**Chapter Twenty-Seven**

With a supreme force of will, I pulled myself up and out from between Yang’s legs, thankful for the fact that we were both clothed.

“Pyrrha said you’d be cool with us sharing you,” the blonde said, concerned, sitting up herself, bravado fading fast and worry quickly replacing it. “So, what’s the problem?”

“The problem is I would’ve liked to *be part of this discussion,”* I snapped as I stood, and she flinched, causing me to sigh. “Sorry. I just have a. . . *thing* about open communication, and this *isn’t.*”

I was almost certain this wasn’t some kind of ploy to steal me away from Pyrrha, and even having two girls interested in me enough for that to be an *option* was odd, but if Yang was one thing, she was *impulsive*. Reflexively summoning my scroll to me, I opened it up and called my not-so-secret girlfriend. “Yes, Jaune?” she replied, voice perfectly pleasant.

“Hi. Just heard the most *interesting* thing from Yang,” I replied, unable to keep the annoyance out of my tone.

“Oh, that,” Pyrrha replied, voice still placid, though I could hear someone in the background. “It’s fine with me.”

*. . . well, at least I know this isn’t stupid teen drama. But is it something worse?*

“Pyrrha?” I asked, with forced calm.

There was a hesitation on the other end. “Yes, Jaune?”

“Unless what you’re doing can’t wait, *come down here, so all three of us can talk,*” I ordered. “I *don’t* appreciate surprises like this, and I thought you knew that.”

“. . . I’ll be there in five. Bye!” she replied, with practiced cheer, and hung up.

Yang got to her feet, standing awkwardly. “So. . . trouble in paradise?” she tried to say it as a joke, but the underlying tension was clear, even to me.

I pinched the bridge of my nose. “Imagine you were dating someone, and another guy came up to you, started flirting, kissed you, and said your boyfriend was cool with it.”

“. . . oh,” the brawler said in a small voice. “But I wouldn’t do that! I’m not that type of girl!” she objected, getting offended.

Nodding, I looked over at her. “I’m aware, which is why the issue isn’t. . . *this,*” I waved between us. “But the fact that Pyrrha neglected to so much as mention it. I *don’t* cheat, and something that even has the appearance of betraying someone’s trust like that. . . not a good way to start.”

Yang grimaced, likely seeing things from my point of view. “Yeah. . . that could’ve been done better.”

“So,” I asked after another long moment of awkward silence, “when did the two of you decide. . . this?”

Looking at her, Yang was suddenly looking anywhere but at me. “. . . Yesterday. Night.”

*Definitely impulsive,* I thought. “Well, I can’t say you didn’t seize your first opportunity.”

She scoffed, “Yang Xiao Long doesn’t hesitate!”

Giving her a flat look, I reminded her, “The first time we kissed.”

She froze, then laughed awkwardly. “That was. . . a strategic withdrawal. Yeah, totes a SW to, like marshal my forces and stuff.”

“Uh-huh,” I replied, my disbelief clear,

Thankfully, for both of us, the door opened, Pyrrha walking in. “Hello!” she greeted us both brightly, pausing as she looked at us. “Oh.”

“Yes, ‘oh’,” I replied, still annoyed. “Pyrrha, when were you going to tell me you wanted to add Yang to. . . whatever we have.”

“Sorry,” she apologized, and she seemed sincere. “And, well, tomorrow. After our spar.”

“After the spar, or after the sex?” I asked dryly, Yang’s head snapping over to me.

“What the fuck, Jaune?” the blonde swore.

“No, *after* the fucks, Yang,” I replied, getting a laugh out of my girlfriend, still interested in her answer. “So, Pyrrha.”

She winced. “After the sex,” she admitted. “I thought it’d help.”

I sighed. “Okay, first of all, it’d do the *exact opposite.* If I thought you were trying to manipulate me, which you would be doing, even if it’s to help me, my knee-jerk reaction is not only to say no, but *hell no.*”

“Sorry,” Pyrrha apologized again. “But you said you liked her, and I thought this would solve both our problems. You could publicly date her, while being with both of us. I’d just be ‘friends’ with both of you.”

I blinked, trying to follow that logic. “And the fact that, if it ever got out, it’d make you look like a homewrecker?”

“Worth the risk,” she shrugged, as if that was no big loss.

Yang, looking between the two of us, spoke up, “That’s what we talked about, but, Jaune, you *do* you like me? Right? I mean, what’s not to like?”

The statement was full of bravado, but there was an underlying vulnerability to the statement that, had I been younger, I would’ve likely missed. Glancing towards Pyrrha, she nodded in the other girl’s direction, smirking, and I sighed.

“Jaune? What’s- *woah!”* Yang said as I turned and marched right up to her. Following my instincts, I reached down, one hand going to her head, tilting it upwards, while the other wrapped around her, pulling her crushingly tight to me as I leaned down, kissing her deeply.

She froze, before she seemed to melt in my arms, but not going loose. No, instead her arms wrapped around me, pulling us together even tighter, as, nibbling on her bottom lip, she moaned into my mouth, pulling herself up to rub against my breastplate.

I let the moment drag for several pleasurably seconds, before, gently but firmly, pushing her away. She blinked, giving an adorable *“no”* without meaning to, before collecting herself. “Why’d we stop?” she asked, flush, looking at me with desire.

“Because that was me giving you your response,” I replied. “Okay, I know I’ve been sheltered, so I might be missing something obvious, like the ‘give everyone Aura’ thing, but why are you both on-board with this. Everyone in my town was, well, monogamous. Not duogamaous. Bi-relationshipal? *This,*” I stressed, motioning between the three of us. “I’m not saying no, I’m *really* leaning towards yes, to be honest, but I need to know *why.*”

“Well, in Mistral, things are different for the rich and powerful,” Pyrrha stated, without a hint of shame. “I’m sure you’ve both heard how. . . corrupt things can be there?”

“I thought that was a stereotype,” Yang argued, the two obviously not having talked much about this.

“Because it’s true,” Pyrrha agreed readily. “And Huntsman are powerful to start with. A huntsman of your abilities. . .” she shrugged. “I know you’re new to this, Jaune, but the things you can do? They’re not natural.”

I winced at the term, and Pyrrha revised her statement. “Sorry, I mean they’re. . . very, very unusual. If you become even half the Huntsman I *know* you will be, then your having a mistress, especially one famous in her own right? I doubt most of the elites would so much as blink.” She laughed, “It might even make you look better. Brothers knows *I’ve* received enough ‘offers’, it might be worth it to ‘leak’ the secret myself. I considered a few but they were. . . weak, not just of body, but of spirit as well.”

*Holy shit, I’m dating Red Sonja,* I thought, and had to smile. *I’m totally okay with this.* “Glad I pass, though I’d rather have a partner than a mistress.”

“Why not both?” she suggested with a teasing grin.

Shaking my head, I turned to Yang. “Okay, so that’s apparently a thing in Mistral, but you’re from Vale.”

“Patch, actually,” she disagreed, and I wondered what the difference was. “And I had two Moms, so I don’t get what the big deal is. Just. . .” she paused. “Hypothetically, if I were to, after I had a daughter, leave her with you and take off, not bothering to say anything at all. What would you do?”

That was. . . *oddly specific.* I knew Ruby and Yang were half-sisters, but not what’d happened to them, only that the sword-wielding goth version of Yang that portaled in during the train scene was apparently her mother. The thought of having Yang, only to lose her, though. . . it disturbed me. “I’d leave our daughter with Pyrrha, and track your ass down to find out *why* you left, and it’d have to be a *damn* good reason. And even then, if you had to, I don’t know, ‘stay away for my safety’ or something, I’d get strong enough that that’d no longer be an excuse, and then *make* you come home if you were just being dumb. I mean, that’s kinda possessive, I guess, but-”

“No. No that’s. . . good,” Yang interrupted, expression uncharacteristically serious.

Pyrrha, who walked up beside me, added, “One small problem.” When we were both looking at her, she stated, “I’d be right there with you to get her back.”

“Okay,” I replied, reworking the plan. “We’d leave your daughter with Ruby, and we’d *both* find out what the hell was going on.”

“Uh, Rubes would be right there with ya both,” Yang disagreed, laughing a little.

Rolling my eyes, I chuckled as well. “Okay, Pyrrha, what are *your* parents like?”

“They’re lovely people,” she replied instantly.

I paused, “Are we talking actually good people, or,” I used air quotes, “‘*lovely people’?”*

That got a concerned look. “What are you. . . *oh,”* she said, seemingly understanding something I more than what I meant. “Yes, Jaune, they are honestly good people.”

Turning back to Yang, I nodded, “Okay, we’d leave your daughter with *Pyrrha’s* parents and all *three* would do what was needed to get your head out of your ass.”

Yang laughed, but her expression turned somber. “So you wouldn’t say things like ‘she made her choice’, or ‘I have to respect her wishes’, or ‘It’s not my place to say’?”

Pyrrha asked gently, “Yang, is there something you want to talk about?”

“Just, just answer the question, okay!” the blonde insisted.

“Yang,” I said, putting my hand on her shoulder. “Think about what just happened. I was told something, something that I was *completely okay with,* and I *still* ***needed*** to know *why.* What makes you think something like that, if our relationship even end up *going* that far, would result with me just shrugging and going ‘whatevs’?”

“And if she had a good reason?” Yang pressed. “Would you tell your daughter?”

“Duh?” I replied, before shaking my head at the blonde’s hurt look. “Sorry. That sounded glib. *Yes.* I’d frame it the best way I could, and if there were things my daughter wasn’t old enough to deal with, I’d *tell her so*, but I’m Mr. Communication. Speaking of which,” I turned to look at my girlfriend, was looking back at me with a fond smile. “Pyrrha.”

“Yes, Jaune?” she asked, voice filled with repressed mirth.

“When we graduate, we can take our *own* missions, right?” I checked. “Do our own thing?

She tilted her head, and nodded. “Yes, we can. As long as we exterminate Grimm as we do so.”

“And those missions let us cross national boarders, right?” I continued.

Now slightly more confused, she nodded again. “Yes, we can.”

“Okay, first mission we’re doing when we graduate is tracking down Yang’s mom and finding out why she’s being such a bitch,” I decided.

“*Jaune,*” Pyrrha chided. “Don’t call Yang’s mother a bitch.”

“Nah, she’s totally a bitch,” Yang disagreed, grinning, the smile faltering slightly. “But. . . really?”

I shrugged, “Yes? You’re our friend, *my* friend at the very least, since I don’t like to speak for other people. I’d do that for you even if I *wasn’t* dating you, while also secretly dating Pyrrha.”

“You’re my friend as well,” Pyrrha confirmed. “And, yes, that sounds like a plan Jaune.”

Yang took a step back, looking at both of us. “Really? All I’ve got is a picture,” she warned. “Not even a name.”

That. . . sounded wrong. “Okay Pyrrha, first step is to interrogate Yang’s *dad* to find out Yang’s *mom’s* name. Then we’ll use *that* to find out more about her, so we can figure out where’s she’s fucked off to.”

“You. . . you guys are really gonna do this?” Yang asked. I glanced to Pyrrha, who smiled at me, and we both looked at her, nodding in unison. “You. . .” the blonde said again, rushing us both, grabbing us in a hug that was *actually* a bit painful, even *with* Aura.

*“That’s a little tight,”* wheezed Pyrrha, thoroughly squished against me.

“Sorry!” Yang said, letting up a little. “Jaune?”

“Yes?” I replied.

“*This* is why I’m okay with this,” she told me, her head pressed against my shoulder. “None of my friends ever offered to help.”

“Then they’re shit friends,” I replied automatically, getting an unhappy laugh from the blonde. “We’re a team, and that means we’re supposed to help each other where we can. For you that’s apparently your mother. For Pyrrha, I *guess* its her fame. For Blake, it’s her general cattiness.”

*“Jaune,*” Pyrrha chided.

“And for me, it’s my everything,” I replied, extracting an arm from Yang’s grip, to better hug her, the redhead beside me following suite.

“Well, this isn’t how I expected today to go,” Pyrrha commented with a smile.

Looking at her, I asked, “Is that a bad thing?”

Shaking her head, she replied. “No. Just unusual.”

*“Same,”* Yang added, and I could easily hear the smile in her voice.

<DR>

After that, we all just hung out, relaxing with each other in our room. Blake gave us a weird look when she came back from wherever she’d gone to, but hadn’t said anything. Weiss’s next lesson, ‘Scrolls for Dummies, Especially Jaune’ had been unfortunately named, but both truthful and useful. The fact that, by the end of it, *everyone* other than Blake was taking notes helped me ignore the insulting name, and had made the day rather enjoyable, Weiss drinking up the academic attention like it was a fine wine.

Once more classes continued, Glynda informing me that I’d start fighting next week, a declaration which had, for some reason, elicited nervous looks from some of my classmates. Similarly, the field trip was cancelled, with an announcement that they’d found out the issue, a combination of unusual Semblance interactions and negligent professional Huntsman. Unstated but clear was the message of how, when our fellow *students* were huntsman, half-assing a job could get people killed, like *they* almost were.

However, while I’d shot Pyrrha a look that asked ‘Training, then *‘training’*?’, before class could end Glynda announced, “Mr. Arc. Please come with me. Everyone else can leave.” The other students dutifully filed, but my team stuck by. “Ms. Rose, you can leave,” Goodwitch stressed.

“Um, is Jaune in trouble?” Ruby asked, worried, and I glanced at the professor, wondering the same thing.

“No,” the vice-headmistress replied. “The Headmaster wants to discuss something with him. It involves his Semblance.”

“Oh, really?” I asked, and the older woman nodded. Turning to the others, I told them. “You know how we *all* talked to Oz? We talked about my fire breath, and some of the problems I’ve been having with it.”

As one, the others, save Weiss, glanced down at my mask, then back up at me. “Ooooooh!” Ruby articulated. “Oh, that’s good. See you later, Jaune!”

I nodded, Pyrrha giving me a questioning look, and I shook my head, telling her not to worry. “See you guys later.”

Following Glynda out through the back door, we walked down a fairly empty hallway. “That was well done, Mr. Arc. I didn’t think you capable of such subterfuge.”

I winced, realizing I’d just shown I was a halfway decent liar to someone I was kind of lying to. “I don’t like lying, but that doesn’t mean I’m bad at it. As my father liked to say, ‘there’s a difference between can’t, and choose not to’. And I’m assuming I’m *not* misleading them on why I’m talking to the headmaster?”

“You’re not,” the totally-not-a-sexy-librarian noted, and I kept my eyes forward, stopping there and not giving me anything else to chew on to figure out what the Wizard needed me for.

Following her, I was eventually led to an elevator and a familiar looking training space, the same kind of one that I’d first experimented with Dust in, maybe even the exact same room. Inside, at a table, sat Ozpin, sipping tea, most of the room a cleared space, targets arranged along a far wall, and Dust in vials next to him.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Arc,” the headmaster greeted. “Tea?”

“Sure,” I replied, sitting across from him. “So, if you don’t mind me asking, why am I here?”

Ozpin took a long sip of his tea, before pouring out a cup for me. “I do not,” he stated blandly, waving for me to take the cup. I did so, and he informed me, “You are here because of your. . . *Semblance*. It is dangerous, to you and others, and as such you require instruction.”

I shot him a questioning glance, but he turned and addressed Glynda, “Thank you, Miss Goodwitch. I believe I can handle things from here.”

The blonde woman looked between the two of us, frowning, before nodding and walking out.

“Now I am not so presumptuous to inform you that you *must* take the help I offer,” Ozpin informed me, after she left, “though I’m sure she would disagree. No, Mr. Arc, I merely offer my assistance.”

I took my mask down, noting the headmaster didn’t so much as twitch at my scars, and too a sip.

Something bounced off my defenses as I did so.

Taking another, small sip I felt the sensation again. *Was it poisoned?* I thought, tensing. *Truth serum? Something to make me suggestable?* “And if I say no?” I asked, carefully, trying to figure out what to do next.

The Wizard shrugged. “Then I ask you to use this room, until you can be sure you won’t hurt yourself or others, at least accidentally.” Reaching over, he picked up the pot and topped off his own cup, taking another sip. “Something wrong with the tea? It’s one of my personal blends, and something of an acquired taste.”

I looked at him, trying to figure out his game. Taking another sip, not foolish enough to let whatever it was affect me just because he was drinking it as well, there was something familiar to it, from Jaune’s memories. Taking a gamble, I made a slight face, putting the cup down. “Not a fan of calming teas. Chemically induced peace isn’t peace at all.”

“Ah, understood,” Ozpin nodded, taking another sip.

*Was I right, or is he just letting me believe I’m right?* I wondered. I could think of a number ways to poison someone, and drink from the same pot as he’d just done. Drugs with minimum effective levels that required more than a couple diluted sips. Having the Antidote already in his cup. Having the poison already in *my* cup. Have a poison that was lighter so it sat on top of the tea at rest, going fully into the first pour, but not the second. And that was *before* I took into account him being a *literal wizard.*

“Hmm, I can see you have some reservations, and, I admit, perhaps starting off our meeting with recreational drug use, however mild or legal, might have put the wrong foot forward,” the white-haired man noted, smiling to himself. “Would you permit me to offer my help now, and decide later?”

I hesitated, before nodding, slowly. “I don’t see why not, but, I have to ask. . . *why?*”

“Did I not say? To help you with your Semblance,” he repeated, with seeming honesty.

“You did, but you just as easily could’ve just directed me towards this room and walked away, like you did before. I’m certain you have other things you need to attend to,” I pointed out. It’s what my parents did, and my teachers, and really anyone that was supposed to teach me. ‘Here’s the basics, if you don’t automatically get it all you’re dumb and I’m not going to explain why’ had been what all the recriminations had boiled down to. I’d gotten good enough at teaching myself to get by, but when it came to things like this. . . well, I wasn’t expecting this.

“I’m aware you are training with Miss Nikos,” Ozpin noted. “Is it so surprising I would wish to instruct one of my students.”

Shaking my head, I countered, “It benefits *her* to train me. We’re partners, and on the same team, so improving my skill improves her chances for survival, and means she has to do less to carry the team. What do *you* get out of this?”

He regarded me curiously, before sitting back, and taking another sip. “The same, though not as direct a benefit. The Grimm are a threat to us all. You have the potential to, with training, and with time to come into your own, break a Tide single-handedly. Why wouldn’t I wish for such an arrow in my quiver?”

That. . . made sense, actually. Especially if you didn’t know I’d eventually be able to leave Remnant behind. “And if, after I graduate, I go somewhere else? Vacuo, Mistral, or Atlas?”

“Would you still fight the Grimm?” he asked in return.

I gave the Wizard a deadpan stare. “No, I’ll *help* the forces of *literal darkness* that want to destroy all humanity in general, and *me in particular*.”

“It would be a dark day for us all if you did,” Ozpin noted, though he smiled as he did so. “As long as you fight the Grimm, no matter where you do so, my efforts will be repaid several times over.”

He sat back, taking more sips of his tea, and waited.

“Okay. Fine. What do I do?” I finally asked. “We’re here to train my Semblance, what’s the first step?”

“Well, your breath seems to be the most important factor,” the Wizard noted. “Far more than your wings, which you seem proficient with. Perhaps we should start with that?”

Shrugging, I leaned back in my own chair, and spat a ball of flame into my hand. Looking over, Ozpin had paused, mid-sip, and seeing me look, completed the motion.

“I see you have already done some experimentation of your own. How did you know it would not burn you?” he questioned.

“Because it’s *my* fire?” I asked back, not seeing why so many people asked that. “It’s not going to burn me.”

Ozpin nodded. “Ah, of course. Though, if that is the case, then how did. . .” he waved around his mouth.

“My fire is mine, Dust is *not,*” I explained. “It’s got an. . . *intention* of its own. Burn. Freeze. Crush. Blow. To ask it not to do what it *is* is. . . like asking water not to make things wet.” I listened to what I just said, and to the centuries old immortal at that, and laughed, “Or I’m talking out of my ass. Never *touched* Dust before I got here.”

“You’re partially correct,” the Wizard informed me, reaching over and taking the light green vial of Wind Dust from its place in the rack. Pouring out a few grains, they seemed. . . *dimmer* than I remembered. Picking up one, he waved a hand, and an unseen wind blew down the range hitting the target, the metal human outline not moving in the slightest. Picking up another, he paused, eyes narrowing, and flicked his hand.

This time the wind whistled, and a thin sliver of metal was sliced off the top of the target.

“Dust at its basest is as you described,” the Headmaster instructed. “But, with skill, it is much more varied than that. ‘Blow’ can cut. ‘Crush’ can strike. ‘Burn’ can bash. And, as you’ve seen from Miss Schnee, ‘Freeze’ can pierce, shield, and much more. However, you said that Dust *gives* your fire the ‘intention’ it holds?” I nodded. “Then perhaps we should leave Dust alone for now, and focus on working with your fire by itself.”

That made a certain amount of sense. “Master the fundamentals, and everything else will follow,” I quoted, nodding. “So, it’s fire, or at least it looks like fire, but I’m not even sure if it will burn people.”

“Does it burn the Grimm? They are notoriously resistant to flame,” Ozpin asked.

“Melts them like wax, but it also puts itself out, for some reason.” I crushed the fire in my hands, until it was little more then a candle-flame, not pushing it into my gloves, but the air itself, like I’d seen happen at Home. I blinked, as the air seemed. . . cleaner, if only for a moment. Pushing that thought to the side for later, I dropped the small bit of fire on the table, waving to the Wizard to do his thing.

Ozpin regarded the fire curiously, reaching inside his jacket to pull out a notebook. Tearing off a page, he tried to feed it into my fire, only to poke it instead, pushing it slightly, eyebrows raising. Putting it over the fire *did* light it, the fire mostly normal, but hints of other colors, greens, purples, and blues, danced within.

Taking another grain of Wind Dust in his free hand, holding the burning paper in the other, the headmaster inhaled, before breathing out in a slow stream, the small flames exploding into a roaring conflagration. could easily feel the heat coming off the man’s own fire breath, which mostly like regular fire, but with unnatural bits running through it that marked it as something *other.*

However, *I* had no connection to it, and the flames burned themselves out, while my single flame, still somehow a part of me, remained burning merrily on the table.

“Yes, I believe it will burn people,” the Wizard noted dryly. Moving a finger towards my flame keeping it low, he got close, as if to push it, paused, then pulled his hand back. “Most certainly.”

Leaving the fire there, I spat another into my hand, my reserves already refilled. “Okay, what now?” I asked.

Brown eyes regarded the flame. “How are you holding it. Does it group together, like a gel?

That. . . .was a good question. Looking at the fire in my hands, I wondered if it was a solid, or a liquid. As if in response to my thoughts, the fire suddenly came apart, running in rivulets between my fingers and down my arm. *“Shit!*” I swore, frantically trying to catch it, only for it to reform into a solid mass, except for the parts that’d already dropped from my hand onto the floor, but leaning down I easily collected it all into a single piece again.

“It’s, um, yes?” I offered, as the Wizard chuckled. “Help?”

“You seem to be able to control it, so long as you touch it, and regain control when you reestablish contact,” he offered. “Perhaps form a cube?”

Concentrating, I tried to shape the fire. I’d seen Professor Tim do it with Fire Dust to make his ‘demon’ guise, so, if this was anything close to Fire Dust flames, and considering I could mix the two it probably was, it *should* be possible.

However, there was a great deal of difference between *possible* and *easily achievable.*

Getting it to clump was easy, but shifting it to an actual *square?* Flame was many things, but *flat* and *edged* weren’t either of them. The top of it still burned like normal fire, but, as I concentrated on it, it started to tamp down without the base shrinking. If anything, it grew slightly.

It still burned, but, as I pulled it in tighter and tighter, it became less ephemeral fire and more solid flame. However, as soon as I stopped concentrating on one part to try to pull in the others, it flared outwards, requiring me to hold it in, like plugging a dozen leaks with only two hands. You could get four or five, but when you tried to reach for the sixth, one of the others started to flow once more.

“Okay, this needs work, but *why?”* I finally asked, frustrated.

Ozpin silently measured out three Fire Dust grains, and I looked at them with reflexive trepidation. The first grain was picked up, and a foot-wide fireball was thrown into a target, splashing harmlessly over it. A second was formed into tight ball, six inches across, and fired, deforming the metal of the middle of the target slightly, the impact point glowing red hot. The third, was formed into a spiraled lance, which formed over the man’s hand. Raising it, he pointed his arm, wreathed in fire at the target.

It pierced the ‘head’, burying itself halfway through a solid inch of metal easily, the tip sticking out the other end before it destabilized into a small explosion of flame, smaller than the first fireball, but still enough to open the hole it’d made even further.

Without a word, he turned to regard me.

“Okay, fair enough,” I grumbled, letting the fire collapse back into its normal form. “But I can work on this on my own time. Any other suggestions?”

The Wizard regarded me. “Well, I’ve found that when one follows one’s inclinations, one finds it much easier to perfect one’s skills. Tell me, Mr. Arc, which do you favor: Creation, or Destruction?”

“Creation,” I answered easily, as I was *literally* a dragon of creation. “It’s practically in my blood.”

“Your family *are* agriculturalists,” Ozpin nodded, smiling. “But your uses of your power seem to lean in the opposite direction.”

I waved away the comment. “Destruction is easy, Creation is much, much harder. Besides, if you want to get nitpicky, the distinctions aren’t *that* cut and dry. If I create a boulder and slam it into a window, it’s just as destroyed as if I hit it with a fireball. And if I want to make a target like that, I need to destroy rocks, get the ore, and melt it down.”

“You often need to create to destroy, and destroy to create?” The Wizard asked. “If one reduces things enough, I can understand why you’d have those objections. I was referring, however, to more general concepts. Destroy all who stand in your way, or create something better?”

“Are you saying you haven’t done both?” I shot right back, and Ozpin nodded in acknowledgement of my point. “But, in general, creation is better. ‘A rising tide lifts all ships’ just seems better to me then ‘screw you got mine’. That said, some ships *need* to be sunk, lest they capsize the rest.”

“A lesson most your age do not learn, but also one that many who do then misuse to mask and achieve their destructive desires,” he noted. “In a way, we both are oversimplifying things. Also, are you going to drink that?” he asked referring to my tea.

“Um, go ahead?” I offered, watching as he used another grain of Fire Dust to re-heat the tea, taking a sip.

“Ahh. Good tea is something that should not be wasted,” he sighed, throwing almost every idea had for how he could poison my tea, but not his, *right* out the window. “This has been an enjoyable break. But duty calls, and if *you* don’t return soon, I fear Ms. Nikos might start tearing apart my campus looking for you.”

Frowning, I checked my scroll, blinking as I saw that three hours had already passed, along with a couple missed calls, so wrapped up in trying to cube my flame that I lost track of time. “That doesn’t sound like her,” I cautioned.

“She’s already asked Glynda about your whereabouts several times,” Ozpin noted, with a smile, holding a scroll of his own with messages from the Vice-Headmistress. “But don’t worry about wasting my time, while you were working, I caught up on some of my paperwork. A headmaster’s work is never done.”

I sighed, a little relieved. If he’d spent the entire time just *watching* that’d be. . . well, it’d be creepy, but it’d also mean I owed him more than I liked. That said, “This was a whole lot of nothing. Are you sure you want to keep doing this?”

“Really? I believed these last few hours were quite productive,” he disagreed. “So I take it you wouldn’t be averse to more instruction?”

Hesitating I considered it. I hadn’t even *thought* of shaping my flame, but. . . I didn’t like owing people. However, he’d stated how I could repay him: *killing Grimm*. If he demanded more. . . we’d see. Slowly, I nodded. “If it’s not too much. Is, is there anything I could do to help?”

He glanced at the fire, still in my hands. “If you leave that with me, I might be able to determine some of its properties.”

I dropped the ball of flame in the empty teacup on the table, focusing on it to try and keep it stable, or at least as stable as I could. I could still feel its connection to me, and, drawing that down, managed to thin it down until it snapped, the fire in the cup rippling, no longer quite *mine*, but, somehow, I knew all I would need to do was touch it to reclaim it.

Nodding at what I’d made, I looked to him, and saw he was watching me. “There,” I announced. “So, same time next week?”

The Wizard shook his head. “No, next week we’ll have ‘solved’ the issue, and field trips will resume. Monday, instead of combat class with Miss Goodwitch, come here. Your instruction with Miss Nikos will more than make up for it.”

I blinked, nodding. “Then, I’ll see you then. Um,” I paused suddenly awkward. He might be an ancient being, one who would use me as a chess-piece the instant it benefited him to do so, but, regardless, he *had* helped me. “Thank you, sir.”

He returned my nervous smile, *far* out of my comfort zone, with a serene one of his own. “You’re most welcome.”

<DR>

After calming down an unexpectedly concerned Pyrrha, who was overjoyed that I was going to be receiving *personal* lessons from the Headmaster, even as part of me still wondered what his game *really* was, things returned back to normal, or as normal as things got at Beacon. We were wrapping up with the basics of Rock Dust in Tim’s class, and starting to move to water, and *everyone* was getting soaked, even Weiss.

With that, the weekend rolled around once more. However, with it, came then end of my self-imposed one month holding period. Inviting Pyrrha out for a picnic, we’d gotten away from the others, far enough away that the school was still in sight, just on the other side of the odd, invisible dividing line between ‘Beacon’ and ‘The Wild’.

We were armed, of course, but otherwise relaxed as we found a nice hill, and, with Pyrrha watching, a small smile gracing her features, I laid out the blanket, taking out the sandwiches I’d prepared, leaning on my Talent to make them the best I could without crossing the line into literally addictive.

Taking a seat, we relaxed, enjoying the food, the environment, and the company. Finally, sitting side by side, both of sipping on the non-alcoholic cocktails I’d prepped, I knew I couldn’t put it off any longer, or I might never do it.

“So, it’s been a month,” I started, and she looked to me, gaze measuring.

“Since the problems with Professor Amakuni,” she nodded, “A bit more, actually.” While she hadn’t said a word, she apparently hadn’t forgotten my declaration.

I winced. “Yeah. Sorry. Wanted to get, well, this ready,” I waved.

Looking kindly over to me, she reached over and rested a hand on my leg. “Jaune, if you don’t want to, you don’t have to.”

“*No*,” I insisted. “No, I, it’s. . . this is complicated,” I sighed, trying to figure out how to start this entire thing.

Pyrrha laughed, the sound warm and comforting. “Then take your time. We’ve got all day.”

“Unless the Grimm attack, *again,*” I argued, but I’d made sure *all* of my gear had been unenhanced, and the Grimm gave Beacon a wide berth, for some reason, so we should be fine.

“Then we’ll kill them, and go back to talking,” she countered, but said nothing else, just waiting.

*Just go for it,* I thought. “All right, this is going to sound odd, but I want you to answer me honestly, okay? Not that I think you won’t be honest,” I quickly added, “It’s just-”

She stopped me, with two fingers to my lips. Leaning languidly back, she shook her head, smiling, and said a single word. “Ask.”

*Do or die,* I thought, taking a deep breath, letting it out, and collecting myself. Sitting up straight, I looked at my partner, and started the conversation that could make or beak *everything.*

“Tell me, Pyrrha, what is your favorite fairy tale?”