**Chapter Fifty-Four**

“Wait, *what?”* I questioned. “What do you mean you don’t know how that crystal works?”

The immortal, millennia old, reincarnating Wizard laughed. “Old people don’t know *everything,* Mr. Arc, even if some pretend they do. No, I do not know what that crystal is, or how it does what it does. What I could tell, from using it, was that it guided my attempts to Dustcast with it, creating something far finer than what I intended,” he stated, waving towards the sphere of ice on his desk.

“It also imparts a small level of magic into its creations, though that will only harden it and double, perhaps triple, the amount of time it would take to melt. It is a rather intriguing artefact, if I do say so myself, though structured in such a way as to not attract the attention of the Grimm,” he explained. “There are still hints of your fire in it, underpinning it and creating the base formation, but the structure itself is something entirely different. Something that doesn’t follow the dichotomy that you and the Grimm are either end of.” The man smiled, “Isn’t that just *fascinating?”*

I stared. “And you figured all of that out just by looking at it for a minute and using it *once?”* I demanded.

The Wizard smiled smugly. “Twice. I *did* create this stand. And yes, yes I did. There *is* a reason that I am your headmaster,” the man noted.

“But, do you at least know what the writing said on the base?” I asked.

“Before you sent it to me, I’d never seen it in my lives,” the ancient reincarnator remarked, enjoying my consternation. “But Oobleck recognized it. I do believe you’ve made the man’s year, if not his decade. Fragments of it had been found in some older ruins, but never something as complete as what you and Ms. Schnee provided. He is at work, attempting to decipher it, even now.”

The headmaster sighed, taking a sip of tea. “It is interesting, how many people believe history started with them. I must admit that, until recently, I fell into the same trap. But the world was *so* much larger back then, and my concerns *so* much smaller, so much more *personal*.” He shook his head, “Though I doubt you will have the luxury for as long as I had it, given the state of the world you have entered, enjoy the small moments you have. They will help you in the moments when the weight of your role, whatever it may be, rests heavy on your shoulders.”

*It already does,* I thought, wanting to tell him of Cinder, but, but while we were working together, the man was still keeping secrets, a *lot* of secrets, and from everything I’d heard of the man, before I’d come here, he was a chess-master. And even if I *knew* he wouldn’t sacrifice me, which I *didn’t,* the fact that he was keeping Ruby in the dark over her silver eyes was another mark against him.

Maybe I could trust him, but I had a lot of experience with those I *should* have been able to trust, or those I *thought* I could trust, only to be proven wrong. Pyrrha had been the rare exception, and her loyalty was now *assured*, with no room for things to suddenly change, leaving me without so much as a warning or explanation.

Like so many others had*.*

“So the ruined city?” I asked, shifting topic. I’d thought, with the green Wind Dust crystals lighting up its corridors, Oz would have something to do with the ‘emerald’ city, but-

He shook his head. “I had no idea such a thing existed underneath Patch,” he admitted easily. “One hundred and fifty years ago, no one lived on that island. There were attempts to, of course, but those all failed, overwhelmed by the Grimm. It was only with a concerted effort, backed by the King of Vale, King Tremelain, the third to last of them, that the island was secured. It was one of his advisors, a Mistralian warrior named Ozora, that suggested their current system of awakened warriors, Huntsmen in our current parlance, to draw the Grimm as soon as they emerged.”

“It’s a good system,” I noted. “Not workable on the mainland, not without a lot more people, but it seems to be working for them.”

“I’m sure Ozora, if he were still here today, would be quite pleased with how it all turned out,” Oz remarked, winking and taking another sip, before his expression fell slightly. “However, there were surface level ruins of settlements that should have been able to hold out, even against the forces that were encountered. We had suspected they fell to treachery, or other interior weakness, but a Behemoth Aranea, leading a force of its young, would have overwhelmed them far more easily. The Behemoths that have been encountered do not normally lead Grimm Tides, and for that I am thankful, but the ones that have done so have shown themselves to be. . . *uniquely deadly*.”

I frowned, “But it’s still around. I burnt it, *yeah*, but it was still very much alive when it ran.”

“It is, but it will be some time before it has rebuilt its forces, if your estimation on the number of its young that you killed is accurate,” the Wizard noted. “Had you not, in a decade or three, we would likely have had a tragedy akin to the fall of Mountain Glenn. Now, in a hundred years or so, when it emerges again, we will be ready. Assuming we do not dig down to root it out of the city it has claimed as its nest, but that will be a grand project, akin to the construction of Atlas, and one a long time in the future.”

Blinking, I tried to think in terms of that kind of timescale and. . . couldn’t. Intellectually, I could understand, but I had *months* before it was do or die. To consider even what would happen a few years from now. . . I had no idea.

Shaking my head, I moved on to the other thing that had been bothering me. Taking out my scroll, I brought up mural of Beowulf evolution. “There is one other thing,” I said, flicking the image in the direction the headmaster’s desk. The computer built into it received the file, and the other man clicked accept, the image springing up, hanging vertically between us. “You said there were five stages of evolution,” I prompted, pointing at each step of development in turn. “New, Grown, Advanced, Alpha, Behemoth.”

However, there were two more steps after that.

“That is indeed concerning. Especially given how *that,*” the Wizard stated, pointing to the fifth step, “is an accurate depiction of a Beowulf Behemoth. The last of which was seen four hundred years ago, and killed hundreds of Awakened warriors before it was slain. It was as arrogant as the others, but was obsessed with the hunt, which meant that pinning it down to bring the army’s might against it was *quite* the challenge. Beowulfs are seen as low-level threats now, the standard measurement of danger that other land-based Grimm are measured against, the common foot-soldiers of the Grimm, but. . .” the *much* older man shook his head. “They have always been prevalent, but to underestimate them because of that was the *height* of folly.”

“So, there’s two more ranks?” I asked, watching Oz carefully.

The headmaster merely shrugged. “I suppose there are.” He stared at it for a long moment, before chuckling to himself. “And to think, I had started to believe I had an understanding of this world that I had found myself in once more. I do wonder if this came before, or after. . .” he trailed off.

“Before or after *what*?” I questioned, having *no* idea what he was referring to.

He glanced up, before shaking his head again. “It does not matter. Not now. I did have one matter I wished to ask you, before next term started. Given your newly discovered. . . *talents*, I believe it would be best for us to meet twice a week instead of once. We shall still meet on Mondays, to further develop and refine that fire of yours, but to learn Magic requires a great deal of time, if one wishes to do more than throw it about like an angry child. Would it be amiss to say you would rather *not* spend another semester working with Professor Amakuni?”

“Is that allowed?” I asked hopefully, the headmaster giving me an amused look over his glasses. “Oh, right. *Yes.* If I could get out of that, I would. I could have my teammates tech me, if you’d like.” I hesitated, before putting forward, “I don’t know what her problem with me is.”

“She can sense magic, and is used to the only living things that possess magic are the myself, and the Grimm,” the Wizard remarked, not calling out my blatant fishing for information.

I frowned, “Wait, Grimm are magical? Wait, *duh,* of *course* they’re magical. Everyone here is just so use to them being a *thing* that no one thinks the murder-beasts made of sentient darkness could ever be *magical*,” I groaned, Oz chuckling. *“*But, wait, if she could sense it, why were you surprised I could use magic?”

“Because *being* magical and *using* magic are two very different things,” the older man remarked. “Which is a fact that we should all be thankful for. I shudder to think what things would be like if the Grimm could weave spells.”

“Honestly, I have no idea what you *can* do with Magic,” I admitted, knowing nothing about how it worked in *this* dimension, “so I have no idea how bad that would be.”

“*Bad,”* the Wizard insisted. “But not something we need to worry about. Now, if that is all?” he questioned, the elevator doors opening behind me.

I stood, slipping my phone out of a pocket, and opening a portal nearby. I’d already told the man about this, but, looking at him, he didn’t so much as twitch when when the entrance to my pocket dimension opened. That meant he either didn’t notice, or he was *far* better at hiding his reactions than I thought, and all of the other ‘telling’ reactions before were faked to fool me. The fact that I had *no* idea which one it was, was *another* reason why I couldn’t trust the man, not fully.

“No, that’s it. See you Monday,” I smiled, and strode right through it, enjoying the look of puzzlement on the headmaster’s face as I didn’t head towards the elevator, and wishing I could see his reaction when I vanished into thin air.

Sighing, I closed the portal and headed upstairs. That. . . hadn’t been what I’d expected. But I could work with it. “Okay, super-Grimm are a thing. And there are even *more* Super-Grimm than that Super-Grimm.” Looking up that ‘Sea Feilong’ thing Oz mentioned, vaguely recognizing it from something I’d seen of RWBY, but the memory was fuzzy, maybe a clip, or even a picture, of something that happened long after I stopped watching the show.

The ones that had been recorded were *enormous*, easily twice, if not three times as long as I was when I was *fully transformed,* though as ‘flying snake’ eastern dragons, they probably only barely out-massed me. Flying fast enough to break the sound barrier with unreal maneuverability, able to breath water, and with an electric breath weapon, they were considered ‘Advanced’. Given their strength, and, with their belly plates, meaning they were just over 1/4th of the way encased in armor, the classification made sense. If one was spotted, we were *required* to report it, and a team would be put together to kill it while sea-travel in its hunting grounds would be halted.

They were *that dangerous.*

. . . *I could take them.*

I shook my head, as whether or not I *could* was irrelevant, I was *not* going to be looking to fight anything like that any time soon. Wandering upstairs, I checked my reserves of blood, the substance keeping supernaturally well, likely because of magic. Even then, I was starting to run low, which meant I’d need to ‘tap’ myself again, probably tomorrow morning before class. By the time Port finished his ‘Grimm Studies 2’ my Aura would be long since refilled from healing me back up.

Wandering back down to the portal room, I opened the app fully, the quick-activation option only good for creating a portal and leaving back *through* the portal I’d just created, I paused, staring at the display. The progress bar had split into two. The bottom one, which had the ‘earn x points’ marks was the same as before, but the top one was labelled ‘Dimensional Divergence’, the only mark on it the point at the end, which seemed to also be the same ‘Dimensional Unlock’ option that would take me collecting one-hundred points to gather.

Opening up the ‘help’ tab dropped me into a complex menu that, on the tiny scroll’s screen, was near impossible to read. Heading back upstairs, I plugged it into the desk in the office, that was included in the house’s design, a computer just like Oz’s throwing the tiny details up on several screens, large enough for me to actually understand.

It was, however, written in the unholy lovechild of legalese and complex technical jargon that was nigh indecipherable.

Poking around the Company apps, however, I found even *more* help documents, several *thousand* pages of help documents, that seemed to be put together at random. However, while the files weren’t searchable, they *were* selectable, which I dumped into *new* documents that I *could* search.

Looking up the terms I didn’t understand, the explanations also included words I didn’t understand, and *their* definitions were similarly obtuse, but ***their*** definitions were such that, while complicated, I could actually figure out what they meant.

. . . *Okay. Let’s do this,* I thought, cracking my knuckles, and getting to work.

<DR>

Three hours later, and having stopped to open a portal to warn my team that I’d be running a little late, I *finally* understood what the hell was going on.

Mostly.

Probably.

Okay, I had a general idea that I’d bet money on, but not a *lot* of money.

To put it simply, *really really* simply, the multiverse was infinite, but it could be infinite-*er*. Common clusters, like RWBY, were simultaneously infinite but also *known*. That meant that, while the Company could find one that followed the main-line path, so could others. And even then, the ‘main’ path, or the Canon path, was not in any way ‘Prime’, ‘Golden’, or otherwise special, it was just the one that’d harmonized with something in the universe, spreading knowledge of it hither and yon, the ones where the girls had died, and there were a *lot* of those, just as ‘real’, but, because of the lack of interference, there were ‘less’ of them.

Yes, less of the infinite resource.

I was *really* simplifying this.

Even my current universe, where Jaune wasn’t Jaune but me (and a *dragon*) was just another bud off the ‘main’. To stop unregulated recursion, the Company actually froze the timeline, stopping it from splitting while I was in it. That meant there weren’t an infinite number of Draconic mes going in infinite directions in Remnant, creating infinitely splitting dimensions, there was just the *one.* Reading between the lines, that didn’t mean there wasn’t more versions of me out there, only that once I, the me that was a Dragon of Creation, dropped into this version of Remnant, the splitting *stopped*.

And that would last until the second that I died, or formally ceased operating in it.

When that happened, one of two things would happen. If it was too close to the mainline universe, and still ‘discoverable’, it would be passed on to another, or left fallow in the hope that it would diverge far enough on its own. If it had reached the point where it was so different, that it no longer operated on the same ‘wavelength’ as the original, that’s where things got. . . *interesting.*

It was still part of the multiverse, still operating under the same underpinning rules as the mainline universe from which it originated, but it was no longer *discoverable* by anyone that didn’t already know about it already, the ‘harmonization’ that originally allowed others to glimpse it gone. *New* harmonizations could occur, but then the process could just be repeated, once more creating ‘dark’ dimensions, which, despite the name, were not *bad,* just dimensions that were unknown, and thus, ‘effectively undiscoverable’ as well.

Discoverable by *whom,* the documents didn’t state, which worried me.

There were mention of *secondary* networks that could be used to identify dark dimensions, the two examples being intra-agent trade organizations and ‘Elizabeths’, the second of which wasn’t defined in such a way that it was obviously something that was just supposed to be ‘known’. Like how the help document also didn’t define what ‘points’, ‘stamps’, or ‘Waifus’ were.

When I’d opened the app to set the waypoint, two weeks ago, there’d only been one progress bar, which apparently happened when the Dimensional Divergence matched the rate of point gain, which was often the case. However, since then, I’d done enough to set the world on a different path, about a third of the way to the point when the Remnant I lived in would no longer be in line with the world of RWBY, to the point that, unless you knew what to look for, you’d never find it.

*Which means, even if I don’t capture fourteen more people, I have a way out,* I thought, nodding to myself. I didn’t *want* to leave, at least not without taking my team with me, but, if things went bad, as long as they went bad *differently*, I could still leave.

Mind you, that still meant we had to *survive* the avalanche of trouble coming our during the Vytal festival, but, if our brush with death under Patch was any indication, we were well on our way to getting there.

Pyrrha and I had talked with Taiyang, to get a sense of how *normal* Huntsmen and Huntresses worked. The man was more than happy to brag about his kids, and remark on how much they’d grown in only a few months, enough that the man actually felt a little guilty, feeling as if he’d underestimated them before they’d left. Regardless, he’d been clear that most Huntsman teams, *professional* Huntsman teams, would’ve likely lost someone in our *first* escape attempt, *before* the long fall RWBY had suffered.

Not for the first time, I kicked myself for not having watched Volume 3, but if the eight of us, with the others not growing, and Jaune being *Jaune*, had still done as well as they did, with our increased capabilities it stood to reason that *we’d* do better as well.

Which we *would*, because I was *not* losing Pyrrha.

She was *mine.*

But, the question became, would we be able to handle what happened if we rocked the boat too much, and changed things.

And, in my hand, I held an indicator that the boat had *already* been rocked, but had it been rocked *enough* to change things.

. . . *Yes. The answer was yes,* I realized. The Schnee Dust company shipment had been stolen by the White Fang, and, with my being banned from Vale, the chances of Blake finding the terrorists, and Torchwick, ending with that highway battle were close to zero. While RRWN would still go to Vale, my team had decided that, if *I* wasn’t allowed to go to the city, *they* weren’t going to either, even when I told them I didn’t mind.

*Okay, in that case we need to keep working, keep training, and keep pushing ourselves,* I thought to myself, opening a portal back to my dorm-room, the door leading into the common room forming from the chaos of raw potentiality that existed in the central aperture of the portal device.

Opening it, all three of my teammates looked up. Pyrrha was at her desk, typing something up, Yang was playing a game on her scroll, pausing it, and Blake was reading one of her *totally* not smutty books, and looked back down the second her eyes met mine. “Hey all,” I greeted. “Finished my talk with Oz. Got some answers, and I think you guys need to hear this.”

I closed the door behind me, dismissing the portal so that I could open it into the hall, but as I turned around, Yang called out, “Jaune, wait!”

Turning back around, the blonde had sat up, and glanced to Pyrrha, who nodded, and then to Blake, who avoided her partner’s gaze. “Jaune,” she said, hesitating, obviously struggling with herself. I waited, giving her the time she needed, until she tried again, looking down. “I’m sorry.”

She didn’t say anything else, so I prompted, “Sorry for what?”

My girlfriend grimaced, ringing her hands for a moment, still not looking at me. “Sorry for being an idiot.”

“Um, not to sound like a dick, but you’re gonna need to be more specific,” I replied. “And I speak as the team expert on being an idiot.”

She looked up, frowning. “You’re not an idiot! I am!”

“I’m pretty much we’re *all* idiots here,” I argued, teasing her a little. It was that, or get annoyed at the fact that she wasn’t getting to the point, but she *was* trying. “Though, again, I’m the ranking moron. So, what are you sorry for?”

“For being an idiot!” she insisted, and I stared at her. To her credit, she realized that didn’t actually mean anything, and amended that to. “You told us not to go down that *stupid* hole but I didn’t listen!”

I felt my eyebrows lift. She’d been thankful that I’d gone after her, but she hadn’t actually *apologized* for doing it in the first place. I’d found that most people tended to do that, appreciating help but never owning the mistake that necessitated the help in the first place, and, in doing so, would make the same mistake all over again. The timing was suspicious, and looking over to Pyrrha, she just smiled at the both of us. This thing had her fingerprints *all* over it, but. . . the fact that Yang went along with it was still was pleasantly surprising.

My girlfriend was staring at me, upset, and waiting, so I walked over, got my chair, and moved it so I could sit opposite of her, reminded of the conversation I’d had with Weiss. “Okay,” I said. “*Why* did you do it?”

Again, Yang’s eyes flicked over to Pyrrha, who, though I couldn’t see her, I *felt* nod. Looking back to me, the blonde took a deep breath. “I, I was mad. I was worried about Rubes, and you told me to screw off. So I wanted to tell you to.”

I looked at her, considering her words. She’d obviously been warned I’d want to know *why*, but the answer was, ironically, so *dumb* it obviously wasn’t coached. “So, when I was worried about you, you decided the best course of action was to put yourself in danger.”

From her reaction, it would’ve hurt less if I’d just slapped her. “I-I didn’t think I was in danger,” she laughed, though it was hollow. “It’s *Patch*. Yeah, it was dangerous when I was younger, but I’m stronger. It should’ve been safe.”

I watched her, paying close attention. The way she was putting it, she wasn’t excusing her actions, she was explaining them. “Did you know that Grimm can grow beyond Alphas?” I asked, amending it to, “Before last week?”

She stared at me, before shaking her head no.

“Neither did I,” I agreed. “The knowledge of them is suppressed to avoid mass panic and hopelessness. There was a Geist that took over an entire forest a few years ago, but they killed it and claimed it was an Alpha Melancholia.”

Blake looked up from her book. “I heard about that!” she declared, and I looked to her. “I, I knew some of those that lost their lives in that forest.”

Pyrrha sighed, “That must’ve been terrible.”

The Faunus winced, “I, thank you.” She went back to her book, practically hiding her face with it.

Turning back to Yang, I told her, “And there have been others. You didn’t know about it, and neither did I, but this world’s dangerous enough that taking unnecessary risks *will* get you hurt sooner rather than later, or killed. Oz didn’t know about the Aranea Behemoth, nor did he know about the ruins underneath Patch, but even *he* told me he didn’t know all of what was out there. And, hell, we thought that *Vale* was safe, but I’m sure you remember what happened there.”

“So, what? We always need to be on our guard?” the brawler asked tiredly.

“Not always. We’re safe here,” I said, waving around the room. “We were safe at your house. We’re probably safe in Beacon at large. But in big cities, where we know criminals operate. Out in the wilderness, where the Grimm roam? *Yes*, we need to be careful. And to do that just because you were mad at me. . .”

I frowned. “I get it, I guess, intellectually, but emotionally?” Sighing, I shook my head. “I don’t. That would be like me not going down after you, when you fell, because I was mad that you didn’t listen to me and got into that position in the first place. I’m not going to do that. Give you a hard time, yeah. Maybe avoid making the foods you like for a bit, sure. But to risk my life, or to stand by while you risk yours. . . *no*.”

“Then I guess I just suck,” Yang commented bitterly, looking away, glancing back my way when I didn’t say anything else. “Well?” she demanded.

“Well what?” I questioned.

“Go ahead, tell me I suck. I deserve it,” she commanded.

“Okay, you suck,” I agreed, and she looked down, balling up her fists. “It was childish, stupid, and not becoming of a Huntress in the *slightest*. Now what are you going to do about it?”

“W-what?” she asked, unsure.

“Yang, we’re in training *for a reason*,” I stressed. “If we were a fully licensed Huntsman team, I’d be fucking *pissed.* Tell you the truth, I’m *still* kind of annoyed, and hurt, and just because we all survived doesn’t erase what the four of you did. But there’s a *reason* we’ve not gone out on any assignments, and, even when we do in a month or two, we’ll be doing so with a professional Huntsman supervising us.”

I sighed, leaning back in my chair. “Do this again and we *will* be having words. And *we,* the two of us, will be *done*, as I won’t be with someone who treats me like I don’t matter. You didn’t do that to save someone, Yang, you didn’t even do that to help gain knowledge about the Grimm like Weiss, rather stupidly, did. You did it because you were mad at me, and because you refused to *talk* to me, throwing my own words in my face to *hurt* me. And congratulations, you succeeded.”

“Jaune,” Pyrrha said behind me, her tone soft and worried.

I shook my head, “But you *don’t* talk, Yang. And you don’t *think*. You *do*. The question is, do you want to be better?”

“Yes, of *course* I do!” she shot back, off-balance and hurt.

I opened my hands. “Then do so. You say your sorry-“

“Because I *am!”* she interrupted, hands once more in fists, purple eyes flickering to red.

“And I believe you,” I continued, unhurried.

The red vanished from her eyes. “W-what?” she questioned, her anger fizzling out, overtaken by her confusion.

“I believe you,” I repeated. “You made a mistake. Fuck, God knows that *I* have. And I believe that your sorry honestly sorry. *In this moment*. But I’ve had people be sorry to me before, and I forgave them, only for them to turn around and do it again. Almost all of my sisters, for example.” *My other family, for another*, I added internally*.*

“You see, they *were* sorry,” I continued, “just not sorry enough to put in the effort to keep from doing it again. Which is why, among other reasons, I didn’t bother telling them I was leaving.” And that wasn’t even a lie. Jaune wasn’t me, but, in that, his reaction *was* mine. “They didn’t care if they hurt me, so I treated them the way they treated me, but I will *not* do that to anyone I’m dating. So I believe you, I believe that you’re honest with me now, and I accept your apology. I forgive you. But I do *not* forget,” I warned.

“So, what, you’re gonna hold this over my head forever?” Yang questioned, confused, and upset, and I could practically see her trying to fit me into the mold she’d made of other people.

I lifted an eyebrow. “Does that sound like me?” I questioned.

“But, you said you weren’t gonna let me forget,” the girl stated.

“Yang,” Pyrrha chimed in, “That’s not what Jaune said.”

“Yeah it is!” the brawler argued.

*“Yang,*” I warned, annoyed, and getting her attention with my tone, just short of a growl. “I’m exacting with my words. You should *know* this by now. I didn’t said that I wouldn’t let *you* forget, I said *I* would not forget. When I was younger I was told ‘forgive and forget’, but all that meant was ‘let me hurt you again’. I’ll remember what *you* did, but if you show me that you’ve grown, that I *don’t* need to worry that you’ll put yourself and others in danger *just* because you’re mad at me, then I’ll remember how you *used* to be,” I explained.

My first instinct was to assume that, just like the others who’d attacked me over my refusal to instantly turn the other cheek with nothing more than a quick, *worthless,* apology, Yang was mad that she was *actually* going to be held accountable for her actions, for once. But, in doing so, I’d be doing *exactly* what she was doing now. So I had to assume she was reading more into what I was saying then what I was *actually* saying, and getting mad at what she *assumed* I meant. That said, I wasn’t joking. She’d almost gotten *everyone* killed, along with the rest of RWBY, and that wasn’t something I was going to overlook.

“So, you’re sorry?” I pressed. “Show me. *Talk* to me when you have an issue. Or you won’t have me to have an issue with at all.”

“God, you’re such an *asshole*,” Yang spat angrily.

*Okay, that was a short fucking second chance,* I thought, responding coldly, “What a coincidence, you’re-“

“*Jaune,”* Pyrrha interrupted, and I turned my back on Yang.

“*What?”* I shot back, *pissed*. “I must’ve missed the part of the apology where you insult the person, or is this just a *Patch* thing? If so, I might as well-”

“I’m fucking *sorry*, okay!” Yang yelled, standing up. “Why can’t you accept that!?”

I turned back around. “Are you *deaf*?” I questioned her right back. “Okay, let’s try this again, using *small words,”* I snarled, my temper flaring, breath sparking. “I accept you say you’re sorry. I appreciate you making the apology. But *I don’t trust it.* It’s fucking *easy* to mouth some meaningless fucking platitudes, but you almost got all of us fucking *killed*, and it isn’t the first time you’ve *dragged my ass into a lethal fight with no warning.* Only this time it wasn’t just the two of *us* you put in danger, it was the *whole damn team.* And you showed me that you learned *nothing,”* I hissed.

I took a step towards her, and she reflexively stepped back, falling back onto her bed as I continued, “So I believe you *think* you’re sorry, but until you *don’t do it again,* I can’t know if you *actually are.* And since you can’t see when something *doesn’t* happen, it’s gonna take some fucking *time.* Because half the assholes out there never apologize, and of the half that *do*, the ones I’ve met that fucking *mean it* I can count on *one fucking hand.* So you say you’re sorry? *Words aren’t good enough*, *Yang.* You need to *show* me, not with some big dramatic gesture, not with some more meaningless proclamations, you need to show me you are by showing you actually *give* *a damn* and try to be the kind of person that *won’t do this again!*”

Wresting my anger under control, I sighed. “Yang. I try and be clear. Sometimes that means I hit a topic a few times more than you feel like I should. Because if I fuck up the explanation, *that’s on me*, so I’m *painfully* clear on it to make sure there’s no misunderstandings. But that means, when I talk, you can’t just *guess what I’m fucking saying,* you need to *actually fucking listen.* People have *nasty* habit of assuming what someone else is saying so they can prepare their counter, but *I. Am. Fucking. Weird.* So that *doesn’t work.* We have *literally had this conversation before*.”

Shaking my head clear of memories of other conversations I’d had like this, where I told people I cared about, who *claimed* to care about me *exactly* why I was upset, why I’d been hurt, only to be *told* they understood, only for them to *do it again anyways,* I took in a shaky breath, and le tit go. “And this is what I’m talking about. I can’t read your mind. I don’t know what you *hear*, but it turned ‘I won’t forget’, by which I meant that I wasn’t going to just let it go if it happens again, into ‘I won’t let ***you*** forget’, which you took to mean that I’d bludgeon you with it for the rest of your fucking life. I didn’t say that, and for you to think I *would* shows me that you *really* don’t understand me, you just keep fucking *guessing* instead of *listening*.”

I looked the girl in the eye, unable to figure out the emotions on her face, and beyond caring. “So. Apology accepted. I’m *still* pissed at you, Ruby, and Blake, though. Weiss already apologized. *That night*. Do this again and we’re done. And if you want this relationship to work, Yang, maybe figure out who the *fuck* you’re dating. Your father *literally* told us how badly it goes if you don’t.”

The teenager paled, and I turned my back on her, facing Pyrrha. “I appreciate the effort, but Yang isn’t you,” I stated. “She needs more than being pointed in the right direction. If you want to help her, fine, but she doesn’t listen to me. I’m. . . . going out. I’ll be back after dinner.”

Opening the portal, I paused looking to Blake, who just stared at me, as if she didn’t recognize me. *Yeah, I don’t care enough to unpack that clusterfuck,* I thought, leaving my team behind, and heading out for a fly, wondering what the point of being team lead was when half my team *didn’t listen.*

“What a way to start the fucking Semester.”