry shot back, biting back a retort, almost instantly disliking Weiss like she was a female version of Malfoy. *But she hasn’t said anything special about herself, so I will reserve judgment.* “Nor was I introducing myself to you, Miss. Instead, I was greeting a friend. None of those things you mentioned matter much in comparison.”

“And you claim to be a friend of Pyrrha’s? I’ve never seen anything about you in the media,” Weiss snorted again, not noticing how Pyrrha’s smile had widened further at Harry’s words.

Harry did, and he had trouble keeping from staring. *Good grief, she looks amazing when she smiles for real. The people who bought her poster have no idea what they are missing.* “We haven’t actually seen each other in person more than once. Although that once was a very memorable time. But I figured going from shopping and hiding amongst the crowd to fighting Grimm was enough to make us friends.” He winked at Pyrrha. “Have you told her you’re a chocoholic yet? It could be a deal-breaker.”

Pyrrha had been smiling before, Harry’s presence enough to make her very happy, although the way Tia was standing next to him, her shoulder pressed into his, annoyed her just a bit, twins or not. But now, the smile on her face edged directly into the grin territory, and she laughed. “Alas, my secret is out. I would be willing to do anything short of murder for a large chocolate bar. If that’s a problem, I’m afraid we will never be partners.”

“Drat, there goes my plan for world domination,” Harry snarked, causing several of his listeners to laugh.

At that point, Weiss scored some points with both Pyrrha and Harry. Instead of being annoyed or angered at her words and presence being brushed off, she set aside her initial impression of Harry to look at him both more closely, and then, with a nearly audible grind of her teeth, Weiss shook her head. “Perhaps my first impression of you was... In error,” she huffed. “If you went to Sanctum and fought alongside Pyrrha before, I suppose I should reserve

judgment. Although I would have thought if you were that good that as a Mistral native, you would have entered the tournament. It is the national pastime for you all, isn't it?"

Her tone both insulted Harry and got a subtle dig at Mistral simultaneously, something Weiss felt she could get away with, considering that Pyrrha had left Mistral to come to Beacon in the first place. But to her surprise, Harry simply snorted. "When did either of us say I went to Sanctum? I went to Lighthouse. We met in Chian during the Grimm attack there months ago."

"Now I know you're lying! There were only a few unsupported reports of there being another Hunter there with Pyrrha, and no one ever came forward to take credit," Weiss growled.

"Why would I want credit? Many people died, and we couldn't save the entire town. So much of it was damaged the people eventually had to relocate anyway. Mistral decided it wasn't worth helping, and the locals didn't have enough money to pay for all the repairs they needed to make it livable again," Harry grumbled, shaking his head.

"I tried to drum up public support for that, but my manager and my family put a halt to it when it began to interfere with other more lucrative projects," Pyrrha sighed. "I suppose I could go back to it now that I've broken off with them, but since the folk there have already relocated, I don't know if there would be any point."

"..." Weiss stared at the two of them, a part of her still thinking that Harry had her on, but Pyrrha's response was too honest, and Weiss had indeed seen a few commercials where Pyrrha had tried to run a fundraiser for the Chian survivors several months back. It had not gone anywhere because the politicians in Mistral had decided not to run with it, making it a privately funded operation only with very limited advertising despite Pyrrha's involvement. Although it had brought in some lien from private citizens, it hadn't gone anywhere without the government willing to match the amount raised.

This was, in fact, a known policy of all four main city-states in Remnant. Unless the town was an important source for some kind of resource, it was better to abandon towns like that rather than sink lien into them. None of the city-states had resources or Hunters to spare to back up a place that had already fallen.

"Wait, wasn't there some kind of super dangerous Grimm involved in that attack?" Yang demanded, interjecting into the conversation for the first time. *This has been kind of fun, watching someone getting under the Schnee Queen's skin. Heh, that's a good one. I'll have to use that later.* Next to her, Ruby had gone all gaga about Pyrrha's weapons, her eyes flicking from it to Weiss's elegant-looking rapier in delight.

"Yes, a Nuckaleevee. We killed it," Harry said simply.

That shocked Yang as she stared between the two, then winked at Tia, who had yet to move from Harry's side. "Really feeling the hype here. I'm seeing one more reason that you and I should partner up, Harry."

Rolling his eyes at that, which had been a follow-up on an earlier comment from Yang, Harry turned back to Pyrrha, letting his eyes rove over her for a moment before commenting on her armor. *Legs to kill for, crimson hair, and a face that puts models to shame. Is it any wonder she was so famous? I'm used to being around beauties by this point thanks to my family, but Pyrrha doesn't lose anything in comparison to even Tia and Arturia.*

"I'm glad you got rid of that over-sexualized armor set you used during the tournament. I know you huntresses are supposed to use sexiness as a weapon, but that doesn't seem to fit your personality." *And with that body, Pyrrha doesn't need any help in that area.* "But it looks good nonetheless."

"It really doesn't," Pyrrha announced firmly. "You would not believe how long the argument went when that armor was being picked out for me before my first tournament. But I was thirteen at the time, and I allowed myself to be convinced that it would help my mobility." She sighed. "It only took me a few matches to realize that it also added to my appeal, and I rather did not care for it. The arguments about my new armor were equally as loud. But considering that I had turned eighteen the day before, I ignored everyone's opinions and demands. On many levels."

"I can't really imagine going through something like that! Having all those people look at me like that, even if they're only looking at me fighting, gah, that would be enough to drive me crazy." Ruby shivered, then smiled. "Although I am happy to meet another member of the sisterhood of the combat skirt."

She held up a hand for a high five, and Pyrrha happily gave her one, while Weiss huffed, looking away, before buckling under the gazes of everyone else there and doing the same. She had remained silent for a moment after Yang's question, observing Pyrrha and Harry's interactions. "If you are still... Having issues with your managers, I happen to know several good lawyers," the white-haired girl now stated, showing that she understood many of the undercurrents that Pyrrha had not verbalized there somehow.

Weiss still wasn't certain if she believed Harry was truly capable enough to stand against a Grimm horde with Pyrrha. She had never heard of him before, nor the school he had mentioned. But Pyrrha's friendship with him was slowly eroding that belief. *Perhaps he is someone worthy of networking with? Time will tell, I suppose.*

Time was also on Harry's mind, so he decided to wrap things up. "We need to get going, but are you ready to make an impression, Pyrrha?" He knew she wished to start breaking away from her old public mold during initiation and had no problem helping her do so.

At that, Yang and Ruby both turned away, rushing back to their own locker rooms to grab up their ammunition while Tia simply reached up and loosened Tiburon in its sheath. Weiss and Pyrrha both turned back to their lockers, Weiss looking a little mortified that the conversation had completely taken her out of her own preparations. Now she hastily made certain that each of the Dust canisters in her rapier was situated correctly before strapping it to her side again.

But those words meant something special to Pyrrha. It meant that it was time to ‘take no shits’, and Harry was here to stand beside her as she did it. Indeed, his grin at her was both supportive and challenging, and if there was one thing Pyrrha Nikos wasn’t willing to ever do, it was back down from a challenge.

Turning, Pyrrha reached into her locker and picked out the headpiece Harry had sent her, a simple bronze circlet with up swinging wings that looked almost like dragon wings, a tiny emerald set in the center of it on her forehead. Whether or not Harry had somehow made it using his Semblance or had purchased it didn’t matter to her. It was the thought that counted. With it, Harry had sent her a birthday card, in which he said, *Invincible Girl, champion, neither of those matter. You are Pyrrha, and you’re my friend. That is the only title that matters to me.* That made the gift all the more precious in her eyes.

Pyrrha placed the headpiece into place, and Weiss stared. Instead of putting her hair up in her normal tight ponytail, Pyrrha’s new hairstyle gathered behind her head, falling loose in a wild mane of fiery red curls. The headpiece, a small bronze-colored circlet, kept her hair out of her face and eyes, while the wings at the side made her look like some modern-day queen.

With that in place, Pyrrha let her shield fall off her back, summoning it to her arm with her Semblance. She had begun to use her Semblance a bit more openly since using it against Arturia and the tournament, although the extent of it was still unknown to most. She turned, smiling at Weiss. It was not the same public smile she had used before Harry showed up, nor the warm, happy smile she had been bestowing on him. Instead, this was a challenging expression full of teeth, and Weiss nearly recoiled as she looked at it. “Weiss, I have been put on a pedestal all my life. The Invincible Girl, the goddess of victory. The aloof, unattainable, unapproachable icon people wanted to either tear down with words or avoid at all cost for fear of appearing lesser in comparison.”

She watched as a flash of recognition and understanding passed across Weiss’s face before going on. “I have **hated** it. Being alone on that pedestal, no one wanting to be close to me without using me in some fashion, no one seeing the real me, only the image. But recently, I have had a bit of a revelation. People will always try to put me on that pedestal. Normal people will always see me as special simply because of my skills. But that doesn’t mean I have to be alone. Harry and Tia are both willing to stand beside me, to join me because they too wish to be examples people can follow to become special. If you want to stand with me, then step up onto that pedestal, an example others wish to emulate, an example others will follow.”

With that, she turned, moving to walk beside Harry and Tia and Weiss stared after her, shocked by the ferocity that Pyrrha had shown in those few moments. Then her eyes narrowed, and her hand fell to her rapier's hilt as she threw her shoulders back and marched out after them. She'd think about what Pyrrha's words meant later. Right now, Weiss knew that a challenge had been issued, and as a Schnee, she was not about to let that slide.

As they joined the rest of the inductees, Harry watched in amusement the impression Pyrrha left behind as she moved. The redhead moved confidently, each step perfectly balanced, her armor gleaming in the sun, her rifle in hand. Normally when she was seen in public, her weapons would have been on her back, and she would be smiling her public smile, a perfect mix of cute and dangerous. That was no longer the case. Her jade eyes gleamed with violence, no smile was on her face, and her eyes were locked forward.

Pyrrha ignored the whispers and looks she got from the rest of the freshman class as she passed them by, ignoring the calls of 'the Invincible Girl'. Stepping forward towards the edge of the cliff, Pyrrha stared out over the forest beyond, her eyes scanning the horizon as if searching for enemies, her hair flowing behind her in the wind as nearly every student and even the two professors stared at her.

Watching everyone's reaction as he joined the inductees, Harry had to shake his head. *I know Pyrrha's famous... and hot as Fiendfyre..., but come on, people. I knew she was famous, but it's like seeing the reactions I got from the 'Man Who Won' nonsense. No wonder she wants to change her image. Don't worry, Pyrrha, I'll help as best I can,* Harry promised. *We need to show people the real girl underneath, and that little speech she gave to Weiss was a good start.*

Pyrrha made such an impression that Harry and Tia passed by almost unremarked, sliding into a few free places near the professors as they stopped on two of what looked like a series of steel plates set into the ground. Harry didn't know what these were, but looking over the cliff's edge, he had a bad feeling about them.

Ruby and her sister were further down the line, with Weiss, as one of the last to come out of the changing areas, joining them with a ferociously focused scowl on her face. The scowl seemed to diminish as Harry watched Ruby and Yang whisper something to her, and the diminutive Schnee nodded back, rolling her arms to either side to get out some kinks, although she lost none of her focus.

Harry looked at the rest of the crowd of students, noticing Ren first, with Nora hopping in place beside him. The two young men exchanged nods as they looked around the crowd, analyzing. Harry could already see cliques forming, but beyond that, there were a few students that stood out slightly for one reason or another. Two who seemed to be bickering back and forth. One looked almost as elegant as Weiss, dressed in an Asiatic manner. The student she spoke to was a rail-thin, intense-looking young man whose entire body looked as if it was built for speed and agility. He was armed with several daggers, although he couldn't tell from this far away if they were mecha-shift weapons. A massively powerful lion Faunus who seemed to be

the only Faunus among the initiates, a woman with coal-black hair and yellow eyes, and several others.

His attention turned back to the professors when Ozpin gently tapped his cane down on the ground, almost instantly commanding silence from the scattered line of students. "Today, you will take another step on the road to becoming Hunters and huntresses. Today, you will prove you have what it takes to be a Beacon student. In the forest below, you will find an ancient ruin. There, a series of relics have been placed, and your task is to retrieve them. Fight with your all, or you will die."

His words caused some murmuring, but not a lot. All of these students were prepared or at least thought they were, to face death after years of training. Glynda's voice cut through the hubbub like a knife, and Harry turned his attention to her, not noticing Tia looking down at her feet thoughtfully. "We know many of you have been wondering how you will be paired with partners. You will be paired with partners today. Once you have been launched into the forest, the first individual whose eyes you meet will become your partner for the next four years of your time here in Beacon."

Instantly, a lot of people began to look around as Ruby in the distance shouted, "What!" This was followed by an equally irate shout from someone else, the elegant-looking young woman in Asiatic garb raising her voice. "That is grossly inefficient and illogical!"

That was pretty much in keeping with Harry's own thoughts. Partners were the cornerstone of teamwork as a Hunter, and using such a random means to decide on partners was foolish. *Damn it, Arturia, is this what you meant about not choosing your team? Letting people make their own partners would be better than this kind of random lottery.* He stared back at the professors, shaking his head, the small desire inside to keep a low profile after having been given special dispensation to miss orientation disappearing. "And if you have irreconcilable differences with your partner, what then?" *How many partners and teams have been broken up by simple personality conflicts?*

Both professors simply looked back without censure or ire as Glynda replied. "You are no longer children to have your hands held like that. We assume that you will solve any interpersonal problems on your own. So long as you can fight effectively in the field, and are not a liability to others, be it in skill, general attitude, or efficiency, we do not care how you maintain unity within your teams."

"And only children have egos and attitudes? My, that's amazing, so politics is what, a play? And all those public scandals and drama in the news created by arrogance, an inability to work well with others, and simple ego? Your reasoning lacks logic," the elegant woman from down the row deadpanned.

"Perhaps. Or perhaps you are underestimating what kind of metal can be forged from what looks like different materials on the surface," Ozpin answered from behind his coffee cup.

“Fighting alongside one another is a tried-and-true method to see the worth of your fellow man. If you go into this act without preconceived notions, perhaps you will meet a partner who will make you grow as people, and in ways you did not expect.”

“Furthermore, as Hunters and Huntresses, you must learn to work with people you dislike. Sometimes you will be sent on missions you hate. Sometimes you will be forced to fight beside strangers, former schoolyard enemies and ex-boyfriends or girlfriends,” Glynda continued, ignoring the scattered titters her words evoked as some of the students wondered what Goodwitch’s exes could be like, only to concentrate on her words as she emphasized them with slaps of her riding crop into her other hand. “Regardless, you must work with them. **Nothing** matters beyond fighting the Grimm. Nothing matters beyond the mission. Get along, or else you will not be the only ones to suffer. Best to start learning that lesson now rather than later.”

While those were good points, they didn’t really convince Harry and shaking his head, Harry looked away. “Just because it’s always been done that way doesn’t mean it’s the best way.”

Tia had a far more pointed response to this revelation. As the professors and students were speaking, she had stepped back. This caused several pairs of eyes to glance at her, but Tia ignored this as she moved around the people separating her and Harry. There, Tia stepped onto the metal platform he was standing on.

Realizing what she was doing, Harry chuckled, trying hard not to blush at the feel of Tia’s chest pressing against his. *Damn it, I can’t feel anything through my armor, but even the impression is enough!* “Heh, that’s remarkably quick thinking, twin of mine.”

As Tia’s eyes sparkled nearby, Pyrrha fought the urge to click her fingers in annoyance, muttering under her breath, “Cheater!” *Oooh, if that works, Tia, we will have **words!***

A smile on his face, Ozpin spoke up now, while Glynda just shook her head at the girl. “I’m sorry to say, Ms. Arc, that your ploy, while quite ingenious, is not in keeping with the spirit of this task. Please, return to your own platform.”

Sighing with more than a bit of disappointment – he did want to partner with Pyrrha, but his twin was very much a close second - Harry gave Tia a hug, then gently pushed her away very lightly. “Go on. We’ll see each other soon.”

If Tia hadn’t wished to go, that push would have done nothing, but Tia stepped back willingly, her shoulders slumping slightly as she reclaimed her position. Then she became all business as, at Ozpin’s command, the students started to be launched out over the forest. She lifted her hand, using her thumb to pull Tiburon out of its sheath, twirling the blade in front of her as she crouched down.

On his own platform, Harry crouched down to wait and watched as Pyrrha launched through the air, placing her shield in front of her as she went. Several minutes later, Harry was launched into the air, the platform underneath blasting him up in an arcing line towards the distant forest like he was on a jack-in-the-box.

While flying, Harry made no effort to pull out Caliburn or ready his shield as Tia and Pyrrha had. Instead, he placed his hands along his sides, becoming as streamlined as he could as Harry shot towards the forest, placing a hand against his chest as he used Leviosa on himself, making his body extra-light. This let the initial impetus carry him forward farther than most of his fellow initiates. The power he placed into the spell was such that it wouldn't overcome gravity, but it let him glide much further than a human body should have been able to.

Eventually, he began to descend into the foliage below. There, Harry slowed his descent further, his hands up and smacking into one branch ahead of him. Thanks to his Aura, the impact didn't hurt, and Harry bounced back and down onto another, which broke under his weight as the Leviosa spell cut off. "Crap!"

Falling down, Harry grabbed at another branch, slowing himself down a bit before hitting the next one. Here, Arturia's training came into play. She had been adamant that Tia and Harry learn full body style parkour to help move through trees or other broken terrain. With his momentum carrying him forward, Harry used his hands and feet to go from one branch to another, descending if not prettily, then at least quickly down to the ground, where he landed with a roll, shaking his head as he hopped to his feet. *Heh, that was actually kind of fun. It would have been better with a broom, though.*

Somewhere to his left, Harry heard the sound of someone shouting, "Nailed it!"

That has to be Yang. From what I saw, she was the only other person who flew as far as I did. He then very deliberately turned away from that direction. Instead, he began making his way back towards the cliff. Both Pyrrha and Tia had made far shallower arcs as they flew, and Harry was in no rush to head to where these 'relics' were before making a partner. *Sorry, Yang, you seem like a fun sort, but I have another partner in mind.*

Humming to himself, Harry moved through the forest, sword in hand, the barrels of his rifle and shield gauntlets shifted into their work mode. However, Harry's primary weapon was the same as it had been in his last life, his magic. And when the first Grimm appeared, it died by magic, a spike of stone rising from the ground and impaling the Beowolf through its stomach.

Turning, Harry readied his weapons as he stared around him, smacking his sword against the shield gauntlet. "Come on then."

Several more wolves came out of the brush around him. Four charged forward, while two, Alphas, stayed behind, circling this way as if to get behind Harry. The Alpha Beowolves were huge, several feet larger and broader than regular Beowolves, with larger teeth and claws.

Yet they still moved lightly on their feet, watching everything with a disturbing level of intelligence.

The pack's current tactic was supposed to give Harry the impression that there weren't already wolves behind him, a tactic that Beowolves and real wolves had in common. But Harry wasn't fooled. *Wolves always prefer to attack from behind, hamstringing and then go for the throat of their victims. But this victim has teeth too, and since I still don't want to show everything I can do...*

Pointing his sword at the ground, Harry pushed a transfiguration spell through it into the ground, and stone spikes appeared behind Harry, intercepting the wolves coming at him from behind. An instant later, he turned, slicing the head clean off one Beowolf from his left flank, rotating his body around the attacking Grimm, ducking underneath a swipe from another Beowolf. Caliburn cut upward, removing one of the legs from the Grimm who had tried to leap at him.

Rolling as that Beowolf fell, Harry brought up his rifle again to fire, before stomping on the ground, a flash of Aura and magic flowing from his feet into the ground, a visible splash of white light. *Thank you for forcing me to learn how to send magic out through my legs and not just my hands, Arturia.* The transfiguration spell shifted the ground underneath him into two more spikes, stabbing into another Beowolf.

Now the Alpha Beowolf leaped upwards over the other spikes landing and flinging itself forward faster than Harry could dodge. The thing was crazy quick, even compared to Harry's reaction time, and smart too. It pulled up before Harry's blade could take it through its Grimm mask. Before Harry could recover from the thrust, the Alpha ducked low, trying to bodycheck Harry, its claws raking his armor. The claws did nothing against Harry's Aura-reinforced armor, Aura spread at least an inch away from the body, but the bodycheck smacked Harry off his feet. *Freaking Alphas!*

On the ground, Harry raised his shield to block the jaws of the Alpha, which clamped down on the shield, grinding against the metal. A moment later, Harry got his feet between them, pushing the Alpha off him just enough to get his sword between them, slicing along its stomach before it could dodge. The Grimm's armor parted like silk under the caress of a knife, dumping its intestines onto Harry, and with a last howl, its body began to dissipate. Thankfully, this took the guts and black ichor with it. *Thank goodness Grimm are clean enemies.*

A second Beowolf closed fast as Harry tried to get to his feet. It met his shield to its face. Using the momentum of the hit, Harry twisted backward, lashing out with his gun, sending several of them stumbling back although the unnamed fire didn't penetrate their armor, wounding but not putting them down, as Harry stabbed Caliburn into the wounded Beowolf at his feet.

One of them died an instant later from a flung the javelin, stabbing the Beowolf straight through the skull from one side out to the other. Seeing that, Harry smiled. He recognized that spear. A shield took a second Beowolf in the side of the head from the same angle, and then both weapons were being pulled back towards their owner as Pyrrha charged forward, the javelin turning into a rifle as she came, finishing off two of the wounded Beowolves.

Before the second Alpha Beowolf could figure out which target to go for or whether to retreat, its red eyes widened, and it tried to leap upwards. Somehow it had felt the earth shifting underneath it, and it had seen enough to know what that meant. This was truly what made Beowolf Alphas dangerous. While their armor and durability only slowly grew with time, the instant they made the jump to Alpha, their minds grew to almost match that of a human or Faunus, and so did their observation skills.

In this case, however, this ability did not help it. Harry's stone spike attack grew up from the ground from every direction, catching the Alpha Beowolf from all sides. Try as it might, the Alpha couldn't dodge them all, and one stabbed deep into its body, causing it to howl in agony before it started to dissipate.

However, the forest must have been teeming with Grimm, as the commotion dealing with that one pack brought still more Grimm towards them. Howls erupted from around them, and another dozen Beowolves appeared out of the forest in every direction, surrounding the two fighters. They were joined by even more Creepers, two-legged Grimm with overlarge jaws, and several Ursa, large, bear-like Grimm. There didn't seem to be any Ursa Majors, though, and, thankfully, no more Alphas. If there had been, the Alphas at least would have ordered all the other Grimm like an army instead of attacking like animals like this.

Seeing this, Harry took command quickly and calmly, a wry smile on his face. This was nothing he hadn't seen before. *In one life or the next, dealing with an assault from all sides gives you the same options. Fort up, charge forward and break the encirclement, or just outfight the black-blooded bastards. And I suppose initiation is all about making an impression.* "Pyrrha, get over here."

Pyrrha instantly agreed, racing towards him and placing her back against Harry's as the Beowolves charged. The two fired at the first few, then a wall of stones appeared, ten feet long and twenty feet high in various places around them. Coupled with the trees, this blocked many of them, forcing them into fewer avenues of attack. "Forward! Take the fight to them." Harry ordered, charging after Pyrrha, although the order had been superfluous. Pyrrha had already begun to move. *Right, keep the orders to a minimum, idiot! Pyrrha knows what she's doing.*

Her rifle was a higher caliber than his and took one wolf through the mask, punching straight through its armor. Two Creepers also fell before two others charged into the area between two of the walls, with several more behind them. Counter charging into them, Pyrrha's shield slammed into one with the impetus of her body behind it, bowling it and two

other Creepers over as her javelin stabbed into a Beowolf to her left. Milo shifted into its xiphos form, which she used to kill another Grimm before finishing off the ones she had bowled over.

“Huh, so Creepers really do have trouble with balance. Odd,” Pyrrha mused aloud conversationally.

“Eh, nature does tend to come up with some evolutionary dead-ends at times,” Harry answered in the same tone, musing about whether Grimm really should be called natural, before ducking as Pyrrha turned, firing behind them towards their former position into the mass of Grimm. Harry twirled around her in the small confines between the two walls on either side, firing his rifle as fast as he could, each of the barrels going off one after another as he laid down suppressive fire on several more Grimm.

Several Grimm collapsed, while others backed away, ducking behind trees or bushes, showing the mix of intelligence and instinct that Grimm exhibited. However, the walls that Harry had constructed, along with the spikes that were still there, had fully disrupted their charge. Their numbers no longer mattered as much as they should have, even though the Ursa proved strong enough to just smash through the walls.

That just meant Pyrrha targeted them more than the others whenever she could. This was quite a lot of the time, given her Polarity powers. At least four times, Harry tracked her shot going off its seeming course towards one Grimm to angle into an Ursa’s neck or eye. *Even in this kind of environment, her control is insane!*

Harry and Pyrrha moved within these obstacles, with Harry directing their course backwards and forwards, carving through the Grimm even as they were joined by a few Nevermore, who died just as quickly thanks to their fire turning on them as one. Thankfully, there weren’t many of them around, although Harry could see specks of black in the distance. He conserved his magic for now, seeing no need to waste any more on this number of Grimm with the environment already turned against them. He still occasionally lashed out with it to make more spikes to take out a large group of Grimm or protect their flanks, but that was it.

Even better, he and Pyrrha worked almost seamlessly, twisting and twirling around one another using their weapons in tandem. “Try to conserve your ammunition. We don’t know how long this initiation is going to take.”

“Ah, good point.” At that, Milo turned into a javelin, and Pyrrha hurled it forward, then whirled around Harry to block a Beowolf charge at him from the back with Akuo. He twisted around in turn, his sword slicing low underneath her shield to take the Beowolf’s legs off, and she kicked it away, flipping herself upwards onto Harry’s shield and into the air, where she pulled her javelin back towards her with her Semblance.

Landing beside him, Pyrrha ducked down as Harry lashed out over her with his sword, at the same time stabbing behind him to kill another Beowolf with Milo.

At that point, it almost became like a dance, the two of them whirling around one another as they made their way through the battleground. Their shields protected not only themselves but one another while swords and javelin stabbed through the vastly changed forest.

It was enthralling. It was exhilarating! *By the Brothers, is this what it means to have a real partner!? I love this!* Pyrrha crowed, a fierce grin growing on her face. She had never fought alongside someone before. When her talent in combat had been discovered at Sanctum, she had been singled out for specialized instruction, and the school had never really gone into partner-based combat even before that. But this, this was amazing!

Admittedly, Pyrrha knew a lot of their synergy had to do with the fact that she could sense the metal on Harry's body and knew how he would move from that. But a large amount of it was also Harry's willingness to follow her lead when it came to close-quarter combat, which was thrilling in and of itself. Harry directed them around the small battlefield, using the terrain problems he had created to keep the number of Grimm who could close to a minimum, but when the Grimm closed, he let her take the lead. *I have not been in control of so much of my life before this that even though this is in combat, being trusted to lead like this is exhilarating!*

Eventually, the last Grimm in the area attracted to the sound of combat, a Creeper, died, and the two of them stood side-by-side, their chests heaving a bit in exertion, before Pyrrha began to laugh, looking at Harry in amazement. "Well, partner, I would say as an introduction to how this partnership is going to go, that would take some beating."

"Happy to have you, Pyrrha," Harry answered with a laugh, and then he pulled her into a hug.

Harry might have intended that hug to just be friendly, with only a smidgen of attraction to it. After all, they hadn't yet gone on any real dates yet. But Pyrrha, high on adrenaline and remembering the fact that Harry had indeed invited her out on a date, decided that it just wasn't enough. *Months of getting closer over our scrolls, of looking at him as my attraction grew without being able to even see him in person. I am not letting this chance pass me by!* With that, Pyrrha leaned up and without hesitation kissed Harry on the lips.

Instantly Harry was kissing her back, his friendly hug turning into something else, pulling her against him until their armor clanged together. The noise barely registered to either of them, too busy kissing the lights out of one another. Pyrrha's eyes closed, as did Harry's. Their lips pressed against one another, moving this way and that, until Harry gently opened his mouth, letting his tongue out and tapping against her lips. Pyrrha instantly opened her mouth, and their tongues began to dance in the oldest waltz in the world.

How long they made out, Pyrrha didn't care. This was her first kiss, and she was by the Brothers going to savor it. But eventually, air became a concern, and she pulled back, laughing quietly as she blushingly leaned her head against Harry's shoulder.

Harry kissed her hair right between where her hairpiece lay, whispering, "well, I had hoped it wasn't just me who wanted that date to be a real one."

"Not at all!" Pyrrha whispered, now somewhat embarrassed at having kissed Harry like that during initiation out here in the woods, when who knew how many Grimm could be around. "Very much not, Harry! I've been, well, I've been thinking about us as more than friends for at least a month."

Actually, she needn't have worried about Grimm. Most people, even Hunters, forgot that while negative emotions attracted the Grimm, positive emotions had a negative impact. Grimm couldn't feel positive emotions, warning them a human or Faunus was around if the Grimm couldn't see or hear them with their normal senses. And strong enough positive emotions could even weaken certain types of Grimm. Not all, but some. So, without any Grimm in position to see the young couple, their positive emotions were actually a good thing.

Harry nodded, then began to chuckle, shaking his head as he slowly pulled away from the hug. "My oldest sister will be insufferable once she learns about this." Pyrrha cocked her head in question, and he went on ruefully. "You know how often you and I talked and how often most of those conversations were alone? Well, Saffron said that whether or not in person, those would count as dates. She insisted you and I were already going out weeks ago."

Pyrrha thought about it for a moment, then leaned over and kissed him again. This wasn't a lingering one, just a peck on the lips before she pulled back entirely, stepping back and checking her ammunition, a faint blush on her face as her hands began to work without any input from her brain. "I rather like that. I suppose our talking for hours, watching the same movies and commenting on them to one another via our scrolls, and my watching you cook occasionally truly would count as dates... yes, I like that. We can make that retroactive, can't we?"

Her smile then turned teasing as she looked up from her work, satisfied with that and very, **very** satisfied at how this whole initiation was going. "Especially since you then sent some of the food to me. My father once asked me what take-out restaurant I had begun to order from, you know? Your food was that good."

"Such compliments warm the chef's heart I keep in my luggage, I'm sure," Harry drawled, shaking his head. "Although I am afraid the Hadrian Arc Restaurant would be very much closed to your parents given how little they were willing to do to get to know the real you. Although I would still like to take you out on the few real dates now that we're actually able to spend time together in person."

That brought warm giggles from Pyrrha, and she shook her head, looking around her now that the initial adrenaline of the battle had faded, and her relationship with Harry had started, and she could concentrate on less personal matters. *No ambiguity for this girl, no sir. Mine! Sorry Tia, but you are going to have to learn to share.* “What now? I confess I got completely turned around while trying to follow my Polarity-based metal sense to you. Your sword, by the way, has a very odd presence to my Semblance. It doesn’t quite read the same as other weapons do. In fact, I’m not certain I could use my polarity of power directly on it as a whole. I’m lucky I noticed that before we were flung into the wilds of the Grimm.”

“I would be surprised if it didn’t have some strange properties given what I know of Caliburn’s abilities. I’ll tell you some of that later. As for where to go, there are a series of hills to our...” Harry paused, orienting himself by looking around for the tree he had initially landed in. It was standing to one side, barely in sight through its fellows, and Harry wordlessly led Pyrrha toward it. Once below the tree, Harry noted the broken branch he had left accidentally halfway up its length.

“Now, if I remember how many turns around the tree I went correctly...” He murmured, working it out for a moment, then pointing to one side. “The forest is bordered by another cliff in that direction, then sort of curves, making the forest into a small valley almost. If we follow that, we should be able to get to the other side, where the relics are supposed to be.”

“That sounds as good a plan as any, considering I can’t tell one direction from another in here,” Pyrrha confessed, her lips quirking. “Surprise, surprise, but my training tended to concentrate more on combat than other skills necessary in the field.”

Harry leaned slightly downward and kissed Pyrrha, causing the self-deprecating scowl on her lips to disappear into a smile as he pulled back. “None of that. We’re all here to learn, after all. I can for sure tell you’ve got a lot you could teach me regarding shield and sword combat. Arturia was a big help with that, considering she uses a shield and lance, but a lance isn’t quite the same as a sword. And neither of my parents used shields either.”

“I’ll be happy to help!” Pyrrha answered happily before she winked at him. “Although I doubt you would like to tell Arturia that her training of you wasn’t all it was supposed to be.”

“Do I look like I have a death wish?” Harry drawled. “She would take it as a personal insult and train me into the ground or force me to cook for her until I admitted her training was not the problem, I was.”

The two shared a laugh at that, exchanging another kiss before Harry pointed them in the direct direction and then walked off, chatting happily even as both of them began to scan their surroundings for Grimm. Harry kept their minds on that task as well, commenting as they continued, “After all, a Hunter’s second-most important duty is to kill Grimm. I will consider it a very good day if we completely depopulate this forest.”

OOOOOO

Up on the cliff, Glynda and Ozpin had been joined by a few more teachers, observing the students through the hundreds of cameras scattered throughout the forest. Although most of the teachers were there to help retrieve students when they realized they were in over their heads. This was particularly necessary this year, as it had quickly become obvious that Port had outdone himself.

Port had taken the senior class and spent an hour and a half herding Grimm from elsewhere into the forest through the use of noise canisters, an old trick that allowed Hunters to generally herd Grimm. It didn't work on all types, hence why there weren't many Nevermores or snake-type Grimm, but Creepers, Beowolves, and even Ursa could be herded. It was somewhat expensive in terms of equipment, but the budget could allow for it.

And already, it was having an impact. Everywhere, the students were being forced to fight harder than most had ever imagined. More would fall by the wayside, unable to handle this kind of combat, but that was all to the good in Ozpin's mind. What would be left would be the cream of the crop, and as long as most of the dropouts did not actually die, that was fine. Just because Ozpin knew many would not be up to standard did not mean that he was sanguine with students dying. A few died every year, but that was the price of fighting Grimm, and why every student had signed legal documents stating the school was in no way responsible for their deaths.

Regardless, the fights were extremely interesting, and none more so than two. Weiss Schnee and Ruby Rose pairing up with only a few whimpers to fight a vast pack of Ursa led by a larger-than-average Ursa Major. And the fight that had just ended pitting the newly paired team of Pyrrha Nikos and Hadrian Arc against the largest number of Grimm yet seen in this initiation. A fight that had segued into a most surprising scene.

"... Well, I did not expect that," Glynda murmured. "It seems as if Ms. Nikos is close to both Arcs and very close to Mr. Arc. It is a pity that we aren't able to get audio, or else what we just saw might make more sense. Still, his command of his Semblance is admirable, so perhaps I won't come down on them too harshly. Simply warning them about public displays of affection, the school's relationship policy, etc. Still, of all of the incoming students, Ms. Nikos was easily the last I anticipated having to give that particular speech to... She and Ms. Rose, I suppose. Although there, you do know you dropped a whole different kettle of fish into my lap, yes, Professor Ozpin? She isn't old enough to be seen as an adult, while every other student here is. That will cause future complications if she wants to start a relationship."

"Try not to be too hard on the two of them. Judging by how well the duo fought together, they must have a previous relationship of some sort," Ozpin murmured. Glynda noted with some annoyance that he did not comment on the second part of what she said.

Unlike Glynda, Ozpin could lip read, and from what he had been able to discern through the obstacles occasionally blocking the view of the cameras scattered liberally through the forest, his newest mystery and his prospective Maiden did seem to have been dating for several

months online. It wasn't a concept he was used to, but Ozpin understood that such closeness could come about in that manner. *I am not in favor of divided loyalties like this, but so long as Pyrrha is still susceptible to suggestion and willing to follow authority, the fact that she and Mr. Arc are involved should not matter if the worst comes to pass and we are forced to transfer the remaining power from Amber to a new maiden.*

"And from what we have seen, two of them could become an extremely dangerous duo." He added aloud.

"They are already dangerous, and you know it. I still cannot believe you agreed to change our curriculum this year for the Vytal Festival," Glynda grumbled. "There are at least four, possibly five students who will be well ahead of the curve anyway, and if we limit the combat training in the first two semesters to simply that necessary for the festival, the disparity will show all the more. We might have a major morale crisis on our hands."

"You say that every time the festival occurs, yet you always do an amazingly good job of rolling with the changes. And if the other freshmen feel they are being left behind, they will strive all the more to catch up. Or they will break, and if so, it is better to know such a thing now," Osborne answered instantly.

This was an old argument, and Ozpin had more important things to think about. So he paid it no mind to Glynda muttering about not having had a tournament champion among the freshmen before and how she would have to schedule a meeting with Pyrrha to discuss that and other matters.

Instead, Ozpin concentrated on what he had been able to observe. *Mr. Arc did not show anything beyond his earth manipulation, so was he telling the truth about how much doing anything more than that costs him? And does he really not know the extent of his abilities?*

I'm looking forward to the rest of this initiation far more than I expected, even with Ruby and her silver eyes here to observe. "I wonder what else this class has to show us..."

End Chapter

So you all can see I'm going with Good But Manipulative Ozpin here. I also have begun to show Tia's possible team. I fought with myself about including Blake at all, as I just don't like her character much, but as Ozpin said, she is a CATalyst LOL, so she needs to be around. I've also show what the Arcs have been doing in short, and explained the importance. Now, what would Salem think of all this... hmm...

Up to this point, Harry knows the Grimm are artificial and he is here to bring the world back into balance, but he doesn't yet know the extent of his enemies. That is going to change soon.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this, and if so, leave a review.