

# CLOSER THAN EVER

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BY CHALDEACHANGE



It wasn't often that Ruby Rose received mail during her stay at Beacon Academy. Things came from her uncle now and again, of course, but she didn't exactly have a ton of connections outside of the school. Most of the people she knew? They were her fellow students! She saw them on the daily, so there wasn't really any reason for them to write her letters or send her packages.

That was why she was so excited to find a box sitting in front of her dorm room door when she got back from classes with Yang that evening. **"Yang! It's addressed to both of us! I wonder what it is! I wonder what it is!?"** Her excitement soon led to the girl shaking the box violently while listening to something or other rattling around inside.

Yang, on the other hand, gently shoved Ruby through the open door. **"Be careful! Whatever it is, you don't want to break it! Who's it from anyways? Taiyang?"** Her father was the only person she could think of that would send them anything. Growing impatient because her little sister was too slow to answer, she snatched the box to the sound of a *'HEY!'* from Ruby. **"Huh. No return sender? But if it got through Beacon's security, it must be safe. Maybe the return label fell off?"**

She dropped the box back into Ruby's hands, knowing her little sis would be upset if she opened the box herself. So Ruby did the honors, and like a ravenous animal at that. It didn't take her long to pull out the contents, scraps of cardboard now scattered across their dorm room floor like rose petals. And so the girl held up the contents triumphantly. **"TADAA! JEWELRY! ...Wait, jewelry!?"**



It wasn't exactly the sort of thing she was *expecting* to find in there; two gold bracelets that appeared way too big? Yang didn't think so since she snatched one of them and shoved it over her right hand before giving a wave as she walked into the bathroom. **"Yup! Jewelry! You never know, Rubes! You might like wearing some if you tried! I'm going to freshen up though, so I'll be out in a little bit!"**

**"Jewelry just isn't for me!"** The younger sister called back to the sound of laughter echoing from within the bathroom. Ruby plopped her butt on the nearest bed with the bracelet in her hands. Was it real gold? The band was really wide and thick! After a moment of

deliberation though, she took her sister's words to heart. **"I guess there's no harm in trying..."** And so, she slid it on.

It was far too loose, of course. It kept sliding up and down her arm! Just as she thought about taking it off, though? The band suddenly tightened – so much so that she couldn't even pry it off. **"Uh, Yang!? I think something's wrong with this bracelet!"**

No reply.

**"Uhh... Yang!? Come on! This bracelet is stuck! I could really use your strength right about now!"** Silence from her older certain was the scariest thing of all. Yang wasn't the type of person to not talk if addressed, if only because she enjoyed talking *so much*. Ruby had even seen fit to knock on the door, still receiving no reply in return. Her knocking did end up interrupted, but only because of a sharp pain beneath the bracelet. **"Ow!?"**

Was the bracelet getting even smaller!? No, that didn't look like the case. Instead there were a number of strange symbols glowing on the surface, and the pain? It almost felt a little *warm*, like something was flowing into her. Which it was. An energy that didn't exist in Remnant, at least not in this form. An energy called *mana*.

The pain eventually subsided, but the warmth not only persisted, but it also spread up her arm and throughout her body as well. Every part of her body that warmed became still, and that included her face – mouth and all. She couldn't cry out or anything of the sort. Was this why Yang didn't reply to her? Was she experiencing a similar phenomenon? But *why!?*

Unbeknownst to Ruby, her very eyes were taking on a color similar to that of the gem of her namesake. The mysterious silver colors they possessed brightened gleefully with a ruby red – while more mysteriously still her black pupils shone white amongst this red. The girl's eyes were always so bright and wide, but with this color change also came a change to their resting shape. Her light was lost, and optics narrowed ever so slightly.

“*Nn...!?*” She was paralyzed, but Ruby was trying with all her might to make some sort of noise. If she could get someone's attention then maybe she could get some sort of help? *But why would I rely on a human for help? We're stronger than them. What!?* Why would she possibly think that!? Why would she think of herself as something superior to a human!?

While panicking internally, the color literally faded straight out of her hair. Not the black, of course. That color persisted despite it all. But the red that dyed her tips? The red she'd inherited from her mother? It was removed by the mana flowing through her veins, leaving her head of hair *completely* black. Otherwise her hairstyle didn't change a whole lot, although her bangs did end up much more centered than they'd been before.

*Do my muscles feel stronger? Of course, we're meant to be stronger than any human could ever be. We!?* Why do I keep thinking 'we' like there's more than one of me!? It really *was* weird. There weren't plural Rubys... one would hope. But these thoughts felt more as if she were thinking about herself as part of some sort of *collective*.

Her question wasn't off the mark though. The Huntress-in-training had asked because her muscles, frozen as they were, just felt firmer through the sensation of her skin just feeling more restrictive. Her muscles had certainly bulged with strength and that skin was straining a little more to contain this power – largely around her arms and belly.

But overall? Ruby's body didn't experience a ridiculous amount of change. Her height sprung up a single inch, and her breasts grew just a little bit plumper beneath her dress, but a lot of it was minor changes. The removal of callouses upon her arms and legs, the erasure of cuts and scars that had plagued her mortal body, and a leanness that took

some of the baby fat out of her face. Otherwise? It was like she was being shoved into a role that she was already almost the perfect model to fulfill.

Slowly but surely the warmth began to fade, and her paralysis wore off. Rather than cry out for help like she'd intended though, the girl didn't say much of anything. "**Huh?**" That sound was all she could muster, the most she cared to express to show any confusion about her circumstances. Rather than be confused about the effects she'd suffered and the condition of her body... *This room is unfamiliar.* Even though it was her *own* room.

She stepped away from the bathroom door, unsure of why she had been trying to enter it, and as she did? A pair of something began to bulge out of the top of her head. Little by little, small nubs erupted up and bent back slightly with a joint, black feathers emerging from these growths to create a tiny pair of wings upon her head. Were she still of sound mind as Ruby Rose, she might have identified these as the traits of a Faunus. As she was now, though? She had no idea what that word meant.

The final piece of the puzzle, Ruby's dress, was the other bookend to the effects enforced upon her by the mana contained by the bracelet. White stole away blacks and red alike, skirt deflating into simple, snow drapes that exposed her legs while the top exposed her tummy in a cutout. The cloth that was wrapped around her chest hardened into silver armor, and even Ruby's hooded, crimson cape whitened – now bound around her neck by a brown belt.

Subconsciously, she flipped her hood up and over her head to disguise her wings, and not long after a weight plagued her left arm. A big, golden shield now rested there, imbued with similar runes to those on the bracelet she wore on her right. Decorative, golden wings appeared to wrap around her hips, and she ended up adjusting them with her fingers as if she was used to them *always* being there. "**That's more comfortable.**" Why had it all felt so dissheveled before though? *I should always remain dressed in our uniform. It demonstrates the unity between us.*

The Valkyrie, *Ortlinde*, member of Walküre, shook her head from side to side after pulling her white hood up and over her head. All of her previous energy and enthusiasm had dried away, leaving her dull in both expression and tone of voice. Thoughts surrounding her own identity felt, quite honestly, jumbled. For a brief moment she believed herself to be human before common sense corrected her to the contrary.

"**Where...?**" Just as alarming as her jarred identity was her surroundings. She didn't know where she was or how she'd gotten here.

It looked to be a human bedroom of some sort? But why did they require five beds? Humans would forever be beyond her understanding.

Just as she thought she was alone though, a nearby door opened and another Valkyrie stepped out. With blonde hair and wings sprouting from her head, she was dressed the same way as Ortlinde was. And the moment their eyes met? Something clicked in a strangely intimate way. Their thoughts and memories all blended together until it was almost like they shared a consciousness of sorts, though their personalities distinguished them as individuals enough at the same time.



“**Thrud.**” A name came to Ortlinde’s mind while looking at the blonde. In human terms, she was a Valkyrie that was something like an *older sister* to Ortlinde, but neither of them realized just how on the nose that was. “**Do you know why we’re here?**”

Unfortunately, the blonde shook her head. “**I have no idea, Ortlinde. I just ‘woke up’ here.**” Neither of them was even sure if ‘woke up’ was the right term as they shared memories about their origin points. “**I suppose we’ll need to gather intelligence and judge our next move from that point on. After all, this does not feel like Chaldea.**”

Little did they know how much chaos they’d cause by flying around Beacon’s campus with the energy wings that had just spawned behind them.