**Chapter Thirty-Two**

The following day, Cardin was no longer in class.

His team was, but the ringleader was absent, and the remaining members of CRDL were looking *anywhere* but at my team.

And that was perfectly alright with me.

Port’s class went as normal, and he *did* tell us about how he defeated three Ursa with three gallons of industrial grade lubricant. It turned out that variety of Grimm, while strong, weren’t particularly *graceful*, and depended on their weight to keep them grounded. Because of that, on an unnaturally slick surface they were rendered almost helpless, except for waving clawed limbs and gnashing their teeth in useless bites, of course.

The secondary lesson, hidden under the first, was that *most* Grimm were creatures of instinct, able to hunt in natural settings, but they didn’t have an animal’s adaptability. They *would*, eventually, figure it out, as had the last one when Port got too arrogant, and got slashed in the face for his trouble, but it’d taken far longer than one would expect.

The standard tertiary lessons of avoiding overconfidence was there as well, but that’d been an undercurrent of a *quarter* of his stories, and was becoming a familiar refrain.

Then came combat class with Goodwitch, the first combat class that I’d be able to *participate* in since the Tide, and things got. . . *odd.*

To start with, Glynda *wasn’t there.* Goodwitch was a stickler for punctuality, to the point that, unlike other professors I’d had who’d declare the criteria for being late as ‘after them’, you could only really blame yourself for missing the class she was always *early* to. As the minutes passed, at first people got tense, confused by the change, before they relaxed, small conversations breaking out while we waited. We all assumed there was some reason, though no one knew what it was.

I turned to Pyrrha, to ask her what she was going to do for Port’s assignment about nonstandard anti-Grimm armament, only to realize she’d gone completely still, her sword and shield slowly moving down from her back to her waiting hands, seemingly on their own.

Stomping on my first instinct to ask what was wrong, and in so doing giving away that something *was* wrong, I instead, with forced casualness, nodded slightly and turned away, glancing in the direction she was looking.

Halfway up the training hall wall was a patch that was *ever* so discolored, and focusing on it, I realized the texture was. . . *off.* It wasn’t quite the same smooth stone, but is still had a dull sheen.

Casting my gaze around, no one else had noticed. No, Quinn from team LVND was also watching it as well, but everyone else was either ignorant, or *far* better actors than I gave them credit for. On my other side sat Yang, who I carefully moved a hand over to, poking her in the knee.

“Huh, what’s up Arcs?” she asked, and I met her eyes, before looking towards the off spot. “What’s that?” she asked, and from the corner of my eye, I could see her cock her head in confusion.

“What’s what?” her sister asked, and the shape shifted, which was all the warning I had before *DANGER* blared to my senses, the *cloth* dropping, revealing a thin older woman, hanging against the wall, armed with two *very* large pistols, which she whipped up to point directly at us, the increasingly familiar feeling of an incoming shot *directly* between my eyes.

Yang froze, and I shoved her as I leapt up, but the sense of impending fire tracked me, the phantom sensation of being shot stubbornly sticking to between my eyes. The woman sprung from the wall towards our class, gathered in the bleachers, her guns barking in a staccato beat.

Lacking the time to draw my shield I breathed fire, doing my damnedest to make it umbrella out into a shield while turning it solid, as I dodged to the side, the bullet that would’ve struck me between the eyes kissing the edge of my cheek, barely touching my Aura.

Similar shots sparked off Pyrrha’s raised shield, off Yang’s Gauntlet, missing Blake and Ruby as they dodged, though passing right between the eyes of the former’s clone. Weiss was hit, as was Ren as he pushed Nora out of the way, the bullet meant for her missing by inches.

With a roar, *Anger* at being ambushed blossoming in my chest. I manifested my wings and shot forward as the Flames in front of me dispersed, and more surged upwards, ready to be unleashed.

The woman landed, smoothly holstered her pistols, and looked around, even as I prepared to breathe. She nodded, noting, “Passable.”

I hesitated, unsure. Yang *didn’t*, blasting forward with a fist cocked forward. The pale woman, who I noted had had grey, almost blue-tinged hair, waited, stepping forward into my teammate’s punch with unhurried ease, a single hand reaching out to grab it almost negligently.

Casually, our attacker took hold of Yang’s punch and twisted, spinning on the ball of her foot once to throw my teammate, *hard*, in the other direction, moving twice as fast as she’d attacked, the blonde girl crashing into the stone stands hard enough to shatter the concrete.

And then the woman waited.

Keeping my Flames ready, I demanded, *“Who are you?*” ready to set half the arena ablaze in an instant.

“I, Mr. Arc, am your new combat instructor,” the woman replied blandly, straightening out her almost military looking jacket, a mottled grey thing that seemed to blend into the wall behind her, and to a lesser extant the dark arena floor below her.

Landing, Flames still ready, I slipped out my scroll, messaging Goodwitch *‘Blue haired old woman says she is new teacher. Please confirm.”*

“We didn’t know there was going to be a new teacher,” Ruby replied, some of the class relaxing a little, and, keeping one eye on the threat, I looked around.

Most of my classmates has bright blue markings right between their eyes, though a few had streaks elsewhere, the others with bits of blue on their weapons, armor, or just clothes. Bringing my own hand up to my cheek, it came away clean.

If the woman was bothered by the implication, she didn’t show it. “I wanted to test you. A third of you passed. Far more than I expected,” she replied, with just the hint of amusement on otherwise bored features.

The woman was thin, slim in every manner except for her bust, which was of a similar size to Nora or Blake. Her clothing looked a bit like a Victorian riding jacket crossed with a uniform, though an undecorated one. Thigh high mottled dark grey boots were combined with dark blue pants, and similarly colored gloves. Able to focus, I saw her clothes weren’t just blotchy, but decorated, the mottling I saw actual a subtle pattern of birds running up her body, wing designs down her arms.

“Who tests by attacking people?” Weiss demanded as she stood, incensed, taking out a handkerchief and trying to clean her face, but her skin had been stained by whatever the bullets that’d hit us had been covered with. Everyone except for me.

*Body defense stopping transformations?* I wondered, before I realized I was probably overthinking it. The bullet had punched through my fire, which, even for an instant, would’ve served to dry out, even if a little, the dye the others had been smeared with, maybe the physically hardened nature of the Flames scraping it off completely.

“A *combat* teacher,” the still unnamed woman noted reproachfully, face bland, Weiss wincing before sitting back down.

The doors opened and Glynda walked in, looking around at the room, and sighed.

“Students, stand down. Mrs. Sepper is a member of staff,” the Vice-Headmistress announced, taking in the dye streaks. Turning to the woman in question, she asked, “Your assessment?”

The newly identified Mrs. Sepper gave a one-shouldered shrug. “Better than I feared, less than the Headmaster suggested. Some of them have potential.”

“Have potential? That’s *Pyrrha Nikos* of there!” Weiss objected. “If she’s just ‘has potential’, what are the rest of us?”

Lazily glancing at the heiress, the teacher replied, “You have the potential, to have potential.” Her eyes flicked over to one of Cardin’s flunkies. “Some of you have the potential, to have potential, to have potential.”

“You’ll need to teach them all,” Goodwitch warned the older woman.

“I will teach those that want to learn,” Sepper countered, glancing over, and in a way *down* at the other woman. “*He* has not asked for more than that.”

Glynda stared back, working her jaw slightly, before nodded, with a sighing exhale. “If that is your agreement.” Without another word she turned her back on the blue-haired woman and stalked out the door, which closed behind her on its own.

Looking back in our direction, our new teacher’s eyes danced over us. “Those of you who were lethally shot, had you not had Aura, your assignment for next Monday is to practice defending yourself against gunfire. Dodge or block, I care not.”

“How are we supposed to dodge gunfire we don’t know is coming?” Rob, the bluebird Faunus, asked incredulously.

The woman looked to Charlie, his team lead, who had a stone hovering in front of him, a blue patch on it. The black-clad young man nodded, “I’ll teach him.”

“He should already know,” the teacher noted, the recrimination in her voice not hidden at all. “The rest of you, I will train. Who is first?”

“Um, Ma’am? How are you going to train us?” Weiss asked, trying to be respectful but still upset. “Ms. Goodwitch had us spar with each other.”

“I am not going to train *you*. Not yet,” Sepper noted, giving the blue spot between Ms. Schnee’s eyes a significant look, causing the girl to flush in shame. “And you will be fighting me. Unless you do not wish to learn. Who first?”

I blinked, thinking of the skill gain I could get from martial talent from going against someone who could handle Yang, and thought Pyrrha had *potential.* “I will!” I announced, but I wasn’t the only one, Quinn, Nora, Yang, Ruby, and *Pyrrha* all echoing my declaration.

Once again the hint of a small, confident smile slipped across the woman’s features. “At least you are enthusiastic. Nikos. You first.”

My partner already had her weapons drawn, a thin blue streak across her shield, and walked forward, watching the older woman as the gladiatrix closed with carefully balanced steps.

Sitting, I watched, focused, as Sepper reached behind herself and, from seemingly nowhere, pulled out a long, ornate cavalry saber. The single edged, slightly curved blade was covered with multicolored designs, all weaving into one another, the colors glowing slightly even under the lights of the arena.

*“It’s Dust Forged!”* Ruby squealed in front of us, eyes riveted on the weapon. “But to do it with so many different kinds of Dust. . .”

The teacher took a prepared stance, one hand on the weapon, the other clasped behind her back, in a formal dueling stance, while Pyrrha low and ready.

“Dust Forged?” I asked, remembering her mentioning that, but only that it was expensive.

“You infuse the weapon itself with the properties of Dust,” the weapon-expert quickly explained. “So a Fire Dust forged sword could *be* on fire with just a bit of Aura. Or shoot flames. Or any of a *lot* of different things! But using them is *super* hard, and making them is *superer* hard, and combining different types together is, like, the *superest* hard!”

Seeing the blue, red, green, pale blue, and other colors along the blade, each representing a different element, I started to realize why the tiny team lead’s gaze on the weapon was almost lustful, and absolutely revenant.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgxWir6fBqI>

[Pyrrha](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgxWir6fBqI), seeing that Sepper was waiting for her to attack, stepped forward, twisting her sword up as it shot out into a spear, to close the distance and strike unexpectedly.

Not unexpectedly enough, though, as Sepper angled her sword, deflecting it up as she herself lunged forward, blade slashing down. Pyrrha spun around, catching the blade with her shield but was thrown backwards as her attempted deflection turned to a full block, the force of the blow physically shoving her away.

My partner twisted backwards, lashing out with a kick as the teacher followed, the older woman twisting in turn to avoid it, coming around with a rising slash that Pyrrha deflected, coming in for a shield bash of her own. But the attack was blocked with the butt of the saber, knocking Pyrrha back as the blade darted in faster than it had before, a blur as it sliced the ‘invincible girl’ along the inside of her arm, surely shaving off Aura as it did so.

“Do not assume a fighter is moving as quick as they can,” Sepper commented conversationally, as Pyrrha pulled back, the class shocked.

“Nikos got hit,” Lave gasped, clutching her own spear.

*Yes?* I thought, then realized that, as partners, Glynda had never paired us together, to see the ten to *one* combat that our training always turned into. *She never had been hit in this class, had she?* I realized, as the class’ attention, which had been a bit scattered, was now tightened to a laser focus on the fight before us.

“Noted,” the red-head nodded, before lunging forward, moving as fast as I knew she could move, pressing her opponent.

Coming in, hard, with slashes and gunfire, Pyrrha was a long, smooth wave of motion, but Mrs. Sepper rode that wave, always one step ahead, using the blade, hand guard, and butt of the weapon dancing back and forth as she retreated, more and more, forcing my partner to keep pushing forward.

Then, with a twirl, the hand behind her back game out and slapped the gladiatrix with a vicious backhand, knuckles against the girl’s cheek, that sent her spinning off her feet. Pyrrha landed with a roll, bringing her shield up to block the follow up thrust, but now with Sepper using both hands, the gladiatrix was the one being pushed back.

Sepper’s saber flashed out over and over, blade and hilt, the free gloved hand darting forward to pull Pyrrha’s shield, slap the shaft of her spear aside, even reaching in to press on the flat of her sword to create openings.

My partner lashed out with kicks, only to be met with kicks in turn, the older woman matching, and surpassing, her skill. *Some kind of Semblance?* I wondered. Quinn’s, ‘**Duelist**’, made him better at fighting someone the longer he did so, though it reset when he fought someone else, but the woman’s skill with her sword wasn’t getting any better, she was just adding more and more attack vectors, pushing Pyrrha harder and harder.

Finally, the gladiatrix, blocking a thrust with her buckler, shot forward in a gunfire assisted lunge, only for the teacher to grab the spear, right above Pyrrha’s own grip and yank it out of her hands, tossing it behind her like it was unimportant.

Shoving the girl back, and even further away from her weapon, Sepper pressed the attack, Pyrrha doing everything she could to dodge, even as the spear, glowing blackly, started to rise behind them, twisting to point straight at the woman’s back.

Some in the class gasped, my partner never having been so *blatant* about her Semblance before, but the girl was too focused on the fight to seem to care, lashing out with kicks and the occasional punch of her own, but her now empty hand was unarmored save for a black glove and she took another slash for her trouble.

As the teacher pressed forward another attack, the floating spear shot forward, silent but as if launched from a ballista, *straight* for the instructor’s back. It looked like it was going to hit when the old woman bowed forward violently, the weapon missing by inches.

Pyrrha caught the spear, still glowing blackly, and twisted, just as Mrs. Sepper had done with Yang, hurling the weapon back at her opponent.

Only she was no longer in front of the gladiatrix.

Standing as Pyrrha had twirled, the old woman took a single purposeful step, and disappeared, reappearing directly behind my partner, just as she turned to throw her weapon forward.

The spear was hurled with tremendous force, but the teacher, almost casually, brought her weapon up from behind my partner, and ran the blade along the girl’s throat, a loud beeping coming from the woman as she finished the slice, even as the spear hit the far wall with a crash that shook the floor, shattering the stone and burying itself in the wall.

There was silence as the woman stepped back, flipping up the tail of her coat and revealing a thin box, into which the blade slid into, a mechashift sheathe.

“I believe that is your Aura below fifty percent,” she announced as Pyrrha, breathing hard, stood stock still. “As I thought, you have potential. Stay after class.”

Hand shaking a little, my partner reached a hand out, and ripped her weapon out from the stone, calling it back to her. Holstering her shield and weapon she turned, looking as shocked as the rest of the class, but a broad smile spread across her features. “*I will!”* she promised, happily returning to the stands.

Mrs. Sepper, turned back to regard the rest of us. “Who is next?”

Nora and I responded as one. *“Me!”*

<DR>

When class ended, Nora, Yang, Pyrrha, Ruby, Blake and I were all asked to stay after, the others told to leave. When Kobe had asked if they’d be fighting her on Monday, our teacher had given the boy an uninterest look, and replied, “Perhaps.”

The others had filed out, and it didn’t pass my notice that only the ones that’d fought her, *and* pushed her to do more than just use her sword, were the ones now present.

Yang had gone in hard, accepting hits to get in her own, forcing the woman to literally slap aside the shotgun shots to avoid being hit. When Sepper had started teleporting, the blonde had just started moving faster, pinballing desperately so that, even if the teacher moved behind her, my teammate was already dodging.

On the lookout for similar grab-and-throws as she’d been first hit, she’d been quick to lash out the second Sepper grabbed her, but it hadn’t been enough, and, when Yang had finally lost her temper and used her Semblance, the teacher had twisted her sword in a circle, throwing up a momentary blizzard, blinding Yang long enough for her to appear and get a solid slash right across the girl’s unprotected stomach, dropping her below fifty percent Aura.

Blake’s fight had turned into an extended game of keep-away, the Faunus using her clones as she threw everything she had at the older woman, who was always, merely, *not where the attack landed.* Not teleporting, merely sidestepping, a swing of her sword had finally let off a wave of fire that’d covered a quarter of the field, *after* Blake had already clone-dodged, catching her solidly, and following with a few more solid hits while the girl was off-balance, ending it.

Nora’s fight had started to be a shut-out, until the girl had popped a glowing electric pill from her belt and crushed it between her teeth, bright yellow lightning wreathing her form as she screamed in momentary pain, before turning into megalomaniacal laughter, the electricity turning the same pink as her skirt.

Sepper had hesitated, teleporting away as the ginger-hair girl had blasted forward, blows beyond even anything *I* could produce, shockwaves created by the swings of her hammer pushing the older woman back, and, when the teacher had stepped behind her with a teleportation, Nora had displayed ungodly reflexes as she’d spun, firing the hammer to go even faster, slamming the weapon into the woman’s hurried guard and sending her flying backwards.

From there, the teacher had peppered Nora with blasts of fire from her sword, teleporting to always stay out of reach, until the girl’s Aura had dropped below 50%

Ruby’s battle with our teacher had started with the girl adopting her older sister’s strategy of constant movement, but turned up to eleven, and with judicious use of Crescent Rose’s sniper capability. It quickly turned into a Jumper’s Melee, the small girl able to move so fast she practically teleported, while our teacher *actually* did so. However, between the two of them, Mrs. Supper was *far* more skilled, appearing in the best body positions to take advantage of their ever-changing locations, while Ruby needed a moment to swing her Scythe.

Mine own battle was. . . well, it was a shitshow. I couldn’t fight with my weapon well enough to fight her that way, and while I *might’ve* been able to stand up to her hand to hand, but she just used the advantage her weapon gave her, my skill not enough to disarm her.

All I got was the knowledge that, underneath her gloves, she wore a thin frame of metal that ran down each finger, her punch like that of a gauntleted fist instead of flesh and blood.

I’d taken to the air, which had helped a little, until she’d started doing odd falling teleports, coming down exclusively at first, before appearing mid-air beside me and lunging across the field.

Even just filling the arena with Flame hadn’t helped, as she’d flicked her sword, bright green teeth running down it like a chainsaw, and literally *cut through my Flames*, and then into me. She’d paused a couple of times, even once teleporting away to check her scroll, while holding a single finger up from her sword, telling me to wait.

I’d used the time to catch my breath, and try to form my Fire into a weapon, but as soon as she hit me again my focus wavered and it came apart in my hands.

In the end, despite my best efforts, I hadn’t been able to touch her either, even if, as the fight had constantly shifted in nature, I started to feel that same adjustment of skill that’d come from first going against Pyrrha.

Now, lined up in front of her, the older woman looked us over. “You all have potential, but you all have the same weakness. Do you know what that is?”

Frowning, I looked over the rest of my team, trying to figure out the answer.

I had nothing.

“It’s our Semblances, isn’t it?” Ruby asked, getting an appreciative look from the teacher.

“Wait,” Yang objected. “Then what about Pyrrha? She *barely* used her Semblance. And I only used mine at the end.”

“Some of you over-relied on yours Semblances, some of you used it only as a trump card. It is still an issue of Semblances,” Mrs. Sepper noted. “The issue is how you think of them. A Semblance is an ability. Nothing more. Nothing less. Belladonna, why did you not use yours to attack?”

The black-haired girl who’d looked thoroughly unimpressed by our teacher, blinked, expression turning introspective. “I. I don’t know. It doesn’t work that way?” she asked more than stated.

Sepper raised an eyebrow. “Does it? Long, is yours all or nothing? Or can you use it a little? Rose, you shifted position between movements. Why not do so to set up attacks?” The teacher, to set herself up, had needed to move into the position she needed *before* she teleported, the movement one continuous shift, just with a change in location halfway through. It’s why she’d needed the blizzard to disguise her position, as my blonde teammate had started to watch her try to counter her.

The sisters shared looks. “I don’t know,” Yang replied. “Never had it not work before, ‘cept with Arcs. He had me training to fight without it, and save it when I needed it.”

As the older woman’s gaze shifted to me, only inquisitive instead of judging, I shrugged. “Didn’t check to see if it was fractional. I just assumed her power was a toggle, since that’s how she used it.” The fact that such a thing hadn’t been listed in the GURPS books had also suggested she *couldn’t*, but, in retrospect, that only meant that she’d never developed it *in that direction*.

The unimpressed look she gave me annoyed me, but, if it helped make Yang a better fighter, it was worth it. Turning back to my teammate, the teacher instructed, “Find out by Thursday.”

Looking over Nora, Pyrrha, and myself, the old woman asked, “How long have you known about your Semblances?”

“A couple of months,” I replied. “Ozpin has been helping me with it.” The woman narrowed her eyes, before nodding, and turning to Nora.

“A couple years. But I never thought of using Dust until last week! Thanks, Fearless Leader!” the Valkyrie cheered, shooting Ruby a broad smile.

The girl in question held her hands up, “It’s no big. I just thought. You use lightning. Lightning Dust exists, and, like, we have a Weiss. Why not combine the two? Like chocolate and peanut butter. Or chocolate and bananas. Or chocolate and caramel. Or, um, sorry, I just like chocolate,” she muttered, under Mrs. Sepper’s stare.

The teacher turned to Pyrrha, who reddened, and answered, quietly, “Seven years.”

“Then you need to make a decision, Nikos,” Sepper stated coldly. “Which is more important to you. Your Pride? Or your teammates lives?”

Yang took a step forward, “Hey, that’s not fair! Pyrrha’s, like, the least prideful person I know!”

However my partner winced. “No, Yang. No, she’s. . . she’s right. I was told not to use my Semblance openly, when I was at Sanctum.”

“What? Why?” my fellow blonde asked, confused.

However it was Ruby that responded. “It’s ‘cause you look more impressive if they don’t know what you can do? Isn’t it?” Pyrrha nodded, and Ruby turned to her sister. “Like Dad’s Semblance, or Uncle Qrow’s. If you didn’t know better, you’d think they were better than they were. Well, with Qrow’s you’d think the other guy was just worse. I mean, they’re good, but-”

“No, I got ya Rubes,” she said, turning to her red-headed teammate. “Is that true?”

Pyrrha hesitated. “They did not say so, but yes, I believe so.” She smiled wryly, shooting Yang an amused look. “I’ve never had it not work before.”

“Why her *teammates* lives?” Blake asked, looking at our teacher. “Normally it’s your pride or *your* life.”

“It is that as well,” Sepper agreed easily. “However, risking your life for your pride can be seen as noble. Risking your allies lives for your pride is not. And making yourself weaker for your pride, or dying because of it, is putting the lives of the allies that rely on you in danger.”

The others fell silent, and I asked, “And what about me?”

“What about you?” the teacher asked. “The Headmaster is personally instructing you. Do you think I could teach you more than he is?”

Frowning, I slowly said, “Yes? Or if not more in general, then more in specific fields. He doesn’t know everything.”

*That* got me a measuring look. “You learn by fighting. Keep doing that. And stop assuming that others know more than you do.”

I started to reply, pausing. “Are you telling me to be *more* arrogant?” I asked, incredulous, wondering if I’d heard her right.

At the woman’s unamused expression, I hadn’t, but I was honestly confused. Pyrrha, thankfully, came to my rescue. “She means don’t assume that, just because someone does something a way, that is because they have tried other things and found their way was best. Like Yang. Or like me.”

“Now if you could use that insight on your Semblance, you would be a danger, Nikos. You have your assignments, now leave. I don’t want to see you until next Thursday.”

Ruby frowned. “Thursday? But what about class on Monday?”

For the first time, Mrs. Sepper truly smiled.

It was *terrifying.*

“That will be the ***Remedial*** lesson.”