**Chapter Fifty-five**

Pyrrha stared as her Jaune closed the door behind himself, back in the very much *other* world he’d entered from. Now that she was his, she could see the large, reinforced gate room on the other side, when before her eyes had just slid off it, only understanding that he left, but not any of the details.

*Well, that could have gone better,* she thought, looking to her remaining teammates. She knew Yang was boisterous, and aggressive, but had hoped their near-death experience would have knocked some sense into the girl. From what the gladiatrix could tell, what they’d experienced *had* had an effect, but not enough of one.

*Not every thrust hits,* she reminded herself, smiling to the others. “Well. That could’ve gone better.”

“You don’t say,” Blake replied, in her normal flat manner.

Yang, who, now that Jaune was gone, found her courage again, was glaring at the door. “It wasn’t my fault!” she insisted, when she saw that Pyrrha was watching her. “I was trying to say I was sorry, and he was an *asshole* about it!”

*This is going to take more work than I thought,* the gladiatrix sighed internally, but there was one thing that niggled at her. “Jaune said you apologized to him over dragging him into that criminal nightclub, but I don’t remember you saying so,” she prompted. Knowing Jaune, if Yang hadn’t actually *said* she was sorry, then he might reverse course, having gotten that fact wrong. The man was odd like that, and in many ways the opposite of Yang who wouldn’t car-

“I did after we sparred,” the brawler waved away, banishing away Pyrrha’s statement, *and* her attempt to find a way to make this right. “He was all serious about it, going on about springing it on him, and about how it wasn’t even for a good reason, and I *said* I was sorry, but this was *different!”*

“You’re right,” the gladiatrix agreed, annoyed, but hiding it. “This was a great deal worse.”

Yang scowled at her in response, but, given what she had regularly stared down, Pyrrha was not impressed. “Not you too! I *said* I was sorry!”

It was Blake who responded, from the blonde’s other side. “But what does that mean?”

Yang turned to her partner, uncomprehendingly. “What?”

“What does ‘I’m sorry’ mean?” the hidden Faunus asked.

“It means I’m sorry!” the blonde reiterated. “What *else* could it mean?”

Blake wasn’t looking at her partner, but at her own book, not reading it, but deep in thought. “When I was a little kid, my mother said she was sorry when she made me take medicine that tasted bad. But she’d still do it again if I got sick. And when I was with. . . before I came here, the people I was with said they were sorry that we had to. . . that we had to do what we did. But they did it again. They didn’t even try and avoid it. People say things they don’t mean. And it’s hard to tell, sometimes, what meaning of a word they’re using. They can say nothing but the truth, but mislead you all the same.”

*This might not be a complete loss after all,* Pyrrha thought, allowing herself a small smile while both girls weren’t looking at her. She’d known that Blake and Jaune’s relationship had been. . . *strained,* in that it existed at all. Given the girl was not only a Faunus, but spoke out on behalf of her race whenever she could, it had been confusing, and her status as ex-White Fang had made that even more so.

She had been pleasant enough to the gladiatrix, but had been standoffish when it came to Pyrrha’s partner, not speaking ill of the man, but not supporting him either. To hear her do so *now*, was as surprising as it was welcome.

Yang, however, did not take Blake’s statement nearly as well. “I mean I’m *sorry!*” she repeated, missing the point. “You think I *wanted* any of that to happen? That I’d do it again if I knew?”

The dark-haired girl, looked up, confused. “What? Of course I don’t. That isn’t what I’m saying.”

Sighing, Pyrrha stood. “Yang, no one is claiming that you wanted that to happen. What Jaune said, was that you told him you understood his concern about putting yourself in danger. And then you did it again. When you did that, you said to him that you understood his fears, but you did not care about them, or him.”

The blonde’s face screwed up in bewilderment. “What? He never said he was scared!”

The gladiatrix looked at her prospective co-lover in disbelief. “*Yang*. Jaune is scared *all the time.* He may seem like he’s confident, but he’s scared he won’t be a good enough leader. He’s scared he’ll do the wrong thing and get us all killed. He’s scared we’ll leave him, though he’s started to get over that.”

“Well, maybe he shouldn’t,” Yang muttered mulishly.

*. . . you did not just say that.* “I’m sorry,” Pyrrha apologized, “I must have misheard you.”

“He’s being an asshole,” the brawler re-stated. “All on me for not talking, but he doesn’t! And he’s the leader, so he should’ve said something! Stopped us!”

“He *tried,”* Pyrrha noted, Blake wincing from behind the brawler’s back, her bow dipping as her cat ears likely drooped.

“Well, he should’ve tried *harder!*” Yang argued, frowning, and Pyrrha could practically *see* the girl pushing blame where it did not belong. “Yeah, I fucked up, but I didn’t know that was down there. How could I? And he just let us go. If anything, what happened is *his* fault! *He’s* the team leader, so it’s *his* responsibility to keep us safe. If he’d caught us instead of letting us fall then none of that would’ve happened!” she declared completely unfairly, working herself up into a fury, purple eyes flickering to red. “And then he acts as if he’s better than us? You know what? I’m not gonna put up with that! *Screw him!* When he comes back I’m gonna tell him that we’re *don*-”

***SLAP***

Pyrrha didn’t even realized she’d moved, until after she’d struck the girl, who was stumbling back and looking at her, shocked. “*Yang. Xiao. Long*,” she stated, cold fury in her tone. “You will *not* say *anything* of the sort to Jaune. Not after I have spent *so* long convincing him that he can open up to us. Not after I spent so long convincing him that everything *bad* that happens around him is not his responsibility. It took me *weeks* to convince him that what happened with the Grimm Tide in Forever Fall was *not his fault*.”

She had *tried* to be nice, and caring, and patient. And she would continue to be so in the future. However, as much as she did not like her title, she did *not* earn it by letting others damage that which she had decided to defend. And, if this girl did what she wanted, she would hurt Jaune, *deeply*, to the point that the boy would reject, out of hand, any other attempts to become closer to anyone else.

Pyrrha knew that the mark she now bore would push her to include others, but it was not something she was averse to *before* she had given herself to the man she loved, so she did not mind it, even as she was aware of how she was even more inclined to push things in that direction now. While she was polite, there were times that such things were a hinderance to her goals, such as now. Thus she stared at the other girl, and apologized, “I’m sorry, but I do believe I’ve been too kind to you.”

“Too kind? You *slapped* me!” the out-of-control teen yelled.

Lifting an eyebrow, the gladiatrix replied, “You do not respond to words, Yang. Unlike Jaune, however, I have no problems speaking to you in a language you *will* pay attention to. May we talk, or shall I repeat myself?”

Yang glared at the other girl, “I’d like to see you try!”

“Very well,” the gladiatrix nodded, and stepped forward, arm pulled back, her opponent lashing out with a punch.

The other girl may as well have been striking air.

It was child’s play to step around them, inside the brawler’s guard, and backhand her. “Now,” Pyrrha started to say, as Yang lunged, hands grasping, but it was simple to redirect the girl onto her own bed. Reaching out with her Semblance, Pyrrha used her Polarity to pull the Rock Dust forged steel chain from her dresser, taken from her lover’s armory, and when the enraged girl came at her again, it took only momentary concentration to grab and *twist,* pulling the graceless fighter’s hands together, binding them, and then her feet. With a careful shifting of her soul, the gladiatrix lifted the struggling teen up into the air with her Semblance, where the girl could do nothing but grunt and strain, even her strength not enough to break free with Pyrrha keeping the links from being pulled apart.

“*Let me down!”* Yang screamed.

So Pyrrha slapped her. *Again*. “Not until you stop having a tantrum like a spoiled brat. The boy is already damaged enough, and your childish actions will *break* him!”

“Damaged?” Blake echoed hesitantly, and Pyrrha turned her back on Yang, physically dismissing her as she faced the Faunus.

“Yes,” she sighed, shaking her head. “I thought it obvious, and it would be. . . not done, in Argus to discuss it openly, or even Mistral as a whole, but I have been learning just how different things are here in Sanus. I had an idea, from my interactions with others in the tournament community. I had thought, at first, that Jaune was indicative of Vale’s non-gladiator population, but he is not. However, neither are Yang or Ruby. Their behavior is not of Vale, but of *Patch*, and I am only now understanding what that means. Would it be remiss to assume you are not from Vale, Blake?”

“I’m, I’m not,” the ex-White Fang terrorist replied, worried, almost certainly of what she assumed Pyrrha’s follow up question of where she *was* from. If she were to answer honestly, and say Menagerie, it would out her racial status, which the girl was still attempting to keep a secret, and that was *not* what the red-head wanted.

“As I thought,” the gladiatrix nodded instead, while Yang, having found herself unable to break free, slumped in her bindings. “I have been talking with others from Vale, and there is something, not wrong, *never* wrong, but very much *different* about Jaune. It was something that took me months to understand myself, and I was watching him closely, *trying* to understand.”

“I’m trying to understand him,” Yang lied, tone petulant, though the rage had leaked from her tone in her ‘time out’.

*Hmmm,* Pyrrha thought, *either she is as childish as I accused her of being, or the girl may have a bondage kink. Possibly both.* It was difficult to hold onto anger when you were being aroused, after all, something she had used to help pull Jaune out of his spirals, though never to try and negate his anger entirely, only to help him keep an even keel on what he was thinking about.

“I’m sorry, but you have not,” the redhead disagreed coolly. “If you had, your apology would have worked. Or not been needed at all. Tell me, how much of the time you spend together alone with Jaune do you spend talking?”

“What?” the blonde asked, confused, and Pyrrha waited for her to answer. “I, um, don’t know. Like he talks about random stuff sometimes, which can be kinda weird. I let him, since he wants to, but we’re normally fighting, or, ya know, other things. Can you let me down?”

“No,” the gladiatrix replied without missing a beat, disappointed, and while Yang glared at the denial, she also blushed at the casual dismissal. *Definitely a kink. That. . . explains some things.*

Her lover had mentioned, when Pyrrha had asked about his time with the girl, that they would go to mutual handjobs, at which point the blonde wouldn’t go any farther, but something seemed off about her. Jaune, kind, sweet Jaune, had been confused, but perfectly alright with not progressing, giving the girl all the time she needed. It appeared that he had misunderstood things, but how was Pyrrha going to tell him. . .

*Or should I?* she thought. This debacle was happening because she’d tried to help Yang mend the rift her actions had created, and the damage that she had done, past the girl’s own capability of understanding. However, that had been a mistake, and while Jaune did not blame her, he likely should have, and that meant it was her responsibility to stop this. That also meant that she needed to be more careful in how she acted, lest she make the same mistake again.

*No. She will need to tell him herself,* Pyrrha decided. If the other girl was so unable to have an honest conversation that she continued to blue bean herself, that was not the gladiatrix’s problem, and she would be there to help her lover relieve any *tension* that he built up.

“How is he. . . different?” Blake inquired, taking the opening that Pyrrha had left available, and Yang refused to use.

“Did you know that, before our Initiation in the Emerald Forest, Jaune had no Aura?” the gladiatrix questioned in turn.

The feline girl stared at her, confused. “No. . . Aura?” she echoed, disbelievingly. “How was that even allowed?”

“He faked his transcripts,” she replied, as a test. By this point, with the personal training Jaune was receiving from the headmaster, and what had happened over vacation, even if it came out publicly, it would not matter. At worst, he would receive a slap on the wrist, and be taken in under the same provisions that had allowed Ren and Nora to attend Beacon. If they spread this secret, or threw it in his face, well, it was better to give them something harmless to do it with, instead of something that could hurt him. “It is why he does not know half of what she should. His family would not allow him to be a Huntsman, so he taught himself, and ran. I thought his wings were a parachute, and accidentally impaled him with Miló, skewering him through a wing to a tree.”

“That’s bullshit,” Yang argued. “That morning I, he was too strong not to have Aura,” she stated, changing course mid-sentence.

It was Blake who countered her. “Some Faunus are stronger than Humans. It’s why they were used as slave labor. They’re stronger than Humans, but not as strong as Huntsmen or Huntresses. And. . . when we met,” she said slowly, looking into memory. “At the ruins. Your weapon. It was bloody. I, I didn’t think about it. It’s already red, but the gold. . .”

“Wait, he *didn’t?*” the bound brawler asked, dread creeping into her voice. “Then. Oh, *god*. I almost crushed his hand, before we started. Why didn’t he *say* anything?”

*That explains why his hand was injured,* Pyrrha thought. She’d noticed it twitch when he’d offered it to her, when she’d gone to unlock his Aura, but had assumed he’d struck it on a branch. “And reveal he didn’t have Aura, that he’d lied on his application, before he’d even gotten *into* Beacon?” she questioned in turn. “If I hadn’t injured him, he probably wouldn’t have told *me.*”

“But how was he gonna fight the Grimm without Aura?” Yang demanded, frowning.

Pyrrha smiled slightly at the memory, of the boy, injured and bloody, shrugging when she’d asked that very question, and replying, “‘Very carefully’, according to him.”

“That’s *insane,*” the brawler stated, unnerved.

The gladiatrix shrugged. “That’s Jaune.”

“No, that’s *actually insane,”* Yang stressed.

“So is single-handedly holding off a Grimm Tide,” Pyrrha countered. “Ms. Goodwitch came to talk to me afterwards. Jaune, after he’d set the forest aflame, effectively without Aura, badly burned, and with Fire Dust in his wound tracks *continuing* to burn him, still dragged himself up the wall to help shoot the Tide as they swarmed the walls, and then moved to the front line to buy us even more time. Fighting that enormous Grimm Aranea was also insane, but he still did it,” she remarked, smiling.

The brawler stared at the gladiatrix, with confusion, and a little fear. “And you think that’s a *good thing?”*

*Ah. She’s starting to understand. Good.* Pyrrha thought. Yang and Ruby were sheltered, *everyone* from Patch seemed to be. Having visited the island, she now understood why, but that was something that had caused problems, and might get people killed.

“I think Jaune will be a hero, like Achilles,” she responded simply.

“Achilles *died,* Pyrrha,*”* the blonde pointed out.

Blake responded before Pyrrha could, “I, I remember that story. Achilles, he was alone when he died.” The girl gave the gladiatrix a searching look. “You’re making sure he isn’t alone.”

*I really should have encouraged their relationship instead,* Pyrrha couldn’t help but think. The situation with Yang had fallen into her lap, and she’d taken the opportunity that presented, and *was* salvageable, but she’d misjudged the blonde, almost as much as Jaune had.

“I am,” she agreed. “Jaune will never be a normal Huntsman, never live a normal life. I’m sorry if that’s what you wanted, Yang, Blake, but that is not what you will have if you follow him. What you *will* have, is the chance to make things better.”

“What do you mean?” Blake asked, taking the bait before Pyrrha had finished laying it down. Finding out her history, and why she had left, made this far too easy. Yang nodded as well, still floating in the air.

However, as today had shown, the gladiatrix could not assume as much as she had before.

“Vale is no longer a kingdom,” she stated, “But power is still held in the hands of a few. I am sure that Weiss could tell you about how the council of Vale runs things, but I am from Mistral, and Mistralians understand that power is not solely held by those in official positions. The Vale council may be *officially* in charge, but Headmaster Ozpin holds just as much power as they do, if not more.”

As she predicted, this was obviously news to Yang, but, surprisingly, Blake nodded. “Because he runs Beacon,” she explained to her partner.

“What does that have to do with anything?” the blonde questioned.

The Faunus frowned, speaking slowly. “Vale has an army, but most of them don’t have Aura. And one person with Aura can fight dozens without. The other Huntsman Academies are controlled by the government. Atlas’ is run by General Ironwood, the same man who is in charge of their military. Shade and Haven are run by the government too. But Beacon is separate. That’s why I came here.”

Pyrrha took up the explanation, “And the Huntsman and Huntresses that graduate from an academy are often beholden to their headmaster, or headmistress, which gives those people a great deal of pull, and power. I’m sorry, but the most powerful person in Vale is Headmaster Ozpin, whom Jaune trains with *weekly*. Whom Jaune just returned from a several *hour* long meeting with. Whom Jaune refers to as ‘Oz’, and even Ms. Goodwitch no longer objects to his doing so. And, to Jaune, this is *nothing special.*”

Yang blinked, stunned, not having thought of any of this, and Pyrrha took the opportunity to put her back down, still needing to concentrate to snake the iron chain away from the girl as she untied her, directing it back into her closet. The brawler idly rubbed her wrists, the girl’s Aura keeping her skin from being rubbed raw by her earlier struggles, sitting down on Jaune’s bed as she considered this. “So. So he’s gonna be important, so we should just put up with his bullshit?” she asked, though it was obvious that even Yang didn’t believe what she was saying.

“Of course not, though there are some that may attempt to do just that. I will *not* allow others to use him so,” Pyrrha disagreed kindly, the time for violence having passed. “But you cannot expect someone like Jaune to be *normal*.”

Blake murmured, almost too soft to hear, “He saved me.”

“And to him, that probably wasn’t anything special either,” the redhead informed her, the girl, as Pyrrha had expected, giving her a hurt look, misunderstanding her statement, but providing the gladiatrix the opening to drive her point home. “Not because of anything against you, Blake, but *not* saving you wasn’t even an option to him. Because that’s how Jaune is. Because that’s *who* Jaune is.”

Turning to Yang, Pyrrha made sure to make herself clear to the brawler as well. “Your father noticed something was different about Jaune as well. And that is what he is. *Different.* Sometimes, he will do something so selfless and kind that you won’t know how to respond. Sometimes, he will be so incredibly thick that you won’t know how to respond without wanting to yell at him. In both cases, he is not doing so on purpose. He is just being himself, take him or leave him. And I, myself, have chosen to take him. Whether or not you choose to as well, is up to you. Just as if any other decides they would like to walk beside him. But that is not a decision to be made lightly. And, if you hurt him, I *will* respond in kind.”

“. . . you’re kinda hot when you’re angry,” Yang responded, after a long moment, and Pyrrha pulled the chains back out of her dresser. “I’m joking, I’m joking!” she said, hands up.

“I’m sorry,” the gladiatrix apologized, “but please tell me you understand what I am saying. I thought you had before, but I was mistaken.”

The blonde winced, “Yeah. Sorry ‘bout that.’ Pyrrha stared at her, waiting. “Huh? Oh, yeah. ‘I understand, *Mom,’”* she teased.

Point made, Pyrrha let herself smile slightly. “You’re not too old to take over my knee ‘young lady’,” she teased in return.

Yang laughed, and blushed slightly, before asking, “How’d you do that, anyways? Hand to hand’s my thing, and, yeah, Jaune’s pretty good at it too, but I couldn’t *touch* you!”

“I am not called the ‘Invisible Girl’ for no reason,” the gladiatrix noted. “While I am better with Miló and Akoúo̱, I can fight disarmed as well. And we have never fought, you have only seen Jaune and I spar. You may think that, because you can hit him, and he can hit me, that you could hit me as well, but Jaune patches his inexperience with quite frankly insane strength and toughness, while I am a more technical fighter.”

“When you don’t shoot your spear like a railgun,” Blake noted, smirking.

“I am *usually* more of a technical fighter,” Pyrrha corrected, getting a laugh out of Yang. “Though, when pressed, high-risk, pure power techniques have their place.”

The brawler gave the gladiatrix a long look. “We’re gonna spar. Not right now, but, if there’s shit like what we saw out there, I need to get better.”

“You will lose,” Pyrrha noted neutrally.

Yang, however, just rolled her eyes. “Well, *duh.* But I’ll learn. Bet you kicked Jaune’s ass up and down the sparring ring.”

“For hours at a time,” the redhead agreed. “But he never gave up.”

“Then neither will I!”

Pyrrha smiled at her teammate. “And you are *not* going to go after Jaune for ‘not saving you fast enough’?” she pressed.

Yang winced. “Y-yeah. That was. . . I was mad, alright?”

“And would that be an acceptable excuse if he tore into you?” the gladiatrix questioned.

Opening her arms, Yang said, “Uh, he kinda did.” Pyrrha laughed in her face. “What, he did,” she insisted.

“Oh, you *really* haven’t listened to Jaune, have you,” the redhead sighed. “That was Jaune being *nice.* Consider how he treated your father, after the man tried to ‘spar’ with him while using his Semblance, and realize that, even *then*, he was still trying to be civil out of respect for you and your sister. Then consider how he treated that spineless worm known as Cardin Winchester.”

To her credit, Ms. Long did just that, and paled. “Oh, shit, he *was* being nice. That’s. . .”

“Jaune is many things,” Pyrrha noted with a smile. “Tactful and Polite are *not* two of them, despite what he may think. Honest, however, *is*, and I believe that more than makes up for things. That said, when we visit my parents in Argus, I will not let him out of my sight, lest he gut some unfortunate fool who suggests that, for the right price, they could purchase your company.”

“Purchase my. . .” Yang, repeated, confused, before realization dawned and her hair blazed into a golden inferno. “They’d *what!?*”

Pyrrha couldn’t help but laugh. The girl was *incredibly* sheltered. “They would play it off as a joke, but such things happen. And I’m sorry, Yang, but your confident, flirtatious nature would not been seen as strength, but as, well, *advertising.*”

*“Advertising!”* Yang yelled, turning a betrayed glare Blake’s way as she giggled.

“You watch Jaune, and I’ll watch Yang?” the Faunus proposed with a smirk.

Pyrrha smiled as Yang rolled her eyes. The gladiatrix was *very* happy with how this all had turned out. “I think that may be for the best,” she agreed.