

Happy (belated) **Hanukkah**, guys! Those of us who get eight craaaazy nights, anyway.

Chapter 6: School Daze, Date Haze and Grimm Growls

There was no actual registrar's office or anything similar at Beacon Academy simply because the Academy's student population wasn't large enough to need one. After all, even the core classes, both Hunter and general education classes, barely had thirty-two or thirty-six students. Most classes were smaller, with each grade smaller than the one before it. Beacon's message was very clear from start to finish: meet our requirements, or you will be expelled. Moreover, while third and fourth years could choose their classes to a large degree, the freshman and sophomore grades could not.

That, however, did not matter to the quartet of ladies making their way to Otis Olive's office Tuesday morning. He was the professor who taught the two years of Laws and Logistics of the Four Kingdoms that the leaders of the would-be Hunter teams would need to take in their first two years here in Beacon.

This quartet consisted of Ruby, Weiss, Tia, and Sung-Sun. Tia and Sung-Sun led the way, walking silently next to one another. It wasn't an altogether unpleasant silence given both the girls' nature, but there was still a bit of wary tension between them. Sung-Sun was somewhat leery of Tia in many ways, while Tia was willing to see how Sung-Sun performed in battle and now in the leadership role before deciding to treat her as more than an acquaintance. That was not a decision Tia would rush into.

Behind them, the two diminutive girls were talking quietly to one another until Weiss said something neither girl could hear. Whatever it was seemed to make Ruby happy, though, as she suddenly squealed, "Really!? Thanks, Weiss, you're the best partner ever!"

"Ack, Ruby! D-Don't touch me!" Weiss shouted as the younger girl pulled her into a hug.

Turning to watch this, Sung-Sun noted with some amusement that Weiss was not actually trying to escape Ruby's grasp. Instead, she was very clearly of two minds about the younger girl's affection. One of Weiss's hands was ruffling Ruby's hair in a clearly affectionate manner, even as she had turned her nose up at the act, looking away.

The young Schnee heiress is quite the walking mass of contradictions, Sung-Sun chortled internally while saying aloud, "Mah, how cute." Sung-Sun's tone was a teasing one, which was her normal tone when speaking to other people, and she continued on, interested to see the response. "Fufufufu, I wonder what your parents would think about making friends so quickly, Weiss. I'm certain they would be quite pleased."

Mention of her parents caused Weiss to struggle even further, and she opened her mouth to shred Ruby, pulling her hand away from the other girl's head quickly as if it had suddenly turned scalding hot. "Let me go, Ruby! This is unbecoming of a Schnee!"

Blinking, Ruby seemed to realize they were in public at least, and she released her partner, shaking her head. "Okay, but I'm gonna be hugging you more in the future. You're surprisingly fluffy."

Weiss blushed, and then Tia got into the act. The silent Arc twin moved towards her, arms outstretched. Weiss, who was more than a foot shorter than Tia and built like a twig in comparison, backed away rapidly, holding her hands up defensively and wishing she had Myrtenaster with her. "None of that, you, you brute!"

"Stingy." Tia pouted behind her scarf, but her azure blue eyes twinkled in amusement. "Hugs are always nice." *And she's just as big as Magenta.*

"Yes, well, I wouldn't have much experience with them," Weiss muttered under her breath, holding up a hand to Ruby, who seemed ready to dive on her again at that statement. "And that was not a request!"

With Sung-Sun still chortling behind one upraised hand, Weiss glared at Tia and Ruby before sighing and gesturing behind the two taller girls. "If one of you could please knock? I believe I've had enough humiliation for the day."

"That is proof that you are not from a big family," Tia opined, even as she turned away. "That wasn't humiliation. That was just teasing. And there are no limits to your daily amount of teasing."

"Fufufufu!" Sung-Sun chortled again behind her long sleeve before reaching out to knock on the door.

Otis Olive was a middle-aged man who could practically be described by the word 'nondescript'. He had slightly green-brown hair, a pair of small reading glasses on him at all times, somewhat like Professor Oobleck, and a body type that very obviously told everyone around him he was not a hunter. While Professor Port had the overall look of a barrel on legs, Peter still had a lot of strength and solidity. Otis Olive had a soft, overweight look that showed he was not a person who enjoyed much in the way of exercise.

Yet despite not commanding the respect of his students on that score, Otis had been a teacher for a long time, and when Sung-Sun and Weiss had talked to Harry about him – their own leaders not being the best source of knowledge given one fell asleep, and the other barely could concentrate enough to not do the same – Harry had no real complaints about the teacher himself. Just that the class's subject was about as dry as you would expect from the name.

Strangely enough, there were multiple laws about selling ammunition and Dust to foreign hunters, and hunters in general, that team leaders needed to know about. What kind of tariffs they would need to pay on what kind of missions, how much local aide they could call upon, and so forth was just the start. Licensing and permits, for example, would cover a full educational unit.

“Which just about put me to sleep!” Ruby had complained at the time. “I mean seriously! I love learning about Dust and ammunition and such. I can recite the number of gun makers in Vale and their specialties, but why are there so many laws controlling how they sell their stuff to us! Not just what they can sell but how they do it! GRAAA!!!”

“Because of the White Fang,” Weiss had snarked at the time. “We don’t want those filthy terrorists to be able to get their hands on more weapons than they already have.”

Blake had started to bristle at that but seemed to calm down when Weiss didn’t make any slur against faunus. Although she seemed surprised when Mila nodded agreement and Apacci seemed to take it personally.

Before the deer faunus could say anything, though, Harry, realizing the discussion might become too vituperative, quickly shifted the topic. “There are also a lot of laws regarding what people with Aura can get away with. Because of how much damage we can do, we are held to a higher standard of self-control. Trust me, I’ve been thinking about that recently, and it isn’t without reason. Which is why you were in so much trouble for whatever you got up to before school started, Yang. If you had been a Beacon Academy student already, you’d probably have been expelled for whatever it was.”

Sensing the same thing Harry had, Yang did what she could to defuse the situation. She did so by grabbing Ruby up off the ground and holding her in front of her as if using Ruby as a human shield against Harry. “Ruuubyyyy, hottie Harry is being mean to me!”

This had prompted Ruby to try to punch her sister in the face, and the tension in the immensely crowded Team ANVL dorm room had subsided before the three teams had gone their separate ways last night.

Now, Otis waved the quartet of girls in, gesturing the four of them to two seats in front. “Come in, girls. What can I do for you?”

With a small smile hidden behind her scarf, Tia took one, then gestured down to her lap, amusement very visible in her blue eyes.

“I can’t see your smile, but I know you’re smiling at me,” Ruby grunted, kicking her lightly on the shin, pouting a bit at seeing Weiss had already taken out the other seat.

Standing at parade rest behind her teammate, Sung-Sun ignored this little byplay and began to speak. “Thank you for seeing us this morning.”

“My door is always open, Miss Greenscale. Whether I can actually help you is a different issue entirely. So I repeat: what can I do for you, ladies?”

Weiss took up the discussion at that point, her body posture almost as formal and poised as her tone as she began to hint at why they were there. “Professor, while we are not

questioning headmaster Ozpin's decision-making, we feel that he did not take into account certain... issues that are now facing both of our teams."

In comparison, when Tia interjected her thoughts, her words and tone had all the subtlety of Tiburon coming down on a Creeper. "I cannot become a leader. I'm not good enough at communication and don't think long-term. Nor do I wish to try to be something I am not. As should have been obvious to anyone who read my scholastic and psych profile before this."

While Weiss, Sung-Sun and even Ruby winced at that blunt approach, Professor Olive simply nodded, his eyes slightly narrowed. "Yes, Miss Arc, I noted that you seemed to fall asleep in my class yesterday. Like most professors here, I believe it is not my job to motivate you or make certain your study. It is yours to make sure you keep growing as individuals. And now you are saying that you are unwilling to better yourself in leadership skills, which is most decidedly a mark against you."

"Such skills have to exist in the first place to better them," Tia replied sharply, shaking her head, and although becoming more uncomfortable the more she had to, Tia kept speaking. "I am not Arturia. I am not my brother. I merely followed his lead in Initiation. I have no idea why the Headmaster gave me this job."

"But rarely in the past have Arcs been less than excellent leaders. Are you saying that you don't want to continue that legacy?" Otis retorted.

"That has never been the part of my family's legacy I have been called toward," Tia answered simply.

Staring at the unrepentant girl who had just told him his employer had messed up, Otis sighed. In truth, he had read Tia Arc's scholastic record and, more importantly, asked the counselor for her opinion on her psych profile. That was something that Ozpin probably had not done. It wasn't something most people didn't notice, but Otis had been in Beacon for more than a decade now and knew that Ozpin rarely thought about asking people's opinions beyond, perhaps, Glynda's or the bursar's when it came to money matters.

And Otis felt that this time, Ozpin's instincts had failed him. Tia was simply too introverted to be a real leader. She wasn't outgoing or charismatic at all. People were attracted to her because of her overall looks and what Otis had heard described as 'kuu-dere factor'. Otis didn't understand it – for more reasons than because he didn't speak Asiatic - but that wasn't really important. What was, was that Tia Arc had never evinced any interest in leading, not like her brother or Arturia, who Otis had the pleasure of teaching during her time in Beacon. *Coupled with her mild phobia for talking and her lack of what most would term emotional cues, I have to think there is very little chance of her 'growing' as Ozpin wants.*

Still, Ozpin's orders, and precedent, were clear here. "I urge you to stick it out at least for the first semester, Miss Arc. At that point, when we begin to talk about local politics and the

societal view of Hunters in Vale, you can talk to me again. If your team has only survived instead of grown as a team at that point, you will find Professor Ozpin far more amenable. But do not just throw in the towel at the start.”

“That’s exactly what we don’t want, Professor, at least in our case,” Weiss said, gesturing to Ruby and herself while Sung-Sun and Tia looked at one another, obviously somewhat chagrined at how things had gone. The professor did not seem willing to go along with the idea of simply shifting classes between them, and in a way, Weiss had to admit he had a point. *If a child like Ruby can grow to become a good leader, maybe Tia can change... although I don’t see it happening. Ruby has people skills and is quite outgoing. Those aren’t things you can just learn... even if Headmaster Ozpin thinks so.*

“Er, Weiss is right, Professor Olive,” Ruby spoke up, showing the courage and the people skills Weiss had just internally praised her for. “I, I **tried** to follow along with your class yesterday. I really did! But I had to set my scroll on record because I couldn’t follow what you were saying. I’m really, really sorry, but I couldn’t concentrate, and I...”

“I also saw your attempts, Miss Ross, never fear,” Otis said simply, smiling thinly at the younger girl. “You tried. And you are younger than Miss Arc here. I will willingly allow you and Miss Schnee to collaborate on any assignments I give. Indeed, you can get all the help you want, even on essays and so forth for the first year you are in my class. After that, your work will need to become your own, regardless of your other educational priorities.”

That didn’t quite mollify Ruby, but Otis shook his head, saying gently, “Think as a leader, Miss Rose. Why would I not be willing to let you and Miss Schnee exchange classes? I will tell you it has nothing to do with believing you are a natural leader. As with Miss Arc, I will not comment on that. I am no Hunter, but I trust Ozpin and believe he has a reason for everything he does. But there is a point that even I, a mere educator, can see.”

Put on the spot by this question, Ruby froze, but it was obvious her mind was still churning as she looked at her partner and the teacher. “Um... something about... oh... Weiss, you’re in, um, in Aura Manipulation and Growth, right?”

Weiss winced, “I, I am.”

“And you need help in that,” Ruby murmured, and Weiss’s wince deepened into a scowl. As a Schnee, she had been trained to never show or, worse, admit to weakness, but it was a certainty that her Aura reserves were the smallest on her team. Even Ruby, two years her junior, had larger reserves, while Yang’s were already the size of most fully trained Huntsmen.

Worse yet for Weiss’s pride, some students were exempt from the class entirely. Both Arcs fell into that category, although, to her surprise, Pyrrha and Yang did not. Pyrrha’s Aura was well-controlled and developed but not of sufficient size. Whereas Cardin and another young man named J-something or other (Weiss had not paid attention to his name) had joined a second-year version of the class. The two Arcs hadn’t even done that. Like Arturia and Guld

before her, their Auras were so massive they dwarfed even the professors. They had reading material and exercises they had been supplied with, but that was all.

“Exactly. Everyone’s Aura levels are part of their scholastic record here at Beacon, and even a non-Hunter like myself is aware of them,” Otis approved. “Always look at all the implications of your actions and plans, Miss Rose. I would willingly exchange these two timeslots, but it would harm your partner’s growth. Is getting her to take my class really the best way for your team to grow together?”

The two height-challenged girls looked at one another for a moment, then shook their heads. “If we could have a written copy of your words stating that we can work together on my assignments, professor, I think that will be enough for us,” Ruby decided firmly.

“And... I suppose Team Argent will need to work on this together going forward,” Sung-Sun sighed, wondering how this was going to go now that it seemed Beacon wasn’t willing to just go along with their decision.

OOOOOO

Harry and his team were only peripherally involved in the drama regarding the leadership position on Team RWBY and Team ARGT during the first week at Beacon. Instead, they had their minds on other things: getting to know one another was a big part of that, as, while the two partnerships knew one another quite well, that only took them so far. Also, Harry planned out the lasagna meal he had promised Professor Goodwitch. Not that it would only be for the professor, Harry intended to cook for his sister, Pyrrha, and their new friends.

Since Harry had to have access to the cafeteria when it wasn’t already in use, his team, ARGT and RWBY were forced to wait quite a bit longer than normal that first Wednesday for their nighttime meal. But given Tia’s nearly dreamy eyes at the thought of Harry’s food, all were willing to put up with it. They entered the cafeteria at around nine en-masse, only for Ruby to stop so suddenly Yang and a laughing Mila to nearly run her over.

But they paused too, surprised to see Miss Goodwitch sitting down with a cup of tea at one of the cafeteria tables. “Professor Goodwitch? I didn’t know you were joining us tonight,” Ruby said hesitantly.

“I’m not going to make it a habit of it, Miss Rose. I fully understand how invasive a presence even a single professor can be on young people trying to have a good time,” Glynda answered primly. “However, Mister Arc’s older sister used to regale anyone who would listen with tales of his cooking prowess, and I found myself unable to not avail myself of it when it became available.”

“Which is teacher, parlance for saying she knows the food here is kind of bland too,” Yang translated, throwing an arm around Tia. “Am I right or what?”

“Harry’s food is made of yum,” Tia said simply, giggling a little behind her scarf. “That’s what all of us used to say at home.”

That sound made everyone look at her, cock their heads and think ‘cute’ simultaneously before shaking their heads and trying to banish the thought.

“Well, while I don’t know about that, I have to agree. How the cafeteria staff here can make even something like swordfish taste so bland is beyond me,” Weiss said, with Sung-Sun nodding in agreement as Blake let loose a little whine of dismay.

Hearing that, Miss Goodwitch looked at her, a small twitch of lips the only sign of amusement Glynda let appear on her face. But Blake resolutely did not meet the older woman’s gaze, staring straight ahead. *Don’t look her in the eyes, don’t let your ears twitch, I’m invisible, she can’t see me, my secret is safe...* Blake repeated in a mantra.

Yang, on the other hand, was gazing at her partner thoughtfully but said nothing, simply plopping into a chair next to her and pulling the shorter girl into a hug. “Your face when you first tasted that fish was a horror to behold, Blakey, but now maybe we’ll see what a real chef can do with those same ingredients.”

“Sorry to say, but I’m not cooking fish tonight,” Harry demurred as he came out of the cafeteria’s kitchen with Ren and Pyrrha. Harry had asked his teammates to help him with the meal, and Pyrrha had been a dab hand at slicing things. Nora had rolled the pasta like a champion, getting into it so much she had to be stopped by force. But beyond that, there had been no disasters in the kitchen.

While Pyrrha was dressed normally, Yang and Mila both let out loud whistles as they looked at Harry and Ren’s outfits. Really they had only modified the school uniforms, but Harry’s color change charm made them look almost like butler or maître-d outfits. “Woo-hoo! Please tell me this is a Chippendale show instead of just a dinner!”

“Miss Mila Rose, Miss Xiao-Long!” Goodwitch barked. “That is highly inappropriate!”

Weiss, Sung-Sun and Blake were all silent, staring at the two boys with faint blushes as some fantasies came to the fore. While neither boy was to any of the girls’ tastes for various reasons (Sung-Sun wasn’t overly interested in romance, Blake could smell the hormones between them and their partners, and Weiss preferred more outgoing men) they rocked the butler look. Ruby was shaking her head in incomprehension, not understanding what the fuss was about, while Apacci scoffed, saying something about men cooking under his breath that was not flattering going by his face.

Tia simply sat, watching her brother expectantly.

Harry waited while Goodwitch finished berating Mila and Yang before continuing, while Ren placed down some silverware and placemats while also renewing Glynda’s tea. When the professor looked his way, Harry spoke up. “Now, just to go over everyone’s preferences. I

have... Vegetarian, spicy vegetarian, meaty, cheesy, extra meat, and spicy meat lasagnas. Which does everyone prefer?"

As he went around the table, Harry made a list of the kinds of lasagna everyone wanted, then bowed low towards the table. "Your meals will be laid ready soon, ladies."

He and Ren left them there while Pyrrha and Nora sat at the table, with Nora excitedly hugging the other girl, wondering aloud what the meal would be like.

Ruby shook her head. "I don't think I can get used to the idea of two out of the three men of our little clique being the ones good at cooking."

"I know, right?" Yang laughed. "Talk about busting stereotypes. Heck, Dad basically forced most of the cooking on me as soon as I figured out how to read the instructions. And let me tell ya, I didn't object after years of his cooking. Ugh."

"Is that so unusual?" Weiss asked in confusion. "In the Schnee mansion, the head cook was a man, as well as the cake Butler."

Everyone at the table turns to look at Weiss, blinking in unison. "Cake Butler?" Sung-Sun asked, smiling faintly. "Fufufu, there is the bourgeoisie, and then there is the Schnee."

Weiss blushed, looking away. "All right, that wasn't his real title! It just seemed that most of his jobs consisted of carrying cakes and trays of food from one place to another. That's what I called him as a child, and it stuck."

Everyone there laughed, bar Apacci and Goodwitch, with the former scoffing. "Damn, the rich really do live differently. It must be nice to get all that money from the blood and sweat of faunus, huh?"

Weiss bristled, while Blake seemed torn for a moment. This was definitely not the time to bring up that kind of topic, but at the same time, part of her did agree with her fellow faunus. *If only he had an ounce of tact or even just some subtlety! What was he thinking, playing Fangs to the Sky last night!*

But before Weiss could reply or Blake get over her internal conundrum, Miss Goodwitch tapped the table with her riding crop, which Blake and everyone else at the table could have sworn she wasn't carrying a moment ago. When they looked at her, Goodwitch growled, "There will be no arguments at this table, whatever the topic. I came here to sample some hopefully excellent food. I did not come here to get involved in social squabbles."

"Indeed," Sung-Sun said calmly, although her hands were clenched in her long sleeves. "One cannot help their upbringing, whatever that might be. The fact that Weiss is here at all, working hard to become a Huntress, should tell you more about her as a person than her family's wealth."

That the same could be said for Sung-Sun and Blake was a secret known only to the ladies in question. Indeed, Sung-Sun had yet to discern if Blake knew of Sung-Sun's secret. But she was in no rush to find out, lest that secret come out regardless. *Heiress to the richest family in Remnant. Daughter of the White Fang's original leader and current chieftain of Menagerie. And then we have me, the daughter of the largest, oldest organized crime syndicate in Vacuo. What a trio we are...*

Weiss sent her friend a grateful look and then turned to the two faunus, her eyes narrowing. Mila had been silent up to this point but looked as if she agreed with her counterpart. "I will say I never had anything to do with the business side of things with my family. Say whatever you want about them. I've probably heard it all before. So long as you don't attack me like the White Fang have too many of my family, I can handle it. Those people are terrorists, plain and simple."

While Goodwitch grimaced, Blake could not let go, and she retorted quickly, "That's what those at the top always say about people trying to fight for their freedom!"

Weiss blinked, staring at her while Mila just shrugged, and Apacci nodded firm agreement. "That's right! The White Fang is fighting for our freedom!"

"Fighting to take over a dust mine and free the Faunus there is fine," Tia interjected, glaring at Apacci and then around the table as Goodwitch once more prepared to step in should this topic become too heated. "Setting up a bomb to kill the mine manager and his family in their home is murder. There is a difference."

"Harry was telling me that many of the people moving to Evig Låga from Mantle lately have been ex-miners," Pyrrha interjected, quick to back up Tia. "The conditions there are bad, but all of them, including the faunus among them, agreed that the White Fang was taking things too far when Harry and his family talked to them about it. Violence can help people win their freedom, but you can't take it so far."

Blake grimaced at that but subsided, while Apacci still looked a bit angry and Mila apathetic. She had no real opinion on the White Fang or Mantle and its anti-faunus society. Her family had lived in the city of Vale for several generations. Vale had always been far more open than Mantle, more-so after the creation of Menagerie. Although, there was currently a blowback against faunus due to the White Fang that she didn't like.

"Well said. And on that note, I think you all should stop such political talk for now," Glynda announced.

She might not have convinced them all to leave it at that, but the professor's demands for peace were helped a second later by the door to the kitchen opening and the smell wafting out.

"My word, at least it smells promising," Weiss mused, her thoughts completely derailed.

Moments later Harry came out, with several small heavily laden plates. Soon everyone had their chosen type of lasagna in front of them while Ren placed a large salad bowl on the table, with Harry adding the final touch in the form of a bowl of breadsticks.

Everyone waited for Ren and Harry to join them, although Nora and Apacci had their hands slapped away from the food by Weiss and Sung-Sun, respectively. When the boys joined them, they all dug in eagerly, and the result was immediate.

“WOW! This is so tasty!”

“Yum, yum, Tia was right!”

“My compliments, Harry. You and I will have to exchange recipes,”

“Marry me, Harry!”

“Holy hell, dude, this is so good! Vegetarian is usually so bland, but this is amazing!”

“ACK, wh... the hell?”

“Whhrsss, wrngg Yng?” Ruby mumbled through her food.

“Don’t speak with your mouthful, Rubes. Jeez.” Yang shook her head. “And my knife just slipped off the table and stabbed my thigh. Weird. Didn’t hurt, obviously, but huh...”

Most were too busy to actually speak for a few moments, but those that could were markedly appreciative, although Harry noted what Pyrrha had done and slyly patting her knee under the table where her skirt had risen up a bit. She jumped slightly but did not move her thigh away from his touch, instead looking at him out of the corner of her eye, a smile that had little to do with the food she was eating crossing her face as she did.

Finishing her first bite, Glynda shook her head. “Mister Arc, your sister was clearly underselling your culinary skills. If you decide to retire from being a Hunter, we could certainly use you here in Beacon.”

Only Weiss could say she had ever eaten a better lasagna, and even she admitted that it had been because it had been a meaty style on a cheat day. She ended this statement by promptly stealing a bite from Blake’s dish, only for Belladonna to steal several from Weiss’s. This caused many of the other girls to do the same, although it was all in good fun and never became a serious point of contention. Only Glynda did not take part, sitting sedately and watching the floor show, for once feeling so mellow she had no desire to step in and punish the childishness before her.

Eventually, the meal ended, and Tia volunteered her team to do the cleaning. “That’s the rule at home. Help cook or help clean.”

The others were too well-fed to complain, and Glynda, Team ANVL and Team RWBY left the cafeteria together before Glynda left the teens with the comment, "Consider your bit of bribery accepted, Mister Arc. I will look forward to one such meal every week. See me if you need any lien for ingredients, and I will have the keys to the property to you at the earliest moment I can."

With that, Goodwitch walked off, leaving Harry to field an inquisitive Yang's questions on what he had been trying to bribe Goodwitch for. Harry told her the truth, and RWBY clamored around, trying to convince Harry he could cook for them too. Even Weiss got into the act, offering to pay for them all, and Blake could only beg for the chance to try a fish dish. "Only you have the skill to truly do the swordfish justice, Harry! Please, Harry, you're my only hope!"

Several other teens watched this in confusion, and the next day, Harry had to deal with rumors he was starting a harem. But such was par for the course at any school, alas. The only thing that moved faster than rumor was wild hearsay. But Harry eventually agreed to cook for them once a month along with Team ARG. It was a very happy Team RWBY that entered their dorm room, as Team ANVL did the same.

"All in all, crew, I think that was a success," Harry quipped as the door closed behind him.

"Hell yeah! Lasagna's not a pancake or anything, but damn if it wasn't good!" Nora nearly shouted, before jumping into bed, and almost immediately falling asleep.

"Agreed. The vegetarian lasagna was quite tasty," Ren added, chuckling as he moved to pull Nora's blanket up.

"I'm surprised that you decided not to make a dessert," Pyrrha teased while she and Harry headed to the dressers to grab their bedclothes. "Considering how well your lasagna went over, I imagine even one of those treacle tarts you claim to love would have gone down like a treat."

Harry paused for a moment to look at Pyrrha pouting at her disdain for treacle tarts, then remembering what Pyrrha's favorite dessert was, he leaned over and whispered into her ear, smiling slightly as he watched the shiver this caused to go down her neck. "how about this, for the first time I can cook for just the two of us, I will make a chocolate ganache with rum cherries."

Pyrrha's eyes dilated, and her breath came out in a gasp. "Oh, oh my," she whispered, trying not to fall into a choco-coma at the very sound of the desert. "That sounds grand!"

Harry grinned, then continued, licking her ear lightly, unseen by either Nora or Ren and calling on some oft-heard comments from girls he'd known in his past life when they learned he could cook, said, "Maybe I will even cook it wearing an apron. Just an apron..."

At that, a blush suffused Pyrrha, and she gasped as, besides the chocolaty delight, her mind was suddenly ambushed by thoughts of Harry in an apron. *His back to her, his muscles moving as he worked around the kitchen. He fed her bits of food, smiling at her as Pyrrha's hands found his naked skin...*

Smiling faintly at the thousand-yard stare and blush on Pyrrha's face, Harry continued, "And maybe you would return the favor? Or wear your old combat skirt, with nothing on above or underneath?"

So out of it was she, Pyrrha nodded without realizing what she had agreed to.

"That sounds like we have an agreement." With that, Harry decided to walk away with his victory, heading toward the door to the bathroom. "Heh, I'll go and change first, shall I?"

Pyrrha stared after him for a moment, then her eyes narrowed as a feeling of having lost filled her. She wasn't certain why or what she had lost, but it was clear she had. And while the Invincible Girl moniker had always frustrated her, Pyrrha was not one to take a loss lying down. *You might have won this battle, Harry Potter, but I will win the next one!*

OOOOOO

As the small band of Beowolves that she had been tracking started at the growling of her stomach and began to turn toward her position, Arturia sighed, stood up from her hiding place, and charged. Before the pack of Beowolves could realize what was going on, she was, Rhongomyniad flashing out in every direction so fast it looked almost like it had multiplied. The tip of Rhongomyniad stabbed straight into them, armor or skin. There was no wasted motion, nor did Arturia use her shield rifle or Semblance.

Seconds later, the last of the small pack fell, the back of its skull pierced by Rhongomyniad even as it tried to howl. As it began to dissolve into modes of blackness, Arturia looked around, then quickly latched her lance back onto her back and flung herself to the ground, hiding among the large bushes lining a small indentation in the ground two of the Grimm had been standing within when they heard Arturia's stomach.

For a moment, the area around her was silent, and she stayed put, watching everything, her senses strained, wary of another group or solitary grin having noticed the one-sided slaughter. But after a few seconds, it became clear that no other Grimm had been around.

Sighing, Arturia pushed herself to her feet, glaring down at her stomach balefully. "You are supposed to be on my side blast it. That was an attempt at mutiny. No, an attempt at mutual suicide if ever there was one!"

It growled at her again, and Arturia sighed, having it lightly on the stomach, which, like actually talking to a body part, was not something that Arturia would ever do around anyone else, not even her family. It was just too silly. "Yes, I know, we're missing a Harry-made meal. But Harry did promise that we can stop in whenever we wish, and he will feed us."

This time, the growl from her stomach almost sounded like a happy purr from a lion, and the seditious body part fell silent.

With that bit of rebellion handled, Arturia continued on her way, looking around her carefully, moving silently through the forest.

This kind of scouting job wasn't one Arturia would normally take. Indeed, part of a Huntsman's job was to be somewhat like mobile targets, or gravity wells, bringing the Grimm down on themselves rather than whatever they were protecting. Even scout trips were normally merged into extermination missions.

But not always. Sometimes scouts were just supposed to go out and discover what was going on in the Grimm Lands if someone had noticed something unusual. Such was the case now. For Arturia was getting worried.

Even before she had graduated from Lighthouse, Arturia had been on missions out into the Grimm Lands with her father and mother. She knew what kind of Grimm were around Evig Låga and had been through the lands between the new Fire Dust mine with Harry and Rasputin, the bat faunus whose abilities were so central to the mine, several times. Arturia knew what Grimm to expect in an environment like this.

The weather in this segment of Mistral, west of the mines, was much warmer than near Evig Låga. There were numerous smaller hills leading up into large mountains that dominated the skyline, mountains that were volcanic, much like the mountains around Evig Låga and the Arc Butte. There were only a few rivers, although those which there were quite deep and fast. Nearer the mines, there were a few aquifers that Arturia had marked out already for a follow-up examination.

Near the rivers, there would be water types, Grimm molded after frogs or lizards, such as the Clawfrog or Grimgator.

In the forest, there would be Beowolves and Creepers, both prevalent almost entirely around Remnant, catlike Grimm like the Slashcat or the Panthera. And occasionally, one or two bear types, the most prevalent being the Ursa and its older, evolved brethren, the Ursa Major.

That last type was not very common in this area, compared to where the Arc Butte resided. They preferred real mountains to these rolling hills, despite the heavy forest cover that began about two miles out from the mine.

But despite having pushed well beyond the area cleared around the star fortress that defended the mine, there weren't any Creepers around, and Arturia had yet to see a single catlike Grimm. All she had been seeing were Beowolves, few and far between, and all of them heading in one direction.

That could only mean one thing. A Grimm migration was going to be moving through this area.

Grimm migrations only somewhat resembled regular animal migration. Occasionally they could be started the same when a large group of Grimm was forced out of their traditional territory by natural disasters or having hunted out any prey after having grown too large.

That was where the similarities ended. Grimm occasionally fought other Grimm, type against type, out in the wilds where no humans were around to attack. Guld had witnessed one such battle. But by and large, if one group of Grimm grew too large for their neighbors to stand, it was the large group that moved, with other Grimm moving out of their way.

Arturia felt that was what she had been seeing since leaving the mines to head back to Evig Låga on foot. But by and large, the initial group of Grimm left in search of larger, better hunting ranges, which naturally included human settlements.

And when a Grimm migration found a settlement, it almost invariably became a horde. The fear, hatred and other negative emotions caused by the migration built up. Other Grimm types would start working together with the initial one, in this case the Beowolves, as they always did against humans.

And worse, migrations are almost always led by one S-class Grimm. An intelligent monster...

Shaking her head, Arturia emerged herself as she groused bushes. *I will push southwest. Whatever is going on, my instincts are telling me it is coming from the same direction those Beowolves were moving.*

Arturia spent two more days pushing out and away from where her stomach had tried to get her killed before she started seeing more Grimm. Beowolves again, only this time there was a group of five led by an Alpha.

That was something of a shock. The grip of Grimm ahead of her feasting on the corpse of a deer was only six strong. Alpha Beowolves rarely appeared in packs smaller than seventeen, but here was one with a group of six? *This is not good.*

Very carefully, Arturia shifted away from that group of Grimm, moving silently through the forest, scanning the area around her every time she moved, moving slowly and deliberately, making as little noise as possible. Hunters learned this early on at the academies and continued to practice throughout the rest of the three years until every Hunter or Huntress was an expert. Only a few Grimm types used their noses as much as animals normally would, and while Beowolves did, Arturia had brought along a special salve that made her smell of dirt and mud. It wasn't pleasant, but she could deal with it.

Needless to say, Arturia was quite good at stalking, yet even so, she nearly missed the other band of Beowolves Grimm as they came out of the wood on her left flank.

They paused for a moment, sniffing the air, and Arturia crouched down, slowly placing Rhongomyniad on the ground, her shield rising to point one of its rifle barrels toward the

enemy Grimm. *I really need to develop a new long-range weapon, but building Rhongomyniad to sustain and guide my Semblance was so difficult I doubt I could build anything equal to it. And there is something to be said for having a shield you don't mind disposing of at need.*

Luckily, the Beowolves hadn't noticed her. Nor did they move in her direction. A second later, their pack leader, another Alpha, led the small pack away. Once they were out of hearing range, Arturia quickly leaped into a nearby tree. She spent several minutes making certain she could not be seen from the ground, Rhongomyniad laid out on a large branch nearby. Once her little hide was done, Arturia pulled out a spyglass and began slowly scanning the area around her.

What she saw surprised her. The second group of Grimm were moving quickly, not hunting, but looking in every direction, their wolfish heads practically on swivels as they looked around them. But as she watched, they paused and returned, retracing their steps and passing by her position moving in the other direction. This happened twice before the group which had eaten the deer, their maws still matted by blood, started to move opposite them. Then the second group of Beowolves halted their movement and moved further away from her down the valley they were in, moving until they disappeared out of sight.

The group that had eaten the deer started to move around the area. The second group did not seem to be returning, but they didn't have to. Arturia knew what they had been doing. *They were patrolling*, she thought, shaking her head. *I know Alphas are intelligent, but that is a bit much. Patrolling around the outer range of the migration? Disturbing.* That meant the S-class Grimm leading this migration was both intelligent and had such strength it could command multiple Alphas.

With a shake of her head, Arturia waited until the new Grimm patrol was at its outermost stopping point, then shimmied down the tree, racing to the other edge of their range and up the hill lining the valley there. Arturia was grateful that the forest was so thick, else she might have been spotted. But as it was, Arturia moved along the hilltops, keeping an eye out in every direction for other Grimm patrols.

Arturia didn't have to go very far before she saw what she had feared all along. The forest ahead of her was literally crawling with Beowolves. From where she was crouched, she could see several dozen moving through the woods. Slowly and silently climbing a tree, Arturia took a few moments to make certain she was invisible, and her binoculars would not reflect the sunlight before looking ahead of her position again, hoping to see more detail.

Ahead of her, the valley below opened up, the trees becoming sparser for a time with many more rocks than trees. The Grimm climbed over and around them in every direction, a vast black and white wave covering the ground. It continued out well past where Arturia could see with her binoculars and spread out too into the deeper forests up on the hills, although Arturia couldn't see any detail there.

And the only place a Grimm migration would be heading out this far from Mistral or any other smaller towns in the mines. It is time I left.

Exfiltrating was slow going at first. Twice, Arturia felt almost as if she was being watched and doubled back on herself several times, spending another day and a half to make certain that she wasn't being followed until the feeling finally went away. At that point, Arturia began to move faster, not stopping during the day, running into one pack of Beowolves again on the way back and killing them all without stopping while also dealing with two flying Grimm. Luckily, thanks to the thermals of the Terrebonne mountain – the volcanic range nearby - much like around the Arc Butte, there weren't that many flying Grimm here.

That will help if the worst comes to pass, but I must press on. Hmmm... I hope that Tia and Harry are already learning the most important lesson of all at Beacon, Arturia mused as she sped along, racing as fast as a non-Aura user in excellent shape could sprint. The difference was Arturia could keep this up all day long and then some. *Physical endurance matters just as much as Aura endurance.*

A day after dealing with the flying Grimm, it was in the dead of night when Arturia arrived at the edge of the open area around the mines. Stepping forward, she waved her lance above her head for attention from the wall. A second later, Arturia smiled approvingly at how quickly she was spotted. A spotlight was quickly moved in her direction, and when they saw who it was, the light blinked off and then on again, repeating the gesture three times, indicating Arturia should come ahead.

When her night vision returned, Arturia did so, leaping over the five intervening ditches, almost missing the barbed wire between the third and fourth ditches. When she reached the wall, a rope ladder was lowered toward her.

There was no gate, nor would there be. The mines would transport their goods via the air. There was no need to weaken the outer defenses in such an obvious manner.

Arturia stepped onto the ladder, but before she could start to climb, she could feel it already moving, pulling her upwards via a winch or perhaps a group of individuals on top. Somewhat feeling the strain after the last few days, Arturia let whatever it was work, although she was somewhat gratified to note that it was a winch rather than a group of people. That would have been somewhat demeaning.

Up top, Arturia hopped onto the battlements, nodding at the wall sentries. "Is the security commander awake? If not, wake him up. I will be in the command post."

The command post was small and would undoubtedly be replaced in time if the mines and the still-haphazard village above them continued to grow. There were only about three thousand people here, most miners or guards. The majority of their dependents still lived mostly back in her hometown, which had greatly expanded since the last time she had been home before her graduation.

Setting that observation aside, Arturia stared at the map of the area around the mine that dominated the room, marking out in which direction the migration would come.

“What did you find, miss?” the mine guard commander asked as he entered the room, followed by Sunflash.

The two men, both from the continent of Soliditas, could not be more different. Cherry had served in the Mantle army and looked the part, being clean-shaven, with his hair in a buzzcut, his body fit and trim. In contrast, Sunflash, a badger faunus, had a paunch to him, a ragged beard, and sunken eyes. His hair was cut short too, with a yellow flash prominent among the black and white stripes.

Arturia somewhat approved of both. As gruff and demanding as Sunflash was, he was also an extremely hard worker, and cared deeply for his people. The miners were willing to walk through fire for him.

As for Cherry, she had long set aside his past when it came to evaluating the man. She did not like Ironwood. The man was too grasping, controlling, and far too sure of himself. And yes, Arturia knew there was a bit of the pot and kettle there. *Still, Ironwood does train good soldiers. And Cherry seems to have become determined to make this mine, and our future ideas, work out.*

She gave the men her impressions of what she had found and the direction from which the danger would come. “We must be prepared. The Grimm will keep moving until they hit something that can feed them all.”

“The walls are ready, the ditches directly outside of that, the men are decently prepared,” Cherry said slowly, while Sunflash just grunted and left to get to work on preparing his folk. “We still don’t have as many guns as I would like on the walls, and our ammunition for the artillery guns is well below what I would like. But our riflemen are decently trained, I suppose. Not quite up to Atlas standard, but unlike most Atlas soldiers, the people here have their Aura to fall back on. Still, their close combat drill is lacking,” he said, his tone somewhat acerbic. “But I suppose if it comes down to bayonets, we’ll have already lost, Aura or no.”

“Quite probably. But that is not going to happen.”

“OH?”

Arturia’s lips twitched into what only a few knew was her equivalent of a public smile. Unlike Tia, Arturia could be quite effusive with those she cared for, but she was never such in public, deeming it somewhat beneath her dignity. “I trust the work you have been doing on the defenses and the plans for this fortress that you and my brother worked on between you. Furthermore, you have me.”

That was an extremely arrogant statement. But it was also one that Arturia was fully capable of backing. And since Cherry had tried to spar with the woman when she had first

arrived only to get his rear handed to them in three seconds flat, the commander of the defenses of the mines fully understood that. "Will you take command of the defenses, Miss?"

"I will not," Arturia said, shaking her head. "While normally as the Huntress here I would be obliged to do so, I feel I will be best suited out in the field, calling down long-range artillery strikes on the enemy."

Occasionally Huntsmen worked with local militias against Grimm. In such cases, their greater knowledge and abilities made them natural leaders. But as it was, Arturia would be of better use out away from the walls. *Bringing the Grimm down on me before they can even hit the outer line of defenses.*

Cherry winced. "Miss, those artillery guns are the biggest Guld and I could find on the Vacuan market. Have you ever worked with artillery before?"

"I have worked with mortars, but I have noticed how large those guns are, yes. I will speak to one of your artillerists. We have time to prepare." Arturia's public smile appeared again, a chill little thing despite the joke she was about to tell. "I could say something about boys and their toys, but then someone would undoubtedly point out my own Semblance and the attacks it lends itself to."

The mine's chief defense officer surprised himself with a laugh at that, and Arturia's smile widened slightly before disappearing as she looked over at the door, which opened to allow the man's lieutenants to join them. She nodded at the men and waited until the commander had filled them in on what she had already said before peremptorily gesturing them down to look at the map once more, explaining how the attack would start as various other things about fighting Beowolves.

Knowing that none of them had Hunter training, she first went over basic information about the wolf-type Grimm they would face, their weaknesses and strengths. Two of the men took notes as if she was giving them a lecture, but Arturia approved, considering they could then dispense that information to the rest of their people. *If the Grimm attack in the day, this will all be important information.*

Once that was done, Arturia finished marking out the direction the Grimm would be coming from and how the Grimm would probably spread out, judging by the terrain she had traveled through.

"We will have to sustain four to six waves. Beowolves think in terms of four to six, whatever they are up to. One to attack you from the front, one from behind, two from the sides, two attack you from the front, and so forth. Beowolves always think in terms of circling their enemies, attacking from behind most of all, much like normal wolves would. They will attack straight ahead to start off and then from the sides. They will try to keep some of their forces hidden, move around our defenses once they understand the range of our guns, and attack us from behind."

“This star fortress doesn’t really have any blind spots,” the base commander pointed out, frowning thoughtfully. “It’s part of why the design works so well. We also don’t have any lines either. We’ll have to ensure our troops don’t leave their positions whatever else is happening, but that should be possible.”

“Yes, the lack of blind spots will flummox them. However...” Arturia paused, looking up from where she had been marking things down a map, showing where she felt the Beowolves would try to fight forces, looking at each man in turn, her golden eyes boring into them.

The men all stiffened under her regard, but none of them quailed, and after a moment, she allowed herself a nod of approval. *Harry and Father have chosen well, it seems.*

That nod made the men straighten their backs even further, their shoulders coming even straighter as they felt the approval behind the move.

“There will be Alphas leading them. I believe this migration is being led by a Dreadwolf, the evolved version of the Alpha. Alphas are fast, strong, and cunning. They will understand the nature of our defenses quite quickly. As such, I do not doubt they will figure out that the best way to take us down is to wear us down, make us expand our ammunition for little gain, search for weaknesses, and wait.”

“They won’t try for a simple Grimm wave assault?”

Arturia frowned pensively, tapping the map with a finger. “Once the battle begins, the battle itself will start to bring in more Grimm, especially aerial type. Not so many. This area of Anima does not allow many to survive in the wild as much as elsewhere. But they will almost certainly start to use that tactic.”

“So you think we should conserve our artillery?”

Arturia nodded. “I will be out in the field as I said, and I will try to force my way past the initial rush and station myself well away from the defenses, so I can call down artillery on the forces the Dreadwolf will undoubtedly try to send around behind the initial point of engagement. Beyond that strike, yes, I would say you should conserve your ammunition and your Dust. Just because Fire Dust is the type used as propellant normally does not mean we have an endless supply of shells, correct?”

The two officers in charge of the artillery section frowned a little, then shrugged. It was true after all. Indeed, the artillery pieces, which would not have been out of place in World War 1 on Earth, only have twelve shells each. And unlike the casing for spent rifle rounds, artillery shells could not be found and reused.

“Once the attack begins, we want every civilian out from under our feet. I want all of them within the mine’s shelter and the doors locked. But I also do not want any kind of panic or fear.”

Miss, most of the miners and, heck, most civilians have their Aura unblocked. They can help.” One of the men argued.

But Arturia shook her head. “Are you going to look me in the eye and say they’re trained, then?”

The man looked away, shaking his head.

“That is what I thought. I have seen your men drilling commander. I know your men can shoot well. Even in melee, they could fight well enough to survive. But if the Dreadwolf is as smart as I fear, and they do attract enough flyers, they might be able to try to drop Beowolves behind our walls. At that point, it is better to have the civilians out from underfoot.”

The men all nodded, but she understood why they were reluctant. If the battle went against them, if there were enough Grimm around to soak up all of their fire and keep on coming, which was always a problem, the civilians would be trapped underground. *But even if that happens, the metal doors into the modern mind are so thick that even a Goliath would have trouble denting, let alone breaking through.*

And Arturia had also looked at the supplies available in terms of food. They would be able to hold out for a while, perhaps even long enough for Mistral to send a relief force, regardless of how reluctant the Mistrali would be to do so.

But the worst will not come to pass, Arturia reminded herself sternly. I will not allow it.

For the next day and a half, Arturia rested, only speaking to the artillery crews, not bothering to scout out around the mines. On the second day of her return, aid arrived from Evig Låga.

Arturia smiled faintly at her uncle, Paul. Paul was the rake of the family, a tall, spare, man with model features who never wished to settle down and who routinely cut a swath through the opposite sex a mile wide. Yet he was also the only one of his generation who was still a Hunter 24/7. Guld did work as a hunter, but not all the time, while Hazel had effectively retired beyond training with the kids and the Evig Låga militia.

The man was a wastrel, in Hazel’s view, but the whole family loved him despite his womanizing ways, and Arturia allowed the indignity of the taller man lifting her off the feet and kissing her cheek. “Damn fine job, Artie! Do you know how few migrations are spotted before a town is attacked!? Fantastic work!”

On the other hand, the nickname was too far, and she reached forward with both hands, grabbing at his ears and twisting. “What have I told you about that nickname, Uncle?”

“GAHH, not to, not to, oww, oww! Woman, you are worse than your mother!” Paul growled, letting Arturia down as he winced, his hands going up to his ears one after another, ignoring the laughter of the guards who had come in from Evig Låga with him. Much like Aura

wouldn't stop someone from spraining their ankle, there wasn't much it could do about a body part being twisted like that.

Recovered, he lightly shoved Arturia, ignoring the glare she sent him. Paul knew all about Arturia's public ice queen persona and didn't give a crap about it. "But still, you got in and out fast enough to warn us about the migration, kiddo. That's some fine Hunting."

Arturia nodded her head in thanks, then with a chill little sniff, gestured Paul to follow her to the command tent. "Where are my parents?"

"Guld's out on a mission. Some bandit group brought down a Grimm horde on a small town, Rattana. You ever been there?" Paul asked his tone light despite the words. When Arturia shook her head, he went on. "Well, the survivors could hole up and call for help. Guld responded, he's there with a large team of Hunters out of Mistral. Your mom's in Mistral, meeting with one of their Councilors. They've been trying to figure out what to do about our little operation here."

The two fell silent for a moment as they moved from the landing area to the command post. There Arturia paused as if she had deliberated over her words for some time. "Better Mother than I."

"True that!" Paul guffawed. Moments later, he was scowling as he glared at Arturia. "You want to be out there all alone?"

"Uncle, you've never been very good at scouting. I am. Your Semblance can help the defenders. Mine is more destructive on its own," Arturia argued.

The older man looked at his niece for a moment, then slowly shook his head. "Well, I guess I am out of practice moving through the woods quietly. I won't argue. But I will say I ain't about to explain to your parents how you got yourself killed, got it?"

Arturia nodded firmly, then stuffed the last of the rations she was currently eating into her mouth, grimacing at the taste as she had been while the mine commander Cherry had been explaining things to her uncle. "That goes without saying," she said after she finished chewing, ignoring the wry grin that flashed across her uncle's face at the site, knowing he was thinking about calling her 'the Arc's hungry lion' as he always did. "But will you take command here? Or leave it in Cherry's hands."

"Ha, no, don't worry, Cherry, I was never a leader, Arturia, not like Guld, Harry or you. I'll do my part up on the wall." He then threw a wry grin at Cherry and a salute. "Just tell me where ya want me."

As day turned into night, Arturia became restless. Her instincts were telling her that the Grimm were near, and she headed up onto the wall. Arturia spent the next hour patrolling the battlements, letting her presence and certainty in their victory raise spirits everywhere. She

tapped a shoulder here, nodded at a soldier there, bolstering their courage. While down below, her uncle, plagued by the same instincts, started the evacuation into the mines.

This took barely an hour. There were no children in the mines, only miners, a few wives who doubled as cooks, and other support personnel. And with no actual sign of Grimm just yet, and thanks to Arturia's quick return, there was little fear. Trepidation, yes, but the time since Arturia had returned had let the civilians make the shelter within the mine as homey as possible. This comfortable air allowed the people to treat this as an exciting adventure that would eventually be over, letting them return to their normal lives no harm done.

Finally, as the broken bits of the moon appeared in the sky and the spotlights began to move across the ground, Arturia left the wall to perform her final preparations for the night. Once her weapons were blackened by black gunk made of tar and coal, along with her face and hair, Arturia moved up onto the battlements, where she leaped out into the darkness, landing lightly on the ground beyond.

Moving through the darkness, out and away from the mine, Arturia was nearly as invisible as she leaped over the ditches, although she grimaced as she did. *Those ditches need to be larger, or else Alphas might be able to jump over them. Damn. Still, they would be at long range even so, and no Alpha will live through a mass of bullets.*

About two hours after she left the last outer edge of the defenses behind at a jog, Arturia ran into why she felt so uneasy. Because the Grimm were much closer than they should have been.

A pack of six Grimm looked up at Arturia from down below a small incline, where they had been slinking forward on their bellies out ahead of the main mass of Grimm.

They saw her at the same time, their red eyes piercing in the dark, their bodies mere patches of greater darkness in the night. As one, they surged to their feet and leaped towards her howling their battle cries, which were quickly taken up by hundreds, then thousands of wolfish throats beyond.

The darkness of the night and that primal sound would have normally called to a human of faunus fight or flight instincts, the sheer number of howls being enough to force most into flight.

But if she had ever had a flight instinct, Arturia had trained it out of herself years ago.

Arturia caught the attack from the first wolf on her shield as she raised it. A second Beowolf, trying to move around her side, was smashed to the ground by a strike from her lance, where she stomped on it with such power that its neck snapped. The third and fourth, which had been trying to get behind her died to the rifle fire from her shield, the fifth was skewered through the head by Rhongomyniad, and then, the last, the one which had been attacking her

shield, was bulled over as she charged into it, taking it to the ground where she proceeded to bash its head in with the side of her shield.

But already, the howls from her first attackers had summoned help. From around Arturia, red eyes gleamed in the dark, and howls arose as the Grimm charged forwards. Their skull-like masks gleamed in the shattered moonlight, and the light of her rifle began in turn as she began to discharge it in a circle around her.

Arturia yelled no battle cry. She shouted no challenge. Arturia let her weapons to her talking, and the first few Grimm that reached her died. Turning into smoke and fog, their bodies barely had time to get in the way of their fellows. But they did do so, and Arturia's lance took several of them through the head one after another while her rifle shield barked out rapid fire. This was no time to conserve ammunition, although she did dodge as best she could to conserve Aura.

Indeed, Arturia practically danced in place, dodging blows that came at her back instinctively, pirouetting in place, her lance lashing out like a snake's tongue, stabbing, cracking, smashing aside Grimm. She conserved her Semblance, knowing this would be a long fight and not wanting to run out of Aura and get wounded later on. *After all, this is but the vanguard. There will be more.*

Similarly, Arturia noted that most of the Grimm attacking her were Beowolves. She had yet to see a single alpha, and Arturia had to mentally nod at the intelligence driving this migration. It was clear that it knew the best plan was to wear her down. Meanwhile, all around her in the darkness, thousands of Grimm moved forward, racing towards the mine, while only a few hundred pinned Arturia in place.

But this wasn't going to work. *Because while you have the pack, I have human ingenuity.* Arturia slew the next Grimm, who attacked from her side, then smashed her shield into another, tossing it over to crash into a Grimm behind her, letting her have just a second to reach up to her helmet and click on the communications device there.

"This is Arturia. Artillery park, alpha strike on my position," Arturia ordered, her tone crisp and clear, showing no strain despite her exertions.

She had time to smash another Grimm that came at her out of the pack behind her, then dodged a charge from a second, grabbing it around its neck with her shield arm and twirling in place, knocking several others flat, before she received a reply. More Grimm hurled themselves over the downed bodies of their fellows and were trying to grapple with her once more. With scant success. But they were still trying.

"Miss Arc, are you insane! These artillery shells are..."

“I will not be here when they arrive, soldier!” Arturia interrupted. “I have the entire first wave moving around my position. Do it!” *I doubt we will get any better chance to winnow down their numbers at range.*

So sharp was the commanding tone Arturia used that whatever further protests the man might’ve made died in his throat, and he answered meekly. “Yes, Miss.”

Meanwhile, Arturia was beginning to take some hits, not that they mattered much. She was an Arc, after all. And the term Aura Monsters was not just for show. Still, the Grimm had changed tactics. They were now trying to bear her to earth almost exclusively, rather than each trying to wound her. This was another sign of the intelligence behind this migration.

In response, Arturia also shifted tactics, leaping up into the air.

Beowolves howled and leaped towards her, but she used Rhongomyniad to stab at them. As she did, she finally used one of her semblance attacks, shouting out, “Thousand Thorns!”

The instant her lance touched its next victim, a blazing purple light enveloped her, sweeping down into the lance and then the Grimm. From there, it blasted down into the ground, expanding like a flower, skewering hundreds of Grimm around her.

This bought Arturia enough time to land, but there were still enough Grimm alive within that kill zone to charge at her once more.

Then she heard the sound of the officer finally replying. “Splash five on the way!”

Each splash with a single artillery gun, the size of which would not have been out of place during WW1 on earth. Those guns were around sixty percent of the money spent on getting the mine up and running. That didn’t even include their ammunition. Now they fired into a single area, on Arturia’s position and all around her.

Instantly Arturia broke left, the area that seemed to be the weakest portion of the horde around her attack.

She lashed out at any Grimm that got in her way, but no longer was she trying to kill or stand her ground. Instead, she was trying to escape. Like the animals they resemble, the Grimm felt that and closed in on her all the harder, using the bodies of their fellows to leap and jump after her from every angle.

Arturia kept firing her rifle and stabbing, and then, when a Beowolf Alpha finally appeared, leaping towards her out of the darkness, she leaped towards it in turn. This surprised the Alpha, and Arturia got her feet up and into the creature’s chest. She could feel the Grimm breath on her legs as it snapped at her, clawing at her legs, trying to break through her Aura even as she kicked off, but it did nothing.

In contrast, Arturia's double kick shattered the Grimm's armor and hurled her through the air in the direction she wanted to go. Arturia flew through the air above several more, using her rifle now to gain still more space as she raced for the edge of the horde. And then, above her, Arturia heard the whistling begin.

The whistling of the artillery shells was so loud that the Grimm around her paused in their assault, staring up at the sky in confusion. This and another use of Thousand Thorns gave Arturia time to race through the horde before the first shells landed.

“KKKAAABOOOOOOOOOOOMMM!!!!”

The cracking boom of the explosion reverberated through the night, the sound and fury of the explosion blinding many of the Grimm around her, followed by still more explosions. Each artillery piece was set to fire at least twice, shifting their aim only slightly to completely cover the area where Arturia had been standing.

The blast caught Arturia mid-leap, and she was hurled through the air. She landed on top of a Grimm, stabbing it with a small dagger she had attached to the inner side of her shield as one of her two secondary weapons through its eye.

Rolling, Arturia's lance took another in the chest, catching it before it could pounce on her. An Alpha came out of the darkness but was blown off its feet by the concussive arrival of another shell, landing nearby, one which also caused Arturia to lose her feet, rolling through the darkness across the ground as it heaved under her. Then Arturia was inside a small ditch, left by a tree that had apparently been uprooted in some ancient storm.

There, Arturia hid in the dirt, and small bushes at the bottom of the ditch as more shells landed around her former position. The artillery strike continued its devastating work, but Arturia knew the artillery guns alone wouldn't be enough. Indeed, the Beowolves had already begun to spread out, and more and more howls in the distance responded to this assault. *Clever beasts. They kept their waves separate so that if one ran into resistance, the others would be free to flank it.*

“This is Arturia,” she whispered into her mike as the artillery fell silent. “I am away. The Grimm's initial wave has been bloodied, but there will be others. Remember to husband your star flares and good luck.”

Back at the mine, the defenders waited, buoyed somewhat by this report – which the officers shared with them - and the sheer sound and fury of their big guns going off. There was nothing like the noise of someone else getting fired at by big guns to make an infantryman happy, especially when you knew the enemy couldn't fire back.

But now, as the guns fell silent, the darkness crept back in. If not for Paul and the officers, a feeling of fear might have begun to spread among the men. But they kept morale up,

reminding the defenders of their advantages, which was enough to keep the fear at bay as they waited for the Grimm to arrive.

The Grimm had indeed continued moving forward, racing now instead of slinking along. The first massive wave of black, white and red eyes had split up into smaller bands, yet they were still moving faster than nearly any human group of equal size could have.

As Arturia waited, hidden in her little hidey-hole, the Grimm continued racing forward around her for another hour.

Unfortunately for the Grimm, this meant coming out into the open area around the mine. Several miles worth of forest had been cleared around the mine by this point, an ever-expanding clear zone, coupled with layer upon layer of ditches and a bit of barbed wire, although not much for the area covered. Sharpened wooden stakes could work just as well on Grimm skin and those the ditches were liberally lined with them.

The first of the Beowolves ran into that defense, and although they didn't feel pain, their thrashing about warned the defenders. Searchlights came down from the sky all around the mine, staring out into the no man's land beyond, and the gunners on the wall manning the large guns on the wall, which had much longer range than the machine guns or rifles of the men manning the battlements, heard the order. "Light them up! Aim for any large group possible."

Those guns that could train on the first packs to come out into the open did so, and the mind behind the migration howled in the night with the voice of a million Beowolves as still more of its followers died.

Arturia watched as the next few waves moved around that initial wave, trying to find a way at the walls where they didn't have to go through so much intervening distance. They failed. But soon, the star fortress was almost completely surrounded as Grimm charged forwards. Thousands soaked up the fire coming from their would-be victims, and more came out of the forest to charge through the smoke and ash of their dead fellows.

Now, as the emotions of the defenders began to turn dark, the Beowolves were joined by other Grimm out of the wilds. Creepers joined the wolfpacks seamlessly, and Nevermore cawed out in the night, diving down toward the defenders. But the anti-air guns opened fire on them quickly, and so dense were the defenses that even with this enhancement to their numbers, the Grimm could simply not make much progress very quickly.

"Heavy guns, start to conserve ammo," came the call about thirty minutes after the last gun stationed at a point of the star fortress had begun to be engaged.

Some on the wall questioned that order, one such being near Paul going, "Dammit! What the hell does that Atlesian cunt mean that machine guns should conserve fire! They're cutting them down by their hundreds."

“More are coming on in their thousands,” Paul warned. “We need to conserve our ammunition, or else we’ll run out of bullets before the Grimm run out of bodies. Besides, they haven’t even reached the halfway point yet. You want to actually participate in this battle, right, instead of simply standing up here like a fixture, right?”

The man grumbled but did not have much to say to that.

Soon the Grimm had moved forward, entering the mid-layer of defenses now, where the regular guards on the wall could fire at the Grimm. The men on the walls opened fire instantly, and though few hit the target they truly aimed at, that didn’t matter much when confronting a horde this size.

For the next hour, the shouts of men, curses, battle cries and orders fought the sounds of the Grimm and their weapons. The howls of the Beowolves had been joined by the hisses and snarls of the Creepers and caws of a few Nevermore, but they couldn’t drown out the noise of the human defenders even so.

Meanwhile, out in the darkness, Arturia waited. She waited until the sound of battle in the distance was so loud as to reach her here and there was no movement in the dark around her. Now she moved, pulling herself out of the little ditch the fallen tree had made. But Arturia did not move back to the battle. Rather, she pushed deeper into the darkness.

And instead of engaging the next few Grimm Arturia spotted, she halted, slinking past them, using her emotional self-control - really, more her total lack of fear of the creatures - and her body appearance to blend into the darkness. In this manner, Arturia saw more and more of them racing towards the distant battle, groups of Beowolves that had followed separate lanes of advance instead of the main one.

Twice more, she called down artillery strikes on groups of Grimm that were seemingly waiting for orders. One such group had been led by a bank of five Alphas, several hundred Grimm, strong, and then she began to hear the artillery firing closer to home, annihilating the whole group.

Soon after that, Arturia turned to move around the battlefield, using hearing to discern where it was in relation to her current position, knowing that no matter how intelligent the Dreadwolf would be, it would still think largely like the creature its existence mocked.

And sure enough, two hours later, Arturia found it.

Several thousand Beowolves were waiting in the darkness, staring towards the distant sound of thunder, spread out so much Arturia doubted she could have hit more than a few hundred with her Excalibur attack. Interspersed amongst them were more Alphas, far more than Arturia had ever seen in one place, more than she had ever **heard** of in one place outside of the battle for Mountain Glenn in Vale years ago.

There, the number of Alpha Beowolves had, once they had burst through the outer defenses of the city, spelt the ruination of the defenders. The Alphas were able to take to the urban environment as well as humans could, directing small bands of the invading Grimm like the best trained officers could have.

But here, the site of that horde nearly made her smile. *The Dreadwolf is overestimating our numbers severely if he thinks he needs that many alpha Beowolves after our defenses are broken. And it's underestimating our defenses if it thinks it can break through this way.*

A second later Arturia had to fight back a gasp as suddenly from out a pack made entirely out of Alphas an even larger Grimm stood to its full height, pushing the other Grimm away from it. Like the alphas, it stood on its hind legs, but it was more than a yard taller. Instead of the two upper arms, it had four, making it a six legged creature, and its back legs were even more humanoid than an Alpha's. Its head was large for its body, full of serrated teeth, its back, chest, and most of its legs and arms covered with red-striated armor, and its hands ended with long, wicked looking claws, longer and sharper looking its less-evolved brethren. Its tail was also longer, thicker, ending in a base like a club, giving it another weapon to go with his four arms, two legs, and those fangs.

The Dreadwolf's eyes were also a darker, deeper red color than most Grimm, showing its age just as much as its evolutionary form, and its mask too was marked with numerous red marks. But more than anything else it was the way the Grimm moved, human yet so very **not** at the same time. This thing was very obviously intelligent, watching the distant battle as if it could make out details that Arturia would need binoculars to see.

As Arturia watched, holding onto her self-control with some difficulty to not instantly attack, it howled, and soundlessly, the reserve of the migration loped forward towards the back of the star fortress. And as they did, Arturia smiled. *Mistake!* The Grimm had packed together once more as they raced forward.

Seeing that, Arturia raised one hand slowly to her ear, clicking on her communications gear once more. "This is Arturia. I want a rolling garage out from your position to my current one. You have Grimm incoming. This is their Sunday punch people! Kill it before it can get to the walls."

Back at the star fortress, many of the Grimm had reached the walls, and to the dismay of the defenders, those that did were capable of scaling up. The gripping strength of the Beowolves claws gave them the ability to pull themselves upwards no matter how smooth the wall was and when they died, they left those tiny handholds for the follow-on waves.

That defending fire was still heavy, still organized, and any lingering feeling of shock or horror at the night's business, the sight of all those red eyes in the darkness racing towards them, had long since dissipated. Once more, mankind had stared into the darkness of the night,

held up its rifle and said, "I don't fear you, for this is my boomstick!" in the words of more than one soldier on the wall that night.

Paul could feel it all around him. The defenders coming together, overcoming the intrinsic horror of fighting Grimm and fighting them at night. *Is this what Harry was on about? The eldig ande (fiery spirit) of the fighting man?*

The wayward uncle of the Arc family had been somewhat ambivalent about having everyone who could get their Aura unlocked upon arriving in Evig Låga, regardless of their occupation. He'd been somewhat dismissive of using commonly trained soldiers but had felt that defending a wall was indeed something they could do.

Now Paul realized he had completely underestimated what successfully doing so would do for their morale, for their sense of self. Something that Harry had more than once mentioned in talks with Evig Låga's counsel. *What did the brat say, 'Teach someone to stand up for themselves, give them the skill to do so, and with just one victory, they'll keep doing it'? Damn it, Harry, where did those smarts of yours come from, huh?*

Now he could feel it all around, determination, a growing sense of elan, and he smiled. *Wherever he got that wisdom from, it's obvious Harry was right here.*

Behind him, the artillery began to fire, a rolling barrage lit up the night, even as more star flares accompanied it.

But the Grimm had seen the artillery before and, more importantly, heard it. The whaling noise of the shells through the air caused the Grimm to once more spread out so that the shells did not have as much carnage to the horde as they should have. The Grimm kept charging forward, soon entering the clear zone around the star-shaped wall defending the mine.

Barely able to see the fortress with her spyglass, Arturia watched the battle for a moment, calculating. The defenders showed no sign of breaking. The artillery might be running out of shells, as well as the heavy guns on the wall. Yet the secret assault, the overpowered blow at the back of the fortress that might have overwhelmed the walls, had been broken up.

The Beowolf Alphas were doing well, trying to keep their lesser brethren from bunching up, but to come forward, they had to enter the range of the cannons on the wall, and they could not avoid them. The ditches and distance kept them from even getting to the defenders. All of their intelligence, their cunning was nullified by the defenses.

Arturia could now see the Grimm were also running out of numbers. Without the fear of the civilians hidden in the mine, and with the defenders taking courage and how well they've been doing, there wasn't the fear, horror and anxiety that would have called down still more Grimm to join the migration's efforts against the walls. *They are losing this battle. The star*

fortress design and the layers of ditches have completely foiled this attack. Well, that and my scouting and the artillery.

Watching the Dreadwolf, Arturia could see the moment that realization hit the S-class Grimm. It twitched, its claws elongating as it leaned forward like a real wolf, digging into the ground for a moment in an almost human gesture of anger. Then it rose to its formidable height, three meters tall if it was an inch, threw back his head and howled. The sound battered Arturia's senses where she hid several hundred feet away, and she had to bite her lip against the cry of pain.

All of the Grimm nearby took up the howl, and the Alphas leading the reserves of the pack still moving forward instantly obeyed, pulling away, retreating from the defenders. The migration had been beaten off.

But for Arturia, that was not enough. She knew that if these Grimm survived, they would take what they had learned and eventually return. An S-Class Grimm always learned from defeats and returned to avenge them. *I cannot allow that.*

With barely a thought, Arturia gathered Aura into Rhongomyniad and stood up, pulling it back before thrusting forward. "Excalibur!"

The Dreadwolf had barely a second to turn, but it didn't matter. The creature was insanely fast, and somehow it was already moving by the time the attack lashed out.

Few opponents that Arturia had ever faced had been fast enough to react to her energy wave assault, but much like Pyrrha had when defeating Arturia in their second championship match, this Grimm did so. It dove towards the ground, grabbing several of its fellows with its four hands and pulling them over itself before the blast of energy landed.

The blast continued on, searing into the rear of the enemy force that was slowly beginning to pull back towards its leader, shattering that cohesion, and on the walls, Paul saw his niece's assault blasting out of the slowly receding night like one of the star players from the night before. Then came a command that he had never thought to hear. "Up and over! Up and over!"

Paul was shocked, but a nearby Lieutenant hurried to obey. Men replaced spent magazines, then tossed down a dozen rope ladders. One man out of every three went down, followed by a second, while the third remained on the wall. "Push forward until the barbed wire. Keep up the pressure!"

Hearing that, Paul understood. While turning the attack back on the Grimm was not something most would have thought of, the humans still had the advantage of range. The more Grimm killed now, the better, and the sun was coming up to boot. *I'd wager anything that this is a move that Atlesian ass and Harry thought up. It goes against the grain, but so long as we keep our distance, it's the right move.*

With that, Paul leaped over the side, followed by the better-trained officers, leading the way toward where his niece's attack had just gone off again in the distance. "Kick their black and white asses all the way to the underworld!"

Arturia was incensed, furious that this Grimm was so fast! It had sacrificed its fellows to give it more time the first time and now leaped up over her second beam of energy. The pre-dawn light began to gleam in the distance as other Grimm charged towards her position, normal Beowolves and Alphas alike, while the Dreadwolf practically disappeared into the shadows.

For a few moments, Arturia couldn't concentrate on the Dreadwolf. Rhongomyniad lashed out, slamming several Grimm one into another, then an Alpha was on her, and she was forced to dodge and block, battering it aside. Whirling, the side of Rhongomyniad crashed into the creature's skull with bone-crushing force, only to not do much damage. The creature staggered, its mask cracked, but its hands came up, grabbing Rhongomyniad. Two other Grimm leaped on her, clawing and biting, trying to wear down her Aura to kill her.

Arturia kicked, punched and, dropping her shield, grabbed a Grimm and used it to block the attacks from several others before stepping forward again, pulling Rhongomyniad out of the Beowolf Alpha's grip with difficulty before ramming it into its chest as it made to jump toward her.

Just as the smoke of the Grimm bodies began to fill the air around her, Arturia picked up her shield once more, and the Dreadwolf appeared, rising out of the shadows of a tree to one side of her. All four of its arms came at Arturia, the upper arms smashing her in the side and back while the other two tried to pull her weapon out of her grip.

That effort failed, but the other strikes were so hard they flung Arturia off her feet.

I have very rarely been struck harder than that! Arturia thought, teeth gritted in anger and pain. Rolling as she landed, Arturia came up in a crouch, her shield forward, Rhongomyniad raised behind her head as the Dreadwolf stalked towards her.

With the dawn breaking, the two made for quite a sight to the defenders pushing their way forward. The battle against the other Grimm had pushed Arturia towards the mines, with the Dreadwolf following. Now that blow had flung her out of the wood line into the open, letting the defenders see both Huntress and Grimm.

Arturia was not a tall woman, she wasn't quite petite, but she was certainly not as tall as Tia or Pyrrha. Her Huntress outfit barely stood out in the dark, the armor, a dull black from her nighttime activities, covering her from neck to foot. Only her silver-gold hair and the paleness of her skin stood out against it, the dirt and ash she had covered her head in having been knocked off her skin or smeared off during the night.

In contrast, the Dreadwolf stood taller than any man, wider in the shoulders, hunching forward like its smaller brethren. Its four arms were splayed wide, its claws glistening in the light, its tail flailing around like it had a mind of its own.

For a moment, the gunfire slowed, the advancing humans just watching the tableau. And then both combatants charged. Arturia roared like a lioness, Rhongomyniad thrusting out, while the Grimm howled, dashing forwards, dodging Rhongomyniad, its forearms reaching to grab or slash, its tail flicking around.

Arturia's shield came up, battering aside the attack from the tail, which she couldn't dodge, feeling the shield's metal deform from that single strike. Her last rifle rounds cracked out, doing nothing against the armored hide of the Grimm while her lance thrust went low, slicing along one of its legs, drawing some black blood from that area. Then she was forced to twist away, dodging and moving through a series of attacks from the Grimm's four arms before leaping over a strike from its tail.

In mid-air, she lashed out with her lance again, her Semblance crafting her strike. "Thousand Thorns!"

But one arm of the Grimm battered it aside. The others crashed into her, hurling Arturia backward even as her Thousand Thorns attack went off at the point of impact. The Grimm was forced to dodge the thorns as they appeared, and point-blank range, the Grimm could not dodge it all. Two struck the Grimm in its chest, smashing into its armor with so much force that the armor shattered, while a third strike nearly took its legs out from under it. Only a last-second twist saved the limb; once more, a long rivulet of black blood began seeping from the wound.

Shaking her head from the blow that had hit her in the head, Arturia pushed herself to her feet as the Grimm charged towards her once more. She rolled out of the way, slamming Rhongomyniad down on the ground again as she cried out, "Thousand Thorns!" once more.

With her thought now guiding the attack, the thorns didn't just appear in a random circumference around the point of impact. Instead, the purple energy thorns lashed out toward the Grimm, reaching for it from every direction in a thin arc from Arturia's position. The Grimm snarled, lashing out with its hands and feet almost as a human would, save for the fact that it had four arms. Its claws grew as it cut at the energy attacks, dissipating them even as the energy damaged the claws. Claws that then popped out of their fingers and were replaced by new ones growing out of the Grimm's body.

But it had been held in place, and Arturia charged into the mass of energy thorns. "HAAA!!!"

A second later, Rhongomyniad's tip stabbed into the creature's side, directly between two of its arms. Those arms spasmed, trying to reach for her, as did the other two, reaching across its body. But the spasming arms were not under the Grimm's control, and the others

lacked the range. Her attack had burst through the creature's armor and damaged its insides, interfering with the Dreadwolf's control of its own limbs. The spasming arms smacked into Arturia's chest, but without even a tenth of the force they should have, and Arturia continued to bull forward, pushing Rhongomyniad deeper into the Grimm.

The creature threw back his head, then thrust it towards her.
"AOWWWWOOOWWWWOOOOOO!!!!"

As before, the Dreadwolf's howl was so strong it acted like a sonic attack. Arturia cried out, her forward momentum halting as both hands went up to her head.

The Grimm pushed itself off Rhongomyniad, and its tail came around again before it charged forward. The strike from the tail sent Arturia flying, but the first two blows were taken on her shield, raised as it was to her head, a lucky happenstance. The shield deformed and then was torn asunder as Arturia's lance flew away.

The Grimm then grabbed her around the throat with one working upper arm while its lower arm pummeled Arturia along with its tail, trying to get through her Aura.

Which, Arturia now felt, it would soon enough. *Brothers, this thing is strong!* She thrashed in place but couldn't break its grip on her neck, and the seventh blow from its tail knocked the wind out of her, denting her armor, which had heretofore been protected by her Aura. The next blow did worse, and Arturia felt her ribs go as her Aura collapsed at the point of impact. The Grimm howled again, and Arturia's head was still ringing with the sound as it dragged her close, intending to bite her head off.

This proved to be a fatal mistake.

Arturia's hand flashed down to her belt, where she pulled out a stiletto dagger, one of her two holdout weapons, the thin dagger quickly unfolding in her grip to be about four inches long.

When the Grimm opened its mouth, Arturia thrust forward with the weapon, stabbing it into the creature's mouth. She had intended to stab straight into the creature's brain, but the Dreadwolf's bones were too thick to punch through.

The pain of the strike caused the Grimm to release her, and Arturia hit the ground painfully, rolling away. Throughout her battering, Arturia had kept an eye on where Rhongomyniad had fallen, and now she sprinted towards it.

The Grimm, throwing off its momentary pain, spat out the stiletto and came on, howling.

Arturia reached her lance and turned, thrusting forward.

The creature's arms once more reached for her, but Rhongomyniad, the World Breaker, had more reach.

Its tip crashed into the Grimm's chest, the armor of which had been shattered already in numerous places, and once more, Rhongomyniad penetrated. The Grimm's own momentum spitted it on the lance, Rhongomyniad burying deep inside, and Arturia stared up at the creature's baleful red eyes, holding Rhongomyniad in both hands as she snarled. "I win, creature!" Then, her yellow eyes began to glow as she harnessed the last of her Aura, funneling it into Rhongomyniad. "'Split the heavens and rend the Earth! Shine, Excalibur!"

Even though the attack was barely a tenth of what Arturia had used earlier, the Grimm couldn't dodge this time. The upper half of the Dreadwolf simply disintegrated, leaving the legs to fall to the dirt, where they slowly turned into dust motes of black ash before dissipating.

And in the distance, the defenders cheered. "OOOOOOOOHHHHH!!!!!"

Without the over-intelligence guiding the packs of Beowolves, they quickly began to retreat from the victorious defenders. But although they still weren't as well-trained as traditional Huntsmen, the soldiers guarding the mine complex were certainly eager enough to make up for it. Far too few people outside Hunters had ever been part of such an overwhelming victory against the Grimm, and these soldiers would never forget the part they had played in it.

Slowly and carefully, they moved through the tattered remnants of barbed wire, pushing further out, searching out and destroying any Grimm they found. Even some motorcycles and industrial Bullheads got involved in the chase, the bullheads dropping the bikes down outside the defenses before moving over the land, with gunners leaning out of their sides.

Arturia did not take part in this activity. The fight against the Dreadwolf had taken it out of her, and she did not argue with her uncle as he ushered her back to the star fortress, even allowing him to help her up the ladder, something that she would never normally have allowed.

When Arturia reached the battlements, she was greeted by cheers, not just from the defenders who had remained behind on watch but from the civilians who had been let out of the mine. They filed up the area within the star fortress, and for the first time, Arturia found herself battered by a wall of sound from the human side of things, the men below yelling and clapping so loudly it made her battered ears ring.

Hearing that shout of victory, Arturia allowed herself her small, public smile as she raised Rhongomyniad in triumph.

The chanting began then. "Dark Queen, Dark Queen, Dark Queen!"

But Arturia was not having that. She shook her head, then banged Rhongomyniad against the walls of the battlements until the crowd had quieted down. "No!" She said, her tone cold, regally demanding as she stared down at them all. Her presence was so commanding and

powerful that any noblewoman in Atlas or elsewhere would have committed murder to possess it.

“No. This is not just my win over the Dreadwolf. Cheer for yourselves. Cheer for your fellows. Without them, without their courage to stand on this wall and defend you, without the defenses they had toiled over, without their training and their sacrifice, this victory would not have been possible. Cheer for yourselves. Good folk. For this is your victory!”

The cheers then had no words to it for the first few moments. And then, rising below those but soon overtaking the others, came the call of “Arc, Arc, Arc!”

And Arturia allowed herself another faint smile before hobbling down to the stairs leading up to the wall.

OOOOOOO

While he wasn't going to say anything aloud, Harry was mildly frustrated at how the first three classes of their combat course had gone. While Professor Goodwitch was conscientious about calling everyone up to spar, there weren't any exciting matches last Friday or today. Instead, Yang, Tia, and the rest had been pitted against other freshmen. It was seemingly random, but Harry had his doubts on that score. For one thing, Pyrrha had just finished a match against another freshman who used a spear and rifle-shifting weapon and had helped Professor Goodwitch, pointing out a few mistakes in the girl's form.

The girl herself looked a little resentful at first but had begun listening at least near the end of their talk. That had put Pyrrha in a good mood, at least, for which Harry was thankful. But not enough to set aside his realization that Pyrrha had been used as a teacher's aide instead of being challenged herself. Nor was she the only one.

Yang had also been paired against other hand-to-hand fighters, as had Tia, the second class, although that hadn't continued in this one. The same was true for Ren, while Nora...

Harry glanced to the side, where Nora was giggling quietly to herself, patting her hammer where it lay on her lap like it was a dog that had just done a trick, staring across at Cardin. The large youth was resolutely trying not to look in her direction, hunching his shoulders and looking deliciously down at the floor instead.

Which is another sign that Goodwitch is messing with the 'random' pairing. What are the odds that the largest bully in our grade would be pitted against someone who can make a fool out of him in every class? I know that the first time around, it wasn't Goodwitch's idea, but the two times after that? Random... Sure. The second class had pitted Cardin against Weiss, who had massacred him through glyphs and precise strikes with Myrtenaster.

Shaking his head, Harry turned to his other side as Tia touched his arm, looking at him inquisitively. Her eyes were narrowed, a look of concern in them.

Harry shook his head at her, indicating it wasn't anything serious, and his sister subsided. When she did, Harry's thoughts went back to the class. *While I can only applaud Professor Goodwitch's desire to force us all to help one another, it does leave those of us who are well ahead of the learning curve on our own...*

Harry's thoughts paused again, and his eyes widened, and he leaned back, staring up at the ceiling, no longer even bothering to look as if he was paying attention to the boring match going on below him. *I'm an idiot. I've thought about training exercises for all of us. We've already done some getting-to-know-you stuff, trust exercises, and so forth. So what is stopping us from taking it further? If this class can't push us to grow because Goodwitch needs to teach to the middle denominator, it falls on us as a team to push forward. And I'll just bet that's what she wants, the conniving woman.*

With that in mind, Harry quickly pulled out his scroll and began to look for a training area that had a few hours open on Tuesday. And later that night, Harry asked his team to meet him with their hunter outfits and weapons at training field sixteen.

The next day, while the other students had Aura Maturation class, Harry and Tia spent some time together, with Harry helping Tia with her history homework and Tia helping Harry with his science homework as the two of them had a leisurely breakfast. The two broke off to change before meeting back up and heading to the training area in question. Tia had evinced interest in joining Harry's team in their training, and so long as it didn't get in the way of Tia training with her team, Harry wasn't about to deny her.

Many of the training fields for the students were pretty much the same. Situated around the outer edge of the campus, the training areas were separated by walkways and large, heavily reinforced walls separating the path from the training grounds and one another. Most of them were the size of a tennis field. Most were indeed just grass fields with small benches with holographic systems, but a few were advanced, made to be examples of various combat environments.

Harry was particularly interested in training through the four interconnected areas at the far end of the training zone. That area was apparently made to act like a town, complete with the inside of buildings. But to use that training ground, you needed to get a professor's approval because it came with an expensive hard light technology that could create a Grimm horde for the trainees to fight through which felt real.

Entering the training ground, Harry sat down several water bottles he had taken the time to fill before turning, watching as Tia moved into the center of the area. She stared into the blue sky above, feeling the sun on her face and skin, her eyes gleaming with pleasure. Then Tia pulled out her weapon and began to do a series of stretches, moving so fast her hair shifted in the wind.

Harry paused, taking in the view, realizing how beautiful his twin was. Tia's dark caramel-colored skin stood out sharply against the white of her outfit, and as she moved, the power she put behind every mock strike did not detract at all from the allure of her curves. Harry watched as her eyes seemed to sparkle, looking forward to what was coming. It still surprised Harry that people could call Tia's face inexpressive or Tia herself unemotional when those eyes could say so much.

Stop staring, you arse! Stop it! She's your sister, she's your sister, you ran around with her in diapers, for Merlin's sake! Mind you, I can't remember much of that, but the sentiment is there! And you've got a girlfriend! Remember Pyrrha, remember your redhead fetish!

That last was a bit of a holdover from his past life and his relationship with Ginny, which had kept him going when Ron and Hermione fled Britain. But the point still stood. And frankly, sometimes his need to remember Tia was his twin needed all the help it could get.

Thankfully for Harry's mental state, his team began to arrive at that point, led by Pyrrha. She was clad in her huntress outfit, her tiara gleaming in the sunlight as her red hair flowed behind her, the others following her inside. Nora and Ren were also dressed in their Hunter outfits, but Harry felt he could be forgiven for concentrating so much on his girlfriend.

Harry waved, and his teammates moved in his direction, although Nora took a moment to say hello to Tia, who stopped her exercises to nod back. "I realize why you and Tia aren't in our Aura Maturation class, but it is still a little annoying to contemplate," Pyrrha mock-complained, smiling at the two Arcs.

"Honestly, we probably could teach that class. We started learning about Aura manipulation well before you unlocked my aura, Pyrrha," Harry said, winking at her. "Our family has long known that having a gigantic Aura isn't enough. You need to know how to use it and how to make it grow further."

Tia nodded as she came over with Nora, who had flung her arm around the other girl snorting at something under her breath. Tia didn't do anything to throw her arm back off, instead adding a quiet, "Our Mom also knew some meditation techniques," to Harry's words. Then she cocked her head, staring at Harry, and waving her one hand lightly around them, indicating he should get a move on.

"Today marks our first real team training exercise. For today, I want us to go through a series of drills. First, we'll build on the conversation we had last night. I'll give us various scenarios to work through as a team. Tia here will play the part of the Grimm with the training ground's hologram system."

"Grrr...." Tia mock growled behind her turtleneck, her tone its normal bland one, causing Ren and Nora to laugh at the moment of levity from the normally silent girl, looking at her in surprise.

But Pyrrha wasn't surprised. Tia was always that little bit more expressive once you got to know her. That, and Pyrrha knew having her hidden behind her outfit's large turtleneck helped Tia immensely. Still, Pyrrha gave the other girl a thumb's up, which she returned.

"What next?" Ren asked.

"At that point, we'll take a break to discuss our various strengths and weaknesses when fighting against Grimm. Then, we'll have a partner vs. partner sparring session with Tia as our referee. And then, the five of us will have one-on-one matches, during which we will work through a few handicap-style scenarios." Harry frowned a little shaking his head. "Today will be the only day we're going to have any one-on-one combat, though. It will allow us all to see one another's styles up close, but no way are we going to get stuck in one-on-one hell like the combat class."

Pyrrha chuckled weakly at that, scratching her chin and looking away, while Tia just nodded. Even Harry had more to learn in one-on-one combat training than Tia unless she was paired against someone like Pyrrha or Yang. *And, Harry reflected, unless Goodwitch wants to use her powers to repair the room after every match, having Yang and Tia fight would not be a good idea. I honestly don't know if either would learn anything style-wise, although I am certain it would push them physically.*

There was a difference there, after all. Without advancing your style or how you harnessed your Semblance; a Hunter would have a dangerous weakness no matter how strong they might be.

The combat scenario went pretty well, in Harry's opinion, although Tia acting as the opposing force left a bit to be desired. In this training area, there was no hard light system. It was only simple holograms. And Tia's tactics were typical, normal Grimm tactics: numbers and multiple angles of attack. So the training lacked quite a bit in terms of realism.

Still, it was an okay session to start with, during which Pyrrha told the team about her Semblance, and Nora showed what hers could do.

Harry was interested in that since one of the attack spells he could use in Remnant summoned a lightning bolt, and he was eager to see how strong she could get if given a big enough jolt. Until then, he had some suggestions to add to her outfit, as did Tia.

"Armor," Tia announced firmly, practically glaring at Nora and Ren.

When they looked at her in confusion, Harry elaborated. "Pyrrha and I wear armor. Tia's Semblance and Aura lends themselves to the defensive so much that armor would be redundant in her case compared to becoming better at dodging. But neither of you can say the same. Ren, I know you lack the strength or endurance to wear a lot of armor, and heavy armor wouldn't be a good idea in your case. But brigandine might be. Nora, you should wear at least a full chest plate and some armor for your thighs and legs."

“And now is the time to look into that kind of upgrade,” Pyrrha enthused, clapping her hands together. “I could help you design your armor if you needed the help, or Ruby could. That young girl has an insane level of knowledge about weapons. Maybe it extends to armor as well?”

Ren hesitated, of then nodded. “I suppose that makes sense.”

“And Nora, if you do get an armor upgrade, you could add some kind of small battery or something to the inside of it, which you could then activate to give yourself a jolt if you needed one in battle,” Harry wheedled, noticing Nora’s frowning as she almost glared at Tia.

“Okay, now I’m sold!” Nora’s bullish expression at being forced to wear armor when most hunters disdained it disappeared instantly at that suggestion, and she hopped in place gleefully.

“Excellent. Now, as for our teamwork...” From there, Harry began to break down the team training for a while, while everyone had a drink of water, giving their own opinions about how it had gone, or simply sitting silently like Tia, her head against Harry’s knee as she sat on the ground while he sat on the bench.

Next, the two pairs went at it fighting against one another.

This turned out to be an entirely one-sided exercise. Harry and Pyrrha’s synergy neutralized Nora and Ren in almost every way. That was not a knock on them. It was simply that with Pyrrha’s willingness to use her Semblance and Harry his, the other two didn’t really have anything to combat the two of them. Harry could stop Ren’s bullets midair along with Nora’s grenades, as could Pyrrha, so staying at range was useless. Pyrrha was so fast and powerful that even if either of the others could close with her, they couldn’t really do anything, and Harry’s abilities made him just as dangerous.

When they switched off, Nora and Pyrrha proved to be something of a liability. Nora had issues following Pyrrha’s softly worded suggestions, while Ren and Harry had no such issues. Moreover, Harry’s Semblance proved a very good match against Pyrrha’s, although, as Harry pointed out, “that could be because you’re just not used to using it large-scale like that. You’re used to keeping it a secret, using it subtly. We need to work on that in the future.”

The look he got from his girlfriend showed her thoughts on that score, but despite that, Pyrrha was a good sport, taking her team’s loss in stride. Although Harry’s words and Nora and Ren’s suggestions seemed to light a fire in her. Pyrrha seriously needed to broaden her horizons when using her Semblance openly. Far too often, she fell back on her training to use it as little as possible to keep Polarity’s true nature a secret.

On the other hand, Nora did not take critiquing her teamwork very well. It took Ren a few moments to get Nora out of a minor funk. That was something Harry needed to be aware of going forward.

Thankfully, when he and Nora paired up, she didn't seem to have as many issues following his commands, although this time around, Ren was able to get off one of his aura-assisted assaults on Harry. This attack condensed Ren's Aura, which, while he didn't have much, Ren could manipulate to an even higher level than Harry and Tia. And being hit like this hurt like the blazes.

The strike launched Harry through the air to crash headfirst against the far wall of the training area. As Tia watched, a large chunk of his aura disappeared from the screen she was using to monitor everyone, and her eyes widened in surprise..

In return, Ren had slumped down and was wringing out his hands as if they had been shocked recently. "Dammit! How much aura do you have!"

"Aura monsters," Harry and Tia said as one before sharing a grin, although Tia's obviously wasn't visible underneath her outfit. Then Harry shook his head. "Still, that trick would have worked on seven out of ten people for certain."

Seeing the expression in his sister's eyes, Harry walked over and pulled Tia into a hug, apologizing for letting her feel left out. "But you should be training like this with your own team, you know? I'm fine with you helping us in one-on-one spars, but I don't want to step on Sung-Sun's toes by trying to work you into our team's partner or team-based training."

"I understand. It's just annoying," Tia answered, leaning into the hug lightly, reveling in the feel of her twin's arms around her, feeling a warmth rising from within her. She always enjoyed hugs like this or, well, any kind of touch from Harry. She had always liked hugging Harry, even more than the rest of their family, for reasons she had never bothered trying to define.

Pyrrha and the others smiled at this. Although Nora was looking between Pyrrha and Tia, crossing her fingers behind her back as a thought occurred to her. "So fearless leader!" She nearly shouted, interrupting the brother-sister moment. "What's next?"

"A break, some mutual training, and then one-on-one sparring to finish up the day."

The instruction went pretty well. Nora and Harry spoke about different ways to use her grenade launcher, bouncing shots, angled shots, and different types of ammunition. He and Ren exchanged hand-to-hand tips, with Ren slowly beginning the instruction of Harry and his own on unarmed style, with Pyrrha joining in. Nora and Tia meanwhile arm wrestled, then really wrestled for a bit with Ren as the referee. Meanwhile, Pyrrha and Harry spoke about different ways to use his shield in conjunction with his sword, which was the most useful training in terms of Harry's personal style. Pyrrha turned out to be just as good a teacher as a fighter, and Harry's enthusiastic thanks for the pointers caused Pyrrha to blush bright red.

After that, Harry pulled out his scroll. On its screen was a roulette wheel, with different headings in each wheel segment. "All right folks, it's time for one-on-one combat. First, the wheel will pick out two names randomly, and then the next wheel determines the handicap."

Ren frowned at that. "The same kind you've had us use in class? No weapon, no Semblance?"

"No, I've been far more extensive with this list. 'Don't use your arms, they're broken', for one. And another is 'You're Aura is low, run for your life'." Harry smirked before enlarging the other names, letting the other teens read them and laugh at some of his warnings. "And finally, a coin toss will tell us whether or not it will affect one of the combatants or both."

"Wait, are you talking about an actual penny or something?" Nora asked, frowning over at Pyrrha.

"I would never!" Pyrrha exclaimed, looking affronted at the very idea. Milo flashed into her hand from where she had put it down, the mecha-shift weapon taking its javelin form. "I want to push myself to grow! How would cheating help me!?"

While Nora hastily apologized to the scowling Pyrrha, Harry shook his head. "No, it's not a real penny, just another wheel with only two choices. I like that program and the idea of computer-generated randomness helping us along."

A moment later, Harry stared disconsolately at his scroll, muttering, "Traitor!" His handicap was to have run out of aura. "Which means I can't use my Semblance either, and I can't afford to take any hits."

And paired against him was the reason why he wouldn't be able to take many hits.

Nora bounced gleefully in place, her hammer on her shoulder. The handicap wheel had decided that only Harry would be penalized, but frankly, even if it hadn't, Harry would not have liked his chances against Nora. "Don't worry, fearless leader, I'll be gentle."

"Your smile does not fill me with confidence...." Harry muttered.

Obviously, Harry did still have his aura, so he wasn't actually hurt in the resulting battle. Humiliated, though, that he certainly was. Nora's reflexes weren't near as fast as Harry's, but her agility was well beyond his when she used Magnhild, and it only took a single blast to his back to send Harry careening and to lose the match.

However, Nora's comeuppance came almost immediately. The next match had her having a handicap of only one arm against Ren. She lost but came closer to defeating the other young man than Harry had Nora. Next, Harry's name came up again, forcing him to face his sister with both of them limited to only their weapons.

The two of them fought for several moments before Pyrrha called the match, with Ren agreeing. "I'm sorry, but that kind of match doesn't seem to do either of you any good at this point. You both know each other far too well. Maybe if you both had your Semblances?"

Tia scoffed at that, shaking her head, and Harry explained for the two of them. "At this point, ours are sort of predictable. If I can keep the range open, I can beat her. If not, Tia will eventually overwhelm me, although it's a long process. We've had extremely long matches, and they're pretty good in terms of training our overall physicality, but well, they are really long, like several hours."

"We once fought from after lunch to until the sunset," Tia added, shrugging her shoulders, sounding a bit proud of that as Harry hugged her from behind, laughing at the memory.

Pyrrha then fought Ren, winning handily despite Ren's best efforts, neither of them having a handicap. Nora and Tia fought, both handicapped by the no Aura thing. Since like her brother that equated to no Semblance for Tia, it was actually a very even match, which ended when Nora got in a lucky blow to Tia's leg, which the watchers ruled would have crippled her. At that point, despite Tiburon launching water sphere after water sphere towards her, Nora could keep the range open and simply bombard Tia with grenade canisters.

Eventually, one got through her defense, and the match was over as Nora announced, "Kablooie! The evil vile bandit is slain in the most gruesome manner possible! Without her aura to protect her, she comes apart at the seams, blood and gore flying everywhere, teehee!"

Everyone there laughed, and even Tia smiled behind her turtleneck, rolling to her feet from where the strike had hit her. In contrast to Nora's words, Tia showed absolutely no damage from the powerful dust grenade that it crashed into her chest a moment ago.

The next moment, Tia and Pyrrha's names came up, and the penalty pointed to no weapons. After which, the roulette wheel spent and pointed to both combatants.

"Well, now," Pyrrha mused, hopping to her feet and moving into the center of the training area as Tia dropped Tiburon by her brother and moved to match her, already activating her Semblance. "This could be interesting."

It was. Pyrrha was fast, agile, and incredibly well-trained in both weapon and hand-to-hand. She leaped and dodged around Tia, lashing out whenever she could. In contrast, Tia was just as mobile but not nearly as fast to react, and her style wasn't nearly as refined. She only landed one strike for every four from Pyrrha that landed.

And Pyrrha was using her Semblance, tugging at the little metal zipper or the metal in Tia's boots to mess up her footwork. But facing an opponent that didn't rely on weapons or any metal on their body like Tia was entirely new for Pyrrha. The only times she was able to surprise Tia was when she used her small containers of metal filings, using them to blind Tia several

times, and block her blows. Pyrrha couldn't accelerate them fast enough to use them as a weapon.

But Tia eventually got a hold of Pyrrha that the redhead couldn't break. After that, it was only a matter of time before Pyrrha was on the ground, Tia sitting on Pyrrha's hips, using one hand to pin both of Pyrrha's to the ground, raising the other hand in an elegant threatening to batter her into submission.

Looking over at the hologram screen, Harry was astonished to see that Tia's aura had been drained to 60%, while Pyrrha's was down to 40%. "Match over, ladies! And a very good match, I think. Pyrrha, we really need to work on more uses of your Semblance in the future. I think we'll devote this one-on-one training time to Semblance training instead going forward. Other than that, fantastic fight, both of you."

"You know what this means, though! Pyrrha Nikos, the Invincible Girl, just got beat!" Nora exclaimed, shaking her head.

"I don't think you can count on that," Ren warned. "She didn't have her weapons after all. It was a handicap match."

"Oh no, a loss as a loss," Pyrrha said, hopping to her feet and giving Tia a congratulatory hug which surprised the girl. "Tia here is a truly powerful opponent! I can't honestly pick between her and Arturia regarding how dangerous their Semblance is. I think that Arturia is better trained, but Tia and her Semblance pair better against me."

Tia blinked at this, then hugged the girl back as her armor began to fade away, her blue eyes soft and appreciative. *I really do like this girl.*

Since it was now pushing the middle of the afternoon, Harry called a halt for the day's training. Nora, Tia, and Ren headed immediately to the cafeteria for food, while Pyrrha decided to get a shower, and Harry did the same.

The two of them then headed back to the dorm, with Harry and his neck this way and that as they walked, which Pyrrha noticed. "Are you alright?"

"I hit the wall at a bad angle when Ren tagged me. Remember what Peach is always reminding us about: Aura can't do everything, and sore muscles are something that it can only help with slowly."

"Would you like a massage then?" Pyrrha asked shyly.

Harry paused mid-step, turning to look at her, but Pyrrha refused to meet his gaze, looking away nervously.

Seeing that, Harry smiled. After making sure that no one was around, he reached out and squeezed Pyrrha's hand tenderly. "I think I would like that, yes."

“Grand! I will give you one tonight,” Pyrrha enthused, squeezing back. “Unfortunately, Ruby and I have a scheduled meeting in the engineering room. I’ve been thinking about redesigning Milo. I’m perfectly happy with its javelin and xiphos forms, but I’ve been thinking of upgrading its rifle form to use a larger caliber bullet. Ruby had some thoughts on that, and of course, I’ll have to get used to the javelin form having a longer and thicker shaft.”

Once more Harry paused just as they were about to enter their dorm room, only this time, his stare was extremely deadpan as he looked at Pyrrha. “What?” She asked in confusion.

Harry continued to stare at her, but her innocent expression didn’t change. Seeing that, Harry realized that his girlfriend didn’t know what she had just said or how it could have been taken. “Just don’t say that line in front of Yang, please? I think the teasing would probably cause the capillaries in your face to burst.”

As they entered their room, Pyrrha still didn’t get it. And then she did and began to flush rosily as Harry had predicted.

Later that day, Nora and Ren had not yet returned to the dorm room, nor had Pyrrha. Nora and Ren had sent messages to Harry indicating they were staying in the library to work on homework, while Harry figured that the meeting with Ruby and the weapons engineering instructor had gone overlong. Which was probably a good sign.

Regardless, Harry had something of his own to do. His parents had informed him of the Grimm migration which had hit the mine, and Arturia’s role in defeating it, as well as the fact that Arturia would hopefully be staying at the mine for the foreseeable future. The Council of Evig Låga was looking to pay her a long-term contract to remain in the area, which Harry was very happy about for many reasons.

When it turned six, Harry called his sister, which, given the time difference, meant it would be ten or eleven at night where the mines were. Arturia answered promptly, and the two siblings exchanged grins, Arturia’s a noticeably wider expression than she would ever show in public. For his part, Harry reflected once more that, like Tia, Arturia was also drop-dead gorgeous. *She can pull off the regal noblewoman face better than anyone else I’ve ever met, and her golden eyes are intensely alluring.*

“Harry! I presume you are calling because you learned about our great victory here?”

“I did. Hearing that a Dreadwolf led the migration was a shock, but I know it was no match for you,” Harry said, completely serious. He doubted there was a single Grimm alive, save perhaps the legendary Dragon Grimm, who could face his sister one-on-one.

“Naturally,” Arturia answered simply, causing Harry to laugh.

The two of them talked about the battle until Harry asked, “So what do you think of the defenses Cherry designed?”

“Do not play that game with me, Harry. I know that you are the one who came up with the star fortress design, and you convinced Father to invest in those artillery pieces,” Arturia answered repressively, to which Harry shrugged. She huffed at him, shaking her head. “False modesty is not cute at all, Harry. Wherever did we go wrong with you?”

Harry chuckled again but indicated she should keep on speaking.

“The defenses worked quite well. Ditches, more ditches, and perhaps mud and water traps? Things which, when punctured, would release large amounts of water into the soil, turning it into mud? I am uncertain how to engineer such. It was just a thought. But with the number of Grimm that can attack, it is imperative to keep them at arm’s length. Your walls withstood the Grimm that could reach them, but many types of Grimm can climb far better than their appearance might suggest. And of course, there are varieties which specialize in it, which is even worse to deal with,” Arturia explained as if she was giving a report, which she was.

Arturia frowned for a moment, shaking her head. “Another issue is ammunition. The artillery guns fired all their shells during this one battle, which is not good. The heavy guns on the walls also nearly shot all their ammunition away.”

Harry scratched at his lightning bolt scar reflectively. “I could find someone who could design water traps, but more ammunition... I would have to be there to do that. Purchasing more is probably the only real way to go, unfortunately.”

“I will talk to our father about that tonight. I will be on my way home soon.” Arturia answered.

“What about the barbed wire?” Harry questioned quizzically.

“Only older Grimm feel pain Harry, so the barbed wire really didn’t do much to deter them. It tangled up several hundred, but their fellows simply moved over their bodies. You would have to have much more to matter against a Grimm horde. A better idea might be claymores, mines to go off at the outermost edge of the defenses. But we will then run into the same problem we’re already running into with ammunition.”

Harry scowled a bit, shaking his head. “I would like us to build up an ammunition industry, but Rasputin was pretty clear on there not being any more resources in the corridor between Evig Låga and the fire dust mine. And if we continue to lean just on the Fire Dust we’ll run into problems. Although...”

With that, Harry minimized the screen on his scroll with Arturia’s face in it as he looked up some information. “Huh. Talk to dad about selling fire dust directly in Vale instead of Mistral. The market for Dust here is crazy. Vale’s apparently dealing with a rash of large-scale thefts of Dust recently.”

Harry didn't know what Roman Torchwick was up to, but he had heard about their run-in with the man from Tia and Ruby. How knocking off small-time mom-and-pop dust stores equated to running Dust prices up to this amount, Harry didn't know, but he was willing to take advantage of it. *I have to wonder what his end game is if he's the one with a game in the first place, but regardless, as long as it can help Evig Låga grow, I'm all for taking advantage of the chaos.*

"I will do so, although shipping it will probably be impossible in the short-term unless we make a deal with some shipping company, which will cut into our cost," Arturia answered. Like Harry was doing now, she had gone through the Laws and Logistics of the four Kingdoms classes and then some so she could easily follow the conversation.

"Maybe, or maybe we can have someone here in Vale to do the shipping for us," Harry mused, thinking about all the ways that could help them in the future. Especially if Mistral began to make noises about Evig Låga needing to pay more for their taxes to the large city-state. *Give us enough time, and we can start to really be independent. Place too heavy a burden on us, and we'll stumble.*

"Regardless, ammunition is going to be the biggest bottle. Ditches are simple, even if they take time. But without those artillery guns, last night would've been much worse. I also think we need to think about more anti-air guns. We were thinking about setting them up in terms of the later areas we would hopefully open to more farmland and so forth. We need to be aware of that kind of threat. Remember the first rule of fighting Grimm. There are always more than you would like to see. Aerial style Grimm did not show up in sufficient numbers to matter in this battle, but we cannot assume that in the future."

Harry nodded, then popped open a map of the star fortress, and the two began to go over the idea of perhaps expanding it, creating another large-scale wall outside of the first. The first would then be devoted to the heavy guns and the anti-air guns, while the new wall would be defended by the actual soldiers and still more machine guns.

Arturia objected to that idea, again returning to the amount of money it would take, but Harry waved that off. "We'll fix the ammunition problem first and think about expanding like this when we can in the future. But I have an idea in mind for how to get us another ally. One who might have some money to invest if given the right incentive."

That idea was barely forming in his mind, and he needed to do a bit of research first. But it was one that he might follow up on in the future if it looked possible. *And if Belladonna is still on speaking terms with her parents.*

Arturia huffed at that and said, "Brother dear, I think you are too much of an optimist. But then again, only an optimist would've thought of this idea in the first place, and only your Semblance allowed us to throw up these defenses at all. So I will not argue further." She then smiled and changed the subject abruptly, asking Harry how classes were, what his team was like

and so forth. Harry waved that off but went with the idea of changing the topic, asking Arturia how the huntress life was treating her, whether she enjoyed being back home if she had a boyfriend now, and what else she was doing with her time.

The two siblings had a nice talk until Arturia had to leave to catch her Bullhead back to their Evig Låga. "I will be stopping in sometime before your first semester ends, Harry. Mother's cooking is magnificent as always, but yours is just a tiny bit more special for some reason."

"I can't say why. We both cook with love, after all," Harry answered glibly before winking. "Although you and Tia both say that I'm better at spicy food, so maybe I'm a little more liberal with my love than she is?"

Arturia laughed at that, reflecting that had Harry been anyone but her brother, that line would've been seen as quite flirtatious. As it was, she simply enjoyed it and said simply, "I love you too, Harry, and I look forward to when I can stop by."

Harry was still smiling as he cut the connection, only to jump as small hands touched his shoulders and worked their way up to his neck. A second later, Pyrrha's voice whispered into his ear. "I came in just as you two were finishing talking about your plans for the mine, and I didn't want to interrupt family time. You're as close to Arturia as you are to Tia, aren't you?"

"Not quite. Tia has always been my favorite of the two, but that's obvious considering we're twins." Harry sighed, leaning back and stretching a little under Pyrrha's hands as fingers began to work into his muscles. "Feels good..." He mumbled.

"Was there any reason you were talking about the mine like that?"

"A Beowulf migration occurred, led by a Dreadwolf. It would have run right over the mine, but for the defenses we put up and Arturia. The combination practically annihilated the whole migration," Harry said, his voice low and deep now as he took pleasure in what Pyrrha was doing to his shoulders and neck.

Pyrrha's hands stilled as he spoke but resumed as she leaned in, breathing into his ear. "You see now why I want to be a part of what you started? Why I wish to follow you? Your sister said it herself. Without you, that mine would not have existed. Your people fought against the Grimm, beating off that attack. When normally, even trained soldiers would eventually break against the Grimm. It is incredibly hard to fight them, their unending nature and the fear they bring."

A part of me, the little part of me from my past life who just wanted a family and to be just Harry, keeps on trying to tell me that I shouldn't take credit for this, that I should put it all on the people who fought. But Pyrrha's right. I was the one who convinced everyone in Evig Låga that they should have their aura unlocked and that it should be a prerequisite for adults coming into our community. I was the one who convinced Sunflash and his miners, and I was the one who set up those defenses.

Harry reached up with one hand and gently caressed the back of Pyrrha's own, feeling her grip his fingers with that hand while her other continued its work on his neck. "My people. I suppose they are. I wish I could be there, but I needed to come here to learn what I could from the Academy. Being a traditional hunter might not be in my cards, but I need to know more about my enemy. And thank you for your silence about my Semblance. I know we haven't had time to sit and talk about it..."

"Hush! I gave you my oath of the shield. Whatever secret you keep, you are free to tell me whenever you wish. It does not change my opinion of you, and it never will. Whatever it is, your thoughts on the Grimm truly sets you apart from most people. To most, Grimm are a force of nature, animalistic beings that can only be endured, not defeated. But you really think they can be, don't you?"

Pyrrha's voice, almost stern at the beginning, had turned almost wondering at the end. Now she shook her head and leaned down, kissing Harry on his lightning bolt scar, which sent a jolt through him as her red hair cascaded down over his head. "You really think they can be."

"The Grimm have to come from somewhere! They don't just appear out of thin air. The Grimm might have numbers, but humans and faunus have ingenuity. We have technology, we have range! Why do most hunters fight it mid-range, three hundred feet if that, when a modern-day rifle can hit a target over a thousand!" Harry practically growled, his tone sending a shiver of desire through Pyrrha, the look in his eyes as he stared up at her so fierce it quickened her warrior blood. "No, the Grimm can be beaten. So long as you have enough ammunition, so long as you plan well enough. The idea that the Grimm are simply something that has to be avoided, that we need to rely on hunters to thin them like herds, to keep them away from society, all of that? It's a sign of weakness in our society and a holdover from preindustrial times. And I believe that Evig Laga can show that. If we can hold, if..."

Harry subsided, then leaned up, and gave Pyrrha a kiss on the underside of her chin as she leaned back, resuming her massage. "Sorry. Got a little too heated there, I think. I'll let your magic hands do their work, shall I?"

Pyrrha giggled at that. "You don't have to apologize for that to me, Harry. It's part of why I was so attracted to you and gave you my oath. But you're right. Our time would be better spent getting these knots out of your neck and shoulders. Whatever else, I will still be your shield, and we will still face whatever threats are out there together." With that, Pyrrha resumed her work, humming under her breath, as the two of them fell into a comfortable silence, and Harry's mind slowly let go of plans for the future, simply enjoying her touch.

Then a thought occurred to Harry, and he blinked one emerald eye open, looking up at Pyrrha, a wry little smile crossing his face. "You know, I got so engrossed in asking Arturia about how life has been treating her as a Huntress that I forgot to mention who exactly my partner is. I wonder how she'll react when she learns?"

Pyrrha's eyes almost literally flashed, and a vicious grin crossed her face in reaction. Despite liking Arturia as a person, there was no doubt a very deep rivalry between her and her most dangerous opponent. "I wonder if we could bribe one of your twins to take a picture when she learns. Or when she learns that your sister Tia did something she couldn't: beating me."

Harry laughed, and as Ren and Nora returned, the night for Team ANVL continued pleasantly. Long-term plans were forgotten for now.

OOOOOOO

Several hours later, Arturia leaned back, smiling faintly at her mother for the dinner she had just cooked. "Exquisite as ever, Mother. Thank you very much. If more hunters had access to meals like that, the price that the city-states would have to pay us to leave in the first place would rise dramatically."

Guld and Hazel laughed at that, and for a time, Arturia lost herself in the gleeful chatter of her younger siblings, including Magenta, who apparently had actually started to write her own novel seriously now. For someone so young, that was quite an achievement. The younger twins were up to their normal antics, and Arturia was happy to listen to their adventures. Arturia hadn't spent much time when she first came home actually at home last week, following through on her father's request to head out on foot towards the mine. Since it had turned out so well for her and the miners, she wasn't about to begrudge that, though.

Soon enough, the younger set were all sent off the bed, and violet and Arturia sat on one sofa across from their parents while Arturia explained the battle against the Beowulf migration. The news of how well the normal soldiers had stood up against the Grimm, despite the aura of fear so many Grimm generated, was a welcome relief, as was the fact that the evacuation into the minds had worked so well. "That was because we had so much time to set it up, however. It is something we can't take for granted in the future," Arturia warned.

Then she smiled. "Still, Cherry seemed more than willing to take my advice on board, and Harry had several suggestions for the defense that were instantly acted upon." She shook her head with a wry little smile on her face. "Harry definitely made an impression on everyone at the mine."

"And on the Council here in Evig Låga," Guld murmured, sounding extremely pleased. "And in his last messages to us, his training at Beacon is going well. But he hasn't had one-on-one training with Goodwitch yet. I'm a little annoyed by that, but so long as he is learning, growing, and gathering other hunters and huntresses to himself, I suppose that's as good as we can hope for."

Hazel huffed, scowling as she looked down where hands were clenched against one another. Of the Arc parents, she had the hardest time not showing her disdain for Ozpin. This disdain spread to everyone working with him. Arturia knew a little about why that was but not

the entire story, nor did she care to inquire. Arturia quite liked Glynda, although her opinion of Ozpin was quite a bit more nuanced. “He could’ve done most of that on his own, and you know it! There is a reason why Harry can wield Caliburn so well, and it has nothing to do with continuing his training at Beacon.”

That line should have been a simple statement of fact. Arturia well knew the properties of the family blade. She had wielded it before she had designed Rhongomyniad. But the look her parents shared at that moment said something more was going on there. “What is it about Harry wielding Caliburn that has given you such mixed feelings, Mother?” She asked bluntly.

Her mother blanched, looking over at her father who had also paled, before shaking her head. “Oh will tell you about it some other time. When Tia and Harry are back home. We’ll talk to all of you children about it together. It’s not a conversation we want to have more than once.”

Arturia scowled a bit at that but let the conversation drop when Guld asked if Harry had any suggestions about how to deal with the ammunition problem. She cheerfully went on from there, talking about her conversation with Harry, both serious and not, not noticing how her face had lightened up when she was talking about her brother.

Both of her parents, however, did and looked at one another a little uneasily as the night wore on.

OOOOOOO

The next three weeks passed incredibly fast for Harry and the rest of the freshmen, so packed were they. Beacon had, in Yang’s words, “No freaking chill at all! Even our free time isn’t free, because we have to use it for our exercise regimens and team stuff!”

Mondays continued to be days which, in Nora’s words, “Have been summoned from the deepest darkest depths of hell to break the unwary. They are as evil as days without pancakes!”

Monday was one of only two days where they had to deal with both Hunter and general education classes. The other such day, Thursday, only had three classes in total: Math, Science, and double Aura Manipulation and Growth course. A class which, to the continued chagrin of not just Weiss but everyone else, was a free period for the two Arcs.

The rest of the weekday wasn’t any picnic either. Each day was slightly different, with different classes being doubled, that is, a class that lasted for two periods instead of one.

When it came to the scholastic side of things, Harry had a leg up on most of the others having all of his previous life’s work with essays and Arithmancy. He barely had to concentrate at all in Language Arts, whereas Ruby, Nora, and Blake really struggled. Blake only with the essays, admittedly: Blake hated formal language and five-paragraph hell. But still, it was an issue, and she and Harry commiserated with one another on the books termed ‘classics’.

Nora... was Nora, while Ruby was a fifteen-year-old hyperactive kid trying to read and write about this world's equivalent of the *Grapes of Wrath*. Problems should have been assumed rather than a surprise.

And on team ARGY, it was Apacci who struggled on the academic side of the school. He simply lacked much formal education, so the problem there was obvious. Mila also had a major problem with math, but Harry only learned of that peripherally and, like Ruby and Blake, really had only problems on the general education side of things. And, like them, she made up for it. Blake had a lot of experience to use in combat class and most of the other Hunter-related classes. Ruby had so much Grimm knowledge in her head it was incredible to Harry and the others. And Mila was a budding weaponsmith.

Over the course of the first three weeks, Team ANVL started to really come together. The two partnerships that made up Harry's team had already been pretty solid, and to bring them together into a larger unit, he had settled on a ratio of four team training exercises like that first Thursday every week during their free periods.

Although Harry and Pyrrha had not been able to meet in person since they first met, they had talked dozens of times, which showed in their training exercises and relationship from the start. The redheaded Nikos and the black-haired Arc settled into an easy closeness, a camaraderie they showed in the team training exercises Harry had them running through and their daily lives in Beacon.

Likewise, while Nora continued to say (almost daily) that she and Ren were not together together, it was very clear that if they weren't, they were within a stone's throw of it. In battle, the two of them worked together extremely well, often not even needing to discuss tactics, making do with simple nods or hand gestures.

The hand gestures were something that Harry wanted to nick for the team as a whole, though they hadn't had much luck. Silent communication like that would be tremendously useful in the field, as would all of them being able to slip into several different roles depending on the type of combat they were experiencing.

Even outside training exercises, Harry got along very well with all three of his teammates. Pyrrha had been his friend for months. Slipping from friends to dating with her had been relatively smooth. And both of them greatly enjoyed the private smiles, the nudges, and other little moments like that. They hadn't had much time for anything beyond the stolen kisses, mostly in the morning and evening when Nora was taking a shower and Ren was off to the library or picking up Nora's daily requirement of vitamin P. The last thing that Pyrrha wanted was to give the rumor mill already talking about them as a couple more fuel or make their teammates uncomfortable.

"Ehh, I'm not certain how Nora would react, either to cheer or make kissy faces," Harry quipped one morning.

“I agree, but I am uncertain about how Ren would react,” Pyrrha answered with a shrug. “He strikes me as a very private individual, and I think he would expect others to keep such things private as well.”

However he would react to Harry and Pyrrha’s relationship, Ren had quickly become Harry’s first real male friend in this world. He had made acquaintances in his previous school and in Evig Låga, but growing up, he had always chosen to spend more time with his sisters than the other children around the town. And in school, his Aura-less status and relationship with Tia had worked against him. Neither applied to Ren, and the two men had several things in common. Quiet and unassuming but sharp as a tack, Ren always supported the team while doing his best to corral Nora, which was a twenty-four-seven job if ever there was one.

When it came to Nora, she was frequently a little too rambunctious while in the dorm room for the crowded living space to deal with, but that wasn’t anything Harry had not dealt with before. Of course, Harry could deal with the holes in the walls and flooring. But this did not help to force Nora to keep her strength under control, but that was a ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t equation if ever there was one.

Nevertheless, Nora was energetic, forthright, and eager to learn and train. Her willingness to laugh at dirty jokes, which invariably became a competition with Yang, Mila and Apacci (with a sly comment or two from Blake) as to who could cause Ruby and the other innocents among them to blush the harder, was the only other thing that bothered Harry about Nora. She was also a wild girl who didn’t understand personal space when it came to other people, which made her somewhat like Tia was with Harry and their sisters.

More importantly, she got along extremely well with Pyrrha and Tia. So, with Ren’s example to follow, Harry accepted Nora as a new friend without reservation.

That was to say nothing of both Pyrrha’s response to Tia and Nora. Pyrrha had known that Tia was her friend, but hearing that on a scroll and having it be a physical reality of her daily life were two different things. Then to meet Nora and, to a lesser extent, Team RWBY, Mila and Sung-Sun, girls who knew about her reputation but didn’t care, was just amazing for the sheltered, lonely girl who had spent so long alone on her pedestal. That, and Harry’s training her in how to, as he routinely put it, “Change your image,” helped Pyrrha handle the awe and the somewhat standoffish way the rest of the school treated her.

So Team ANVL looked to be going strong. Astonishingly the same could be said for Team RWBY.

If anyone had asked Harry his opinion, Harry would never have thought that even with Harry helping to soothe Weiss’s feelings about being passed over, the four girls of team RWBY would ever meld into a real team. Their personalities were just too dissimilar to really mesh. But those very differences allowed them to become such good friends.

Yang was loud and combative, but she had a caring side and showed it openly. She was the team's big sister, teasing and taunting but willing to put her shoulder behind any job that needed doing. She wasn't the brightest academically but was a very good Phys. Ed. instructor.

Blake was almost as quiet as Tia. But just like Tia, when Blake spoke, people listened. She also had a very good sense of humor, liking to mock people just as much as Mila and Apacci, but unlike them, she knew when to stop. She and Yang got along tremendously, and if Blake wasn't reading a book in a sunbeam somewhere, she and Yang could be found together, whatever they were doing.

As for Ruby and Weiss, the changes between them were quite profound. Weiss was a great organizer and an incredibly focused individual when it came to tests and such. Ruby followed her orders in that area with ease, along with Blake, with Yang only complaining occasionally about the 'Chibi-sized slave driver'.

In contrast, Ruby was intuitive, had a great people sense, and coupled a vast knowledge of Grimm with incredibly good instincts and a decent tactical mind. Harry was looking forward to facing her in team-on-team combat exercises they would start next year. And when it came to personality, Ruby and Weiss were the poster girls for opposites attracting. But they both seemed to acknowledge one another's strengths and weaknesses. Ruby was determined to catch up to everyone else to prove herself, while Weiss was just as determined to help and become the best teammate she could be.

But as well as RWBY and ANVL were coming together, that only served to show how Team ARGT was not.

Harry had researched Beacon Academy above and beyond talking to Arturia about her time there. Beacon had a long history of teams sticking together after graduation. Even when they didn't, most partnerships did. Occasionally Beacon teams didn't stay together or disappeared from the public eye enough that Harry's research didn't find anything about them. But that was far better than Vacuan hunters, who routinely broke up, or Atlas Academy's, who not only broke up but then either left the country or joined the military. And then there was Mistral, where far too many would-be Huntsmen went to Haven to train for the tournament and made no bones about it. Of all of them, Beacon teams stayed together three out of every five teams.

And the rumor was that some teams fell apart or did not pursue Hunter careers because of... too much chemistry on their teams rather than too little. Harry didn't really believe that one.

(Although... there were his own parents to consider. And Yang was open about the fact that Ruby and her mother were not the same person and had both been on a team with their father and Uncle. So maybe there was something to that rumor.)

But looking deeper into it now that Harry was here at Beacon, Harry felt that the real reason behind this success in graduating teams staying together was the high standards that Beacon demanded throughout its four years. Students failed or succeeded by the strength of their teams. A good team could carry a weak student until they got their feet under them. A team with two or more students unwilling to put in the time?

That was something else that could be exacerbated by the team leader, for good or ill. For all his assholery, Cardin forced – at mace-point – his team to keep up their grades, even if they were rapidly proving to be some of the weakest fighters among the freshmen.

And it was not just the leadership position that was a problem on Team ARG. While Tia lacked any drive to learn about laws or logistics beyond what affected her, she was conscientious about taking notes for Sung-Sun, who would then do the assignments requested by Professor Olive, while Tia helped the Vacuan native with her math and science homework. And while not the best team player, Tia was willing to follow Sung-Sun's lead in team training.

In turn, Sung-Sun was an extremely hard worker, dedicated to becoming a Huntress. Like Blake, she never talked about her family and always seemed to shy away from the subject except for a bland, "I'm from Vacuo. The Greenscales have been in Vacuo for centuries, and since I wanted to be known more on my own merits, coming to Beacon was a natural decision." That was all anyone knew of Sung-Sun's past, which was fine with everyone. Coming to Beacon to start anew was not exactly a new concept.

Despite Professor Olive's unwillingness to back their decision, Sung-Sun took her stepping into the leadership role seriously, with Tia backing her up and Harry fully willing to give her any help she needed. This meant letting Sung-Sun pick his brain whenever she needed it. Which led to Harry becoming aware of the other issues facing his sister's team the Thursday after Team ANVL's first team exercise.

"You started off strong by asking everyone to list their strengths and weaknesses was a great idea, and one I already nicked," Harry said, winking at the Vacuan native who smiled back wanly, tired from their second day's combat class, which, much to Pyrrha and Harry's displeasure, had been more one-on-one combat training. "Have you decided on a weekly training schedule?"

"We have, but..." Sung-Sun sighed, looking over at Ren and Nora, who were sitting nearby.

The four of them were in the library currently. Pyrrha was off with Tia and team RWBY. The B and W of that team had requested one of the Arcs to help set up permanent bunk beds rather than the haphazard lash-up they'd put together Monday morning. Both Arcs knew quite a bit about carpentry, and Pyrrha had wanted to learn.

Seeing the Vacuan native hesitate, Harry waved at Ren, indicating he would be back. When Ren waved him off, Harry led Sung-Sun to a corner of the library where no one could overhear them.

“Mah, Hadrian Arc. Do you have an ulterior motive for bringing me to a deserted corner of the library~?” Sung-Sun teased. “Whatever would your sister think?” *Or your partner. While I am uncertain about what is going on between them, I do not doubt that she is quite possessive, and I really don’t want to know what Pyrrha would do if she got angry.*

“Tia probably wouldn’t understand the implications or would outright ignore them, trusting me not to do anything so stupid,” Harry responded with a snort. “I’m here to give you an ear because you’re my sister’s team leader, whatever the school might say at this point. If you want to vent, this is your chance.”

Sung-Sun sighed but nodded. “Thank you. It has been less than two weeks, but I think I do need to vent a bit.”

With that, the slim girl began to pace, waving her hands around her, her long sleeves flapping. So much so that Harry could see the small daggers, she had strapped to her forearms. They didn’t look like those silly wrist launchers Harry had seen in a movie preview recently, but the daggers themselves were very businesslike items. *Huh, either rich girls grow up very differently in Vacuo, or there is something more in Sung-Sun’s background than her normally refined manner point to.*

“They never stop!! It is like Mila and Apacci think they need to fill the silence with noise wherever they find it! Mila seems to live to annoy me, be loud, brash, and so flirtatious it’s off-putting. I know Yang might act the flirt, but I haven’t seen her flirt with anyone but you, and, once, Blake. But Mila flirts with Apacci, she flirts with Jade Armstrong, she flirts with Cardin!! With **Cardin**, of all people!”

“... Was she trying to find someone taller than her? That’s honestly the only reason I could see anyone flirting with Cardin. It’s not like he’s got much else going for him,” Harry murmured. Jade was another freshman, a Team leader of JUMP, a team with three boys and one girl named Miranda Obsidian. Jade was as tall as Harry but was built like a muscle-builder: massive upper body on a much smaller lower half, which Yang had said was “Not a good sign, even if he’s got a massive Aura reserve.”

“I am not against flirting so much or even taunting one another as Apacci and Mila always do. I sometimes join in, even initiate it occasionally. But blast it. Would it kill them to stop!?” Sung-Sun went on querulously, her tone becoming even more strident, although she still kept her volume down. “Every night, there’s been some argument or other, which either segues into flirting or their ganging up on me when I try to keep the peace. I’ve had to ask Tia to knock them both out more than once to get some peace and quiet, and don’t get me started on the music!”

Harry winced a bit at that and not at Tia needing to enforce quiet time in her dorm room. That just made sense. But the music the two faunus liked was not very good. Mila preferred bad retro rap, while Apacci liked pro-White Fang bands. He, Weiss, and astonishingly, Blake had a massive row the morning of 'the Bribing™' as the lasagna night had come to be called about it.

Weiss had called Apacci out on promoting a song that basically called on faunus to rise up and "Slaughter the real pigs, ya dig, bring them down, make them the animals now." Blake also had a major problem with it, saying that the lead singer was known to publicly call for murdering human children so they couldn't breed more. Apacci hadn't liked being called out by either, but when Tia had stated simply, "It sucks", and everyone else in the group of twelve had agreed, the deer faunus had left in a huff.

"They haven't stopped?"

"NO!" Sung-Sun whined her arms flapping wildly, acting almost like Ruby for a moment, her self-control fraying even further. "Ugh, I don't know what is worse, their music, their loud banter, their flirting or when they turn on me and, and..." Her pacing stumbled to a halt, a faint flush coming to her face. "And um, bringing up various physical characteristics that, in their mind, mean I will never find a man."

"Ah..." Harry paused, scratching at his lightning bolt scar for a moment, looking away as he replied. "Well, I would say not to listen to them on that score. Going by the glances you and Weiss both get occasionally, you have nothing to worry about."

Sung-Sun smiled at that, happy that Harry acknowledged she was good-looking. Even if it was very obvious he wasn't attracted to her.

"As for getting them to shut up, maybe you could join team Ruby in the room for a few nights while Tia joins team Anvil. See what happens. Kill or screw, whichever might take the edge off," Harry continued with a snort. "But I don't think the cleaning people here would be willing to clean up after you all after that."

Sung-Sun snorted, then shook her head, her face going a bit green. "I didn't need that image in my head, Arc," she growled.

"And scholastically?" Harry questioned, wishing to let Sung-Sun fully vent if she needed to.

But to his surprise, the Vacuan girl simply sighed, slumping against the wall. "Too early to tell. At least... that's what I hope. I will wait to see how well they do in the first few quizzes. I, I have a feeling they are not going to do as well as I would like, but I will not make accusations on that score until I have proof, let alone demands. Apacci already has a chip on his shoulder, and I do not want him or Mila to try and play the race game."

Sung-Sun had indeed waited. But now, three weeks in, it was clear Mila and Apacci had issues with various classes. Math was a problem for all of Tia's teammates, but Tia, rightly, had only offered to help, not do their work for them, if Mila and Apacci had something to offer. Mila had tried to guilt her into it, saying that Tia should help her partner out regardless, but that had gone down like a lead balloon with the Harribel of the Arcs. Similarly, Apacci's attempt to play the race card wound up with Tia leaving and ignoring him for the rest of the day.

When Harry asked her about it later, Tia's response had been, "Why argue with stupid? Too much trouble for too little gain." Which had left Harry and Sung-Sun to try and mend things. After Harry had laughed for a few minutes at Tia's wit, anyway.

But math was not the only area they both had trouble. Mila took muscle training seriously, but not Peach's class or Port's. She gave it her all in the combat course, but that was something of a mixed bag. Apacci did not listen to advice when it came to training, although at least was serious about it. He also was having trouble in several of the other classes. In contrast, Sung-Sun only had trouble with the math and Aura Manipulation and Growth classes.

And when it came down to personalities, Sung-sun's serious, sly attitude melded somewhat well with Tia's odd but insightful personality. Mila's loud, brash attitude did not meld with Tia's, unlike Yang and Blake's. Perhaps because Blake, for all that she didn't like Yang's puns, did enjoy the rest of Yang's jokes. Mila's sense of humor was just too far removed from Tia's. The same could be said for Apacci's overall attitude and Sung-Sun's. And worse, stuck in the same dorm room, they couldn't escape one another.

All in all, Harry was afraid that Team ARG'T was going to eventually implode. Something he was of two minds about.

Mila had not endeared herself to Harry at all in various ways. At one point, she had found Tia and Harry cuddling together in his bed watching a TV show during a break, and her comment of 'twincest is wincest' hit too close to home. Worse, from then on, Mila had continued to tease him and Tia about having improper thoughts toward one another. Those kinds of jokes, and taunts about other people's bodies, were her norm, and it just annoyed Harry.

Apacci... the less said about the deer faunus, the better. He was a fanboy for the Invincible Girl and a wannabe playboy, not a good combination. He not only had wandering eyes but seemed to think equality meant the faunus would have their time on top rather than real equality, something that angered everyone who heard it. Apacci was Cardin as a faunus, in other words, although with a bit more game since he could actually get girls to respond to him occasionally.

Thus while Sung-Sun seemed salvageable, Harry cared not at all about the other two. But he worried about what the team's collapse would mean for Tia's future. Still, there was very

little he could do about it other than threatening the rest of the team to get along, which would probably only work for a short time.

And so, the third week of school ended. But that Friday would mark the next important event in Harry's personal life. One that not only he, but his redhead girlfriend would be very happy to see occur.

OOOOOOO

"Mr. Arc, please stay behind for a moment."

As Combat Class ended after yet another bland, blah day of gladiatorial-style combat, Harry paused as he made to follow his team out of the large auditorium, blinking as he looked over to Ms. Goodrich.

"Yes, Miss." Harry moved down to join her in the arena while the rest of the class funneled out of the classroom. *I wonder if Goodwitch has thought of when to reschedule our first one-on-one meeting.*

Harry had yet to have the one-on-one instruction he had requested during his meeting with Goodwitch and Ozpin, although through no fault of Miss Goodwitch. She and several other teachers had been called in to help against a Grimm incursion three days ago, which unfortunately coincided with the first day that she had time free at the same time he did.

Sure enough, when the older blonde woman spoke, this was the first thing she mentioned. She crossed her arms under her bust, accentuating a bust size around Tia's but somewhat fuller if that was possible. But Harry had willpower enough to ignore this, staring into Glynda's equally attractive face with aplomb. "Mr. Arc, I must apologize..."

"There's no apology necessary, Professor. You informed me via email that you couldn't make it, and it's not like Grimm wait for office hours. How is Professor Peach?" Harry asked solicitously. "I heard she was injured."

"She was. One of the few long-range types of Grimm, an Acid Devil, hit Peach in the back with an acid blast, and unfortunately, she couldn't hear it hit due to the screeching of nearby Nevermore. It took several moments for anyone to notice the green clinging to her back, by which time it had almost eaten through her aura. By the time we scrapped it off her, Peach's back and tail were quite badly burned in several small places," Glynda lamented. "She will recover in time, but I will be taking over her class for a few days, as well as the upcoming trip to Forever Fall."

"Noted, Miss. We'll try to gather some extra sap for her."

Glynda smiled faintly. "If you make any more soufflé, perhaps putting one aside for her might be an even better idea for a get-well gift. Which highlights once more why I still feel like I should apologize if not for that, then the fact that I have yet to have your team moved into one

of the townhouses while you kept up your side of the bargain.” Glynda surreptitiously licked her lips. “Magnificently, I have to say. I will have dreams of that banana and caramel souffle you made last night for me for quite some time.”

“It’s always good to know that your art is recognized. I hope it was warm enough?” Harry asked worriedly. “There’s always some issue reheating a souffle.”

“It was amazing, Mr. Arc, and I thank you again for dropping it at my office despite my not being there for the actual meal,” Glynda replied with a smile at Harry’s attitude. *Now, if only our cafeteria staff cared half as much or had Harry’s flare for cooking, I would be very happy.* Shaking her head at that, she went on more seriously. “But Professor Ozpin wished to make certain there were no signs of favoritism, and to do that, we needed to wait until your first few tests came in. It pleases me to announce that your team scored above eighty-seven in every test.”

Harry nodded, already having known that. As Team Leader, he had access to his teammate’s grades, which was somewhat invasive, but he understood the necessity. And had asked all three of his team members if they were okay with it. Ruby had quickly followed his example, as had Sung-Sun, the only one of the three to receive any pushback at the idea.

“As such, your team has been allowed to transfer you to one of Beacon’s townhomes, specifically number nine on Townhome Row. I will send you an updated school map showing where it is, but you should already generally know the townhomes are on the southern side of the campus.” Glynda then sighed and glancing around, made certain there were no more students in the room before going on, pulling out a small key and handing it over to Harry. “However, I regret to inform you that Team Argent did not perform as well. Until Team ARG’T get their grades up, your sister will not be allowed to join you in the townhome.”

“Does that include not joining us for meals?” Harry asked, taking the key gratefully, unsurprised by that declaration.

“Ah, now that would be different.” Glynda allowed a smile to cross her face once more. “Indeed, on that note, I would like to shift my weekly meal to Sunday. I wish to talk to you and Miss Nikos, and that will let me hit three birds with one round.”

Harry frowned, suddenly wary. “Um... may I ask about what, Professor?”

“It is not about what you are thinking, Mister Arc, although the professors are aware of your relationship. I would urge you and Miss Nikos to come out with it in the next week or so. Such things always come out eventually, and it is best to be open about it rather than deal with the fallout of trying to keep it secret, especially for someone who already is in the limelight as Miss Nikos is,” Glynda answered sternly before shaking her head. “But that is all I will say on that score. I am certain you have read our relationship policy, so I don’t need to bring it up.”

That policy basically amounted to nothing more than kissing in public, or you're out, no babies or you're out, and don't embarrass yourself in any way in public, or you're out. The last meant no public breakups, outbursts or other emotional issues that could break apart teams or partnerships were tolerated. The rest was self-explanatory and had been when Harry and Pyrrha had, indeed, read through the rules. Beacon would not supply help for either preventing pregnancy or the baby, and getting pregnant was obviously a big no-no. Similarly, too much PDA, or worse, exhibitionism or other public explorations, were just as bad as breakups and other things of that nature for team unity.

"Understood, Miss." Harry breathed a sigh of relief. *Thank goodness for that.* "We are both very aware of how we need to comport ourselves and have been discussing when to come out with our relationship already. But if not about that, might I ask why you need to talk to Pyrrha?"

"I have approved from the start how you have ordered Miss Nikos and the rest of your little coterie to occasionally fight with handicaps. However, Miss Nikos still needs to work on large-scale usage of her Semblance," Glynda smiled again, this time in approval, as she gently thwacked Harry's still-armored chest with her riding crop. "Something I believe you pointed out as well. But that is an area Beacon can help her with. Possibly pairing her up with Sophomores and Juniors during your free time during the week. Obviously, you and I need to figure out when to meet to start your instruction on working with your Semblance."

Harry nodded, understanding her points and the message that the free-range training gyms and fields were also under observation. That was interesting, and he wondered what Goodwitch and the others felt about his team and others from what they saw. *Probably does not do Tia and her team any favors, blast it. Still, nothing I can do about it beyond what I already am. I can't motivate Mila and Apacci to change any more than Sung-Sun can.*

Shaking his head at that, Harry turned his thoughts to far happier subjects. Looking at the keys in his hand, Harry bounced them in his palm and smiled as he looked back at the blonde professor. "How do you and Professor Peach feel about chocolate desserts, Professor?"

"About the same as any other woman, Mr. Arc. Excellent culinary creations but which need to be eaten in moderation," Glynda replied with a faint chortle.

Harry started at the noise and how it transformed Glynda's face, making her far more approachable for a moment, before shaking his head and concentrating on what this meant. "In that case, Miss, I will make several extras tonight and see you Sunday."

"I look forward to it," Glynda replied, then waved him off, shaking her head as she watched the young man practically skip out of the room.

OOOOOO

Pyrrha hummed an old Mistrali tune as she dried out her hair to herself in the baths connected to the combat classroom. She and Yang had fought one another again, and it had been quite exhilarating, with Pyrrha fighting under the same restrictions Harry had given her the first combat class. *Well, it was fun for me. And for Yang, although she seems to hate that she can't beat me even when I'm handicapped. The rest of the class, well, I was prepared to be placed on my pedestal again, and this time I'm not alone up here,* Pyrrha thought, her smile widening into a grin.

While Yang could accept that Pyrrha was so good she needed the 'no Semblance' restriction, the rest of the class was even more in awe of Pyrrha now than they had been. *I wonder if I could defeat someone like Harry or Weiss, though? That would certainly be fun. As for Yang, give her another few years, and I'll wager she will be just as good as Arturia is without that insane semblance of hers. Getting stronger every time you get hit is crazy. Still, I think Professor Goodwitch had a point: she needs to get better at dodging. Like Tia, she might meet someone who can break through her Aura. And she isn't as much of a defensive monster as Tia is...*

Oooh, and there's another I want to fight full out! The match we had last week was excellent fun. Although what was it Yang said about that match? 'That's not a fight that should happen inside. It's the kind that should happen out in the forest, away from breakable things like walls and other people.'

Pyrrha let loose a little giggle to herself, a part of her noticing that the last of her fellow Huntresses-in-training had left the shower room. *I wonder if that is sour grapes on Yang's part? Her match last week with Tia was canceled within moments due to how much damage the two were doing to the ring, and she has yet to beat me.*

Still, Pyrrha understood why she had been paired with Yang twice now and with other individuals from the class whose weapons were like Milo or which included shield combat. The point was to learn, after all. Yang's unarmed style was close to Pyrrha's, so both learned quite a bit from fighting one another.

In contrast, Tia's armed or unarmed style was far too animalistic, too primal for Pyrrha to learn much from, or vice versa. Further, Tia's tactics were incredibly violent. Like she had said that first Monday, Tia was a paragon of ferocity. When using her Semblance, Tia's style was near full-on aggression, which would not pair well with Pyrrha's more refined, adaptable style. They had shown this in their match last week, although Pyrrha had ultimately lost.

The others Pyrrha had fought had a lot to learn from her, although only Yang had taught Pyrrha herself anything she could use. Pyrrha was happy to help with that, and she had begun to call out pointers to her fellow students as she fought, which won approval from both Goodwitch and Harry. Even if it further alienated Pyrrha from the rest of her classmates, making them treat her almost as an older student on top of her fame, that was fine. Part of

being on a pedestal was being an example, after all, and if Pyrrha could help the other students become better, she would.

As she pulled on her school uniform, Pyrrha's thoughts turned to other things beyond combat class, and her smile widened. *Be honest Pyrrha, your current happiness has very little to do with the fight you just had or others you might have in the future.* No, Pyrrha's happiness had to do with her life and going out with Hadrian Arc in particular.

The two of them had yet to go on any real dates. Indeed, they'd only had a few short, intense make-out sessions over the past few weeks. But that did not detract much from Pyrrha's happiness at finally having friends like Harry, like Tia, and the rest of her team and Team RWBY. She could count most of Team ARGENT among her friends, although Apacci's fanboy tendencies and Mila's lewd humor had Pyrrha keep them at arm's length.

But above and beyond friends, being with Harry was just... it was everything Pyrrha had ever dreamed dating someone could be.

The two of them had talked well into the night several times over the past three weeks, simply talking about training, about Remnant in general, about their likes and dislikes, things they'd already covered but going into greater detail, with Pyrrha explaining why she had fallen in love with the color bronze from an old cartoon, and Harry explaining all the times he'd broken his limbs tree climbing with Tia and Arturia. They'd had nights in with Nora and Ren, watching movies, sharing buckets of popcorn and making fun of the movies. He'd argued with her about the need for lipstick, saying she was beautiful enough without that minor bit of makeup, which Pyrrha had always enjoyed, thinking the red lipstick made her lips pop. Pyrrha had attempted to do something with his hair, only for the wild bedhead that was his normal look to completely fight her attempts to tame it.

And while they'd had no time to go on dates, that was not the same as having no time to snuggle, and further, Pyrrha loved the little touches they shared. When they were in class, Harry would touch her fingers or legs, while Pyrrha always enjoyed touching her shoulder against his or letting her hand on his thigh. When they were walking, she would reach out and run a finger along the back of his hand, or when they were in the room, she would lean her head against his shoulder for a time, letting him run his fingers through her hair as she'd done to him after their first team training day.

That last was one of the greatest things she'd ever felt. Indeed, if not for Nora finishing her shower far too quickly the first day Harry did this, Pyrrha and Harry might have gone a little further than they probably should in the shared dorm room.

And I haven't even had to deal with any paparazzi yet! Pyrrha practically squealed internally. Beacon's policy of taking pictures of fellow students was clear and demanding. Get a professor's written permission, share it with the web supervisor, or face the consequences. Pyrrha knew that some of the other students had snapped pictures of her, but they couldn't

share them outside the school, and that was enough for her piece of mind. There were still numerous fanboys and girls among the student population, but there, the students placing Pyrrha on a pedestal helped, keeping them at arm's length.

That, and Pyrrha rarely went anywhere alone without at least one member of her team or other friends. Pyrrha knew there were still a lot of rumors around her and, growing, around her and Harry, but she could not bring herself to care. *We will come out with our relationship when we are ready, and not before.*

Coming out of the girls changing room, she found Harry waiting for her and smiled at him. "You didn't have to wait for me, Harry. We're just going back to the dorm, aren't we?"

"We are, but it is Friday, and we don't have any more classes. So... I was wondering if you would like to go out tonight? Just the two of us. Into Vale, I mean," Harry suggested, scratching his chin sheepishly. *Two lifetimes to call upon, and asking a girl out is still nerve-racking? Ugh, hormones, you can keep them.*

"Of course!" Pyrrha exclaimed, her smile widening into a grin so wide it hurt her cheeks. "That sounds like a lot of fun."

"Good," Harry answered, slumping a bit. "I was afraid you'd be too worried about possibly dealing with the Paparazzi."

"Hmm... well, we don't have any of your sister's hair stuff, and I neglected to bring any of my own, it's true. But my hoodie and a change in my hairstyle should work well enough," Pyrrha mused. "And spending the night out on the town sounds too lovely to concern myself with the public's reaction to me."

"Well said," Harry laughed.

The two walked side-by-side back to the dorms, where they spent much of the afternoon and evening finishing all their homework. Harry had other plans for his team that weekend other than just taking his girlfriend out that evening and refused to let their homework dictate things.

Nora was her typical self, but Harry and Ren had already worked out a system between them. Or rather, Ren had worked out a system, and Harry simply backed him up, relieving Ren occasionally.

Soon enough, everyone but Nora was done, and the three of them started to play a videogame, tempting Nora to finish her homework so she could join them. This worked, and soon the four friends were gaming their way through a fantasy world. "YES!! Fear the power of my Berserker Priest, you bastards!" Nora shouted. "Give me that sweet, sweet kill count, baby!"

With Nora there, the game was hilarious as she insisted most of the time that they should all speak in character when they were just wandering around the RPG world. The first

time they'd done that, Pyrrha could hardly play at all, thanks to how hard she was giggling, but since then, Pyrrha had really gotten into her character of a down-on-her-luck Paladin and greatly enjoyed Harry's Tiefling ranger's general attitude towards life.

But around six, their game started to come to an end. Harry stood up and said. "Well, I'm going to hit the shower and get changed. I'll be out in a few."

Pyrrha nodded while Nora and Ren looked at one another, then back up at their teammates. Nora's eyebrows waggled suggestively as she bounced in place. "Does that mean what I think it means? Are you two going out on a date?"

"Wait, what? You two knew Harry, and I were dating?" Pyrrha asked, whirling in place to stare at Nora in surprise. "I thought we were being discrete."

"Are you serious?" Nora answered, staring at the redhead like she had grown a second head.

"Pyrrha, we share most of our classes with you and Harry. We've both seen how into one another you two are. Indeed, I can't imagine why Yang still flirts with Harry as she does," Ren explained.

"Yeah, yeah! At first, I wasn't certain which of you Harry was dating, you or Tia, despite the whole brother/sister thing. And for a while, I was afraid you'd been sis-zoned," Nora exclaimed. "But when I came out of the bathroom on Wednesday and you two were sitting at opposite ends of your bed, I saw the look in your eyes."

"It doesn't bother you that you're basically sharing Harry's time with his sister? I don't think even if she gets a boyfriend or girlfriend, I'm not going to judge, that she and Harry will spend less time around one another," Ren warned.

Pyrrha shrugged. "I figured that out on my own thank you, Ren. But no, I don't have a problem with it. Indeed, I like Tia, as long as she doesn't interfere..."

"What, like barging in and interrupting a make-out session or demanding time when you and Harry are going to go to bed together?" Nora cackled.

"That's about the size of it," Pyrrha agreed, a flush on her features. "And don't worry, Ren, we will try to keep our relationship away from the dorm room."

"Awwww, I wanted to take notes," Nora complained, causing all the others to blush and Pyrrha to quickly retreat from the conversation, saying she needed to pick out her outfit. Naturally, Nora followed her, and the two women started an argument over that score, which ended when Harry came out of the bathroom.

About an hour later, Harry and Pyrrha were ready to go. They weren't dressed up. Given Pyrrha's fame, she could only wear so many outfits without being recognized, something she

and Nora had argued about earlier. Rather than the somewhat elegant or racy outfits Nora had proposed (“That’s the genius of it, see!? No one would think the real Pyrrha would ever wear them!”), Pyrrha had on the same sweatshirt she had worn the first two nights in Beacon.

The hood could be pulled forward enough to hide her face and easily covered her red hair. Underneath, Pyrrha wore a nice shirt and a pair of tight jeans, which showed off her thighs and toned rear to good effect, judging from how Harry’s eyes tracked down to her lower half when she came out of the bathroom.

Harry also wore jeans and a buttoned-up black shirt, which was a little more dressy than Pyrrha’s hoody but not enough to look mismatched. Which again would draw attention to them. Despite Pyrrha’s new attitude towards her fame, the redhead’s last desire was to be hounded on her first real date.

His arm linked with Pyrrha’s, Harry held up his scroll as he looked back at their teammates. “If anything happens, we’ll send you a message on scrolls. Otherwise, don’t wait up.”

Ren simply nodded, clapping a hand over her mouth before Nora could say anything. “Understood. Have fun, you two.”

Both young lovers nodded, and then Harry opened the door for Pyrrha before the two left without another word.

A few seconds after the door closed, Nora turned to Ren. “You thinking what I’m thinking?”

“No. There is no reality in which I, Lie Ren, would be thinking what you, Nora Valkyrie, are thinking,” Ren answered, his tone dust-dry even as his lips quirked into a wry smile, giving the words the lie they were.

“I’m thinking some ice cream, pancakes, popcorn, and a night of snuggling and sloth videos!” Nora cheered enthusiastically.

Ren chuckled, shaking his head, but knew better than to argue. And honestly, that sounded like fun going into the weekend. “I’ll head to the cafeteria, then.”

OOOOOOO

It was still early evening when the young couple arrived in Vale. Since the bullhead had come from Vale, they could exit the landing area right out into the city proper, at which point Harry asked if Pyrrha had a preference for a movie or dinner first.

“And here I thought you were going to find some way to cook,” Pyrrha teased.

“I can do that, but I felt it best to ask rather than assume,” Harry retorted before upping the ante as he leaned in, moving her hoodie aside a bit to whisper. “Given how I wouldn’t be

using the public cafeteria, but the townhouse we were just assigned. And if we will go there at all... well, why return to the dorm room?"

At that, Pyrrha frowned her expression a war between her blush at the implication in Harry's taunt and confusion at his statement.

Seeing that look, Harry explained how Goodwitch gave him the keys to one of the townhouses that afternoon.

With that knowledge, Pyrrha's blush won out, but although her face was slowly shifting to match her hair in color, she nodded. "That, that sounds right, although I think that, um, w, while I like the idea of us having the place to ourselves for the night, I don't think I'm ready to, um, to sleep together. We can **sleep** together, but not um, not **that**, understand?"

A part of Pyrrha, the same instinctual thought that had her give Harry the oath Órkos Aspídas so fast, urged her on, but she knew that was a bad idea regarding the romantic side of things. Sex was not something she was going to rush into, lest it denigrate the act itself.

"I might be new to this whole romance thing, but I think I can understand that," Harry drawled, looping his arm around Pyrrha's once more. "In that case, movie first, then a bit of shopping, before heading back for dinner."

"Shopping?" Pyrrha snuggled into Harry's side, delighting in the face they could be so open with their affections without anyone bothering them. *It isn't quite the same as being myself in public, but it is the next big thing.*

Harry nodded. "Tia's Water Dust Crystal for Tiburon is wearing out. Nora uses so many grenades that I got a message from the Bursar telling me to get her to stop, even though ammunition is supposed to be completely free in the first semester. So I need to get a handle on how to let her keep using training rounds without any Dust being involved. I think orange and red paint, with maybe the grenades themselves made of much thinner steel."

Snickering at that, Pyrrha agreed with his eyes, but her expression turned tender as Harry went on, his expression shifting into a beaming smile. "I also want to get some souvenirs for my sisters. None of my younger siblings have ever been abroad, and Vale's supposed to have the best toy selection of the four kingdoms. I need to find something Saphron specifically. Her graduation is coming soon, and I know she will propose to her girlfriend afterward. I'm still debating on giving her a real gift or something that will embarrass the heck out of her."

As Harry continued to speak about her family, Pyrrha laughed under her breath. Like with Tia, Pyrrha had spoken with many of Harry's other family members during the calls they'd shared over the months. She absolutely loved the Arc family, the warmth and closeness they had, and felt Rouge and Rose were extremely cute. Even Magenta was a delight to speak to. *I wonder if I should send some autographed pictures to Rouge and her twin, maybe with a letter telling of our time in Beacon so far?* While Pyrrha wasn't a fan of merchandise signing, in the

case of the younger Arc twins, who she knew were fans, Pyrrha felt she would make an exception.

Shaking his head, Harry led them down another road towards where a map of the city he'd downloaded said there was a movie theater. "Anyway, that's what I want to shop for. But what about what we should do for our actual date? Do you want to go to a dance club or something beyond a simple movie?"

Wrinkling her brows, Pyrrha thought about it and then shook her head. "I'm fine with dancing, but I don't think drinking and dancing on a first date would be a good idea. And I don't think I've really dressed for the club scene anyway."

"Eh, I think ya could make it work, or we could just go up on a rooftop and dance to the music there?" Harry suggested, to which Pyrrha laughed.

Soon the twosome arrived at the movie theater, where Harry purchased two tickets to a romance action flick, *Kung Fu Pilates*. Pyrrha bought them some drinks and a bucket of popcorn, and the two headed to the back of the theater.

Harry set the food down and then looked over at Pyrrha. She smiled at him, leaning against his shoulder. "This should be quite fun. I've seen the first one, Kung Fu Cycling, and if this movie is as fun... what?" Her voice trailed off into a small squeak at the look in Harry's eyes.

"Do you know why I brought us to the back of the theater? What most couples do if they sit back here instead of front and center?" Harry murmured, leaning down until his face had nearly disappeared into the front of Pyrrha's hood, his forehead pressing against hers, his breath flicking out over Pyrrha's face, smelling of mint.

"U, uh... oh, oh!" Pyrrha blushed but found she could not look away from Harry's eyes. Yet he made no move to kiss her, leaving the ball in her court, to back away or to kiss him. *And here, in the dark corners of this movie theater, there's no way anyone would interrupt us. No classes we have to get to, no team members...*

Grabbing her courage with both hands, Pyrrha hocked her head slightly to the side and leaned forward. Their lips met, pushing lightly against one another while Pyrrha's hands traveled up Harry's back, pulling his head further down towards her. Harry's arms wound around Pyrrha, pulling her body against his as the rest of the world disappeared from their minds.

The two spent most of the opening credits and a decent twenty minutes after making out, so much so that when they turned their attention to the movie, it took them a while to figure out what was happening. Luckily, the movie wasn't new, and the theater was pretty empty, so no one noticed them. The movie was funny enough to also pull the two lovers away from one another, although they did occasionally backslide, and Pyrrha was quite flushed by

the time they left the movie theater. Harry also had to sit for a time before following her down the row of seats, adjusting his pants a bit.

From there, the two went to a nearby outdoor mall where they purchased souvenirs for Magenta, Saphron and Violet. Harry even found one he thought his Dad would get a kick out of.

"I'm sorry, but you cannot be serious," Pyrrha giggled, one hand idly making certain her hair was tucked back under her hood. It had escaped a bit during their kisses in the movie theater, and she hadn't realized it until they had passed a building with a window that she realized it. While vibrant red hair wasn't enough to make someone think of the Invincible Girl, it would be enough to draw attention to an otherwise plain-looking girl with an overlarge hood. "There is no way that would make a proper gift!"

The item in question was a box in which a strange, alien-like creature from an old movie was set on a plinth. According to the box, it would play and dance to music that could be loaded into it via a scroll. The fact the alien creature was wearing a gold suit, held a cane and wore a top hat just completed the ridiculous image.

"Oh yeah, my dad's really corny sometimes," Harry quipped, amused at her response, his arm going around Pyrrha's waist. "Like big time. He just doesn't show it often to outsiders. I think he'll get a kick out of it, and my mom will be annoyed by it. Two birds with one round."

"I think you will need to send her something to make up for it then," Pyrrha joked back, leaning in to kiss him. Harry returned it eagerly before breaking off to grab the alien. With it, he found several sets of Rego for Violet, who had never grown out of them. "Her room is full of the things," he confided to Pyrrha.

Pyrrha helped him pick out two books for Magenta and a small painting for his mother. Harry wasn't certain about it, but Pyrrha was adamant the painting, which showed a farmstead and a group of people going about their business, would appeal to Hazel.

This just left Saphron, and after searching for a while, the two gave that up as a lost cause. "It's hard because I don't know enough about Saphron's girlfriend to come up with a real gift instead of a generic one."

"Perhaps just pitch in to pay for a graduation trip?" Pyrrha murmured before shrugging her own ignorance.

"That, or let Yang and Mila find a racy-type present for the pair of them. I know Saphron's body type and everything so..."

Pyrrha blushed, smacking him lightly on the shoulder, and the two of them continued to shop for paint and other things the team needed. Once they had purchased Tia's Water Dust Crystal and the items they would need to put together to solve Nora's grenade problems, Harry and Pyrrha headed back to the bullhead landing area, where they signed up to have the stuff

sent back to beacon. With their arms freed of packages, the two continued, heading towards a grocery store.

But with their arms free again, the date's mood had shifted back to what it had been before. They walked arm in arm, laughing and flirting, occasionally stopping to turn to one another. By this point, it was pushing nine at night, so there were a bit fewer people out on the roads, and the sight of a hood-wearing tall young woman and an equally tall young man in a black dress shirt caused few issues.

One young boy was pulled away from them when the two stopped to kiss, Harry's hands trailing down Pyrrha's back to her rear. Another, a teen girl, blushed and giggled as she watched them, while another teen nearby stared hard at Pyrrha as if he had spotted something under her hood.

However, it was in the grocery store where their luck failed. A family of four young boys had a somewhat harried mother pushing a heavily laden cart. A can fell out of the cart, knocked out of the pile of food by the hand of the flailing youngest.

Before Harry could do anything, Pyrrha smoothly knelt down, grabbing it off the ground and held it out to her mother, not noticing that the quick movement had pushed her hood off her head. "Here you are, ma'am."

The woman thanked her, then stared, as did the older youth beside her. "The Invincible Girl!" he exclaimed.

Pyrrha recoiled, pulling her hood back over her head. "W, wait, no, I'm not..."

"Can I have your autograph!" the boy interrupted her, stuttering as he pulled out his shirt from his stomach. "Here, you can sign this!"

"I, I'm sorry, I'm really not..."

But it was too late. Other nighttime shoppers had heard, and now several more people were coming around the ends of the aisles from both sides.

"Invincible Girl, where!?"

"I heard she is going to Beacon, so it could be!"

"huh, she's the right height, but with that hood..."

"I, I..." Pyrrha stammered as Harry began to look for a way to escape. "I'm sorry, but I'm not..."

"It is her!" another one of the young boys exclaimed, grabbing up a Pumpkin Pete's box and waving it above his head. "Wow, I thought you were a cartoon, but the box doesn't lie!"

While that line made Harry grimace, the boy's shout seemed enough to convince the small crowd. They moved forward, further boxing in the two Hunters in training. "So much for a quiet date," He muttered.

Grimacing, Harry looked around at the group of people moving towards them, comparing this to the times right after his victory over Riddle. At that point, he could barely go outside without being mobbed. *And with the crowd already aware of us, any charms to obfuscate their senses or our presence would be noticed. I would still use them, of course, but it would be obvious what had happened, and we might lose the townhouse just when we proved we deserved it. And Ozpin would have more of an idea of all I can do, which I don't want.*

As he watched, though, one of the grocery store workers was coming towards her with something rolled up under one arm, an eager smile on his face. *Fuck they're going to turn it into some kind of promo event, aren't they? Fuck.* Worse were the people already on their scrolls, obviously calling other people.

Thinking of a way to escape without their date night being totally ruined, Harry looked around, then up, spotting the sprinkler system in the ceiling. *Well, there's only one way out of here, and I suppose so long as I can do it without being caught, it's better than trying to mess with people's minds.* With that, Harry set the image of the sprinkler toward the front of the store in his mind and deliberately turned his attention back to the crowd.

When the family began to turn away, Harry's fingers twitched. A tiny burst of fire appeared directly below the targeted sprinkler, which instantly came on, along with all the others. The fire alarm went off as the sprinklers began their work, spritzing the crowd from above.

The sudden downpour and the alarms shattered the crowd's attention, and Harry instantly took advantage. He grabbed Pyrrha's hand and tugged her along, leaving behind the now panicking crowd as they wondered what had happened. "Come on, let's get out of here!"

Pyrrha blinked, and a part of her wanted to protest. Wanted to stay, help calm the crowd down, and help evacuate the building. But that was the part of her that always wanted to do the right thing, to keep smiles on the faces of her fans. Her mind knew there weren't enough people in the store to result in a riot or whatever, and while the store would lose money due to the damages caused by the sprinklers, that was merely money.

The two raced through the crowd, with Pyrrha's free hand holding her hood in place as they ran, racing out of the store. Outside, the pair leaped onto the rooftops, showing the superhuman physicality that Huntsmen were well known for. Once Harry made certain there were no more video cameras, the pair hid for a moment as a fire truck moved down the street from a nearby fire department.

"You didn't have to do that, you know," Pyrrha made a moue as they continued to watch, shaking her head. "I realize it isn't likely, but what if that stunt injured someone?"

“You’re right, I didn’t have to, but I for sure wanted to. You’re a person Pyrrha, not some unfeeling idol they can come and worship at whenever they spot you!” Harry paused, then shook his head, using a drying charm to dry their clothes. “Okay, that made more sense in my head.”

Pyrrha giggled but, watching Harry, said nothing as he tried to form his thoughts into words. “I... I don’t mind people looking at you or any of us like we are role models. That’s part of being a Hunter, being a role model, a shield, a leader, all that. But to crowd us like that, to make demands of our private time, hell no. You’re a person, and their demands on you do not outweigh your own wants.”

Harry shook his head. “And unfortunately, you’re still not good enough at saying no that you could have turned them aside.” Pyrrha pouted but looked at the ground, unwilling to meet Harry’s gaze as he went on. “This way, it will look like just another wild rumor, coupled with someone setting off a fire as a prank, maybe. Or maybe they will really remember you were there, but they won’t connect it to the fire. It will simply be a coincidence, bad timing. Nothing to do with you or me.”

“I hope you’re right,” Pyrrha murmured, grateful for Harry’s help and knowing she would have otherwise backslid into her old habits of trying to please the public over herself but not quite approving of how they had gotten away.

“I hope so too. Regardless, it’s done now.” Harry pulled out his scroll, checking the map again, before pointing to their left over the rooftops. “Come on, we didn’t get any groceries, and you said you wanted me to cook something for you.”

With that, the two moved over the rooftops. With it being such a nice night out and the stars above, it didn’t take long for both of them to get back into a romantic frame of mind. Soon Pyrrha had thanked Harry properly by pushing him against air conditioning machine, her tongue licking at his in Harry’s mouth. Then it was Harry mocking that he would catch her as they leaped back down to the road. Pyrrha giggled and went with it, only to be held in his arms as Harry kissed and nibbled at her lips, jaw, and what he could get at her neck in her large hood.

They were back in full-on date mode when they reached the next grocery store. Neither of them noticed one young man, pushing some carts into line desultorily in the parking area, staring from his scroll to the pair of them, then racing inside. They would have if he had made to follow or approach them, but instead, he headed for the store’s security room.

Unknowingly, Harry and Pyrrha moved around the grocery store, first buying items in bulk, then the things Harry would need for tonight. As they went, they flirted and kissed, and more than once, Pyrrha’s hood nearly came undone, enough to let her red hair be seen, and once, a nearby camera caught sight of a portion of her face as she threw her head back while Harry worked on her throat a bit.

The teen, his face a battleground between the forces of acne and zits, hissed in victory. "Hell yes! This is going to make me a lot of money!"

Back with the two lovers, they were quickly done their shopping, with the last things Harry bought being some fresh fruits and a bottle of rum. "Are you going to try to get me drunk, Harry Arc?" Pyrrha asked archly.

Fresh from an intense make-out session that had him adjusting his pants for the second time that night, Harry smirked back, licking his lips as he gazed into the hood and into Pyrrha's jade eyes. "Are you saying I would have to?"

"..." Pyrrha's blush and how she bit her lip was enough of an answer, and the two headed to the front of the store.

The pair then took to the rooftops again, heading back to the landing area. There they could not help but notice that, against Harry's expectations, the sighting of Pyrrha Nikos was seen as big news, showing up on a few TVs in the waiting area. He was right that the fire which had caused the sprinklers was not being connected to them. Yet the Invincible Girl sighting was seen as far bigger news than that."

Taking this in, Harry shook his head as they moved on, heading out onto the landing area and back onto the bullhead, where Pyrrha finally tugged her hood off her head. "I knew you were famous, but this much? Especially in Vale? Back in Mistral I could maybe understand, but..."

"I'm afraid the Mistral Tournament has done far too good a job at garnering international recognition for decades now. And I am the undefeated four-time winner," She added, almost as an afterthought, since that was what it was to her. Beating Arturia twice was worth far more than all the other matches she'd had in between. "Sometimes I wonder if I really should have lost to your sister, ended the match when my aura went out into the red as everyone there was saying."

Harry gently ran a finger down her arm, over where the scar was normally displayed, a source of pride, of her growth beyond being a mere gladiator. The Hoodie of course did not put it on display, as that would have defeated the point of going incognito. "You wouldn't be Pyrrha Nikos if you had, regardless of what it would've done to your Invincible Girl persona. You're a fighter, Pyrrha. Giving up like that isn't in you."

Pyrrha smiled at that, and gave Harry a kiss on the cheek, before snuggling into his side. The two of them stayed like that until they landed. At that point, Harry and Pyrrha carried the groceries through the nighttime expanse of the Academy, not back to their dorm room, but to the townhouse they had been assigned.

The townhouse was a two-story affair, with the living room directly abutting the entrance, and a small bathroom to one side. The kitchen took up half of the sitting room, with a

large bar table separating the two. The kitchen looked pretty good, in Harry's opinion. "It's smaller than the one back home, Ren and I might have trouble working around one another. But it's also more modern. Electric stove rather than gas, that's going to be interesting. More modern microwave which is nice, smaller fridge, but newer."

"Does it come with some plates?" Pyrrha asked setting down the bags she had been carrying as her stomach rumbled. "We didn't buy any, nor any silverware." The two of them hadn't bothered with more than a small popcorn for the movie, both of them presciently knowing that more popcorn would have gone to waste. And neither of them had much lunch either.

Harry opened some drawers and quickly ascertained that the answer was yes, at which point he began to cook. "I'm thinking something a bit quick, but also daring. So pork journey cake sandwiches with coleslaw and rum punch."

"While I can't say the alcohol sounds all that appetizing, pork sounds good," Pyrrha mused.

Nodding at that, Harry continued to prepare the sauce for the pork, pointing at where he wanted the rest of their groceries to go, and Pyrrha laughed quietly at time or two as she followed his orders to the letter. Not once did her leader look away from his cooking.

When she was done, Harry was still chopping things for the coleslaw. The smell of cooking pork had begun to fill the house, and the sauce was already simmering nicely, a deep brown cover.

Her own task finished, Pyrrha moved behind Harry, hugging him from behind. "Thank you for tonight," she whispered into his shoulders, her forehead pressed into the back neck. "I know I come with a lot of baggage, and I'm happy you can put up with me."

"Putting up with you isn't quite the words I would use Pyrrha. Happily be your boyfriend, maybe, ecstatically be your friend, sure,". He joked, mangling his words just a bit for the second time that night, but getting the impression across nonetheless.

Pyrrha laughed, shaking her head, and Harry turned slightly in her arms, kissing her on the forehead as his arms went around her. "Seriously. I am going out with Pyrrha, not Pyrrha Nikos, not the Invincible Girl."

As Pyrrha blushed, Harry continued, a smirk coming to his face. "I'm going out with the girl who has trouble getting up in the mornings without coffee, who likes fighting a little too much, who laughs at dog videos and yet is terrified of the idea of taking care of one, the girl who likes homemade clothing and dislikes cereals, and who would cheerfully murder someone over a bar of chocolate. The same one who has trouble with math, but actually quite likes science for some reason, despite that lack. The redhead who tries to fall asleep with her eyes open in Professor Port's class. The..."

“Thank you, Harry!” Pyrrha said, leaning up to kiss him. “MMM.... I think I get the picture.” Licking her lips, Pyrrha went on, wanting to respond to Harry’s teasing yet emotional words with her own. “And I am not just with you because of my Oath or silly nonsense like that Harry. I know that sometimes bothers you.” She gently poked him in the stomach, which was firm and hard underneath his shirt to her touch, sending a shiver through her as she suddenly realized that they were alone in the townhouse right now. And that she was in his arms and vice versa.

Trying hard not to let that sudden realization show too much of her face, Pyrrha went on. “I, I am not in love with you yet,” she said, using the ‘L Word’ for the first time in a relationship. “But I’m definitely falling for Harry, the boy whose hair equates to a bird’s nest twenty-four seven. The one who is wrapped around every one of his sisters’ fingers. Don’t think I forgot how you exited class once, so you could talk to Violet...” she taunted, causing Harry to groan. “The boy who argues history with Professor Oobleck, who actually seems to enjoy Port’s class. The one who would sooner cook than talk to girls he doesn’t know, the one with big dreams for the future,” she whispered, kissing his neck. “You are more than the aspirations which told my instincts to become your shield Harry. Just as I am more than the Invincible Girl.”

Harry smiled faintly, leans down a little more, and captured Pyrrha’s lips again.

This proved to be something of a mistake in terms of getting dinner ready. The two of them have been flirting and making out all night, and despite the momentary annoyance at the first stop, grocery store, the crackling romantic and sexual tension had not faded overmuch since they started to kiss in the theater. And Pyrrha was not the only one aware that they were completely alone in their townhouse.

Harry’s mouth opened as he kissed her, his tongue out and demanding injury for the seventh time that night. Pyrrha allowed it, responding ardently as she crushed Harry to her, and vice versa. One moment, Pyrrha was taking charge of the kiss, then Harry backed her into the refrigerator door, almost dominating her mouth as her hands found their way around his body, grabbing at his buttocks, squeezing.

One of Pyrrha’s leg came up, looping around him, as she rolled her hips into his. Harry’s arms were still around her thighs and he held her there. Then with a quick twist of her body, Pyrrha somehow twisted them around so that Harry was backed up, and Pyrrha was pressing into him.

Of course, Harry wasn’t about to be passive about it, and his hands moved from where they were still around her waist, releasing lightly let his hands down her back, before they could grab her butt cheeks for only the second time that night. As he squeezed that magnificent rear, Harry lifted her the air. Pyrrha squealed into their kiss but found herself sitting on the island table, kitchen counter, still making out with Harry. And from here, her crotch and his thrust directly against one another, the desire to mate apparent in their movements despite the fact they still wore jeans.

The two of them stayed there for a few moments, their make-out session becoming more intense, their movements wilder, until the timer Harry had set for the pork began to go off.

Harry pulled away, very, very reluctantly, and laid his forehead against hers, whispering, "Rain check?"

Pyrrha's stomach answered for her by growling noticeably, and Harry laughed, with Pyrrha joining him a moment later.

Harry directed Pyrrha to work at the table for a time, creating coleslaw to go with his sandwiches. To take her mind off the searing heat building in her, Pyrrha tried to figure out some other topic, anything to concentrate her mind on. *Damn you Harry Arc! What are you doing to me?!* "W, what are journey cakes? They sound like something from a fantasy novel."

Dealing with his own issues, Harry gratefully went along with this. *Cold ice down my pants, cold ice down my pants, Cardin trying to flirt with me, Nora's singing, flipping heck, down, boy! Food first, sticky fun later.*

"It, it's a kind of bread that my mother ran into while traveling either in Vacuo or the south of Mistral. Her story isn't altogether clear. And it isn't really a cake, but it has that same kind of soft consistency.

"Speaking of cakes, they normally are part of dessert," Pyrrha murmured, looking over to another boiling pot.

Harry chuckled and looked over to where he had been melting chocolate before, well... *No, bad Harry, no food-play, just eat it. "*Ahem*, if you're done chopping, you can come over and stir the pulled pork into the sauce and I can take a look at dessert."*

Pyrrha leapt up over the counter table, landing neatly beside him, thumping Harry's hip with her own. "What are you waiting for then!?"

The cooking continued for another thirty minutes. And if Harry occasionally touched, patted, kissed or even rubbed up against Pyrrha in that time, she made no move to complain, greatly enjoying and reciprocating these touches.

Yet by the time Harry finished with the rum punch and had put the chocolate ganache back in the frig, Pyrrha's stomach was growling like an angry dragon and she barely waited for Harry to sit down for grabbing the sandwich and biting into it. "MMmmmmmm!!!"

The sound she made as she did made Harry's knees go weak for a moment, and he smiled wryly as he slumped into his chair. "I take it you think it's good?"

"It's extremely spicy, but yes, extremely good!" Pyrrha whimpered. "By the Brothers, Harry, this is good!"

“Well, mission accomplished then.” Harry laughed and dug into his own food.

So hungry where they that for a time, there was no real conversation as the two devoured the meal, then went back for seconds of the pulled pork and the last two slices of journey cake, making half-sandwiches out of them. There would still be enough coleslaw and pulled pork for another meal, but the sandwiches would be more mundane without the journey cake, which, though bread, really did have some of the same consistency as cake.

“That was extremely tasty, Harry! Thank you. And I’m glad I am learning something about cooking while working with you. I don’t doubt that will be handy in the field.” Pyrrha snickered then. “Although with you on my team I wager I would walk through an army of Grimm rather than do my own cooking.”

The two made small talk as they finished the last coleslaw and pulled pork on their plates. Harry thought for a second that this was the moment to speak about his ‘Semblance’ about the secret behind his ability to use his ‘Semblance’ so quickly after Pyrrha had kindled his Aura. Harry had promised after all to talk to her about it, so it would make sense. Yet that kind of serious discussion would clash horribly with the romantic atmosphere of the date so far, and Harry didn’t want to break that tension by a serious talk. *Sue me, this time I am going to think with my lower head, blast it!*

So instead of bringing up the secrets around his magic, Harry asked if Pyrrha still had room for dessert. *We can have a serious talk in the morning, I guess.*

In response, she gave him a very speaking look. “Silly, Harry. There is always room for dessert.”

Harry chuckled at that then retrieved the chocolate ganache with cherry sauce, setting it down.

However, Pyrrha simply looked at the small bowls then Harry, before shaking her head and standing up, moving to sit down in his lap. *I’ve been fed, and I have waited long enough!*

Harry was surprised by this action, but more than welcomed the contact, one arm going around her waist, as he laid his head on her chest, looking up at her in question. “And what do you expect me to do now?”

{Lime start! - feels a bit redundant at this point but...}

In response, Pyrrha took a bite of Harry’s chocolate ganache. She whimpered a little as the taste hit her, causing a shiver to go down her spine, the sound so primal that little Harry stood at attention underneath her rear. Pyrrha felt that but didn’t react just yet. Nor did she swallow. Instead, she kissed him.

If Harry was surprised by Pyrrha’s previous actions, this practically stunned him. *Damn, I need to read some of the romance novels Pyrrha’s gotten off Blake lately, they’ve obviously*

been giving her ideas. Still, he reciprocated the kiss, and the two made out for time, their tongues dueling until the last bit of chocolate was gone.

And then, she did it again. Then a third time, this time with more cherry sauce to chocolate. Harry's arm tightened around her, while his other hand moved over her stomach, pulling at her shirt a little, then pausing, nonverbally asking for permission.

Pyrrha was now a little high on a mixture of chocolate heaven and arousal, the combination having quite overwhelmed her. She might have protested if Harry had asked her to remove her jeans. But her shirt, that she didn't have a problem with. Pyrrha nodded, and he pulled her shirt upwards, allowing his hand access to her toned stomach, where his fingers began to play across her skin.

Pyrrha tugged on his hair a bit, getting Harry to concentrate on the kiss again, as her hand wound down from his neck and into his shirt from his neckline.

Then Harry cupped one of her bra clad breasts, and she gasped at the sensation.

Pyrrha had some accidents occur during training where opponents accidentally groped her. Well, she thought most of them were accidents, anyway. One most certainly wasn't and the boy had paid the price. But this was the first time someone had touched Pyrrha with her permission and to give her pleasure.

The sensation of fingers not Pyrrha's own working at her breast, even through her bra, a lacy little number that Nora had picked out for her sent Pyrrha to shivering with desire, and a little bit of concern. However, her desire and arousal drowned that part of her mind entirely, and she scooped up a bite of chocolate, pulling back from the kiss. As Harry watched, she lifted off of the fork, very deliberately making use of her tongue to lick the bite of chocolate away, until Harry was driven to pulling her down and kissing her wildly.

The chocolate between their lips disappeared slowly, and Pyrrha pulled back, a low moan leaving her lips as Harry went to work on her cleavage a bit, pulling at her shirt, having pulled his head out from underneath to do so. "T, take me to bed, Harry."

Harry pulled back a little, licking her skin a moment before smirking at her. "Are you sure? You don't want to shower? I can clean up if..."

"Hadrian Arc!" Pyrrha interrupted, her teeth showing a dangerous smile. "If you do not immediately take me to bed, I will not be responsible for my actions!"

Given that all the silverware had begun to hover in the air both around the table and over in the kitchen, Harry decided not to play further with fire, instead, stood up and lifted, lifting Pyrrha into a bridal carry. Pyrrha pulled him into a kiss, demanding almost all Harry's attention. It was only through memory that Harry could get from the main room to the stairs. At that point, he pulled back and began concentrating more on the stairs while Pyrrha took the time to work on his neck, licking nipping and biting a little.

“You realize you’re not going to get through my aura, right?” He murmured as he moved up the stairs to the second floor.

“I know, although strangely enough, I have seen hickies on people with their Aura awakened. How exactly would that work anyway?” Pyrrha paused in her work for a moment, leaning her chin thoughtfully on Harry’s shoulder as she looked behind him at the bit of a mess they had left in the kitchen. *One of us will have to come back out to clean up, and it had better be me! Tia told me the rules, he cooks, I clean.*

“Maybe someone with a bigger aura reserve can overwhelm another person’s at a specific point?” Harry asked, before very deliberately squeezing Pyrrha’s rear. If not for her own Aura, that grip might have caused her pain, but as it was, it merely got her attention. “More importantly,” he said as they reached the second floor. “How far exactly do you want to go. I never want to push you to, and all that joking about us having dated online for a while aside, I don’t want us to rush into something that you might regret.”

“You wouldn’t?”

“Have you ever looked in a mirror, like, ever?” Harry quipped.

Pyrrha laughed, shaking her head. “The underwear and panties stay on,” She said simply. “Other than that, I **want** this Harry! I want to go further than kisses. But I’m also a little leery about going too fast, so, er, no touching below the belt either...”

Her confident, needy tone shifted a bit near the end, making it clear it was really a question, but Harry simply leaned down and kissed her tenderly before pulling back, turning his attention to which room they should use. “As my lady, wishes, always.”

Pyrrha giggled at that, then went back to kissing his skin, having unbuttoned his shirt at some point while they were sitting and exchanging chocolatey kisses. Harry literally could not remember when, his attention had been solely focused on Pyrrha and her mouth, not his own body.

The feel of his skin against her own made Pyrrha want to pull off her shirt, but she also didn’t want to stop kissing or licking. It was a conundrum that was only solved when Harry gently placed her on the bed in one of the four rooms that made up the second floor, pulling away from her as he did.

All four rooms were small, barely big enough for a small dresser about as wide as Harry could reach, a bed, and maybe a table if you sat on the bed to use it. The beds themselves were customized twins, much like those in the dorms. They would be a very snug fit for two people, but Harry thought that was just part of the fun as he watched Pyrrha pull her shirt over her shoulders and toss it to the floor, his eyes practically flashing with desire as he took her in.

Pyrrha’s bra was a red silk thing, that more presented her chest to his gaze than gave her any support whatsoever, but Harry was quite appreciative for its efforts. The bra covered

everything that needed to be covered, with the least amount of material possible. And then, it got better as Pyrrha unhooked her bra, holding it out to one side, dropping it on top of her shirt, before leaning back.

Normally, Pyrrha would probably have felt highly embarrassed, to be looked at while half-naked and lounging on a bed. but she was so turned on at the moment, and she trusted Harry so much, that embarrassment was a distant fifth emotion/thought whining for mind-time in her head. Anticipation was third, her need to slow down was fourth, tied with appreciation for the view.

Harry gulped, his eyes tracking Pyrrha's chest as it bounced with her breathing. Pyrrha was not in the same class as, Tia, Mila, or Yang, but she was probably in the same area as Arturia, a decent sized B-cup. They were big enough to fit in his hands but no more. Extremely perky they were, with only a slight slope to them, and extremely perky, cherry red nipples stood against the whiteness of Pyrrha's skin.

Slowly Harry knelt beside the bed, and leaning forward, touched Pyrrha's chest with one hand, looking up at her for permission. She stared back with half-lidded eyes, licking her lips, and Harry took that as a sign. He began to play with them, marveling at their heft in his hands, the softness of Pyrrha's skin, the springy nature of Pyrrha's chest, and the hardening of her nipples under his palms.

When he leaned in and captured one of those nipples, Pyrrha threw back her head, moaning loudly, before abruptly grabbing Harry by the hair and pulling him into a searing kiss. Her other arm wound around his waist, and she heaved him back onto his feet, then on top of Pyrrha on the bed, twisting them so they were both laying side-by-side.

Without breaking the kiss, she used her polarity powers at a moment that frankly astonished Harry given the amount of self-control it showed. The belt buckle flew through the air, pulling his belt out of Harry's pants. Similarly, the button began to be tugged upwards. Before it was pulled entirely off Harry tweaked Pyrrha's nipple, causing her to squeak and lose concentration. "I like these pants. Let me do it."

Before Pyrrha could formulate a reply, Harry's lips found her once more, quickly deepening into a full make out session. Harry then had to shimmy out of his pants, while Pyrrha did the same to her own.

A moment later Harry was laying on top of Pyrrha, his shaft starting to grind against Pyrrha's panty clad policy, Harry's boxers straining to contain his wizard's wand. Pyrrha's panties were almost liberally soaked with her arousal, while pre-cum had made several marks on Harry's boxers.

As Harry pulled back to look down at her, Pyrrha also took in the view, start to blush a bit, that pesky fifth emotion/thought gaining a bit of headway now. She had seen Harry shirtless before, and greatly enjoyed the view. His scarred, incredibly toned body appealed to

her far more than the normal musclebound type Pyrrha had seen so often the arena. But she had never seen a man in boxers before, and certainly not sporting a tent that seemed fixed to bursting with his desire for her.

But neither had any notion of stopping, and when Harry leaned down to kiss her again, Pyrrha's mouth opened, her tongue demanding entrance to his mouth.

As they kissed, Pyrrha's fingers ran up and down Harry's back, while Harry's hands once more found her breasts, holding them as if they were the greatest treasures in the world. His gentleness sent shivers up and down Pyrrha's body, which were soon followed by pleasure as his thumbs flicked around and then over her nipples.

Whimpering at the feelings Harry was giving her, Pyrrha slid her hands down Harry's back, grabbing at his rear, pulling him harder against her. The pair moaned at that as Harry's boxer covered shaft rubbed against Pyrrha's wet panties. Harry pulled back from their kiss, the two of them looking into one another's eyes for a moment. Then, with Pyrrha's hands on his rear encouraging him, Harry began to grind his shaft against Pyrrha's panties. Pyrrha's mouth opened, and she began to moan louder, the sensation and the sheer sexual nature of the act well beyond anything she had ever dreamed. *Oh my word, my dreams will be far more detailed from now on. Brothers! "Harrrrryyyy!!!!"*

Huffing, Harry had to stop for a moment, shaking his head as he used one hand to push himself upright a bit more, pulling his hips back from Pyrrha. "D, damn, nearly lost it there."

"Mmm?" Pyrrha whimpered, leaning up to kiss him on the chest and neck. "Why'd you stop~~, don't stop~~~!"

"We, well, you're just so amazing, and the whole teasing thing we had going had me so far gone already, it well, I'm not about to finish before you do!" Harry answered, leaning down to kiss her as the remaining hand playing with her breast, his fingers moving to play with her nipples.

"Oh, I, I don't think you need to worry about that. I, I think I'm on the edge as well," Pyrrha nearly whispered, before they were kissing again. Like any other teen, she'd figured out self-exploration years back, and Pyrrha could recognize the signs. *Oh my word and this is going to be a big one!*

Still Harry held his hips away from hers for a bit, working more on kissing her and playing with her nipple for a time. Pyrrha tried to raise her hips to force some kind of contact, but Harry held her down for a moment, then he found a place right at her collarbone that caused Pyrrha to spasm, a loud moan escaping her. "AHHHhhh oh myyyy..."

When Pyrrha came down from that sudden spike of further arousal, she found Harry had moved slightly down her body, laying gentle kisses over her neck and the tops of her

breath. When her eyes found his, Harry smiled gently, then moved further down, and once more, his lips found her nipples.

“FUCKKKK!!” Pyrrha shrieked, her hips humping up off the bed.

“Language!” Harry quipped.

“Fuck you Hadrian Arc, there are some circumstances where language like that is highly appropriate!” Pyrrha retorted, moaning between each word. But she was done being a passive lover at that point. As her hips returned to the bed, she lifted her legs, wrapping them around Harry’s waist, pulling him into her core. Her panties were so sodden they clung to her skin, and the sodden smack of them hitting Harry’s waist right above his boxers was audible over the pair’s heavy breathing. Then she ran her hand into Harry’s hair and tugged him into a kiss, licking his jaw before their lips met.

Harry had recovered some of his self-control so was more than willing to go with this, his hips and Pyrrha’s finding a rhythm. Pyrrha eventually pulled back from the kiss, moving her lips down to Harry’s throat, while Harry worked on her ears, their hips grinding, humping, thumping, both of them now roaring forward to a crescendo.

Harry started to lose their rhythm, his hips moving more randomly with each grinding action.

“Pyrrha, p, PYrrhaaaa....” He moaned. “I’m gonna...”

Pyrrha didn’t reply with words, instead tightening her legs around him. This proved her undoing, as Harry’s shaft, which was still, somewhat amazingly, still held within his boxers, rubbed directly against her clit. Even through her drenched panties, this sensation was enough to push her over the edge, and Pyrrha bit down on Harry’s collarbone, a loud moan coming from her lips as her back arched and her hands on his rear tightened. “HARRRRYYYY!!!”

The feeling of that and Pyrrha’s legs tightening around him was enough to push Harry to climax, and he grunted Pyrrha’s name as he came. The previously small wet spots left from his pre-cum quickly expanded to fill his boxers as his cock recoiled, ropes of cum splattering inside his boxers.

A sudden lethargy filled them both, and Pyrrha’s legs dropped boneless from where they had been squeezing Harry’s hips hard enough to break an Aura-less man’s bones. Harry collapsed with her, his head thumping into the pillow beside hers. “Fucking hell... Pyrrha, what are you doing to me?”

“M, me!? Isn’t that my line? You’re the one who seduced me with your smile, and your chocolate dessert and everything else,” Pyrrha retorted, her voice between a tired gasp and a giggle.

Harry chuckled, the sound deep and content, so close to her ear sending another shiver through Pyrrha, who turned to look at Harry. Harry gently moved his body off hers so they were laying side by side, his hand moving to cup her face, gently moving aside a bit of sweat matted hair. "You're gorgeous, you know that? The most fantastic woman in the world."

Pyrrha giggled at that, shaking her head. "Well, I rather doubt you are an unbiased judge right now, Harry, but I will thank you for the compliment, and say that you are quite amazing yourself." *I might not be where I can say I love you, Hadrian Arc, but I am fast approaching that point for certain!*

His thoughts ran somewhat parallel to Pyrrha for a few moments, but Harry could not ignore the sight in front of him, Pyrrha's hair matted to her shoulders, her eyes gleaming, her lips looking a little redder than normal, her chest heaving as she breathed in. All of it was enough to keep his libido going, and Harry leaned forward, using a charm to clean his boxers and their lower bodies of the sticky remnants of their recent fun.

The sticky remnants flowed down their legs, to the floor, whereas back in his old life, the cleaning charm would simply have banished the mass of juices, cum and sweat. On Remnant banishing charms didn't work, the best he could do was push it away like this. The charm was still quite inclusive, so it worked after a fashion.

More importantly, Harry could see Pyrrha's nipples harden once more as she shivered at the odd sensation, and the way she bit her lip was enough to make his mind go by-by, meaning she was still in the mood too. "You know, it is Friday... and we don't need to wake up until lunchtime..."

"Oh my, that is right, isn't it..." Pyrrha's eyes gleamed, and she bit her lip as she slowly scooted her head towards Harry's on the pillow, before languidly raising her leg, and rolling so that she was on top of him, her chest pressing against his.

As she settled into her new position, Pyrrha felt Harry's cock rising to attention beneath her, still constrained by his now cleaned boxers, thankfully, or else with the way she was still riding a euphoric high, Pyrrha might have gone further than she was really ready for just yet. "And I see you're not a one-and-done man, I've read it's called..."

"Who could be, with someone like you next to them?" Harry replied with a laugh, one hand moving up her back and then around to once more cup one of Pyrrha's breasts. The other moved down to fondle her panty clad rear. "I can go just as long as you can."

"Heh, we'll see," Pyrrha answered, leaning down to kiss him as they resumed their nightly activities, which were most decidedly not going to end anytime soon. For tonight, there were no concerns about the Invincible Girl Sighting, no worries about one of the professors realizing Harry might have started the fire that set off the sprinklers in the grocery store. There

were no thoughts of the future. Only the now, and only one another as the pieces of the moon watched from above.

End Chapter

And there is another chapter, folks. At first, I had thought to shrink the time down and just concentrate on the date and one or two scholastic things alone. But then I got to writing, and the battle at the mine would not leave my mind. I wanted to show the first battle of what is going to be a growing warrior culture in the mine and Evig Låga from now on. I will show little bits of how they grow now, but Harry won't be directly involved with it until the Beacon adventures are done.

I also thought about putting in a Salem segment but decided against it. I will put it off for another chapter, then I can have one large scene where I can hear her thoughts on what happened in the Initiation, and introduce Cinder, Watts, Hazel, and Tyrian all in one scene.

Regardless, we get a whole chapter out of it, the time is further extended into three weeks, and we are leading up to one of the larger events at Beacon: the trip to Forever Fall. This will have quite a large fallout and will show what I will do with the other characters of team ARGT and how I will treat Blake Belladonna going forward. She hasn't featured prominently in either of these last chapters, but since Blake's connection/obsession with the White Fang is so central to the plot, it will come up in the next one as the plot for regular RWBY starts to pick up speed. And from now on, I won't need to show so much about classes, just a few short training blurbs and campus life/romance time.

And hopefully this chapter isn't as mistake-ridden as the last one!