

# **Knightfall: A Jaune Arc x Cinder Fall Love Story**

**By: NoXIV**

Jaune Arc. Student, leader of Team JNPR and... a subordinate of the Queen of The Grimm, Salem. Because of his help, Cinder was able to effectively defeat Ozpin and cause the collapse of Beacon Academy. Now, their mission completed, they return to their Mistress. (Cover image by Lulady030)

Status: ongoing

Published: 2021-11-14

Updated: 2023-04-05

Words: 60722

Chapters: 17

Rated: Fiction K+ - Language: English - Genre: Friendship/Romance - Characters: [Cinder F., Jaune A.] Pyrrha N. - Reviews: 45 - Favs: 241 - Follows: 307

Original source: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/13989470/1>

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# Chapter 1

The school was burning. *Her* school. Beacon Academy. The place she had been happy to call home for the past year was currently under siege by the White Fang and the Grimm. Pyrrha's fists tightened as she thought back to the events that had occurred below Beacon tower.

She was in a pod, trapped before... that *woman* ambushed them. One moment, everything was going smoothly as the Invincible Girl braced herself to receive the Aura of another through screams of agonizing pain and then the next, chaos. An arrow embedded itself into the pod next to her, killing the occupant within as Pyrrha's eyes widened in terror when the power that was about to flow into her instead went to the sudden intruder.

Helplessly banging on the doors of her prison, she could do nothing as her friend... her first love was thrown aside like a rag doll. With a small burst of strength, Pyrrha ripped the doors of her pod open with her semblance, her weapons in her arms in an instant. Before she could engage the woman in front of her, Pyrrha was stopped in her tracks by the Headmaster himself as she was ordered to leave the basement. Retreat, she did even as a look full of shame and regret filled her face.

Now, her she was. Standing in Beacon's courtyard as everything and everyone around her descended into chaos. A few feet away from her, she could see a small group of students fending off the intruding wave of Grimm as another group swiftly took down a rogue group of Atlesian Knights.

"Pyrrha, lets go. I have Glynda's number. We'll wait for all of this to blow over in the Bullheads they're using to evacuate everyone" Jaune said, scroll already in hand. Pyrrha, however, was paying the boy no mind as she stared at Beacon Tower. A few moments of tense silence passed before both of them heard an explosion coming

from below the tower as a human-shaped fireball ascended to the top.

"Ozpin's... gone..." Jaune remarked from her side. Taking a deep breath, Pyrrha turned her attention towards her partner.

"Jaune, you have to go and get help. Now" the girl said, resolve formed on her face.

"Pyrrha, what are you talking about?" her team leader asked, confused before he realized what her intentions were, "Pyrrha, you can't. Y-you saw who she was-"

The Invincible Girl cut off whatever her partner had to say with a deep kiss, savoring every moment their lips met as tears formed on her eyes.

"I'm sorry for this..." Pyrrha said, as she broke away from the kiss first.

"Sorry for... what...?" Jaune asked before she shoved the boy into a nearby weapons locker. At least, that was her intention before her blonde leader quickly stepped away from the girl. The boy then looked behind him at the empty locker before realizing what her true intentions were, "Pyrrha, were you about to... leave me behind...?"

"I can't drag you into this any further, Jaune" Pyrrha argued as she gripped the boy with her Semblance "I have to do this alone"

"Why?" Jaune asked, a challenging tone in his voice as his hands gripped her own.

"Because I'm the strongest in our year and I... I have to do everything I can to stall that woman before help arrives" Pyrrha replied, resolve in her voice even as her grip on Jaune's armor loosened.

"Alright, fine. Then I'm going with you" Jaune answered, before quickly adding, "I might not be the strongest in our year but our odds will be better if I'm up there with you"

"Jaune, you can't-"

"This isn't a discussion. Besides, it's Team Leader's orders" Jaune said, a teasing smile on his face as he started making his way towards Beacon Tower. Unsheathing his sword, he then turned towards her, "Well, are you coming or are you going to let me face the big, bad scary woman all alone?"

"Wouldn't dream of it" Pyrrha replied, as she caught up with the boy even as relief - no matter how small - started forming within herself.

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"Okay so, I've told Weiss and Ruby where we're going. Hopefully, they'll be here to back us up sooner rather than later" Jaune said, turning towards her as the two students stood within the ruined elevator, "Are you ready?"

With a nod, Pyrrha then focused her Semblance all around them as she forced the elevator to ascend to the top. When it finally did, the Invincible Girl followed up by forcing the doors to open before hurling her sword at the woman. Her opponent then swiftly dodged the attack as Pyrrha followed up with an attack using her shield and legs. The woman, however, effortlessly blocked the attack as the redhead jumped back before entering a fighting stance. Her opponent responded by hovering into the air, a jet of fire on the balls of her feet.

Her partner joined her side a moment later, the both of them entering into a familiar stance. To Pyrrha's surprise, however, the woman in front of her put out the flames beneath her feet as she floated back down to the ground, a smile of joy on her face that confused the Invincible Girl.

"What-?"

"I'm sorry, Pyrrha" was the last thing the Invincible Girl heard before a volt of electricity coursed through her, knocking her unconscious instantly as she fell to the ground.

**[Then]**

*" So, you are clear on what your role is to be, correct?" Cinder asked.*

*" Yes. Get close to the student body and identify any possible candidates Ozpin might choose to be the new Fall Maiden"*

*" Good. Stay vigilant. His agents might be closer than we think" Cinder advised.*

*" Have you ever known me to not be vigilant?" Jaune teased as his beloved replied with a chuckle.*

*" Of course. I'd forgotten who I was speaking to" Cinder said with a roll of her eyes before a cough from behind them interrupted their moment. With a look of barely contained fury, Cinder turned towards the Headmaster of Haven, "What is it, Lionheart?"*

*" T-the Bullhead is ready, Cinder" the Faunus said as he flinched, taking a step back in fear from the duo.*

*" And his transcripts. You're sure they're foolproof?" Cinder asked, voice laced with venom.*

*" I-I've made sure of it. They're the finest money can buy" the man said, sweat dripping down his brow as Jaune patted his backpack filled with supplies.*

*" Very well. Leave us. We'll come to you when we're ready" Cinder spat as the man hurriedly left their vicinity.*

*" I swear, a second or two longer, and that fool would have peed his pants" Jaune joked, a small laugh escaping Cinder's lips.*

*" He's a pathetic coward. How someone like him could become the Headmaster of an Academy that trains the future defenders of humanity, I'll never know" Cinder added.*

*" I suppose there are just some mysteries in this world that can't be solved" Jaune replied as the two enjoyed one another's company. Blissful silence passed before Jaune spoke "I should go"*

*" Yes... You should. It wouldn't do for you to be late, after all" Cinder said before the two shared a deep kiss that felt like it lasted an eternity. Jaune was the first to break away as he stood up.*

*" It won't be long before we see each other again. A few months, that's all" Jaune said as he stepped foot into the Bullhead procured by Haven's Headmaster.*

*" A few months. Of course." Cinder replied, as she stared at the retreating form of the Bullhead in the sky, a small frown on her face.*

**[Then]**

*Jaune stared at the door in front of him, sucking in a deep breath before knocking on it.*

*" Enter" a voice said from within the room. Jaune stepped into the unfamiliar dorm room as bright amber eyes widened in joy "Ah, Jaune. You're certainly a sight for sore eyes"*

*" Morning, Cinder" Jaune said, equally happy to see the woman he loved before turning his attention to the other two occupants in the room, "Emerald. Mercury. How's it going?"*

*" Jaune" came the reply from Emerald. That was the best the blonde could expect from the girl, seeing as she also had feelings for his beloved.*

*" Eh, I'm not dead yet so I must be doing something right" Mercury quipped as the two boys bumped fists before he shared a kiss with*

*Cinder even as he heard Emerald's tongue click in annoyance nearby.*

*"Jaune, to what do I owe the pleasure of your appearance on this fine morning?" Cinder asked as Jaune took a seat beside her on her bed.*

*"Team RWBY. Their first-year mission is bringing them to a location somewhere in the southeast" Jaune said, noting the worried frown replacing the smile on Cinder's face "I thought that was something you should know"*

*"It is. And thank you, my love. That was valuable information. I'll be sure to inform Torchwick of this development" Cinder replied before adding, "Although, you could have informed me through text"*

*"What, not happy to see me?" Jaune asked, a teasing smirk forming on his face*

*"Perish the thought, idiot" Cinder said, as her hands linked with his.*

*"It's fine. Nora is currently unknowingly distracting my team with her sugar addiction" Jaune added as he got up to leave even as disappointment formed on both his and Cinder's faces "I... should go. I wouldn't want to... raise any suspicion..."*

*"Yes, of course... That would be best..." Cinder said before the blonde finally left the room.*

**[Then]**

*"Cinder, I have a... request to make..." Jaune said as he sat on the floor of Cinder's dorm, staring up at the girl.*

*"A request? This is rare" Cinder remarked, staring at the boy she loved in front of her "What kind of request?"*

*"It's about my team and Team RWBY" Jaune said, wincing as a frown appeared on Cinder's face.*

*" Oh? Do elaborate, Jaune"*

*" I want you to... spare them when everything finally starts during the Vytal Festival" Jaune replied as he bowed his head.*

*" Spare... them, you say?" Cinder remarked as Jaune nodded his head in reply "And your reasons for requesting something like this are...?"*

*" I've not gone native, if that's what you're wondering..." Jaune hastily said "It's just... They're good people and I... consider them friends, even if all of this is fake"*

*" Your friends?" Cinder asked and Jaune could hear the disgust in her voice.*

*" Yes" Jaune replied, looking up at the girl "I know what my mission in coming here was and I'm definitely not going to betray you or anything of the sort. But this is something that I hope you can grant me. Please."*

*" Very well. I'll spare their lives" Cinder replied as Jaune looked up, joy in his eyes "I'll inform Mercury and Emerald of your request, as well. However, I cannot say the same of Taurus or the White Fang"*

*" Pft, it's just the White Fang. Any student worth their salt would be able to handle them" Jaune quipped before placing a kiss on Cinder's hand, "Thank you for granting my request, Cinder"*

*" Only because you were the one who asked of it, my love" Cinder said as she caressed the boy's cheeks.*

**[Now]**

*"I'm sorry, Pyrrha" Jaune said, before using a modified taser gun to shock his partner unconscious. A moment later, the girl's body fell down to the ground, limp and unmoving.*

"Poor Pyrrha. It's just not your day, is it? First you fail to acquire the Maiden power and now, your partner betrays you" came the voice of his beloved as she stalked towards him before the two shared a deep kiss.

"Is this your way of apologizing for throwing me against the wall earlier?" Jaune remarked as the two embraced each other.

"In all fairness, my love, I was high on my new power at that time and I would have thrown *anyone* against any wall" Cinder replied before Jaune stepped away from her to place Pyrrha's body against a pillar "Also, you were the one who charged towards me so turnabout is fair play"

"I had to keep up the act, after all" Jaune tried to argue even as the two shared a small laugh. The boy then noticed the giant Grimm dragon hanging off the side of Beacon Tower, "So, that's the dragon, huh?"

"Yes, she is" Cinder replied, the two moving closer towards the Grimm in question even as it let out a low growl that unnerved the blonde.

"How do you know it's a 'she'?" Jaune asked, nervously touching the dragon's bone plating.

"Silly Jaune" Cinder said, letting out a small laugh "Don't you know that such a grand and majestic being can only be a woman?"

"Of course. Silly me" Jaune replied as he surveyed the chaos and destruction that was currently sweeping through Beacon Academy. Turning towards Cinder, he spoke, "We should go while everyone is distracted"

"Come now, Jaune. Why not stay just a little longer and admire the fruits of our hard-earned labor"

"Cinder, please" Jaune said before something came to mind "Ruby and Weiss. They're on their way here"

"What? Why?" asked the Fall Maiden as she rounded on the blonde boy.

"I told them" Jaune said and before Cinder could protest, the blonde quickly defended his choice, "It was to make sure that someone would find Pyrrha and bring her to safety"

"That was a foolish decision, Jaune" Cinder said even as Jaune saw her restraining her anger before relenting "Fine. Let's go"

"Okay. There's just something I have to do first" Jaune said before making his way towards his unconscious partner.

"What are you doing?" Cinder asked as she looked over his shoulder to see him writing something on a piece of paper.

"I'm writing a letter telling them I'm sorry" Jaune replied as Cinder let out a sigh, accepting the boy's decision.

"You always did have a kind streak in you. Very well. Only because it's you, Jaune" Cinder said, turning away from the blonde "I'll inform Mercury and Emerald"

"Thank-"

"Jaune?"

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Ruby raced towards the top of Beacon Tower, running as fast as her legs could bring her as worry started to flood her face. Finally reaching the top of the tower, Ruby stood tall as the sight of an unconscious Pyrrha, a kneeling Jaune and a girl who was vaguely familiar greeted her.

"... Jaune?" Ruby asked, her eyes focused on the unmoving body of Pyrrha even before her gaze locked with her fellow leaders' own.

"Ruby...?" Jaune said, a single tear sliding down his face as the boy looked away, "I'm sorry..."

Distraught, Ruby fell to her knees, hugging herself before her vision became clouded in white.

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Pyrrha awoke with a gasp, an unfamiliar scene greeting her as she tried to process her surroundings.

"W-what... where... am I...?" the girl asked before she was assaulted with a bone-crushing hug.

"Pyrrha!" a voice shouted before a third person joined in on the embrace "We were so worried about you!"

"Nora? Ren?" Pyrrha said, finally able to register the two people who were currently cutting off her air supply, "N-Nora... I c-can't... breathe..."

"Oh, sorry!" the girl replied, a tearful smile on the girl's face before she finally let the redhead go "I was just so happy to finally see you wake up. I would bring you some breakfast but *apparently*, I'm not allowed in the kitchen anymore. Thank you for that, *Ren* "

" / wasn't the one who burned down one of the tents, Nora" the boy in question replied "That was *you* and your disastrous attempt at breakfast"

"W-wait, guys" Pyrrha said with outstretched hands, grabbing the two teens' attention "I'm confused. Where are we? What happened to Beacon? And Jaune. Is he safe?"

Nora and Ren both shared a look before the boy handed the redhead a crumpled piece of paper.

"This was found strapped to your side when we found you and Ruby unconscious on top of Beacon Tower" Ren answered as Pyrrha took the piece of paper with shaky hands "As for where we are, we're at the island of Patch. It's currently being used as a place treat those who were wounded when Beacon fell"

The boy's words failed to register in Pyrrha's mind as her eyes roved through the contents of the paper in her hands.

*' I'm sorry. Please forgive me' - Jaune*

**[One-Shot End]**

**A/N: So, that's the end of this one-shot. What do you guys think? It's an idea that's been swimming through my mind for some time now and I just wanted to get it out there. Honestly, I *might* write a full series on it in the future, I might not. We'll see how it goes.**

**Hope you guys enjoyed it. I certainly did enjoy writing everything about this one-shot. It was fun and not to mention, Knightfall is my number one ship so there's that. This is my first time writing a scene with kissing & romance in it so I apologize if it seems cringe or something.**

**As always, fave, follows, and reviews are always appreciated.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall.**

## Chapter 2

"Pyrrha, wait!" Ren said, hands outstretched as he blocked his teammate from leaving the tent. "Just... calm down for a moment."

"Ren, get out of my way," the girl replied, a determined look on her face that, if Ren were being honest, unnerved him at the moment.

"Why? What are you planning to do?" Ren asked, still not budging from the tent's entrance as Nora stood to the side, unsure who to give her support to.

"I'm going to find Jaune and bring him back to us. Obviously." Pyrrha answered before she shoved past the boy as the hot midday sun suddenly assaulted her sight.

"You don't even know where he is!" Ren protested as he and Nora trailed after the redhead.

"No but I know where I can start looking." Pyrrha countered.

"Where?" Ren asked.

"Haven Academy. That woman and her team, I saw them around Beacon a few times." Pyrrha replied, a scowl on her face as she turned to face her teammates "They were wearing Haven uniforms so my best bet to find *any* information about them will be to start from there"

"What if that was just a disguise? You might be going on a wild goose chase, Pyrrha!" Ren countered, a hand on the girl's shoulder in an attempt to calm her down.

"It's better than nothing." Pyrrha replied.

"Even if you wanted to go to Haven, all flights between Mistral and Vale are currently grounded. You'd have no way of crossing the

ocean right now." Ren argued before the redhead provided a swift counter.

"Then I'll just hire a ship and a captain to get me there. That way, all that Invincible Girl money can finally be put to use." Pyrrha countered, a look of impatience on her face as she glared at her teammate "Look, if the two of you want to stand around here making excuses to not help your friend, then that's fine by me. Obviously, neither of you cared about him as much as I did."

"Pyrrha... how could you-" whatever Ren had to say was cut off as Nora suddenly delivered a sharp slap to the redheaded girl's cheek.

"How could you even say that, Pyrrha?!" Nora shouted, eyes filled with tears and anger, "How could you even *think* that?! *Of course* we care about Jaune, you idiot! He's our team leader but more importantly, he is our friend! You don't think I want to just storm someplace when he needs our help?! Because I do! Consequences be damned!"

"Nora, I'm-"

"Pyrrha, I know you're hurting but please, don't do anything reckless. I don't want to lose you, too." Nora said as tears streamed down her face.

"I... I'm sorry, Nora." Pyrrha said, bringing the girl in close for a hug even as she started shedding her own tears, "I won't do anything reckless."

"Don't leave us. Please don't leave us alone" Nora begged as she tightened the hug.

"I won't."

"You promise?"

"I promise." Pyrrha said, a smile on her face before the two girls ended the embrace, "Ren, I'm sorry. The things I said-

"There's nothing to forgive, Pyrrha. The fact that you were angry as you were proved that you cared for our Fearless Leader but we shouldn't let our emotions dictate our actions." Ren said, a small smile on his face as he placed a hand on the girl's shoulder, "At times like this, it is important that we, as his closest friends and allies, remain calm so we don't do any stupid mistakes."

"Ren's right." Nora added, a cheerful smile on her face as she quickly slipped back into her regular self "Besides, Pyrrha's idea about getting a boat to Mistral wasn't half-bad. We just need to find a captain who can navigate through the Grimm infested ocean between Vale and Mistral, that's all. How hard can it be?"

"Indeed. However, we should probably have something to eat first." Ren suggested "The mess hall isn't too far from here."

"That's right. Ren, you said you found me and Ruby unconscious on top of Beacon Tower." Pyrrha said, the boy's words coming back to her, "What happened up there?"

"Nobody knows but what we did see was a flash of white light coming from the tower, freezing the Grimm Dragon in place. When we got up there, the two of you were all we found" Ren said, thinking back to the events of that night.

"And Jaune?" Pyrrha asked.

"He was nowhere to be found." Ren replied "All that was left of him was that letter he left for us."

"What about Ruby? Was she alright?"

"We found her next to you, unconscious with tears staining her face." Ren answered, "Last we heard, she had not awoken yet."

"Oh... Does anybody know what's wrong with her?" Pyrrha asked as the trio neared a tent filled with people.

"I've been told that she's just asleep at the moment and that sufficient rest is all she needs" the boy replied as they took a seat around a nearby table, "The more distressing news is one that concerns Yang."

"Yang? Why? What happened to her?" Pyrrha asked, concern on her face.

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*" Mom?! Dad?!" the boy shouted, to no avail as screams of fear and despair all around him drowned out his own cries for help. Fire and chaos blazed as the boy ran through what was once his home. The boy turned around at the sound of a shattered window, eyes widening in panic and fear at the sight of a creature dark as the night.*

*Tears in his eyes - caused by the smoke from the fires around him or fear gripping his heart, he did not bother to find out - the boy continued running as fast as his little legs would let him.*

*" Mom, dad, where are you?!" the boy shouted and once more, only the sounds of chaos and a raging fire answered him. Instincts of survival kicking in, the boy decided to continue running until eventually, scenes of destruction and screams of despair were replaced by trees covered in darkness.*

*" Mommy... Daddy... Please, help me..." the boy said through pained sobs. The crack of a twig from somewhere around him made the boy jump. Quickly scanning his surroundings, the boy found a small cave. Almost immediately, the boy went inside, shivering as he laid down on the cold ground.*

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Jaune awoke with a start, immediately sitting up on his bed as he gasped for air. Looking around, he realized that he was back in

Evernight Castle. Salem's Castle. A scowl appeared on his face as he recalled the dream he just had before it morphed into a warm smile at the sight of the woman slumbering peacefully next to him. Caressing her hair, a pained look formed on his face as he gazed at the injuries she had suffered just days prior.

"I'm sorry." Jaune said, placing a kiss on the woman's forehead before he got off the bed, carefully so as to not wake her up. Getting dressed for whatever events the day had planned for him, Jaune then exited his room, sword sheathed to his side.

"Good morning, Jaune." A voice said as soon as he stepped out of his room. Sighing, Jaune turned around and came face to face - quite literally, in fact - with a scorpion Faunus who currently had a maniacal look in his eyes.

"Hello, Tyrian." Jaune said, taking a step back from the man, "Didn't we discuss personal space the last time I was here?"

"Oh, but I have missed you, child." the Faunus replied, an unnervingly gleeful tone in his voice, "I have missed you so, so, so much. You can't imagine how lonely I was when you and your dearest Cinder were away from the castle."

"I'm sure you were fine." Jaune replied, as he walked away from the man only for the Faunus to match his pace as the two began to walk beside each other.

"Oh, yes. I wasn't any worse for wear since my most benevolent and beautiful Goddess was here to keep me company." Tyrian exclaimed, a single tear sliding down his cheek as he did so. Jaune let out a tired sigh at the mention of... *her* .

"Well, that's good to hear. Now, if you'll excuse me." Jaune said but was cut off before he could step outside the castle.

"Actually, there is one more thing: the Goddess has demanded your presence on this fine morning" the Faunus said as Jaune let out a

sigh at the mention of... *her*.

"Now?"

"Indeed. And when the Goddess summons, one should never keep her waiting." the threat in his voice was clear even before the blades around his wrist appeared. Not bothering to offer any comment, Jaune then made his way to Salem's throne room.

The blonde was slightly surprised to find Doctor Arthur Watts in the room with her when he arrived. With a nod, the disgraced Atlesian then bid farewell to their common mistress.

"Jaune."

"Arthur." Jaune said as he was left in the room alone with Salem. Almost immediately, the blonde boy bent down to a knee as he lowered his head in front of the immortal, "You summoned me, My Lady?"

"Jaune. Tell me, how goes the sessions with Cinder?" Salem asked.

"Unfortunately, try as I might, I am unable to heal her left eye, My Lady." Jaune answered, pausing for a moment before continuing, "However, I am making significant progress with her voice. It shouldn't be long before she regains the ability to speak."

Salem, in response, merely hummed as she regarded the boy in front of her. A few seconds of unnerving silence passed before she finally spoke.

"Wake her. It is time we resume her training on the Fall Maiden powers."

"My Lady, perhaps it is best if she-"

"Jaune" the immortal said, silencing the boy immediately, "Have we forgotten how much I've done for you all this time?"

"We have not." Jaune said, feeling the slight tingle on the back of his right hand as Salem continued to speak.

"Then mine is not to hear of your suggestions to what I want." Salem said, the tingle on his hand having now turned into a slight burning sensation, "Mine is to want and to say what I want. Yours is to know and to obey. Are we clear on that, child?"

"Yes. We are." Jaune said, tightening his fists in a futile attempt to lessen the pain.

"Good. Keep that up and I foresee us having no problems in the near future." Salem said as the pain on the back of his hand disappeared almost instantly. The woman then dismissed him with a wave of her hand, "Go. Awaken Cinder and inform her that she will only have a half-hour rest before her training resumes."

"As you command, My Lady."

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"Good morning, Mr Xiao-Long!" Nora shouted, causing the blonde man to flinch back in surprise.

"Good morning, kids." The man said as he looked over the three kids in front of him.

"We're here to see Ruby, sir. Is she awake?" Ren asked.

"Yeah, she is. I'll call her down. Why don't you kids come in? I'll make you some tea." The man said, opening the door wider to let the three teens into his house.

"Oh, please. We wouldn't want to trouble you, Mr Xiao-Long." Pyrrha said as the blonde man waved her worries off.

"It's no trouble at all. You're guests at our house." The man said.

"Thank you for your hospitality, sir." Ren said as the three members of JNPR took a seat in front of the television.

"No problem. Ruby! Your friends are here to see you!" the man shouted to the top of the stairs before the girl in question shouted in reply.

"Okay, dad! I'll be there in a second!" the girl shouted.

"Are we sure this is what we want to do?" Ren asked as soon as the man was inside the kitchen and out of earshot.

"Oh, come on, Ren. What's so bad about our plan, anyway?" Nora asked, a cheerful positivity in her voice.

"You mean aside from traversing an ocean infested with Grimm before having to traverse through a kingdom we're unfamiliar with just to chase a lead that might lead us on a wild goose chase?" Ren asked.

"Well, sure. It sounds awful when you put it that way." Nora quipped. Ren was about to respond before Ruby appeared in a flurry of rose petals, cloak and all.

"Hey, guys! Sorry I kept you waiting." The girl said, hair still unkempt, "So, what were you guys talking about?"

"Oh, you know. The usual. Ren's just being a buzzkill, that's all." Nora said.

"Nora, having reasonable concerns about our upcoming journey is most definitely *not* being a buzzkill." The boy in question argued.

"Ah, we'll crush those bridges when we get there." The ginger countered.

"Ruby, are you sure you want to do this?" Pyrrha asked, looking at the young leader of Team RWBY, "The journey ahead... It's going to

be filled with uncertainties and no professional huntsman will be helping us. From here on out, we can only count on each other."

"I'm sure." The young Rose answered, a determined look on her face as she stared at the redhead, "We might not have been on the same team but he was my first friend in Beacon and if Haven is the place we need to go, then Haven Academy is where we're going."

"Okay. Sorry for doubting you, Ruby." Pyrrha said.

"It's alright. I know how much you cared about him, Pyrrha." Ruby replied, "So, we're leaving tomorrow, right?"

"Yes. We know a guy who can take us to Mistral." Ren answered, gesturing to himself and Nora.

"You're not going to tell your dad...?" Pyrrha asked, looking towards the kitchen.

"No. He'll just try to stop me. I love my dad and all but he can be a bit... overprotective sometimes." Ruby answered before adding, "Besides, Nora says it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission. Right?"

"Ruby, you *really* shouldn't be learning any life lessons from Nora, of all people." Ren said.

"I object to that slander." The ginger girl exclaimed, the four friends sharing a small laugh just as Mr Xiao-Long came in with a tray full of snacks and tea.

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"Again." Salem commanded as Cinder fell to all fours, breaths heavy and sweat pouring down her face. A moment later, a Beowolf appeared from the shadows behind Cinder, ready to pounce. Jaune made to step forward before Salem stopped him, "Cinder, do you even *want* this power you have?"

Cinder, meanwhile, could only reply with a silent nod at her mistress, a look of determination in her eye.

"Then *stand* . Prove to me that you are worthy of being *my* Fall Maiden." Salem demanded before, with a snap of a finger, ordering the Beowolf to attack its prey. Cinder, meanwhile, responded with a wave of her hand as a burst of flame instantly incinerated the Grimm and turned it into ashes.

"No! No more fire! You have the very elements at the tips of your fingers, child. Use them. Be creative." Salem ordered as the Fall Maiden stood on shaky legs. Sighing, the immortal then turned to the boy standing beside her, "Jaune. Attend to her. Make sure she's ready to resume her training in half an hour."

In response, the blonde teen immediately went to Cinder's side as Salem left the two of them alone.

"Cinder, drink-" the boy wasn't even able to finish his sentence before she snatched the bottle from his hands as she guzzled down its contents. Tossing the empty bottle away, Cinder then shared a look with Jaune as she ran a hand over her scarred left eye.

"I'm sorry. If it wasn't for me, then you wouldn't have-" the boy was cut off once more as Cinder placed a hand over his mouth.

"Do... you..." the Maiden managed to croak out before Jaune understood what it was she was trying to say.

"What are you saying?! Of course I'm still in love with you!" Jaune exclaimed as a small fire appeared on Cinder's face, "Something like this... isn't enough to make me feel any different."

"Thank... you..." Cinder managed to say before Jaune shushed her.

"You really shouldn't speak. It might delay your recovery." Jaune advised as he offered another water bottle to the Maiden, an offer she gladly accepted. Time passed and eventually, Salem entered the

room once more, an unreadable expression on her face as she stared at her two subordinates.

"I'm assuming, from your relaxed expressions, that she is ready to continue, Jaune?" Salem asked as the two teens stood up in the face of their Mistress.

"Yes, My Lady. She is." Jaune replied with a bow of his head.

"Good. Cinder, do *not* disappoint me." Salem said as a Berringel and an Ursa Major appeared from the pool of darkness behind the Fall Maiden. With a nod and a determined look in her eye, Cinder turned to face her new opponents as the power of the elements gathered around her hands.

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: Surprise. Turns out it *wasn't* a One-Shot. Gee, who could have guessed? Certainly not I, the author. Anyway, yeah, I'm turning this into a full series and probably going to turn all my focus on this one. Still going to update Carrot & Wandering Samurai, hopefully soon, so no worries there. As for Grimm Destinies, still trying to find idea on how to continue in a way that makes sense. There's most likely going to be a time-skip next chapter. Maybe. Who knows? I do.**

**Let me know what you guys think of this chapter.**

**As always, fave, follows, and reviews are always appreciated.**

**Praise be unto Cinder Fall.**

## Chapter 3

"So, are you finally going to tell me what we're doing here, Arthur?" Jaune asked, hood pulled over his head as he nursed the glass of scotch in his hand.

"Come now, Jaune. If I did that, then there'd no longer be a feeling of suspense, would there?" Arthur Watts replied, a devious smile on his face as he took a sip of his own drink.

"Arthur." Jaune said, a growl escaping his lips.

"Alright, alright. Calm down." The older man replied, "Sheesh, it's only been a few days without Cinder by your side and you're already this agitated. But to answer your question, we're here for a virus. Specifically, a virus fit for an android."

"An Android?" Jaune asked, looking towards the man sitting in front of him with a raised eyebrow before realization dawned on him, "You're talking about Penny? I thought she was supposed to be dead."

"I have no doubt that she is. At the moment, anyway." Watts said as he downed his drink in one gulp, "But if I know the blithering idiot that made her - and I do, by the way - he'll be desperate to get his "daughter" up and running again. There's no doubt about that."

"Penny, huh? I can imagine Ruby being happy to know she's still alive." Jaune added, a small smile on his face at the thought of his time in Beacon before the blonde wiped it away with a sip of his drink, "So, who's going to bring us this virus?"

"Oh, no worries there. I have a friend who's all too willing to get me a copy and sell it to us."

"You have friends?" Jaune asked with a snort.

"I most certainly do." Watts replied, "Although, my friendships usually come with a lot more benefits for me than for the other party, of course."

"Blackmail. I guess I shouldn't be surprised." Jaune said.

"I shall take that as a compliment, my boy. Cheers." Arthur replied, holding up his glass towards the blonde. Rolling his eyes, Jaune clinked their glasses together.

"What's so special about this particular friend of yours?" Jaune asked as he look around the hotel bar they were currently in, "I'd imagine he's pretty high up the totem pole if he can get his hands on a virus for something like Penny."

"Perceptive as ever, I see. I suppose Cinder is rubbing off on you, in more ways than one." Arthur replied with a chuckle, "Although, I am curious. With her recent failure in Beacon-"

Jaune let out a low growl under his breath as memories of that incident came rushing back into him.

"- has it put any sort of strain into your relationship with dear Cinder?"

"Watts, I am *not* discussing my romantic life with you, even if we *weren't* on what sounds like an important mission." Jaune said, eyes darting around the bar, "Is your quote unquote friend here yet?"

"No, I don't see him around but I suppose- ah, speak of the Devil and he shall appear." Watts said as a man dressed in a black suit appeared. His hair was slicked back and there was a scar running down his left eye. The most noticeable thing about him was that his right eye was cybernetic and Jaune tensed up as the man looked him over, "Good evening, Max. You're looking as healthy as ever."

"Arthur." The man grunted as he pulled up a chair, "Can't say it's a pleasure to see you, if we're being honest."

"Come now, are you still made over what happened? That was months ago and besides, you received a shiny new eye in return. I'd say it was a win-win situation for *everyone* involved."

"Whether it was or not, that remains to be seen. But that's enough pleasantries. You have the payment?" Max asked, his gaze never leaving Arthur.

"Only if you have the merchandise." Watts replied as he gestured towards Jaune. Nodding, the blonde took the briefcase on the floor beside him and put it on the table. The boy then opened it to reveal it full of Lien and pure Dust Crystals, "So, do we have an accord?"

"Of course. A virus fit for an android, as promised." Max answered as he slid a flash drive towards the man before stopping halfway, "Although, if you're willing to pay this much for something like this, could you imagine how much people who are far wealthier than you would be willing to pay for it, instead?"

For the first time that night, the smile on Watts' face fell as he faced Max with a stern look, "I don't like it when things get complicated, Max."

"I don't imagine you do, Arthur." The man said, snapping a finger before all noise in the bar around them stopped, "I also don't see you having much of a choice in the matter, old friend."

"How nice of you to consider me a friend, Max." Watts said, turning to Jaune as the blonde noticed every patron in the bar staring at the both of them, "Jaune, do try to keep things clean. I so hate it when my clothes get blood on them."

"So confident yet so-" was the last thing Max said before a jolt of electricity ran through the man's body. The people around them barely had any time to react before Jaune plunged a blade deep into his neck, killing him instantly.

"I *just* said to keep it clean." Watts grumbled as he took a napkin to wipe the blood from his sleeves.

"Yeah, well... Tyrian was never the cleanest of teachers." Jaune argued, downing his drink before pulling out a detonator-type device from his jacket.

"Son of a-" a voice from somewhere around them said before an explosion rocked one side of the bar, disorienting those who were unprepared for it. Moving quickly, Jaune got off of his chair before swiftly stabbing one of the grunts in the eye. Pulling the blade out, Jaune wasted no time in dispatching his other opponents. With a few quick bursts from the handgun in his hand and a number of stabbings when his bullets ran out, Jaune made quick work in snuffing the life out of everyone else in the room that weren't affiliated with Salem.

"So, are we done here?" Jaune asked, an unimpressed look on his face even as Watts took a sip from his drink seemingly without a care in the world.

"I was waiting on you, actually." Arthur said, a chuckle escaping his lips as the two left the chaos of the bar behind, "Are you that in a hurry to get back to Cinder? Never in my life have I seen someone so lovestruck as you are."

"Watts, I *will* shoot you if you don't shut up before we make it back there." Jaune said even as Watts let out a hearty laugh at the threat.

---

"Ren, look out!" Nora shouted, leaping towards the boy in question. Her heroic deed proved to be too late, however, when the Berringel she and her team were currently facing backhanded her partner into a nearby tree, "Ren!"

Anger in her eyes, the young girl gripped the weapon in her hands before she leapt towards the Grimm. A moment later, Nora delivered a devastating blow at its chest that ultimately proved futile as the

attack only staggered the Grimm back a few feet instead of blowing it away as the girl had originally intended.

"Nora, get back!" Ruby shouted from behind her. Complying, Nora jumped back a few feet before the young team leader rushed forward, scythe in hand as she delivered a devastating flurry of blows towards the Grimm. Instead of killing it, however, Ruby seemed to only make it even angrier. Before it could deal any sort of counterattack at Ruby, a bronze and red spear suddenly found itself impaled in the Grimm's right eye.

The Grimm then screamed in rage as it suddenly thrashed around wildly. Sensing the danger, Ruby immediately leapt away from the beast with her Semblance, appearing beside Nora and Ren.

"Ren! Are you alright?" Ruby asked, at the same time not taking her eyes away from the Grimm in front of her.

"I'll be fine, Ruby. The blow caught me by surprise but I was able to put my aura up before the attack did any lasting damage." Ren replied as the three teens quickly dodged an attack from the rampaging Grimm in front of them, the spear in its eye dislodging itself as it returned to its owner's hand.

"So, does anyone have a plan?" Nora shouted as the Grimm continued its rampage.

"I have one." Ruby said as she appeared beside her, "Nora, you get its attention from the left while you, Pyrrha, do the same from the right. Ren, you get its attention from the front. While the three of you are doing that, I'll deal the cut off the head from above, killing it. Everyone good on that plan?"

"It's the best one we got." Nora replied, earning a nod from the other two, "Alright, let's do it."

As soon as those words left the ginger girl's mouth, the Beringel suddenly charged towards the group as it roared in fury. Nora ran

left, as she fired a few dust grenades at the Grimm to draw its attention. Ren and Pyrrha followed suit as they fired off volleys of bullets at the Grimm as per Ruby's orders.

Ruby, meanwhile, immediately took advantage of the distraction her friends were providing by going around the Berringel until she was standing behind it. Tensing her legs, the young girl activated her Semblance as she used her speed to swiftly decapitate the Grimm, killing it instantly.

Jumping off the disintegrating Grimm body, Ruby let out a sigh of relief as she looked over her friends, "Phew. I sure am glad *that* worked."

"We couldn't have done that without you, Ruby." Nora said, slapping the young girl on the back so hard that Ruby staggered a few feet.

"We should go. It's getting dark soon and I don't like the look of those clouds." Pyrrha said, cutting off whatever the young girl had to say. Without waiting for a reply, the redhead started making her way towards the nearby village.

"Y-yeah, we should..." Ruby said, sharing a worried look with Ren and Nora before the three chased after the young champion.

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*It's been days, maybe even weeks, since she's been running through the streets of Atlas. Heck, she didn't even know if she was still in Atlas. She might even be in Mantle now. All she knew was that she had to keep running or else the police would find her. They would find her and throw her in jail for murder.*

*These past few days, she had been rummaging through dumpsters and alleyways for even the smallest amount of food and drink, being grateful for whatever she found. Currently, she found herself in a familiar situation, one where she was holding a piece of half-eaten sandwich in one hand while another hand held a sword. A sword she had used to kill both her family and mentor.*

*The sounds of glass shards being stepped on had Cinder snapping her head towards the source.*

*" Hey there, girl. What you got there?" a boy who seemed to be just a few years older than herself and dressed in nothing more than shabby clothes asked. Behind him, two other boys stood as they stared at her, "That's a dangerous toy for someone so small like yourself."*

*" T-take another step and I'll show you just how dangerous it is." Cinder managed to say as she shoved the sandwich in her hand into her pocket.*

*" Oooh, scary. I'm shivering with fear." the boy mocked before the two behind him lunged towards her, one with a brick in hand while another hand a small knife. Startled by the sudden charge, the young girl quickly regained her composure as what little training she received kicked in. Sidestepping one of the boys, the girl didn't hesitate to stab him through his chest. His death was instant, the girl pulling her sword free as the boy's lifeless body dropped to the ground.*

*" Y-y-you bitch!" one of the boys shouted as swung at her with his knife. Parrying the attack, the girl took a second life that night as she quickly made quick work of her attacker. The third one simply ran away screaming at the sight of the two boys laying dead at the girls' feet.*

*Heavy breaths escaped the girl's lips as she stared at the fresh blood that coated her weapon. Deciding to lock away such thoughts, the girl took out the sandwich in her pocket as she resumed her dinner but not without her body shivering noticeable. Whether it was from the cold air or the fact that she had just killed two more people that night, the girl didn't care. All that mattered to her at the time was her own survival.*

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Cinder's eyes slowly opened as memories of a time she'd rather forget slowly made their way back into her mind. Shaking such thoughts away, the Maiden sat up on her bed with a frown that deepened when she saw a noticeable lack of blonde hair in her room. With a heavy sigh, Cinder readied herself for the day ahead.

"Good morning, ma'am." the green haired girl said in greeting as Cinder stepped outside her room.

"Emerald." Cinder said with a nod, "I've told you before, you don't need to stand outside my room every morning."

"It's no problem, ma'am. I don't mind." the girl replied. Cinder gave the girl a stare before letting out a sigh.

"If you say so," Cinder said before asking, "Have you heard any news about Jaune?"

"No, ma'am... But he should be back soon, considering that it's a simple task." Emerald said after a slight hesitation.

"Simple. Sure. Nothing is ever simple with Watts." Cinder said, a frown at the thought of the disgraced Atlesian as the two walked through the hallways of Evernight Castle.

"How is your... arm feeling, ma'am?" Emerald asked.

"Hmm? It's fine. Doesn't seem to be too much of a problem controlling it." Cinder replied as she stretched her left arm. It wasn't long before they ran into Mercury.

"Morning, boss." the boy said before adding, "Salem wants to talk to you. Just you."

Cinder tensed slightly at the news before quickly composing herself, "Thank you for informing me, Mercury."

"Anytime." the boy said before leaving the two alone as Cinder went to meet with her Mistress.

"Cinder." Salem said, sat upon her throne as Cinder kneeled in front of her, "It's been a few months now since you've obtained the power of Fall. I hope for your sake you're close to mastering its abilities."

"I have, My Lady." Cinder replied, "My voice has been much better as of late, as well."

"I see," Salem said, the lack of interest in her voice obvious to anyone, "And your arm? How is it feeling?"

"It's... feeling as normal as a Grimm arm could feel, My Lady," Cinder said, "I'm eternally grateful to you for granting it to me."

"I don't need your gratitude, Cinder. I want *results* ." Salem said as Cinder tensed, "Thanks to the efforts of Hazel, we have managed to identify who the Spring Maiden is as well as her present location. I want you to use whatever means necessary to bring me the Relic of Knowledge. Is that understood?"

"Yes, My Lady. I understand." Cinder answered though it wasn't without a hint of hesitation in her voice, something Salem had managed to pick up on.

"Is something wrong, Cinder?" Salem asked though Cinder didn't fail to miss there was no concern in her voice.

"No, My Lady. Everything's fine." Cinder asked and was about to leave the room before Salem stopped her in her tracks.

"Is this about Jaune?"

"... Yes." Cinder replied after hesitating for a few seconds.

"You care for him that much?"

"... I do."

"Will this prove to be a problem in the future, child?" Salem asked as Cinder could hear her heart beating in her ears.

"No, it won't." Cinder replied, a look of resolve on her face as she faced her Mistress.

"I should hope so. After all, failure is not something we should be making a habit around here, is it?" Salem asked as Cinder felt a stinging jolt of pain in her left arm, "You'll be happy to know that Tyrian is closing in on the silver-eyed girl and her friends. Lets hope for all your sake that he comes back with good news."

"Yes, My Lady. I understand." Cinder answered with gritted teeth. A moment later, the pain around her left arm disappeared, as if it was never there, "I *will* bring you the Relic of Knowledge."

"See that you do. Go. You are dismissed." Salem said with a wave of her hand as Cinder left the room.

**[Chapter End]**

**A/N: And that's the end of Chapter 3. What do you think? Personally, I enjoyed writing this chapter though it wasn't without any headaches along the way. I liked writing the Jaune/Arthur scene as well as the RNPR (I'm just gonna go with Ranger with their team name). Cinder's flashback was also fun to write. I hope you guys are enjoying this story so far.**

**As always, fave, follows, and reviews are always appreciated.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall.**

## Chapter 4

***A/N: Made a small edit to the last chapter. Basically, Tyrian hasn't confronted team RNPR (Rainpour) yet.***

***[/]***

*The blonde fell to the ground with a thud, the bright blue sky greeting his sight.*

*"Jeez, Pyrrha. I understand now how you became a four-time champion." Jaune said with a chuckle, pulling himself back up.*

*"Hah, yeah... Thanks. You're not bad yourself, though." Pyrrha replied in a hasty attempt to change the subject.*

*"Ah, you're just saying that," Jaune said, rubbing the back of his head at the praise, "I don't even think I got any good hits in."*

*"Don't sell yourself short, Jaune," Pyrrha countered as he patted the boy's shoulder, "You're better than you think."*

*"Thanks, Pyr. I'm pretty lucky to have you as a partner, huh?" Jaune said, missing the slight red that suddenly tinted his partner's cheeks, "So, you want to continue sparring or maybe take a quick five minute break first?"*

*"I think it's best if we took a short break. It wouldn't be wise to overwork ourselves, after all." Pyrrha answered before the two students sat on the nearby benches.*

*"You know, I've known you for a week now but I don't think you ever told me a whole lot about yourself." Jaune said, a bottle of water in his hand.*

*"There's not much to tell, honestly." Pyrrha said, "What would you like to know?"*

*" Like, where'd you learn to be so good at fighting?" Jaune asked.*

*" Well, I went to Sanctum, as you no doubt know." Pyrrha said as her partner replied with a nod, "There, I learned like everybody else: from a teacher but I did tend to spend most of my time in the school gym. I was never the most social girl in class, you see, and when I train, I just feel... at ease. It's like it all comes naturally to me, if that makes any sense."*

*" Nah, I get it. You're saying the gym where you trained was like a second home to you, right?"*

*" Something like that." Pyrrha said, a small smile on her face, "What about you, Jaune? You've hardly told us anything about your life before Beacon."*

*Jaune hesitated for a few seconds before he answered the girl's question, "... I lost my whole family and my village in a Grimm attack a long time ago."*

*Pyrrha gasped in shock at the boy's answer, "Jaune, I'm so sorry."*

*" It's fine. You didn't know. How could you, right? My village is just one of many that gets lost to the Grimm every day." Jaune said, as he stared at the grass in front of him with a heavy look.*

*" Jaune, you... you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to." Pyrrha said, a comforting hand on his shoulder.*

*" It's alright. It was years ago now and I've gotten over it." Jaune said, sending a thankful smile to the redhead, "Anyway, after my village was gone, I was... adopted by this woman. She took me in to live with the rest of her family and that's where I was staying before Beacon."*

*" What are they like? This family that adopted you?"*

*" They're messed up." Jaune said without any hint of hesitation as Pyrrha stumbled at the blunt answer.*

*" M-messed up?" Pyrrha asked.*

*"Super messed up. There's this one guy who's crazy religious, another guy with a dumb mustache who always has to be the smartest in the room or else he'll throw a tantrum, and finally another guy who's just... big and quiet." Jaune said, a frown on his face as he thought back to the people he had been growing alongside with.*

*" T-they certainly sound like a colorful bunch."*

*" That's one way to put it. Honestly, I'm pretty sure I'd have gone insane if it wasn't for... her." Jaune said, a look of longing appearing on his face for the briefest of moments before it disappeared just as quickly. Getting up, Jaune then faced Pyrrha with a smile, "Anyway, I guess that's all I have to say about myself, I suppose. You want to continue sparring?"*

*" Of course." Pyrrha said, her mind lingering on the last person Jaune was talking about.*

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"Pyrrha? Something wrong?" Ruby asked, shaking the redhead from her thoughts as the four continued their journey through Anima.

"Hmm? No, it's nothing, Ruby." the girl replied, sending Ruby a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes.

"You know you can talk to us about whatever it is that's bothering you, right?" Ruby said, as the two girls trailed behind Ren and Nora, "We're not just a team out here. We're close friends who have been through a lot together."

"I know, Ruby. It's just-"

"And by a lot, I mean *a lot*." Ruby continued, cutting off whatever Pyrrha was about to say, "From Torchwick to the White Fang to Beacon being attacked. It's insane how much we've all been through and it's only our first year. Could you imagine what kind of stuff is waiting for us two or three years down the line?"

Pyrrha let out a small giggle at the young girl's attempts to cheer her up, "Thank you, Ruby. I really appreciate-"

"Hey, guys! What's that?" Nora suddenly asked from ahead of them. Turning their attention to where the ginger was pointing, the group saw that they had reached a settlement.

"Odd." Ren muttered, studying the map in his hand.

"Ren? What's wrong?" Pyrrha asked.

"This village... It isn't stated anywhere on the map." Ren said as he looked up from the piece of parchment in his hand with a troubled frown on his face, "It shouldn't be here."

The group shared a few worried glances before Pyrrha spoke up.

"Maybe this village was attacked?" the redhead asked, "You said it yourself, right? Villages are lost to the grimm on an almost daily basis."

"Whatever happened here, we should probably look for survivors." Ruby said, though even she could tell that the possibility for success was low. Walking into the ruined village, the four teens started looking through the rubble of ruined buildings. It was Ren who eventually called them over after a few minutes of fruitless searching.

"Ren? What is it? Did you find anything?" Ruby asked.

"The name of the village... Oniyuri." the boy said, rubbing on the sign that held the village's name.

"Oniyuri? I've never heard of it." Ruby said.

"Me neither." Nora added

"I'm not surprised you haven't." Ren said, looking at the two girls with a grim look on his face, "I suppose you could think of it as Anima's version of Mountain Glenn. If it was never completed, that is. Pyrrha probably knows what I'm talking about."

The girl in question simply nodded as a downcast look appeared on her face, "It was a long time ago but yes, I have been told stories about it before. About how the richest families of Mistral, frustrated with the way the council was running things, decided to pool their resources together and build a city of their own. With their own laws."

"They were hoping that it would one day even become its own kingdom but... well, Oniyuri is the only proof you'll need of what happened to their endeavors." Ren said.

"The Grim..." Ruby said, looking at the village around her as a flock of birds flew overhead.

"Come on, it's probably best if we just get through here without much trouble." Pyrrha said as she started walking towards the exit of the village, "There's nothing left for us here."

Ruby shared a nod with Ren and Nora even though an uncomfortable feeling set in her gut at Pyrrha's choice of words. The four teens were halfway through the ruined village before Ren and Pyrrha abruptly stopped in their tracks.

"Ren? Pyrrha? What's wrong?" Ruby asked before her hand fell to Crescent Rose.

"Something... doesn't feel right." The boy said, reaching for his weapons as he looked around the ruined buildings before Nora

shifted her weapon into its hammer form. Pyrrha followed suit, as she and Ruby stood back to back, eyes wary of any sign of danger.

The boy was just about to dismiss the feeling in his gut as a sudden case of nerves before a man dressed in a brown jacket leapt from the building above, spinning through the air before landing just a few feet from Ren.

Cackling maniacally, the man then brandished a pair of blades around his wrists before he leapt towards Ruby. Acting quickly, Ren blocked the man's attempts at going any further, engaging him in what was quickly becoming a one-sided fight. Struggling to keep up with the man, there was nothing Ren could do before the man delivered a devastating kick that sent the boy sprawling to the ground.

Not wasting a single second, the man then turned his attention towards Ruby, leaping towards the girl. Finally springing into action, Ruby and Pyrrha attempted to double team the unknown attacker. Even so, the two girls found themselves barely able to hang on, his wild swings proving to be too unpredictable for the two former Beacon students.

After the man delivered a heavy strike that sent Ruby falling to the ground, Pyrrha immediately swooped in to save her friend from further danger. Even so, the man continued to toy with them, even choosing to stand on top of the redhead's shield.

"Ah, Pyrrha Nikos. I've heard so much about you." the man said, unfazed by the fact that he knew her name. Not wanting to waste the opportunity, Nora appeared from behind him, hammer at the ready as she swung at their attacker.

Dodging at the last possible second, the man then performed a backflip through the air, landing behind the group without so much as a scratch on him.

"Who are you?!" Ren asked as he joined the girls, weapons pointed at the mysterious attack.

"Please, we're not looking for a fight." Pyrrha said, as Nora helped Ruby to get back up.

"My dear boy, you don't know who I am? I'm hurt." the man said, clutching at his chest in mocking fashion, "Because I know who all of you are. Lie Ren, Nora Valkyrie, Ruby Rose and you, Pyrrha Nikos."

"You know who we are. So, what? Big deal." Nora challenged, Magnhild held close to her chest as she glared at the man.

"Oh, how could I not? After all, *he* has told me so much about you." the man said, eyeing each of them with a look of insanity, "Lie Ren, the quiet one of the team yet when he speaks, he speaks only wise words. Nora Valkyrie, the rambunctious and loud member of the team but also someone who cares deeply for her friends. Pyrrha Nikos, loyal friend and trusted partner and finally, Ruby Rose. Also loyal, kind, and righteous to a fault."

The four teens were unnerved by how much the man seemed to know about them.

"You're with Cinder, aren't you?" Ruby spoke up, taking a step forward as she glared at the man, "She's the one who told you about us, isn't she?"

In response, the man simply let out a maniacal laughter before facing Ruby, "Yes and no. I am colleagues with dear Cinder but she wasn't the one who told me about all of you."

"Then how? Who told you about us? What do you even want with us?" Pyrrha asked.

" *Who* ? My dear, shouldn't it be obvious? I suppose I can give you a small hint. He was your team leader back in that little academy of yours." the man said, letting out a mad howl of laughter at the looks

of realization on the faces of the teenagers in front of him, "Finally figured it out, have you?"

"Jaune? Why would he-"

"What have you done with him?!" Pyrrha suddenly shouted as the girl took a step closer towards the man, her knuckles turning white as she held a tight grip on her weapons.

"What have I-? Oh, you misunderstand, young lady. *I* have not done anything to young Jaune. Well, nothing that doesn't warrant the excuse of making him into a better fighter, that is. Why would I?" the man said, sending a mocking smile at the four of them, "After all, I'm the one who raised him."

"You? You're lying. He told me he was raised in a family that took him in after his village burned down." Pyrrha countered, not willing to believe a single word that came out of this man's mouth.

"Jaune thought of me as family? How sweet of him. I'll be sure to bring back a fruit basket to thank him when I get back." the man said, wiping a non-existent tear from his eyes, "That or a young girl with silver eyes. Either of those things would work in this scenario."

"Silver eyes? Me?" Ruby asked, surprised at the man's statement.

"Yes, you. Ah, as My Goddess commands it, so I will obey." the man said, before bowing towards the four of them, " *Where* are my manners? Tyrian Callows, at your service."

Seizing the chance in front of him, Pyrrha charged at Tyrian, eyes filled with something close to anger. Letting out an excited squeal, Tyrian crossed blades with the redheaded champion as he seemed to effortlessly dance and weave around the girl's attacks.

Pyrrha, meanwhile, was immediately put on the defensive as Tyrian turned the tides of battle and was about to deliver a devastating

counter to one of Pyrrha's attacks before Ren and Nora swooped in, saving their friend from a potentially deadly attack.

Sending a grateful nod to the two of them, Pyrrha turned her attention back towards Tyrian.

"Oh, but if you're here, then who's to protect your silver-eyed friend over there?" the man spoke before appearing behind Ruby not a moment later.

"Ruby!" all three members of the former Team JNPR shouted, their weapons shifting to their ranged form as they shot at Tyrian. Effortlessly dodging their attacks, Tyrian delivered a kick to Ruby's side that sent the girl sprawling to the ground as Nora and Pyrrha charged in towards him.

Engaging both girls at once, Tyrian blocked both of their attacks with the blades on his wrist before quite literally grabbing Nora by her arms and throwing her at Pyrrha. Unable to react in time, both girls crashed into each other as Tyrian resumed his assault on Ruby.

At least, that was the plan before Ren appeared in front of him, StormFlower at the ready.

"My dear boy, if both of your friends were unable to deal so much as a scratch on me, what makes you think you will?" Tyrian asked, a frown on his face.

"Doesn't mean I won't try." Ren countered as Tyrian simply shrugged his shoulders.

"If you say so." the man said before engaging the young boy. Almost immediately, Ren was forced into the defensive as Tyrian effortlessly broke through his guard. A moment later, Tyrian threw the boy over his head at Nora and Pyrrha, sending him crashing into the two girls. Howling with laughter, Tyrian then returned his focus towards Ruby, "I'll give you an A for effort, child."

The man then charged towards the young girl, who was currently shaking with fear at the prospect of facing the man in front of her and she would have had it not been for a greatsword falling from the sky and embedding itself on the path between Tyrian and Ruby.

"Oh, now what?" Tyrian asked, annoyed at the constant interruptions to this task. His question was answered a moment later as a man with black, spiky hair dressed in gray dress shirts, black dress pants, and black dress shoes appeared.

"Hey there, kiddo." the man said, ignoring Tyrian as he greeted the girl on the ground in front of him.

"Uncle Qrow!" Ruby said, a relief look on her face at the man's sudden appearance.

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**A/N: And that's a wrap on Chapter 4. I really hope you guys like this one. I really enjoyed writing this chapter. The flashback I believe could maybe use a little more work but I'm fine with it. Anyway, yeah. This chapter has Tyrian confronting Team RNPR (Rainpour), Tyrian letting them know some stuff about Jaune and RNPR reacting how I believe they would react. Then Qrow arrives in Qrow fashion. That was fun to write. Let me know what you guys think**

**Also, next chapter update: I WILL be releasing a new chapter on Christmas Eve and it will be a special holiday themed chapter so stay tuned for that. I won't go into details on what the chapter will be about because I want it to be a surprise. All you boys and girls need to know is that I am REALLY excited about this Christmas special and I am having a blast writing it so, stay tuned. Guesses and theories on the contents are welcome.**

**As always, faves, follows, and reviews are always appreciated.**

**Next Chapter: December 24 (Christmas Eve)**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall**

# Knighfall Holiday Spectacular

**A/N: Before we start, I just want to state that this Christmas Spectacular chapter is based on a "Brightest Timeline" where all of our characters experience a happy ending. Now that that's out of the way, as promised, on to the Holiday Special.**

---

Jaune Arc was happy.

A contented smile was plastered on the blonde's face as he lay on his bed while staring at the sleeping form of his wife beside him. Brushing away a lock of hair from the scarred side of her face, the blonde couldn't help the warm feeling that crept up his chest.

A few seconds of silence passed before the smile on his face morphed into a goofy grin as Cinder slowly stirred to life.

"Good morning, beautiful," Jaune said, moving himself closer to the woman as he wrapped his arms around her, "And Merry Christmas."

Cinder purred as she took in the warmth her husband provided, "A very good morning and a Merry Christmas to you, too, handsome. You were amazing last night."

"Am I ever not?" Jaune replied as the couple shared a chuckle, "You know, it's already half-past seven. We should probably get everything ready."

"But it's so... *cold* outside." Cinder whined, a teasing pout on her face as she tightened her own grip around Jaune.

"Well, it is the season of *winter*, my love. Snow and cold usually come hand in hand with the season."

"Well, I consider myself more of an autumn girl."

"Shocker." Jaune said with a roll of his eyes.

"But really, can't we just stay like this for the whole day, under the covers as we ignore the whole world around us?" Cinder suggested, a cold shiver running up her spine as the couple shared another kiss.

"We can certainly try but sooner or later-"

At that very moment, the door to their bedroom was blasted open as a little girl with black hair and blue eyes came barreling through in her pyjamas. Barely a moment later, a child-shaped meteor crashed into Jaune, knocking the wind out of the blonde.

"Mom! Dad! Guess what, guess what, guess what?!" the girl screamed and before either Jaune or Cinder could reply, the girl answered her own question, "Santa came to our house last night!"

"Did he, now?" Jaune asked as he shared an amused look with Cinder, "What makes you so sure, Sapphire?"

"The bottom of the Christmas Tree is *filled* with presents!" the girl shouted, unable to contain her excitement.

"Are you sure? Because you know what'll happen if you're lying right, young lady?" Cinder asked, teasing the young girl.

"I'm not lying, mom!" the young girl argued before she hopped off the bed. The girl then gripped Jaune by the arm as she attempted to drag the blonde towards the door, "Come on, dad! I'll show you!"

"Alright, alright. I'm going." Jaune said ruffling the girl's hair, laughing as she swatted his hand away.

"I'll be there in a minute." Cinder said before Jaune turned towards her.

"No rush. Take your time, alright? For your sake and," Jaune let his sentence trail off as he placed a kiss on the woman's stomach, "this little bundle of joy."

"Dad, come on!" Sapphire shouted once more.

"I'm coming, I'm coming." Jaune said, laughing as the man let himself be dragged down to the living room by his daughter.

---

Ruby Rose was excited.

Dressed in a red coat over a green ugly sweat, the woman was humming to herself as she and her sister walked through the streets of Vale. With a sack filled with presents on her back and, if the weather forecast was to be believed, a bright sunny Christmas Day ahead, it felt as if nothing could bring down her mood at that moment.

"Calm down, Rubes. No need to get too excited." Yang said, herself carrying a sack, although hers was considerably smaller than her sister's. The blonde was wearing a brown coat over a plain red shirt and a pair of black pants.

"Yang, how could I not be?! It's been nearly a year since we all last got together! A whole year!" Ruby argued, grunting as she adjusted the sack on her back.

"I get that but... A sack full of presents? Really?" Yang asked, a laugh coming out of her mouth, "All you're missing is a big round belly and a white bushy beard."

"Excuse you, I have my beard *right here* ." Ruby said, pulling a fake white beard from underneath her coat before putting it on her face. Yang stumbled in shock at her sister's dedication to the role, a bead of sweat sliding down her face, "It's all so I can win the title of the *best* and *coolest* Aunt this year. What about you? Is that all you're bringing?"

"Well, duh. All you need for a good party are good friends and a few bottles of booze." Yang replied, a gift basket filled with bottles of

alcohol, "Also, you do know that it's just between you and Weiss, right?"

"You never know, Yang. The fight for the title of "coolest Aunt" is a constant battle and I can never let my guard down." Ruby countered.

"Sheesh. Like uncle, like niece, I suppose." Yang quipped.

"Speaking of, have you heard from Uncle Qrow lately? What's he been up to these days?" Ruby asked as the two rounded a corner.

"Last I heard, he, dad, and Raven were travelling to Vacuo for the holidays. Something about keeping an old Team STRQ Christmas tradition alive." Yang replied, "Raven wasn't too thrilled about it at first - shocker, I know - but after a round of drinks, she eventually became the one who was most excited about the trip. Heck, she even paid for the flight tickets."

"Raven did? Really?!" Ruby asked, an expression of disbelief on her face.

"My thoughts exactly." Yang replied with a laugh before the blonde abruptly stopped in her tracks.

"Yang? What's wrong?" Ruby asked, turning around to face her sister.

"Hey, I... kind of forgot something I needed to buy. Could you go on ahead without me? I won't be long, I promise." Yang said.

"Yang, is everything alright?" Ruby asked, a worried frown on her face as Yang waved her off.

"Everything's fine, Rubes. I promise." Yang said, a reassuring smile on her face before she turned around and headed the other direction, "Don't eat all the cookies, alright?"

"Okay. Also, no promises on the cookies thing." Ruby said before she continued her journey to Jaune's home.

---

Lie Ren was thrilled.

Of course, unlike his wife, he was much better at hiding it under a calm exterior.

"Dad, come on! Nobody likes a slowpoke!" his eldest, Sylvie, shouted atop her mother's head. Dressed in a Santa costume, her crimson hair was tied in a ponytail and was swaying in the air as Nora merrily hopped through the snow-filled streets of Vale. Ren couldn't help the smile appearing on his face at such a joyful scene.

"Yeah, Ren! Slowpokes are the worst!" his wife added, dressed in a pink winter coat over the red ugly sweater Ren had knitted her for her last year.

"You two can go on ahead. We'll catch up." Ren said, a small laugh escaping his lips before he looked down to his youngest walking hand in hand beside him, "You know, Frigga, I could carry you just like your sister, if you wanted to."

"S'okay, dad. You don't need to." the young girl replied, wiping away some of the snow that was on her own Santa costume.

"Come on, Frig," Sylvie said as she and Nora came to walk beside the father and daughter duo, "It's so fun up here that you can see everything in Vale."

"Don't wanna..." the girl said, shaking her head.

"Boo, you're so lame." the elder twin replied before her father stepped in.

"Now, Sylvie, what did we say about forcing your sister to do things she didn't want to?" Ren asked, giving the girl a knowing look.

"Not to." the girl replied, a small pout on her face.

"Exactly." the man said, pausing for a few moments before continuing, "Now, what do you say?"

"Sorry, Frig." the young girl said, a downcast look on her face before Ren ruffled the girl's hair. The girl's smile then returned slowly.

"Good girl. Remember that feeling next time before you say something like that, okay?" Ren asked, the girl responding with a silent nod as he and Nora shared a fond smile. Before long, the family of four arrived in front of the doors to their former team leader's house.

"I'll get it!" a familiar voice shouted from inside as Ren pressed the doorbell. As the door opened, the four of them were greeted by the sight of a blonde-haired man covered in flour and powdered sugar, "Ren! Nora! You made it!"

"Merry Christmas, Jaune." Ren said as the two old friends shared a hug even as Ren never let go of her daughter's hand.

"Nora's here, too!" the woman shouted as she gripped Jaune in a tight bearhug before her daughter joined in, as well.

"And Sylvie's here, too! Merry Christmas, Uncle Jaune!" the girl shouted, wrapping her own arms around the man's head, as both mother and daughter let out hearty laughs of their own.

"Merry Christmas, Nora. Merry Christmas, Sylvie." Jaune replied, laughing along before he turned his attention to the couple's youngest, "And Merry Christmas to you, too, Frigga."

"M-Merry Christmas, U-Uncle Jaune." the girl managed to squeak out before she hurriedly hid behind her father's legs. Jaune, meanwhile, offered the young girl his warmest smile before inviting all of them in.

"Well, come on in. Ruby's already here and she's helping with the baking." Jaune said. As his newly arrived guests entered his home,

the blonde patted himself down before he shouted up the stairs, "Sapphire! Sylvie and Frigga are here!"

"Yay! Sapphire!" Sylvie shouted before jumping off of her mother with a flip and landing gracefully. The girl then grabbed her sister by the hand, "Come on, Frig!"

The young girl hesitated as she looked up towards both her parents, a worried look on her face.

"It's okay, Frigga. We'll be down here if you need us." Nora said as she gave her daughter a tight hug. Nodding, the young girl then followed her sister up the stairs towards the second floor of the house.

"Man, if you go back ten years and tell me I'd have a kid of my own with another one on the way, I would have called you insane." Jaune said as he poured drinks for his friends, "Now, though? I can't imagine anything else."

"Heh, you said it, Fearless Leader!" Nora shouted before holding her glass up high, the two men following her lead, "Merry Christmas, you guys!"

---

Weiss Schnee was ecstatic.

Of course, being the head of quite possibly the biggest conglomerate on the face of Remnant, she couldn't exactly outright express such emotion, lest it be used against her in a smear campaign. Brother Gods knows it's happened before. She certainly can't afford to do so with her brother in front of her.

"My dear sister, is all this really necessary?" Whitley asked as he sat across from her in the backseat of the limousine they hired for the day.

"Whatever do you mean, dear brother?" Weiss replied as she tapped away on the tablet in her hand.

"I *mean* did you have to fill up a whole other car with nothing but presents for the children?" the boy asked before taking the tablet away from Weiss's hands, much to the woman's protests, "Also, it's Christmas, Weiss. Even if you *are* the head of the SDC, you should take a break every once in a while, especially since you're supposed to be on the vacation."

"I don't see the harm in all these gifts." Weiss said, conceding the tablet to her brother with a defeated sigh, "I'm just doing my part in spreading warmth and joy to children during the holidays, that's all."

"Yes but, a whole car's worth of present?"

"I'm spreading a *lot* of joy." Weiss said with a self-satisfied smile and a nod, "I'm just showing these children the love that we barely received when we were their age."

"*Barely* received? Try none at all." Whitley replied with a roll of his eyes, "Did you know that when I was ten, father signed me up for cello lessons as a Christmas gift?"

"If you think that's bad, he once dragged me to an investor's meeting when I was eleven. I spent the *whole day* cooped up in the office listening to old people talk about profits and margins." Weiss added, rubbing her head at the memory, "Nobody even offered me a cup of hot chocolate. Who does that to a child on *Christmas* of all days?!"

"Winter once told me that when she was fifteen, father had her take his place for one of those meetings. Winter being Winter, she naturally did well in that role, even if it was for a day." Whitley said with a shrug before the two siblings shared a laugh.

"Speaking of, I'm surprised you were willing to come with me today." Weiss said.

"Well, it was either this or spend my day in front of a fireplace, alone and with a glass of brandy in my hand. Hardly a difficult choice."

A few minutes later, the car they were in finally arrived in front of Jaune and Cinder's house.

"Ms Schnee. Mr Schnee. We've arrived at the destination." their driver said, getting out of the rented limousine before opening the door for the two Schnee siblings.

"Thank you, Samuel." Weiss said with a smile as she stepped onto the driveway. The woman then handed the man a few Lien cards, "You can take the rest of the day off now."

"But Ms Schnee, you rented my services for the whole day. I couldn't possibly-"

"It's alright, Samuel." Whitley said, cutting the man off as he patted him on the back, "It's Christmas, after all. You should be spending it with friends and loved ones."

"I-if you're sure about this, Mr Schnee." the man said as he looked between the two of them. Replying with a grateful nod, the man quickly sped off in the limousine before another car took its place. After coming to a stop, two men with clothes bearing the brand of the Schnee Dust Company stepped out as they unloaded the back of the vehicle of its contents.

"For the record, I *still* think it's ridiculous how competitive you are in trying to win the love of children." Whitley said as the two Schnee siblings stepped up to the door to Jaune's house, "They aren't even *your* children."

"Your opinion is duly noted and filed in the appropriate folder, dear brother." Weiss replied as she rang the doorbell.

"I'll get it!" a familiar voice shouted from inside before the door opened a few moments later. The two siblings were then greeted by

the sight of a woman dressed like Santa with the beard, belly, and all, "Ho, ho, ho! Merry-

The woman stopped abruptly as she finally realized who it was that was standing in front of her at that moment.

"Weiss." Ruby said, eyes narrowed as she stared down the white-haired woman.

"Ruby." Weiss said in return in an equally "cold" tone. The staredown lasted for but a few moments before Ruby broke into a wide smile as she leapt at her former partner.

"Weiss!" Ruby shouted as she gave the head of the SDC the tightest hug she could manage, "It's so good to see you!"

"It's good to see you, too, Ruby!" Weiss said, returning the hug as the two women shared a laugh, "Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas!" Ruby said, before turning to Whitlet, "Merry Christmas to you, too, Whitley!"

"Merry Christmas, Ruby." the man said as the two shared a short and polite hug. It was then that Ruby noticed the two giant sacks of presents behind them.

"Oh, Weiss, going with quantity over quality again this year? You know that would never work." Ruby said, a mocking smile on her face as she invited the two of them in.

"That's what you think, Ruby! I'll show you that last year was just a fluke." Weiss countered as the three of them stepped into Jaune's home.

---

Emerald Sustrai was furious.

Her eyes blazed in a fury not unlike Cinder's whenever she used her Fall Maiden powers. Anyone who saw her stomping down the path towards Jaune and Cinder's home had the common sense to stay as far away from her as possible.

"Em, could you slow down?" came the irritating voice of one Mercury Black as the man trailed after her, a gift basket in his arms, "If you would just slow down and let me explain myself, this whole misunderstanding would-"

"There's *nothing* to misunderstand here, you ass!" Emerald shouted, rounding on her boyfriend as the man immediately clamped his mouth shut, "You left me waiting at that stupid restaurant last night for *an hour* ! That was on top of forgetting that it was our two-year anniversary last night!"

"Look, everything would all make sense if you would just-"

"Save it. The only reason I'm not making you experience your worst nightmares right now is because it's Christmas and we're spending the day with friends."

"I'm pretty sure they just see me as an acquaintance more than a friend, to be honest." Mercury quipped before immediately realizing he shouldn't have said anything if Emerald's glare was anything to go by. Before long, the couple eventually made it to their destination as Emerald pressed the doorbell in repressed fury.

"Merry-" Jaune started to say as he opened the door only to abruptly stop as he noticed the deep frown on Emerald's face, "Christmas...? Emerald? Is everything alright?"

"Ask this idiot and you'll understand." the woman said, giving the blonde a quick hug before she stepped into the house.

"Uh, okay. Come in, Cinder's in the kitchen with Ruby." Jaune said, Emerald replying with a nod before making her way to the kitchen.

As she opened the kitchen door, the green-haired woman was immediately greeted with a scene of absolute chaos.

Ruby was running around putting out trays of literal fires as Weiss laid down on the floor, covered in flour and powdered sugar from head to toe. Meanwhile, Nora was standing in front of the stove, screaming like a banshee as the ginger-haired woman was trying her best to douse the flames in front of her.

To top it all off, all of this was happening as the lady of the house was simply sitting to one side of the room, a glass of hot chocolate in one hand and a book in another, a look of serenity on her face as if the scene of insanity in front of her was non-existent.

"Um..." Emerald said as she made her way towards Cinder, "Cinder?"

"Emerald, you're here!" the woman said, putting the book and glass of hot chocolate down as she gave the green-haired woman a warm hug which Emerald happily returned, "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Cinder." Emerald said before she turned her attention back to the chaos unfolding around them, "Is... everything okay? Your house isn't going to burn down, is it?"

"Oh, it'll be fine. Weiss and Ruby are just helping me make some Christmas cookies, that's all." Cinder said as the two women sat down, "So, how are you? It's been a while since we've seen each other, hasn't it? Are you still with Mercury?"

"Ugh, that jerk..." Emerald muttered as the mention of his name brought out unpleasant memories from the day before.

"*That* doesn't sound good." Cinder said, a small laugh escaping her lips as she poured a glass of hot chocolate for the woman.

"You don't know the half of it." Emerald said, taking a big gulp of hot chocolate before explaining the reason for her sour mood.

---

Pyrrha Nikos was irritated.

More at herself than at anyone in particular. The woman opened the door to her car before closing it. She must have done that dumb routine more than ten times today already. Banging her head on the steering wheel of her car, the woman let out a heavy sigh.

Pyrrha was so distracted that she failed to notice the mane of golden blonde hair approach her car. A few taps on the window beside her made the young woman jump in her seat, eyes wide in surprise as she turned to face whoever it was that decided to intrude on her current session of self-loathing.

"Yang!" Pyrrha exclaimed, surprised by her old friend's seemingly sudden appearance.

"Hey there, P-Money. You planning on coming out anytime soon?" Yang asked, a friendly smile on her face as she took a step back from the car. Although she hesitated for a few short seconds, Pyrrha finally found the resolve within herself to step out of her car and into the cold winter air.

"So... How long have you been watching... all that?" Pyrrha asked, too ashamed to even look Yang in the eye.

"About ten minutes." Yang said, Pyrrha wilting slightly at the blonde's answer, "It was funny for the first five but after that, I just felt bad for you."

"Imagine how I feel..." Pyrrha said, a weak chuckle escaping her lips.

"So, you want to tell me what's going on? It *would* be a good way to fill the silence while we're walking to Jaune's place." Yang said, gift basket of booze tucked under her arm.

"Yeah, alright." Pyrrha said before the two women started their journey, "Before I start, I need to tell you that it's stupid. So stupid."

"Hey, I'm sure it can't be that bad." Yang said.

"Right. Well, it's just... I don't know why but I still find it hard to accept that Cinder's part of our lives now. As if nothing ever happened, you know?" Pyrrha said.

"Hey, I get it. I mean, she was responsibly for bringing down not just Beacon but also half of Vale. Not exactly something you could forget or forgive." Yang said.

"So you see where I'm coming from, don't you?"

"Yeah but why do I get the feeling that it's more than just that?" Yang asked, looking at Pyrrha with a questioning look. The woman could only look away, unwilling to look the blonde in the eye.

"For the longest time, I hated Cinder. So much." Pyrrha said.

"Yeah, that's pretty much general knowledge at this point." Yang said with a chuckle, "Remember that fight the two of you had a few years back? Thanks to the two of you, I'm pretty sure I can cross 'watching two people beat the absolute shit out of each other' off of my bucket list now."

Pyrrha looked away, embarrassed at the memory, "I'm pretty sure we would have killed each other if it wasn't for Jaune stepping in"

"Yeah, there's not doubt about that." Yang added, "You don't still have any bad blood with her, do you?"

"No. At least, I hope not." Pyrrha said, "I just... feel awkward sometimes when I'm there, you know? It doesn't get better with every visit, either."

"Yeah, especially considering that huge crush you had on Jaune." Yang said as Pyrrha's face turned as red as her hair, "You don't still

have a crush on him, do you?"

"No! My feelings for Jaune have been gone for a while now..." Pyrrha said, waving her arms around in denial, "Even if it wasn't, I don't think I could bring myself to do anything."

"Yeah, there's nothing worse than being a homewrecker." Yang said as the two women were approaching their destination, "For what it's worth, at least you'll be spending the day today with friends. Really wouldn't want to see you and Cinder try to kill each other again."

"Thanks, Yang." Pyrrha said, a smile of relief on her face, "But that's enough about me. What about you? Any exciting news to share?"

"Me? Nah. Ol' Yang-Xiao Long is doing great as ever these days. The solo act has never been brighter, either." Yang said, a triumphant smile on her face as she struck a quick pose.

"Solo act?" Pyrrha asked before Yang silently cursed the slip of her tongue, "Speaking of which, where is Blake? I was sure we'd see the two of you arriving together today."

Yang was silent for a few seconds as she contemplated on how to answer her friend's question before finally saying, "We're... taking a break from each other right now."

"What?" Pyrrha asked, stopping in her tracks as she stared at her friend in disbelief.

"It's alright, P-Money. It's no big deal." Yang replied, a small smile on her face, "Besides, it's a mutual break. We both wanted it."

"Is... everything alright between the two of you?" Pyrrha asked.

"Yeah, everything's fine. It's just... She was busy with running Menagerie and I just found it a bit difficult staying in one place for such a long time. Now that her parents are retired, she's become busier than ever." Yang replied, a wistful look on her face as she

recalled those past events, "We did try to make the long-distance thing work but I guess we just weren't very good at it. So, after a heated discussion, we decided to take a break from each other and just... go with the flow, I guess is the best way to put it."

"Well, for what it's worth, I hope everything works out for the two of you. You two are great together, after all." Pyrrha said as the two women finally arrived in front of Jaune's house.

"Thanks, P-Money. You're the best." Yang said, patting the girl on the back before she rang the doorbell. Before long, the door opened to reveal a blonde man wearing a fake white beard.

"Pyrrha! Yang! You're finally here!" Jaune said, giving both girls a hug at the same time as the three friends shared a laugh, "Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas, Jaune!" Pyrrha replied.

"Merry Christmas, Vomit Man!" Yang said even as Jaune groaned at the nickname, "Or should I say Vomit Santa?"

"Funny, Yang." the man replied as he ushered the two of them in, "So, what do you two want to drink? We have brandy, scotch, beer, wine, whiskey, and soda."

"Give me some of that top-shelf scotch, J-Money!" Yang said.

"And I'll have-"

"P-Money here will have the scotch, too. Top-shelf, of course." Yang said, cutting the redhead off.

"Yang, I don't-"

"Two top-shelf scotch, coming right up." Jaune said, ignoring Pyrrha's cries of protests.

"... I hate you guys." Pyrrha said, accepting the glass of scotch from Jaune even as the smell of the drink made the woman's nose wrinkle slightly.

---

Blake Belladonna was anxious.

Not just the fact that she hadn't seen any of her friends for the better part of two years now but she also hadn't been responding to any of their texts or calls for the past few months. The only reason they knew she wasn't dead was because of the blonde monkey Faunus standing next to him right now.

"Ugh, this coat is so itchy." Sun said as he furiously scratched the part of his back he couldn't reach with his tail.

"Sun, could you *please* stop fidgeting for five minutes? You're making my anxiety worse by the minute." Blake said, glaring at the man even as she tugged on her own winter coat. Deciding to outright ignore the grumblings of the man in beside her, Blake rang the doorbell.

"I'll get it." said the familiar voice of Jaune Arc from inside the house.

"This was a bad idea." Blake said, turning around to run away only for a monkey tail to stop her in her tracks.

"No, it's not. Trust me, you'll feel better once the day is over."

"Oh, what are you? My therapist?" Blake asked and before the two of them could argue any further, the door suddenly burst open as they were greeted by the sight of Jaune in a green ugly sweater that had the picture of a robot riding a dinosaur for some reason.

"Blake! Oh, my Gods! You're here!" Jaune exclaimed as he gave the woman a tight hug, "You're actually here!"

"H-hey, Jaune." Blake said, slowly wrapping her arms around the blonde, "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Blake." Jaune said, "I honestly didn't think you were going to make it."

"I almost didn't, actually." Blake said as Jaune released his hold around her, "Sun here actually managed to convince me it was a good idea to come."

"And Sun! Merry Christmas!" Jaune said, the two men sharing a deep hug, "Thanks for changing her mind."

"Merry Christmas, dude!" Sun said, sharing a laugh with his fellow blonde, "And no problem. All in a day's work for the Assistant Chieftain of Menagerie."

"Assistant *to* the Chieftess, actually." Blake said

"Well, come on in. The gang's actually all here." Jaune said, ushering the two of them in.

---

Yang-Xiao Long was tense.

It was so bad that she could practically hear her heart beating inside her chest and all she was doing was going to refill her plate with Christmas food. The fact that Blake was standing nearby the Christmas chicken at the same time was just a coincidence. A huge coincidence.

"Hey there, Kitty Cat." Yang managed to say after mysteriously finding herself standing in front of the Faunus all of a sudden.

"Yang. Hi." Blake said, turning to face the blonde with a look of slight surprise on her face before a warm smile slowly took its place, "Call me crazy but I feel like you've been avoiding me all evening."

"What? Me? Avoid you? That's crazy... Ha ha..." Yang said, scratching the back of her head as she, "I didn't think you were coming, to be honest. I sure am glad you're here now, though."

"Thanks and honestly, I wasn't going to. That idiot," Blake said, pointing towards a monkey Faunus in the middle of a drinking contest with Nora, Ruby, and Emerald, "managed to change my mind."

"So, how've you been? Great?" Yang asked.

"Oh, you know. Running Menagerie. Being the one all of the Faunus look towards for all the answers and solutions. Just everyday stuff." Blake replied.

"Hey, from where I'm standing, they're in good hands. Menagerie couldn't have found itself a better chieftain. Or is it chieftess? Ah, doesn't matter." Yang said, the two women sharing a laugh, "My point is, there's nobody better fit for the job than you."

"Honestly, it doesn't feel that way some days." Blake said, "I'm pretty sure I would have lost my mind with all the insane problems Menagerie always seems to have if it wasn't for Sun and Adam helping me out sometimes."

"Adam Taurus helping to run Menagerie. Never thought I'd see the day." Yang added.

"He can be... extreme at times-"

"Understatement of the year, but go on." Yang added as she brandished her robotic arm.

"But he is pretty helpful with some of the matters at hand. Especially now that Menagerie has officially been recognized as the fifth kingdom of Remnant and that Atlas has agreed to start trade relations with us." Blake said, her expression growing increasingly worried as her thoughts drifted towards the running of Menagerie.

"No. None of that. Shame on you." Yang said, flicking the woman on the forehead, "It's Christmas today. We're meant to enjoy the day, not stress ourselves out."

"You're right... you're right..." Blake said in between deep breaths as a grateful smile on her face appeared on her face, "Thanks, Yang. You always did know how to make me forget my troubles."

"Hey, that's what I'm here for." Yang said as the women clinked their glasses together, "Merry Christmas, Blake."

"Merry Christmas, Yang."

---

Cinder Fall was happy.

As the woman sat on her husband's lap, the man resting his head on her shoulder, the woman couldn't help the warm smile on her face as she eyed the scene of joy and happiness in front of her. Go back ten years and tell her that this was the kind of scene she'd be witnessing and she'd have burned them to ashes in an instant.

On one side of the room, Emerald, Nora, Ruby, and Sun were drinking their liquor cabinet away all the while filling their house with laughter while another side of the room had Weiss, Yang, Blake, and Ren playing with the children. Even Neo was here, the woman appearing from out of the blue and was currently having a drink with Mercury and Whitley.

Although Neo's presence was unexpected, that didn't stop Jaune from welcoming the petite woman into their home like any other guest. Not that Cinder had anything against him for doing something like that. That's just the type of person her beloved was.

"What are you thinking about?" Jaune asked, the man rubbing the growing bulge on her stomach.

"Nothing. Just... embracing the moment, that's all." Cinder said as Jaune let out a small laugh.

"So, did you hear about what happened with Merc and Emerald yesterday?" Jaune asked.

"I did. Honestly, it doesn't surprise me. I'd give it two months tops before the two of them break up."

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure." Jaune said, a knowing smile on his face.

"Oh? Is there something you're not telling me, my love?" Cinder asked.

"Well, I'll tell you but you have to promise me you won't tell anyone." Jaune said as Cinder nodded in agreement. With an amused smile, the blonde then whispered softly into the woman's ears, "He told me that he's planning to propose to Emerald tomorrow. He's bought the ring and everything."

"What?!" Cinder asked, shock in her face as she rounded on her husband.

"It's true. He was going to do it last night but there was a whole mix up with the ring and everything. That's why he was late." Jaune said.

"Well... This is certainly unexpected." Cinder said before Nora called out to Jaune.

"Jaune, come on! It's just you and me now!" the woman said, a bottle of half-empty booze in her hand, "Cinder, you too!"

"Nora, you know Cinder can't drink. She's pregnant."

"Well, just give her some non-alcoholic booze. That'll work just fine." Nora suggested.

"If you have some of that, you should throw it away." Yang added with a laugh, "Non-alcoholic booze sounds illegal and disgusting."

Isn't that right, Sapphire?"

"Yeah! Disgusting!" Sapphire shouted as Yang tossed the girl up into the air with a laugh, "Aunty Yang, again!"

"What's the magic word? Come on, like I told you." Yang said.

"Aunty Yang is the coolest and bestest Aunt there is!" the young girl said.

"That's right. Aunty Yang *is* the coolest, isn't she?" Yang said, sending a triumphant smirk towards Ruby and Weiss before tossing the young girl into the air. If Cinder had superhuman hearing, she would have heard the sound of two hearts shattering at that precise moment as both women cried out in defeat.

Laughing to herself, Cinder sat back in her seat as her husband went to join his friends as she took in the scene with all the happiness and joy she could, a contented smile on her face as she enjoyed the company of friends and family around her.

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: And with that, the chapter is over! Boy, I had a blast writing every part of this special holiday chapter. It was a very fun writing experience. What did you guys and gals think about it?**

**To clarify, this is sort of the happy ending "epilogue" to Knightfall where everyone is happy by the end. Whether the above events are canon to my story or not, well, we'll see by the end. Also, yes, I chose to bring back Adam for the fun of it. No points to those who can figure out where I got the name Sylvie and Frigga from.**

**As always, fave, follows, and reviews are always welcome.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall.**

**And finally:**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR**

## Chapter 6

*" Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!" Screaming his lungs out and with a steel briefcase in hand, Jaune was currently running through the white-colored halls of what was supposed to be a secret Atlas military research base. On top of all that, a hail of bullets were currently raining down on the boy's back. Fortunately for the young blonde, his aura was protecting him from any fatal damage but even he could tell that it was close to empty.*

*" Faster, child. Faster!" came the grating voice of his quote unquote mentor, the scorpion Faunus cackling madly with glee, "It won't be long now before the soldiers catch up to you."*

*" You know, I would appreciate a little help over here!" Jaune shouted as best he could over the sound of gunfire behind him. Turning a corner, the boy suddenly found Tyrian running beside him, the man having appeared from seemingly out of nowhere.*

*" Oh, I'm sure you would but my divine orders were clear: Observe. Only act if Jaune is dying. You're not dying, are you, Jaune?"*

*"Not exactly something I can afford to do right now. Not when I've finally found someone to live for in that Godsforsaken castle." Jaune thought to himself through gritted teeth as the gunfire behind him seemed to intensify by the second, "Fine. Then just shut up and stop annoying me."*

*" Oh, I do enjoy that look in your eyes, child. I do hope whatever it is you have planned doesn't end up disappointing me."*

*Before long, the duo soon found themselves standing in the middle of the base's hangar with several unmanned Bullheads around them. Locking the entrance to the hangar behind them with the help of a program he received from Watts, Jaune immediately took stock of his current situation. With the doors of the hangar slowly closing, the*

*blonde quickly chose the one closest to the exit as he blew the doors of the Bullhead open with a grenade.*

*" Not a very elegant way to enter a Bullhead but I suppose it deserves a passing grade." Tyrian managed to say as he followed the boy into the vehicle. Ignoring the man, Jaune immediately entered the cockpit and sat down on the pilot's seat. A moment later, the doors leading into the hangar were blasted open before a group of soldiers rushed towards them.*

*With the Bullhead only about halfway through to powering up, Jaune let out a loud curse as he snatched the grenades he had found throughout the base. The young blonde then engaged in a firefight with the Atlesian soldiers that lasted just above a minute before the Bullhead he and Tyrian were in was ready to depart. With his aura nearly at zero, Jaune was able to escape from the military base with his life intact.*

*It was half an hour after leaving the military base behind that Jaune finally allowed himself to relax as he placed the Bullhead in autopilot.*

*" Bravo, child. Truly, you should be proud of what you've done today." Tyrian said.*

*" Tyrian, could you shut up... for, like, a second or something?" Jaune said as he faced the man. The two exchanged glances for a moment before Tyrian spoke up.*

*" Okay, second's over." the man said, cackling even as Jaune glared daggers at him. The next moment, in one swift motion, Jaune unsheathed a dagger before stabbing Tyrian in the face. At least, that's what was supposed to happen if the blonde's attack wasn't stopped mere inches from the Faunus's eye.*

*" Ah, what a shame. Maybe if you were faster, then you would have succeeded that time." the man said, snatching the dagger away from Jaune before tossing it to the back of the Bullhead, "You're getting closer, child. Maybe next time."*

" Yeah... Next time..." Jaune grumbled to himself as the Bullhead slowly made its way towards the keyed in destination.

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"I just want it on record that I am *against* this plan." Jaune said, grumbling under his breath as he paced around inside the tent he was currently in. Wearing a black coat over a red shirt and a pair of black pants, the blonde had brought along an assortment of weapons for the fight ahead, ranging from smoke grenades to flashbangs.

"Thank you for your concern, Jaune. They've been noted and recorded." Cinder said, rolling her eyes at the blonde.

"I don't understand why you're not more worried, especially considering who it is we're dealing with."

"Because there *is* nothing to worry about." Cinder argued, an annoyed frown on her face.

"This is Raven Branwen we're talking about. Someone who would casually betray her own blood." Jaune countered, a look of bewilderment on his face at how relaxed Cinder seemed to be at the moment, "She would just as easily turn on us the moment we turn our back to her."

"Then I just won't do that, will I?" Cinder replied, a small chuckle escaping her lips.

"Cinder..." Jaune said before the woman in question interrupted him.

"Look, I understand that you're worried but I need you to trust me. This time tomorrow, we'll have the Relic of Knowledge in our hands." Cinder said, strolling up to the blonde as she held his face in her hands.

"It's not you I don't trust..." Jaune said, finally relenting with a sigh, "It's Raven."

"Obviously, nobody here is stupid enough to trust her, Jaune." Cinder said, gesturing to the people gathered in the tent, namely Emerald, Mercury, and Watts, "Or, what? You don't think I can beat her in a fight? You wound me, Jaune."

"Shut up." Jaune said, as the two of them shared a small smile, "Obviously you're the better fighter but you'll be at a two-on-one disadvantage. I'm worried something terrible might happen."

"Get a room, you two." came the grating voice of Arthur Watts from the side as he stared at the couple, "And here I was hoping that you two would get into a screaming match, not... whatever *this* is."

"Shut up, Watts." said Cinder and Jaune at the same time as the two of them rounded on the disgraced Atlesian.

"Touchy, touchy." Watts said, chuckling to himself with a self-satisfied grin on his face.

"What are you even still doing here?" Jaune asked.

"That hurts, Jaune. Do you want me gone that badly?" Watts asked, feigned hurt on his face, "And here I thought we were friends."

"If that's the case, then you're not as bright as you claim to be." Cinder said, scoffing at the man. Watts made to argue before a black and red portal shimmered to life in front of them as Vernal stepped into the tent.

"Showtime, kids." the bandit said as Cinder formed a fireball in her hands.

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"Ruby!" Yang shouted as the blonde immediately rushed towards her sister's side.

"Good evening, boys and girls." a voice said that immediately caught the young girl's attention, "It's been so long, hasn't it?"

"Cinder." Ruby said, growling under her breath as she stood up from the surprise attack. From behind the woman, four of her subordinates followed her through the portal. Mercury, Emerald, a tan girl with short brown hair and-

"Jaune! You're okay!" Pyrrha shouted, relief and joy in her voice at the sight of her partner, the redhead seemingly forgetting about the presence of Cinder's party. Even Ruby felt happy at the sight of her first friend. Before she could process the situation, however, Cinder threw a similar fireball at Pyrrha but unlike Ruby, the girl had the presence of mind to bring her shield up just before the attack hit.

"Hmph. I'd appreciate it if you didn't try to take what isn't yours, Nikos." Cinder said, eyes blazing as she glared at the redhead.

"What...?" Pyrrha said, her gaze shifting between Cinder and Jaune.

"Hey, guys. I have to say, I'm surprised none of you are dead yet, especially since Tyrian came to kill you." Jaune said, a grin on his face as he sent a look towards Qrow, "But I suppose that was because of you, wasn't it?"

"Jaune, what are you talking about?" Pyrrha asked, the smile on her face beginning to waver. Before the girl's question could be answered, the sound of the door behind them opening grabbed everyone's attention.

"Hazel..." Oscar muttered as the giant of a man closed the door shut behind him before turning to face them.

"It won't be long before the White Fang have completed their duties." the man said, glaring at the group of teenagers in front of him.

"Raven, what have you done?!" Qrow asked, snarling at his sister as he took out Harbinger and pointed it at the woman.

"Don't be too heartbroken, little bird. On top of being a recent addition to our little cabal, Raven is here simply because she has the

Spring Maiden with her." Cinder said, a mocking smile on her face as she spoke, "If you want to direct your anger at anyone, then it should be at the good Headmaster standing up there. After all, he's been an incredibly good source of information for a very, very long time. Isn't that right, Leonardo?"

"That's enough, Cinder." the man in question said, turning his head away from the group below in shame.

"Leo, you... You're the reason why everyone I tried to find is gone. You were the one who led them to a slaughter, weren't you?" Qrow asked, as his body trembled with anger, "Weren't you?!"

"Alright, I think I've had my fill of melodramatic crap for the day." Jaune spoke up as he stepped past Cinder, "Guys, know what's best for you and just surrender. With two Maidens on our side, we're clearly the ones with the advantage here. So just give up and let us leave with the Relic without anybody dying today, okay?"

"Jaune, you..." Pyrrha started before she sucked in a deep breath, "Why are you... working with them?"

"Isn't it obvious?" the blonde asked, eyeing his former friends.

"Jaune, this... this is all a joke, right?" Nora asked, her voice trembling, "You're not actually... *with* them, are you? I... I mean, you can't be. You're our team leader, right? Our Fearless Team Leader won't-"

"Nora, shut up." the blonde said, interrupting her. The girl in question, meanwhile, flinched at the words of her former team leader, "Seriously, for once in your life, would you just shut up? I mean, my Gods, do you know how much willpower it took for me to get through a day with you in that stupid old dorm of ours? I mean, seriously, people should be getting awards just for putting up with you."

"Raargh!" Ren shouted, Stormflower in his hands as he clashed with Jaune, "How could you?! After everything we've been through?!"

"Oh, get over yourself, Ren. We weren't even together for a whole year. Not a whole lot of time to form meaningful connections, don't you think?" Jaune countered, a mocking grin on his face before his eyes widened in panic as the blonde jumped back just time to avoid Pyrrha's shield striking him in the face.

"Jaune, please. Stop this. It's still not too late. Nothing's been done that can't be reversed." the redhead said, a look of uncertainty in her eyes as she and Ren faced their former team leader.

"Oh, Pyrrha. Who knew the Invincible Girl could be this *stupid*?" Jaune said before spears made of glass came flying through the air towards them. Fortunately, the two teens were able to react quickly enough to avoid the attack.

"Who would have thought that the Invincible Girl to be someone who would double-team her opponent?" Cinder said as she strode up next to Jaune.

"Tell me about it." Jaune said, as the two shared a mocking laugh, "Although I appreciate the assist, you should at the vault right now."

"I would if that idiot Headmaster would open the door for us!" Cinder said, shouting that last part as the man in question hurriedly made his way down the stairs just as the scene below him unfolded into various fights. Emerald and Mercury were facing Ruby and Yang while Vernal was off fighting Weiss.

"Nora!" Ren shouted as he kneeled down beside the girl while Pyrrha fought Jaune and Cinder by herself.

"Ren... What...?" Nora started to say, her hands trembling at everything she's had to take in in such a short amount of time, "Jaune... Is he...?"

"Yes, Nora. I'm afraid so." Ren said, taking the girl's trembling hands into his own in an effort to calm her down.

"But... why? How could he...? I don't understand..." the girl said.

"I don't know, Nora. I wish I knew. I wish that everything happening right now was just some bad dream but it's not." Ren said as the boy took a deep breath, "Right now, there are bigger and more important things that we need to do and I need your help, Nora. Can I count on you?"

Nora could only look at her childhood friend with tear stained eyes before she wiped them clean. Then, with renewed determination - for now, at least - the young girl gripped her hammer as hard as she could before proudly standing up.

"Yeah, you can count on me, Renny." the girl said, a cheerful smile on her face but even Ren could see the sadness and uncertainty behind it though he wasn't tactless enough to say anything.

"Good. With Pyrrha's help, it shouldn't be too hard taking Cinder down." Ren added but before any of them could offer their help to Pyrrha, Hazel appeared in front of them.

"Unfortunately for you, I can't allow that to happen." the man said as he stared the two teenagers down, "Surrender. This fight doesn't have to happen."

"I agree." Ren said, weapons drawn and ready.

"But it will if you're with *her*." Nora said, Magnhild gripped tight in her hands.

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"Go, get the Relic!" Jaune said as his blade clashed with Pyrrha's, "I'll hold her off!"

Cinder looked like she wanted to argue but ultimately decided against it. With a growl, the woman then made her way towards the entrance to the vault.

"Raven! If you're done playing with your brother, it's time to go!" Cinder shouted over the noise.

"Easier said than... done, bitch..." Raven growled as she exchanged blows with Qrow.

"You seem out of practice, Raven. I remembered you being better than this." Qrow quipped. Before Raven could retort, Hazel appeared from seemingly out of nowhere, barreling through the Huntsman.

"Go! Get the Relic!" the man said as Ren and Nora appeared behind him. With Vernal having already incapacitated Weiss, she and Raven then quickly followed after Cinder as the two women jumped down into the caverns below.

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"Jaune, please! You're making a mistake!" Pyrrha said as the blonde dodged her attack before following up with one of his own, "Ozpin's told us about Salem and what she plans to do with the Relics!"

"Save your breath, Pyrrha. You're not going to convince me of anything today, least of all betraying Cinder." Jaune said as he delivered a strike at the redhead. Fortunately for her, she was able to block the attack with her shield just in time, "Besides, I already know what Salem's plans are."

"Then why?! If she succeeds, everyone on this planet is going to die!" Pyrrha argued as the two former partners locked blades once more, "Please, stop this. Join us in stopping-"

"That's enough!" Jaune shouted as he delivered a kicked that sent the girl staggering back a few feet, "Nothing you say is going to make me betray Cinder, Pyrrha. Nothing."

"Jaune, stop." came the voice of Ruby as she pointed Crescent Rose at him, now in its sniper rifle form.

"What are you gonna do, Ruby? Shoot me?" Jaune asked as he sneered at the girl.

"I will if I have to." the girl replied.

"Please, you don't have the-" was all the blonde could say before a bullet whizzed past his face as it impacted the wall behind him.

"We don't have to fight anymore. Please, just give up." Ruby said through trembling hands, "Look around you. The White Fang is defeated and most of your side is, too. Now *you're* the one at a disadvantage, Jaune. So just give up."

Looking around, Jaune saw that Ruby was right. Both Emerald and Mercury seemed to be at their limit. Even Hazel seemed spent. Even so, the boy turned towards Ruby with a defiant look in his eyes.

"You're forgetting someone, aren't you? We still have Cinder on our side and with her powers, ending this fight shouldn't be too difficult." Jaune said.

"He's right. Cinder's more than enough to beat all of you!" Emerald shouted, echoing the boy's sentiments. Sharing a nod, the two of them readied themselves to fight once more before the sound of the elevator leading to the vault ascending drew everyone's attention.

A look of joy and relief appeared on both of Jaune and Emerald's faces before it was slowly but surely replaced with despair as they saw Yang standing on the elevator, with the Relic of Knowledge in her hand.

As realization dawned on them, both Jaune and Emerald fell to their knees in despair at the thought of losing Cinder.

"Emerald, let's go. Now!" Mercury shouted as he and Hazel took a few steps back in retreat. The boy's words, however, were unable to reach the girl's ears as tears filled the girl's eyes. In her grief, Emerald screamed out in despair as her Semblance went out of control, creating an illusion of the monster that was Cinder's master. A moment later, everything turned dark as the illusion grew out of control as it turned to attack the ones who were present. As the illusion disappeared, Emerald, Mercury, and Hazel was nowhere to be found.

"What was-?" Blake started to say before Jaune interrupted her.

"You... killed Cinder...?" Jaune asked as the boy was on his knees and glaring daggers at Yang with his tear-filled eyes. When he received no answer, the boy took the sword into his hand as he charged towards the girl, "I'll kill you!"

With the shock from Emerald's illusion still lingering in their minds, the former students of Beacon were unable to react in time as Jaune enforced his legs with aura, leaping into the air as his sword clashed with Yang's gauntlet.

"Jaune, stop!" Pyrrha shouted, being the first one to recover her bearings. Sword and shield in hand, the redhead quickly made her way to Yang's side as Jaune delivered a devastating volley of attacks on Yang.

"I'll kill you! I'll fucking kill you!" Jaune shouted as he hacked and slashed at Yang, the girl desperately trying to defend herself from the blonde's relentless assault.

Jaune, wrapped in all his grief and anger, was unable to notice Pyrrha's shield flying towards him as it hit him square in the face, sending the boy tumbling down the stairs. Growling, Jaune made to stand up once more but was halted in his tracks as Pyrrha pointed a sword at his throat.

"... Do it." Jaune said, gripping the blade of the sword with his hand. Glaring up at his former partner with all the hatred in the world, the blonde said, "Because if you don't, I'm telling you now, I *will* kill every single one-"

Before her former team leader could finish his sentence, Nora appeared from behind him as she delivered a devastating blow to the side of his head with Magnhild, knocking the blonde unconscious.

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: And that's a wrap. Honestly, if I'm told that this chapter isn't my best work, I'll have to agree. I was just pushing myself to put this chapter out before the end of the month. Also, I'm gonna get some heat for this but, yeah. I skipped through the Qrow vs Tyrian fight because it just happened the same in canon, anyway. From this point on, I aim to diverge a bit more from canon. Hopefully.**

**Anyway, what are your thoughts on this chapter? Personally, I found myself struggling to write the earlier parts of it. Towards the end, it became easier as I knew where I wanted to take it. Next chapter, will be the discussion between Team RWBY & Team NPR on what to do about their former friend and team leader. Look forward to that.**

**As always, fave, follows, and reviews are always appreciated.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall**

## Chapter 7

"We are *NOT* killing him!" Pyrrha shouted as she looked over the people gathered in the living room of the house they were staying in.

"Pyrrha, are you serious?!" Yang shouted back as she stood up to face the redhead, "He wanted to kill *all* of us! You heard him yourself!"

"But he *didn't!*" Pyrrha shot back.

"He *would have* ! I saw the look in his eyes when he attacked me." Yang said, her voice lowering just a tiny bit even as her eyes flickered between red and lilac, "There was no doubt. No hesitation. There was just... rage and... hatred..."

Silence overcame Pyrrha as the blonde recalled her sudden clash with Jaune.

"Even so, I can't just let this happen..." Pyrrha said, shaking her head as she stared Yang in the eye, "I *won't!* "

"Pyrrha, listen to yourself. You're being stupid about this." Yang said before turning her attention to the other occupants in the room, "Would you guys back me up here?"

"Pyrrha, I agree with you." Weiss said as Yang rounded on the heiress's response.

"I can't believe this. You, too?!" Yang shouted.

"Calm down, I wasn't finished." Weiss said, pausing for a moment before continuing, "I agree with Pyrrha that we shouldn't *kill* him but what we can and should do is just leave him here to fend for himself."

"Are you serious?! So, your plan is to just... let him do what he wants?" Yang asked as she gripped her head in frustration, "What happens if he decides to hunt us down and kill us one by one?!"

"I can't believe I have to be the one who has to ask this but," Weiss said, letting out a heavy sigh before continuing, "You speak of killing him but are you actually *willing* to do the deed? Are you willing to live the rest of your life with actual *blood* on your hands?"

Yang, surprised by the heiress's sudden question, could only look away as a troubled frown formed on her face.

"Are any of us capable of doing such a thing?" Weiss asked as she looked at the others around her. A few seconds of silence was her answer before a voice spoke up.

"I am. Just give me two seconds and he'll be dead. I won't even blink." Qrow said as he sat down on the nearby couch.

"I *won't* let you." Pyrrha said, a dangerous look on her eyes as her hands fell to her weapons. Qrow merely shrugged in response to the redhead's threat before taking a swig from his hip flask.

"Neither will I." Nora said as she shared a nod with Pyrrha before standing beside her teammate.

"You, too, Nora?" Yang asked as he looked between the two members of Team JNPR, "You know he doesn't see you as a friend anymore, right? He doesn't see *us* as friends anymore."

"That's true but that doesn't mean I stopped considering him my friend." Nora countered.

"Oh, you have *got* to be kidding me!" Yang said, the blonde's frustration starting to boil over.

"Look, whatever happened or is going to happen, Jaune was... is my friend." Nora said as the girl reminisced to her time in Beacon, "More

than that, he was my team leader. He was my *fearless* team leader. All that time we spent together may not have meant anything to him but it did to me. So that's why... If you're planning to leave him behind, then I'm staying here, too."

"What?! Nora, you can't be serious!" Weiss shouted out, "We have Salem and her forces to deal with. Even if we didn't, you can't possibly expect us to just leave you with him alone, do you?!"

"No worries on that front because she *won't* be alone." Pyrrha spoke up as she placed a comforting hand on Nora's shoulder, "If Jaune and Nora is left behind, I'm staying, too."

"Gods, do you know how stupid the two of you are being right now?!" Weiss asked as she slammed the table in front of her.

"Look, these past few months, we travelled through Mistral having absolutely *no idea* where Jaune was." Nora countered, unflinching at Weiss's anger, "All that time spent on the road, with no idea if my friend was even *alive* was... heavy. And now... Now, I find him alive and well? You bet your ass I'm happy and willing to do what it takes to help him through whatever it is that's bugging him."

"That's all well and good, Nora, but you're forgetting one crucial detail: He's working for Salem!" Weiss argued once more and was about to continue before Pyrrha cut her off.

"That's actually not true." Pyrrha said, "At least, I don't think it is."

"... What do you mean?" Ruby asked, the girl staying silent throughout the whole exchange until now.

"During our fight, he says that he won't betray *Cinder* specifically." Pyrrha replied as she looked over the whole room.

"Okay? What's your point?" Yang asked, head tilted to the side in confusion.

"What if Jaune was never loyal to Salem but was instead loyal to Cinder?"

"Even if he was loyal to her, what does that change?" Weiss asked, "Need I remind everyone here that Cinder was the one responsible for burning down our school? Just because he was loyal to a lesser evil doesn't-"

"My point, Weiss," Pyrrha said, interrupting the heiress as she sucked in a deep breath, "What if we can convince Jaune to join us in our fight against Salem?"

Silence reigned in the living room for a few moments as everyone tried to process the redhead's words before everyone began shouting over one another.

"You *cannot* be serious, Pyrrha!" Yang shouted, anger in her eyes as they shifted into a dangerous red color.

"That is the most *absurd* idea I have ever heard!" Weiss added, her head shaking in disapproval at Pyrrha's suggestion.

"Why not?! Literally what is the worst thing that could happen?" Nora asked as she tried her best to defend her teammate's suggestion.

"Hahahahaha!" Qrow, meanwhile, could only laugh at Pyrrha's idea, spitting out the drink in his mouth in the process. The shouting continued for a few more seconds before Pyrrha banged her sword on her shield, grabbing everyone's attention.

"I know what I'm suggesting is insane-"

"Understatement of the year right there." Yang said.

"- *but* it's definitely one path that I suggest we consider." Pyrrha said, the girl hesitating for a moment before continuing, "That's why, I suggest we put it to a vote. Either we invite him on our mission to stop Salem or we leave him behind."

"And if we leave him behind, you and Nora are going to stay with him, right?" Yang asked as Pyrrha responded with a silent nod.

"I'll be staying, too, if that's the result." Ren said, the boy choosing to stay silent before this.

"Wonderful. That's just... wonderful..." Yang grumbled as she let out a defeated sigh, "Whatever happens, it's not a win-win for anyone, is it?"

"No, it's not but that is something I've come to learn and accept throughout my travels through Mistral these past few months." Pyrrha replied, "We can't win all our battles. Sometimes, the best we can hope for... is a draw."

Yang snorted at the redhead's wisdom before the blonde sat back down.

"That's fine and all but you're forgetting one thing: What if he *doesn't* want to help us kill Salem? Did you think of that?" Yang asked.

"Yang has a point. This discussion would be meaningless if he doesn't want to do anything about her." Weiss added, the two girls of Team RWBY sharing a nod of agreement.

"I'll talk to him." Pyrrha said after a few moments of contemplation, "It might not mean anything to him anymore but we were partners. Maybe I'll be able to convince him."

"Fine, whatever. Lets take a vote. Those who wants to leave Jaune behind and let him do whatever it is he wants to do with his life, raise your hand." Yang said and not a moment later, the hands of Yang, Weiss, and Blake went up. Sighing that her sister didn't follow her lead, Yang continued, "Okay, next: Those who wants him to join up with us on our mission to stop Salem, raise your hands."

A moment later, the hands of Team NPR and Ruby went up.

"Rubes, why? If he joins us, we'd have to constantly watch our backs. You understand that, right?" Yang asked, disappointment in her eyes as she looked at her sister. Even her uncle was shocked at the girl's decision.

"I know but... he was my first friend in Beacon and I know what you're going to say. That he lied to all of us and we can't trust whatever he said or did back in Beacon." Ruby said as she looked at Yang with a resolute look in her eyes, "And I think if the roles were reversed, he would do the same for me."

"Ughhh! You're all idiots, you know that? Goddamn idiots!" Yang said as she stood up before making her way towards the door.

"Where are you going?" Ruby asked.

"I'm gonna go for a walk. Maybe clear my head and some of this idiot energy around me. Nobody follow me. I want some alone time." the blonde said before slamming the door shut behind her.

"I agree with Yang. I think a walk would do wonders to clear my own mind." Weiss said as she, too, left the room.

"Blake? You've been quiet this whole time. You don't have anything to say?" Pyrrha asked.

"I... wasn't really close to Jaune back in Beacon and honestly, this is an awful idea, Pyrrha. And that's coming from me." Blake said before turning her attention to Ruby, "But I trust Ruby and if she chooses to place her trust in Jaune, then that's what I'll do, too."

"Thank you, Blake." Ruby said, a small smile on her face before the Faunus also went out to clear her head.

"Wait, don't me and Oz here get a vote?" Qrow asked.

"No." said both Pyrrha and Nora as Qrow shook his head at their response.

"Kids these days. No respect." the veteran huntsman said as he took a drink from his flask.

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Pyrrha was nervous as she stood in front of the door leading to the room Jaune was currently in.

"I think I should... go in alone. We don't want to... make him nervous, after all." Pyrrha said, addressing Ren, Nora, and Ruby.

"I don't think that's a particularly safe suggestion." Ren said.

"It'll be fine. If anything happens, I'll have my weapons with me." Pyrrha said before the other three relented to the redhead's decision. Taking a deep breath, the Mistralian Champion pushed the door open before quickly stepping inside to find her ex-partner laid down on his bed, eyes closed and asleep.

Giving a reassuring nod to her friends, Pyrrha then closed the door behind her before taking a seat on the edge of the other bed in the room.

"Hello, Jaune." Pyrrha said. When she received no response, the redhead continued, "You can stop pretending now. I've known you long enough to know when you're pretending to sleep, Jaune."

"Hmph. Hard to sleep with all that noise you and the rest of the idiots out there are making." Jaune said after a few seconds of silence passed. The blonde then turned his back to her as he laid on his side, "What do you want, Pyrrha?"

"Well, we had a discussion downstairs-"

"That's what you call that?" Jaune asked with a snort.

"-and after a vote, we've decided to ask you to join us in defeating Salem." Pyrrha said, choosing to ignore the blonde's snide remark. Almost immediately, Jaune barked out a laugh.

"You can't possibly be serious?!" Jaune said, turning to face his ex-partner, "After everything, you guys still want me to join your stupid little tea party? Please tell me you're joking."

"No, Jaune, I'm not. We really think it would help us all if you joined us in stopping Salem from reaching her goals." Pyrrha said.

"Gods, do you know how dumb you sound right now?" Jaune asked, his back still turned to her.

"I disagree. I think we're going to need all the help we can get and right now, our best option is to ask for yours."

"Why?"

"Because you've been there. You've seen Salem. You'd know what it would take to kill her. You-"

"I'm going to stop you right there, Pyrrha." Jaune said, interrupting the girl, "Salem can't be killed. Make your stupid decisions or whatever but take my word on that. That... *monster* is immortal. Nothing on this Godsforsaken planet can permanently put her down."

"And how do you know that?" Pyrrha asked, a challenging tone in her voice, "I doubt you've tried everything under the sun. Surely there must be *some way* to-"

"There really isn't. Again, you're going to have to take my word for it." the blonde said.

"Even so, we have to try. We owe it to everyone who's lost people they care about to the Grimm over the years to at least *try*, no matter the odds."

"We really don't." Jaune said.

"Then what are you going to do, Jaune? Just lie here and wallow in self-pity until the end of time?" Pyrrha asked, the frustration in her

voice starting to rise.

"That doesn't sound like the *worst* idea, actually." Jaune said, a chuckle escaping his lips, "Thanks for the suggestion."

"You're pathetic." Pyrrha spat out as her anger and frustration over recent events finally boiled over.

"Ouch. Harsh but not untrue."

"To think I ever had any sort of feelings for you."

"Hey, you can't blame that on me. That's your own bad taste you're talking about, not mine."

"I suppose that's one thing we have in common." Pyrrha said, "Seeing as how your loyalty to Cinder is responsible for your current situation."

"What?" Jaune said, the blonde finally turning to face his ex-partner with a dangerous glint in his eyes.

"I'm assuming it was *her* plan to bring down Haven just as she had Beacon?" Pyrrha asked. When she received no response, the redhead continued, "If she hadn't chosen to perform such a spectacle, she would have succeeded."

"Choose your next words carefully, Pyrrha." Jaune warned.

"All she had to do was have Lionheart and Raven sneak you into Haven discreetly, descend into the vault and leave with the Relic." Pyrrha said, "Choosing to use the White Fang and fight us at the same time? I don't normally call people stupid but Cinder certainly is idiotic."

"Shut up." Jaune said as he sat up.

"Not to mention going down into the vault alone with no backup." Pyrrha continued, "Did she really expect the woman who would

betray her own flesh and blood to not stab her in the back?"

"I said shut up, Pyrrha." Jaune said again as he gripped his hands tight.

"The fact that you would even follow someone as foolish as Cinder just proves-"

"I said SHUT UP!" Jaune shouted as he and Pyrrha both stood up at the same time, the two former partners standing mere inches from each other, "Shut up, shut up, shut up! You don't know *anything* about her! You don't know her like I do so you don't get to say anything!"

"From her actions in Haven, I know that she's egotistical and has a massive superiority complex." Pyrrha said.

"You're wrong! None of you know who she really is! *None* of you know what she's been through, what she's had to go through *just* to get where she is right now! Jaune shouted as the door to the room slammed open, "You, of all people, do not get to talk like that about her! Especially with how mundane and maddeningly boring your life was before Beacon!"

"Jaune, you-"

"I wasn't finished! You think *you* had it bad? Well, try running away from a group of people who physically abused you for the smallest mistakes! Or having to go through days without food! How about having to fend for yourself on the cold and dark streets of a city that could *not* care less about what happens to you!" Jaune continued even as Ren and Nora held him back, "News flash, Pyrrha Nikos, your problems are paltry when compared to the rest of us in this room."

"You're right. It is." Pyrrha said as Jaune sat back down on his bed as the blonde started to calm down, even if just a little, "When looking at the bigger picture, the problems I faced were nowhere

near as important as the rest of you. You were also right in that I was wrong to speak about her in the way that I did especially since I don't know her very well."

When the silence seemed to drag on forever, Pyrrha, Ruby, Ren, and Nora made to leave the room before Jaune spoke up, stopping the four of them in their tracks.

"I meant what I said, you know? Killing Salem is impossible. Stronger people than you have tried." Jaune said as he looked up at his former friends, "That big guy, Hazel? The bastard smashed her head in - and I mean *literally* smashed her head - and Salem came back to life as if it was the most natural thing in the world."

"... What?" Nora asked, a look of disbelief on her face.

"So, believe me when I tell you that it is literally *impossible* to kill Salem." Jaune said.

"I don't believe that." Ruby said, "I believe that with the help of all four Relics, we can use them to kill Salem and finally rid the world of the Grimm."

"I gotta say, I miss that giddy optimism of yours, Rube. It never gets old." the blonde said, a chuckle escaping his lips, "But, high hopes and positive reinforcement isn't going to help us permanently put down the big, bad Evil Queen."

"Even so, it's better than doing nothing. Who knows, we might just be able to figure out a way to kill her at the end of all this." Ruby said, as she extended a hand to the blonde "So, Jaune... Will you help us on this mission?"

Jaune stared at the girl's outstretched hand for a few seconds before he turned his gaze towards his ex-partner.

"Fight me."

"What?" Pyrrha asked, confused at the blonde's sudden request.

"Back in Beacon, I took it easy in order to lay low. It's cliché but if you win, I'll join you." Jaune said.

"And if you win?"

"If I win, you guys piss off and let me wallow in my grief."

---

*Cold. That was what the young girl was feeling right now. It seems like that's all she's been feeling lately, from the cold streets of a city unknown to her to the cold steel floor of the ship she stowed away in. Now, she was lying down on a small pool of her own spit and blood as she heard her new Mistress approaching her.*

*"Is that all you have to offer me, child?" Salem asked as she loomed over her, "I must say, you are quite possibly the biggest disappointment in recent memory. Perhaps I should just feed you to the Grimm. They do seem to be rather restless these days."*

*At the mention of such a suggestion, the young girl reached deep into her for strength - whether motivated by fear or a drive to impress Salem, the girl did not care - as she forced herself to stand up.*

*"Hmm... Adequate but it will take more than that to even make me remember your name, girl. But I am not without mercy. You may rest until tomorrow, child." Salem said. The girl made to leave the room before Salem gripped her hand tight, "When you return tomorrow, do not show me such a disappointing sight ever again. Understand?"*

*Fear gripped the young girl's heart as she stared deep into her Mistress's jet black eyes. Filled to the brim the fear within her, it was all the young girl could do to respond with a simple nod.*

*"Good. Now, go." Salem said as the girl stumbled her way through the castle before finally reaching her room after what felt like an*

*eternity of wandering. Before long, the girl would drift off to sleep but it wasn't without tears nor was it a pleasant one.*

---

Cinder gasped for air as she finally breached the surface of the underground lake she fell into. Through sheer determination alone, the woman was able to drag herself ashore before blasting her way out of the cave she was in. It wasn't long before she collapsed on the side of the road, her legs having failed her after a gruelling battle with the Spring Maiden and almost drowning.

"Gods, a-are you okay?" a voice said, drawing Cinder's attention. Looking up, it was to see a woman dressed in civilian robes carrying a basket filled with fruits. A gasp escaped her mouth as she saw Cinder's Grimm arm. With a devious smile, Cinder gripped the woman's hand tight as her left eye lit up in flames.

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: And that's a wrap up for Chapter 6. If you're still with me this far, I sincerely thank you for continuing on this journey with me.**

**This chapter was definitely a very fun one for me to write. I hope you guys and gals enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. For me, the first part where they all argued about what to do with Jaune was my favorite part to write and was something I really wanted to write when I started this series. The second thing I really wanted to do was the confrontation scene between Jaune & Pyrrha this chapter. That was fun.**

**Next chapter, we see how the team of "leave Jaune behind" react to his presence. I already have a few interesting scenes in mind. So, stay tuned.**

**As always, fave, follows, and reviews are always appreciated.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall**

## Chapter 8

*The boy tried his best to stifle the cries of despair within him as he sifted through the rubble of what was once his village.*

*" Mommy...? Daddy...? Anybody...?" the boy cried out as he made his way through the charred streets of the village once known as Orleans. The smell of burning flesh was still fresh in the air. The same could be said for the sounds currently raging inside the boy's head, sounds of screaming villagers as they were being mauled by Grimm of every kind.*

*Eventually, the boy reached what was once his home. The place where he had spent idyllic days with his parents and four elder sisters. Much to the boy's dismay, the house was all but destroyed from the fires that raged through the village just the day before. Even though the boy had expected such a result, it did not stop the pain from appearing in his heart.*

*Pushing down the tears, the boy made his way into the charred remains of his home. Stepping inside, he found that everything had been burnt to ashes, from the dinner table he and his family always sat around for dinner to the living room where he and his sisters would spend most of their evenings. All had been burnt to a crisp. All except for their family's prized sword and shield, Crocea Mors, which was hung above the mantle.*

*Jaune didn't know much about Crocea Mors, only that it was wielded by his grandfather during a war many years prior. His mother used to tell him that both blade and shield carried with it history spanning hundreds, maybe even thousands, of years.*

*He had asked his father to train him how to use the blade but every time, his father would always refuse his request. When asked why, the man would say that Jaune wasn't of age yet. That he would train*

*him when he was older. Now, however, the young Arc would never get that chance.*

*Pushing the nearby remains of a couch to the nearby wall, Jaune did his best to climb the charred furniture before retrieving the Arc ancestral blade and shield. As the boy finally pried the weapon off the wall, the boy underestimated how heavy it would be as the weight of the blade and shield combined was too much for the boy as it sent him tumbling to the floor below.*

*"Ow..." the boy whined as he rubbed his back to try and lessen the pain he just suffered. As the young boy started admiring the weapon in his hands, the sound of a window cracking from behind grabbed his attention. Immediately turning around to face the source of the sound, Jaune was met with the snarling face of a Beowolf.*

*Staring death in the face, it was all Jaune could do to lift the blade up as best as he could as the creature of Grimm leapt towards the boy. By a stroke of luck, that action was enough to save the young Arc's life as the Beowolf found itself impaled through the head, killing it instantly.*

*Jaune's breath became ragged as he stared at the disintegrating form of the creature of Grimm in front of him.*

*"That was an impressive stroke of luck, boy." A heavy voice said from behind Jaune. Unfortunately for the young Arc, he was unable to turn around to face the source of the voice as the dying form of the Beowolf fell upon him, cutting off his supply of air until he eventually fell unconscious.*

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The stone wall behind him audibly cracked as he was violently pushed against it by his fellow blonde.

"It's good to see you, too, Yang." Jaune said, a chuckle escaping the smug look on his face, "Love the new arm. Do you get to enjoy the discounts like all the other cripples?"

"My arm's just fine, thanks. As for the perks, I got one with your name on it." Yang said, glaring a hole through the boy she was currently pinning to the wall as she pulled back her mechanical arm.

"Yang, that's enough." Pyrrha said as she held the blonde brawler back.

"Oh, Yang, ever the tough one." Jaune replied, not the least bit fazed by Yang's threat, "So tough that it took Adam exactly one attack to put you down like the dog you are."

"Jaune, stop it!" Pyrrha shouted with a glare of her own. At the mention of the ex-White Fang leader, Yang's grip on the collar of Jaune's shirt loosened. Blake, meanwhile, flinched at the mention of Adam.

"Oh, relax. It's just some witty banter between friends. After all, it's been a few months since-" Jaune managed to say before Yang embedded her fist into the spot beside his head.

"We are *not* friends!" Yang shouted as the blonde seethed with anger.

"Ouch, you wound me, Yang." Jaune said with a small laugh and before the brawler could go any further, Pyrrha spoke up.

"Jaune, you asked for a fight, didn't you?" Pyrrha asked, Jaune's weapon, Crocea Mors, already in hand.

"Hard to fight when I'm pinned to a wall by a maniac, wouldn't you say?" Jaune said. After much convincing, Yang finally let the boy go as Pyrrha tossed him his weapon. The others tensed up as he caught it, fully expecting him to attack them.

"Sorry to disappoint but I know when the odds are against me." Jaune said as he clipped Crocea Mors to his side.

"Funny, considering you refused to surrender even when you were at a disadvantage back then." Weiss said, the girl ready to act in the case that things go wrong.

"Never said I was smart enough to act on it." Jaune said as he made his way to the nearby open field.

"I'd like to go on record to say that this is a *terrible* idea." Weiss said as Pyrrha took her place on the other side of the field.

"Preaching to the choir here, Weiss-cream." Yang said before turning her attention to Ruby, "Are you sure this is the best idea, Rubes?"

"Honestly, I don't know." Ruby said, surprising Yang with her honesty.

"Then, why-?"

"Because, like I said, he would have done the same for me if the roles were reversed." Ruby said with a nod, "And he's been there. He might know something that could help us beat Salem."

"Not according to what Ren told me. According to that jackass, Salem's immortal. Her head was literally smashed to pieces and she got back up like it was nothing." Yang said much to the surprise of Weiss and Blake.

"Well, now we have the relics. Hopefully, they'll be able to show us a way to stop Salem once and for all." Ruby said as the fight between Jaune and Pyrrha began.

---

Pyrrha dodged a swipe aimed at her head before hastily bringing up her shield to block the kick aimed at her head. Even with her quick response, Pyrrha was surprised at the force of Jaune's attack as the redhead was forced back a few inches.

Not letting the girl recover even the slightest, Jaune pressed on with his attack as his blade clashed with her own.

" *He wasn't kidding. He really was holding back in Beacon.*" Pyrrha thought to herself as the two ex-partners continued exchanging blows. Jumping back from one of his attacks, Pyrrha shifted Milo into its javelin form as the girl hoped to take advantage of its longer reach. As soon as the weapon in her hand finished shifting, Pyrrha immediately went in for the attack with a stab directed at Jaune's chest.

The blonde, meanwhile, countered by deflecting the javelin to the side as he raised his blade up high. A moment later, Jaune brought it crashing down towards Pyrrha who had the presence of mind to block the attack with both her javelin and shield.

" *His strikes are heavier than I remembered, too. Much heavier.*" Pyrrha thought to herself just as Jaune pulled back his sword. The blonde then followed up with a devastating kick towards the girl's stomach that sent her skidding back a few feet.

Jaune immediately followed up with a charge as he followed up with a flurry of strikes that has forced the Invincible Girl to be on the defensive.

Jumping back a fair distance, Pyrrha took what little time she had to recover her bearings as she shifted Milo back into its xiphos form. Just in time, too as Jaune suddenly appeared in front of her, eyes focused and intent on defeating her.

" *This doesn't seem to be working.*" Pyrrha thought to herself before she threw her shield to the ground as her hands glowed with her black aura. Just as the blades of the two ex-partners clashed once more, Pyrrha surprised Jaune by diverting his blade to the side as she broke through his guard before delivering an aura-enhanced strike to his stomach with her elbow. The blow was effective enough that it sent the blonde staggering back a few feet.

Pyrrha, however, chose to continue her assault as she delivered a devastating flurry of attacks. Jaune soon found himself unable to

keep up with the girl's sudden shift, with the blonde only managing to parry the girl's attacks by the skin of his teeth.

Eventually, however, fatigue caught up with the blonde as Pyrrha managed to disarm him with a quick swipe of her sword before delivering a low kick that sent Jaune sprawling to the ground.

The blonde immediately made to sit up but was halted in his tracks as Pyrrha pointed the tip of her blade at the boy's throat.

"You lose, Jaune." Pyrrha said through uneven breaths.

"Tch, certainly seems that way." Jaune said as he wiped the spit from his mouth.

"So, now will you help us defeat Salem?" Pyrrha asked, her weapon still pointed at her former partner.

"I *told* you, this is a fool's errand. Salem can't be killed." Jaune said, an annoyed look on his face.

"Even so, we have to at least try." Pyrrha said as she withdrew her weapon before offering the blonde her hand.

"A deal's a deal, I guess." Jaune said, swatting the girl's hand away before he got up and collected his sword.

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Pressing the button on the vending machine, Jaune waited as his drink slowly fell to the opening. Grabbing it, the blonde let out an audible sigh.

"Something you want to say, Ozpin?" Jaune asked as he turned to face the young boy beside him, "Or is it Oscar now?"

"You may call me whatever you wish, Mr Arc. Either name is fine with me." the boy said, the tone of his voice not quite matching his young appearance.

"Then I guess you wouldn't mind it if I called you Ozma, would you?" Jaune asked, his blue eyes locking with Oscar's hazel-colored ones. If he was bothered by it, Oscar showed not outward reaction.

"It seems Salem's told you at least that much. Which brings me to one of the reasons as to why I'm speaking to you now: What *else* has she told you about our shared history?" Oscar asked.

"Are you sure you want to have this discussion now? Wouldn't it be best to talk about this with the rest?" Jaune said as the blonde started making his way towards the rest of the group, "In fact, why don't we-"

Almost immediately, Jaune's path was blocked as Oscar held his cane against the boy's body.

"I feel that would be a... *poor* decision." the boy said as his eyes glowed a threatening green.

"And there it is." Jaune said as he leaned against the vending machine beside him, "You know, she told us how fond you were of keeping secrets. Especially from those you call allies."

"I only do so because doing the opposite would bring no real benefit. There is no need to burden them with knowledge they can do nothing about." Oscar said as he lowered his cane. Jaune barked out a mocking laugh at the boy's statement.

"She *also* told us how you like to assume what's best for everyone. How manipulative you can be, especially if you think it would bring you closer to your goals." Jaune said, taking a sip from the bottle in his hand before continuing, "Well, that and the fact that you would stoop so low as to kill your own children."

*That* particular statement received a reaction from Oscar as the boy looked away in shame.

"... It's nothing, Oscar." the boy said, "Salem lied to him, as she always does with those who serve her."

"Well, it *is* your word against hers, after all. Who's to say which of you is the liar, right?" Jaune said, a chuckle escaping his lips, "The monster or the immortal. A tough choice, don't you think?"

"And yet, you chose to follow Salem all this time." Oscar said, "Why is that?"

"I'm not loyal to *Salem*, old man." Jaune said, a small frown on his face.

"No, of course not. You were loyal to the Fall Maiden, were you not?" Oscar said, earning a low growl from the blonde, "What was her name, again? There have been so many that she's become the latest in the line of fools to die for Salem."

"You should watch your words, Ozpin. You might have been a threat when you were the headmaster of Beacon but as you are now, you're nothing more than deadweight." Jaune said, the boy's breathing unknowingly becoming heavy.

"And *you* should remember your place, Mr Arc. Unlike the young Ms Rose, I am not so naive as to place *any* sort of trust in you nor do I believe your involvement to be necessary whatsoever." Oscar said, the two boys glaring at one another, "One step out of line and you'll find yourself reunited with that Fall Maiden you were hopelessly following around."

Any further words between the two boys was halted by the announcement that their train to Argus was ready for departure.

"Let's hope for *your* sake, Ozpin, that your secrets aren't the reason for our downfall." Jaune said as he made his way towards the rest of the group with Oscar trailing after the blonde soon after.

---

"So, Jaune... You want the top bunk or the bottom bunk?" Nora asked as the four teens were settling into their room in the train.

"I'm fine with whatever." the blonde said as he crawled into one of the bottom bunks.

"Oh... Okay..." Nora said, a weak smile on her face. Shaking her head, the ginger tried to another attempt at starting a conversation with her former team leader, "So, I was thinking, since it's been a while, maybe this would be a good time for a good ol' fashioned bonding session?"

"That sounds like-"

"The dumbest thing you could have said today." Jaune said as he laid on his bed with his feet propped up, "We're on a train heading to Argus with a chance of being attacked by Grimm. Which of those things make you think your suggestion of a 'bonding session' is in any way a good idea?"

"Oh, well... I just... thought..." Nora said, the ginger unable to find the words to finish her sentence. Scowling at how his childhood friend was just treated, Ren turned towards the blonde.

"Jaune, she was just trying to-" the boy's words were cut off as explosions were heard coming from on top of the train.

"What was that?" Pyrrha asked as the train shook from side to side.

" *Obviously*, we're being attacked by Grimm." Jaune said, the boy not moving from his current position. Almost immediately, Pyrrha, Ren, and Nora sprung into action as they took out their weapons and were about to head out into battle before they stopped at the doorway leading to their room.

"Are you going to join us?" Ren asked, a small frown on his face.

"Nah. You guys have it handled, right?" Jaune said, not even bothering to face his former team, "After all, nothing can go wrong with the Invincible Girl by your side."

"Jaune, you-" Ren started to say before Pyrrha held the boy back.

"Forget it, let's go. They need all the help they can get up there." Pyrrha said as she and Ren immediately went to join the fray. Nora, meanwhile, chose to stay back as a sad smile was plastered on her face.

"Well, see you later, Jaune." Nora said. When she received no response, the girl went to join the rest of her team, a dejected look on her face.

"See you later, Nora." the blonde finally replied. Unknown to him, the girl's smile became just a little less sad.

---

"Alright, alright. Calm down, ya big baby." Jaune grumbled as he used his semblance to heal the huntsman's broken arm, "How a bunch of kids - *unlicensed* kids, by the way - managed to escape the battle unscathed while a fully trained huntsman wasn't, I'll never know."

"That's a pretty... smart mouth on you, kid." the man said as he groaned in pain.

"You're welcome." Jaune said as the boy finished healing the man's arm before joining the rest of the group. Noticing the heavy air around them, the blonde spoke up, "What's up with you guys?"

"We were planning on using Ren's Semblance to mask everyone on this train but..." Nora trailed off, a troubled look on his face.

"He might not be able to cover such a wide area." Pyrrha said, finishing the girl's sentence.

"No problem there. I can help with that." Jaune said.

"What do you mean?" Pyrrha asked

"My Semblance. It can amplify the Semblance of others." Jaune said, much to the surprise of everyone present, "Shouldn't be too hard to amplify Ren's Semblance."

"What? Why didn't you tell us before?" Weiss asked.

"Nobody ever asked me." Jaune said with a shrug.

"But back in Beacon, you told us it was a healing Semblance." Pyrrha said.

"What part of undercover spy don't you get?" Jaune asked with a raised eyebrow as he stared at the redhead.

"Thank you, Jaune!" Nora shouted as the girl gave the blonde a tight hug.

"Get off." the blonde said, pushing the ginger girl away.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news but we have another problem to worry about." Oscar said, as the boy approached the group, "The relic is... the one attracting the Grimm towards us at the moment."

"What? Is this true?" Weiss asked as Oscar responded with a nod.

"You didn't think to tell us this before? Why?!" Yang asked, anger in her voice evident.

"Ozpin keeping important secrets from his allies? By the Gods, who would have thought such a thing possible?" Jaune said with a laugh, "Anything else you would like to share with us before we proceed, Ozma?"

"Ozma? Who's Ozma?" Weiss asked as she looked between Jaune and Oscar, "Jaune, who's-"

"Weiss, that's not important right now." Ruby said, inadvertently coming to the aid of the young boy, "What is important is getting everyone on this train safely to Argus. Can we do that?"

Understanding the dire situation at hand, the rest of Team RWBY each responded with a nod of agreement, albeit begrudgingly.

"Good. Ren, you guys evacuate the passengers to the front of the car. Once you're in position, use your Semblance to mask everyone's emotions and get them safely to Argus." Ruby said, "We'll cut off the back of the train and deal with the Grimm. Understood?"

With a nod, Pyrrha, Ren, and Nora then went to the front of the train to complete the task at hand.

"Hey." Jaune said, as he went in to whisper in Ruby's ear, "Watch yourself with the old man. His secrets make mine seem tame in comparison."

"Jaune...? What do you mean by that?" Ruby asked only for the blonde to ignore her.

"See you in Argus, ladies. Try not to lose any more body parts, Yang." Jaune said with a laugh as he went to join his former teammates.

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: Phew, this was a very fun chapter for me to write. From the flashback to the fight between Jaune and Pyrrha to the conversation between Jaune and Ozpin. *Especially* the conversation between Jaune and Ozpin. With this chapter done, that makes it three chapters within a week. This is a personal accomplishment for me and I couldn't be happier. I really hope you guys enjoy reading this as much as I have a great time writing it.**

**Also, I would like to point out that, it may seem like I'm bashing Nora but I'm not. I just thought that's the best way to write this chapter. Nora is in my Top 5 favorite characters in RWBY, after all.**

**As always, fave, follows, and reviews are always welcome.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall**

## Chapter 9

**A/N: Special shoutout to Guest User Ouroborosdragon for their constant Guest Reviews. I really appreciate it, kind stranger. To respond, I thank you for pointing all that you said and I promise you, I did not overlook any of those facts you stated. I will do my best to address them in future chapters.**

**Now, on to the chapter!**

---

*" Happy Birthday!" Jaune said, the two of them gathered in Cinder's room as he handed her a small rectangle box.*

*"... What?" Cinder asked as she stared at the box in Jaune's hand.*

*" It's your birthday so, I bought you a gift." Jaune said, the boy's hands still outstretched.*

*" How do you know it's my birthday?" Cinder asked, " I don't even know when my birthday is."*

*" Well, I obviously don't know when it is exactly but I'm just making it today since it was four years ago today that we met each other for the first time." Jaune said, the smile on his face not wavering, "Makes it more convenient, doesn't it?"*

*" I fail to see the logic behind that." Cinder said as Jaune rolled his eyes at her.*

*" So, are you going to accept this gift or not?" Jaune asked.*

*" What's in it?"*

*" If I told you, then it wouldn't be a surprise, would it?" Jaune said, "Boy, you are awful at social interactions, aren't you?"*

*" Shut up. Give me that." Cinder said as she snatched the gift from the blonde's hand. A smile formed on her face as she opened the gift Jaune had just given her. It was a amber necklace with a pendant of the sun, "It's... beautiful. I don't get it but I like it."*

*" It's the sun."*

*" Yes, I understood that part."*

*" It shines light on all of Remnant."*

*" Truly, you are a wealth of knowledge, Jaune." Cinder said, rolling her eyes at the boy as she admired the gift she just received.*

*" What I'm trying to say is... that... um..." Jaune coughed as the blonde started to blush, "You're my Sun and that without you, my whole world would be dark."*

*As those words left the boy's mouth, Cinder looked up slowly from her gift as a look of disbelief had plastered itself on her face. Disbelief at what she had just heard with her own ears. A few seconds of silence passed before...*

*" Hahahahaha! That was the cheesiest and most embarrassing thing I've ever had the pleasure of hearing!" Cinder said, the girl erupting in uproarious laughter as she clutched her stomach in pain, "Who even told you to say that?"*

*" Tyrion. I heard him talking to himself like that about Salem and I decided to steal it." Jaune said as he covered his face in embarrassment.*

*" That's where you went wrong: Using Tyrion as an example for anything other than murder." Cinder said as she held back from laughing any further, "But it is a very beautiful gift. Thank you."*

*" Yeah? You really think so?" Jaune asked as Cinder responded with a warm smile and a nod, "Here, let me help you put it on."*

*" Thank you." Cinder said, the girl pulling away her hair, revealing the back of her neck as Jaune clasped the jewelry around it.*

*" There you go." Jaune said as he took a few steps back.*

*" How do I look?" Cinder asked as she stood up to parade her gift.*

*" Absolutely beautiful." Jaune said before the two of them shared a deep kiss.*

*" Where did you even buy this, anyway?" Cinder asked as she sat back down once more.*

*" I commissioned it from a blacksmith in Mistral." Jaune said.*

*" It must have cost a lot."*

*" Nah, not really. It was someone on Tyrian's hit list. I managed to convince him to let me ask the blacksmith for two more jobs before killing him." Jaune said, "All it cost me was my time, that's all."*

*" Wait, two? What's the other one?" Cinder asked before Jaune grabbed another gift from nearby.*

*" Ta-da, I got us a pair of matching necklaces." Jaune said as he opened the gift he got himself. Only this time, instead of the sun, the pendant was the moon in all its cracked glory.*

*" Thank you, Jaune, for the very thoughtful gifts. I couldn't have asked for anything more today." Cinder as the two of them embraced each other.*

---

The living room was filled with a tense silence as Pyrrha, Ren, and Nora were in the midst of processing what Ruby and her team had learned through the Relic of Knowledge. All sorts of emotions were running through their minds - anger and frustration, mostly - but deep

down, a small amount of despair were beginning to form within the three of them. The only one who didn't share that sentiment was-

"Hahahahaha!" Jaune laughed aloud as every face in the room turned towards the blonde.

"I'm sorry, is there something funny about this whole situation, Jaune?" Yang asked, an annoyed frown on her face.

"Funny? No, this whole thing isn't funny. It's downright hilarious." Jaune said as he wiped away a tear from his eyes.

"Would you care to elaborate?" Weiss asked. Turning his attention towards the heiress, the smile on Jaune's face immediately disappeared.

"It's hilarious because Salem was right. Everything you've just told us was the same crap Salem told me so long ago. I had my doubts, naturally because who wouldn't, right?" Jaune said, anger in his voice evident, "What makes this whole thing funnier is that Salem is a lot of things and trust me, she is *every* bit the monster you can imagine but as it turns out, she's not a liar. Imagine that, a monster whose one good virtue is honesty."

"Is there a point to all this?" Yang asked.

"Yeah, that I tried to tell you - *all* of you - that this whole mission was pointless from the very beginning." Jaune said as he got up from the couch, "But no, you just *had* to doubt me, didn't you? Talking about how we had to 'at least try everything in our power to stop Salem'. Now look where that's gotten you. A literal Spirit of Knowledge had to tell you what I've been saying like I'm some kind of broken record."

As the boy said that, he made to leave the room.

"Jaune, where are you going?" Ruby asked.

"Relax, I'm just going for a walk. Clear my head from all this crap." Jaune said before the boy slammed the door shut behind him. Nobody tried to stop the blonde from leaving. Even Nora was frustrated with this development, the ginger stomping her way to the second floor of the house.

"Nora, wait-" Ruby started to say only for Ren to hold the girl back.

"Ruby, I think... it's best if we have some time to think..." Ren said with a shake of his head as he went to join his partner, "Alone."

"Knock, knock. Mama Nikos is back with dinner." a voice said from the door, startling the girls of Team RWBY as a woman with red hair came barreling through. The woman, dressed in a snow stained black and red jacket, was carrying with her two full bags of groceries, "Is everything alright? I just saw Jaune storming off with a frightening look on... his... face..."

The woman trailed off as she noticed the somber mood that was currently present in her living room. Recovering quickly, Pyrrha immediately went to assist her mother with the bag in her hands.

"Is everything alright?" asked the elder Nikos.

"Mother, please, let me help you with that." Pyrrha said before the woman sidestepped away from her.

"Oh, thank you, dear but it's fine." the woman said, a warm smile on her face before her attention was drawn towards the four members of Team RWBY. Gasping, the woman quickly placed the bags in her hands down on the nearby table, "Are these girls Team RWBY?! Oh, Pyrrha's told me so much about you!"

"Um... hello..." Ruby said, a nervous smile on her face as she greeted Pyrrha's mother.

"Oh, you must be Ruby! My daughter mentioned you were a good friend but she never said you were adorable!" the woman said as

she gave the young girl a giant hug, much to the amusement of the rest of her team.

"A-adorable...?" Ruby managed to squeak out as she tried in vain to escape the elder woman's grasp.

"I do apologize for not being here to greet you. I was busy with work, you see, and was only able to greet Pyrrha's team when they arrived." the woman said, letting the young girl go before turning to face the other members of Team RWBY, "This must be your team members."

"Yes, we are, Mrs Nikos. Good evening. I'm Weiss, this is Yang, and that is Blake." the heiress said as she bowed her head towards the woman, "We are terribly sorry for the intrusion."

"Oh, stop it, dear. It's no trouble at all." the woman said before giving Weiss a tight hug, "I'm just so happy to see how many friends my darling Pyrrha's made ever since she started going to Beacon. She was never the social type, you see, so when she called me to talk about all the wonderful things she did with her friends in Beacon, I could hardly contain myself."

"Mother, please. This is hardly to talk about the past." Pyrrha said, an embarrassed blush on her face as she carried the groceries into the kitchen.

"Oh, hush. It's not everyday I get to meet any of your friends now, is it?" the woman said before she pulled Ruby and Weiss close, "Now, who wants to see baby pictures?"

As the woman pulled out the album, none of the girls of Team RWBY nor her own mother noticed Pyrrha hiding in a corner, trying her best to shield her face.

---

Jaune was silent as he walked through the bustling streets of Argus, the blonde's mind currently running a hundred miles a minute as he

thought back on everything that's happened in the past few weeks.

From making a deal with Raven - the actual Spring Maiden instead of that scrub who was following her around - to the battle of Haven and now to here in the seaside city of Argus. The boy was so lost in thought that he before he realized it, he had reached a park that overlooked the ocean.

Letting out a tired sigh, the blonde took a seat on an empty bench nearby as he eyed the people around him, each of them blissfully unaware of things going on behind the scenes. As the seconds passed, Jaune reached into his shirt before taking out the necklace he had bought all those years ago.

"You would have hated this place, I can tell." Jaune said aloud as he held the pendant of the cracked moon in his hands, "People laughing and complaining about things that don't matter. Kids screaming because of the smallest inconveniences. I don't think you'd have lasted a day here without burning this whole park down."

Memories of a time long past came back to him at that moment. Memories where of him killing Grimm and raiding villages on Salem's orders. Chaos and pain were all that he knew during that period of his life. More often than not, the pain came from Tyrian and Salem.

Jaune could admit to the fact that his life began to change - a small change but a change nonetheless - after meeting Cinder. A smile formed on the boy's face as he thought back to their first meeting. The two of them didn't always get along but over time, they began to trust one another and eventually, they fell in love. It wasn't something Salem approved of but as long as we retrieved for her the Relics and the Maidens, Salem was satisfied.

"Gods, I wish you were with me." Jaune said as he stared at the pendant in his hand. Before long and without realizing it, tears started filling the boy's eyes, "I miss you... so much."

The buzzing of the scroll in his pocket interrupted his train of thought. Sighing, the boy wiped away the tears on his face before he took out his scroll as he read the text he had just received from Pyrrha.

" *Jaune, Oscar is missing. Please keep an eye out for him.*"

"Seriously?" Jaune spoke aloud as he let out a tired sigh. Putting the scroll away, the boy was about to get up before a familiar voice called out his name.

"Jaune." Oscar called out as Jaune noticed the boy's new outfit. Instead of his regular clothes, the boy now wore an olive coat over a white shirt, black trousers and a pair of red boots, "I... didn't expect to run into you here."

"Nice outfit. Where'd you get it?" Jaune asked as the boy took a seat beside him.

"From a shop down the road. I figured if we're really going to Atlas, I might as well buy something to keep me warm."

"With what money?" Jaune asked.

"Qrow's. I found him blackout drunk so I figured, if he has enough money to do that, I'm sure he wouldn't mind me borrowing some for a pair of new clothes." Oscar said as Jaune snorted at the boy's actions.

"I'm pretty sure you just wasted the man's cash for nothing." Jaune said as he tucked away his necklace, "It's impossible for us to get to Atlas as long as that shortstack is in charge."

"Oh... right..." Oscar said as he looked down at his feet. An awkward silence passed before Jaune spoke again.

"Heard anything from the old man lately? Maybe *he* has a plan."

"To be honest, he's been quiet ever since we set foot in Argus." Oscar replied, "I've been talking to him but he just hasn't responded."

It's like he was... never there..."

"Oh, he's there, alright. He's just being a fucking *coward* to do anything." Jaune said, a scowl on his face, "Especially since he's lost the advantage of being able to manipulate everyone with his lies."

"It sounds like you... *really* don't like him..." Oscar said.

"At this point, who doesn't?" Jaune said as his scroll buzzed with another incoming text message. Standing up, the blonde then looked down at the boy beside him, "Come on, the side characters are looking for you."

"S-side characters?" Oscar asked as Jaune started to leave him behind, "J-Jaune, wait for me!"

---

"J-Jaune, wait for me!"

As soon as that name reached her ears, the woman immediately turned her head in search of the source.

"Jaune..." the blonde woman whispered as memories of a time long forgotten came rushing back to her. Memories of a young boy, her baby brother, chasing her around the backyard of her old home. Memories of them living together, as a family in a village on the outskirts of Vale.

As the woman scanned the crowd, her eyes zeroed in on two boys, one with blonde hair and the other with brown. The blonde haired boy was wearing a black coat and he was the one the woman was focusing on. As she rushed through the crowd, small drops of tears began to fill her eyes.

"Jaune, is that... really you...?" the woman whispered to herself, her hand outstretched as the two boys grew further and further away from her. In the end, the woman pulled her hand back with a shake

of her head, "No, of course not. You died during the Grimm attack on our village."

"Saphron! There you are!" a voice called out. Turning around, Saphron saw that the source of the voice was her wife, Terra, with their infant son in her hands, "You said you were waiting by the benches. We were looking everywhere for you."

"Right, sorry. I just... got distracted..." Saphron said as she wiped away a tear.

"Saphron? Honey, are you okay?" Terra asked, a worried look on her face.

"Y-yeah, I'm fine. I just thought I saw someone I knew, that's all." Saphron said even as her expression said otherwise.

"Saphron, you know you can talk to me if anything's bothering you, right?" Terra said as the boy in her hands started grabbing for her glasses.

"I know that but I'm fine. I promise." the woman said as she took her son into her arms, "You believe me, don't you?"

The baby only laughed in response as Saphron held him.

"Well, if you say so. Now, come on, it's almost dinnertime and I'm starving." Terra said as the family of three started making their way back home, "What are we gonna be eating tonight?"

"Oh, I don't know... What do you want to eat tonight?" Saphron said as she pulled the baby close to hear ears. After a few seconds, the woman then turned to her wife and said, "Well, our beautiful baby boy says he wants to eat meatloaf tonight."

"Really? That baby said all that?" Terra asked.

"He sure did. After all, Jaune is the smartest and cutest baby in Argus." Saphron said, as the couple shared a laugh.

---

"I'm worried about Oscar." Ruby said as she and the rest of the group gathered outside the Nikos house.

"We all are, Ruby." Pyrrha said as she placed a comforting hand on the girl's shoulder.

"He'll be fine, I'm sure." Yang added as she shared a nod with her sister, "After all, Ozpin is always with him. Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing is a different subject."

"Yeah, but-"

"Hey, you side characters looking for someone?" A voice said, cutting Ruby off from whatever she was about to say. Turning her attention to the source of the voice, Ruby was filled with joy at the sight of Jaune and Oscar walking towards them.

"Oscar!" Ruby shouted before she crashed into the boy with the help of her Semblance. Looking up at the blonde, Ruby asked, "Jaune, where did you find him?"

"I didn't." Jaune said as he took a few steps back to avoid being crushed by everyone else who was happy to see Oscar, " *He found me .*"

"And where have *you* been all day?" Pyrrha asked.

"Also, did he just call us side characters?" Weiss asked from the side.

"Does it matter? I'm here now, right?" Jaune replied.

"Thank you, Jaune!" Nora said as the girl gave the blonde a tight hug.

"For what? I told you, he was the one who found me." Jaune said as he pushed the girl away.

"Well, yeah but also thanks for... you know..." Nora said, letting her sentence trail off.

"Not leaving?" Jaune asked, scoffing at the accusation that went unsaid, "Where else am I supposed to go? Back to Salem?"

"Still, I'm glad you stayed." Nora said, a beaming smile on the girl's face even as the blonde rolled his eyes at her.

"This does not, however, solve our original problem." Weiss said, inadvertently dampening the mood, "Namely, how do we get to Atlas?"

"Have all of you considered just giving up this stupid mission of yours and retiring to a beach in Vacuo?" Jaune asked before being met with deadpan stares from everyone around him, "Alright, message received. If that's the case, then your best bet would be to steal an airship from the Atlas military base."

"... What?" Weiss asked, the girl mirroring the same confused expression on everyone else's face.

---

The airship descended into the clearing below smoothly. As soon as it landed, the hatch on the side opened to reveal a petite woman with mismatched colored eyes before her outfit changed in a shimmer of broken glass.

"Excellent work, Neo. With this, it shouldn't prove *too* difficult in getting to Atlas." Cinder said as she made her way towards the aircraft. Stepping off the aircraft, Neo then made use of her Semblance to disguise the airship before the two women hopped on board.

"Wait for me, Jaune." Cinder said as she gripped the sun pendant around her neck, "I'm coming for you."

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: Phew, that's a wrap for Chapter 8. This was another fun chapter for me to write. Highlights for me this chapter specifically were the flashback in the beginning and the scene where Saphron heard the name 'Jaune'. That was something I just wanted to put in that came to me last minute.**

**As for the chapter, I hope you guys liked it. Not much action here but there will be some next chapter. I'm thinking of making the whole 'steal an airship' thing into two chapters. I feel it would be better that way. So, stay tuned for that.**

**As always, faves, follows, and reviews are always appreciated.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall.**

## Chapter 10

*" I can't believe Ozpin just let us off the hook like that." Jaune said, he and his team leaving the cafeteria behind as all four members of Team JNPR were covered in all sorts of food and drinks.*

*" It's a good thing he did." Nora said as the girl slurped up the last bits of soda from her finger, "Professor Goodwitch was damn near ready to kill us back there."*

*" If that did happen, I just want you to know that I'll be cremating you, Nora." Jaune said as the ginger girl responded with a gasp.*

*" How could you be so heartless, Jaune?" Nora cried out as the girl jokingly gripped her chest tight.*

*" Hey, I'm not spending any of my hard-earned money on a coffin for you." Jaune said with a shrug and a smirk, "You'd be dead, anyway, so it's not like you could stop me."*

*" Ren! Jaune's being mean again!" the girl said as she hugged her partner tight, "Do something about it!"*

*" It's alright, Nora. If Jaune won't buy you a coffin, I will." the boy said with a nod.*

*" Yay! You're the best, Ren, unlike a certain someone. " Nora said, the girl sticking her tongue out at her team leader before the four teens shared a laugh.*

*" So, classes are over for the week." Jaune said as the four teens walked through Beacon's courtyard, "Anything you guys wanna do?"*

*" We could go watch a movie." Pyrrha said, the girl wearing a smile as she enjoyed the company of her teammates.*

*" Oh, that's a good idea!" Nora said, the girl running ahead before rounding on her team with a giant smile on her face, "And I know just the movie we're going to watch."*

*Both Jaune and Ren stared at the ginger-haired girl, neither of them wanting to speak. The silence lasted for a few seconds as the four members of Team JNPR stood in the middle of the courtyard in awkward silence before Pyrrha spoke up, confused as to why her team members suddenly went silent.*

*" What movie are we going to watch, Nora?" Pyrrha asked as Jaune and Ren lightly cursed at her.*

*" Duh, we're going to watch the movie that just came out, Vindicators 2: Age of Doom-Nomitron!" Nora exclaimed.*

*" I haven't seen the first one yet." Jaune said as Nora rounded on the blonde.*

*" You haven't-?! Are you insane?! How could you not have seen the first Vindicators?!" Nora shouted as she shook her team leader back and forth.*

*" Actually, neither have I." Pyrrha said, a look of slight guilt on her face. A look of disgust and disbelief formed on Nora's face as the girl slowly slumped to the ground.*

*" Heathens... I'm on a team with... uncultured heathens..." the girl muttered to herself. Ren went to comfort the girl but was stopped in his tracks as Nora immediately sprung back up. Gripping the hands of both Pyrrha and Jaune, the girl said, "It's fine, it's fine. We can fix this. We'll just watch the first one after we watch the second one later."*

*" You want us to watch the first one..." Jaune said.*

*"... after we watch the second one...?" Pyrrha said, finishing the blonde's sentence.*

*" That's correct." Nora replied as the girl nodded vigorously.*

*" Sure, why not?" Jaune said with a shrug as Pyrrha nodded along.*

*" Ren, you're coming, right?" Nora asked. Her partner made to answer the girl's question before he was immediately interrupted, "Great! So, we'll take a shower and then quickly make our way to Vale. Got it?"*

*Jaune was about to answer the girl's question before his scroll beeped. Taking it out, the blonde read the text he just received before he turned to face his teammates.*

*" I'll see you guys at the dorm. I just have to make a quick trip to the CCT Tower." Jaune said*

*" Now? You're still covered in food." Ren said, a small frown on his face, "Shouldn't you at least freshen up first?"*

*" Nah, it's fine. It's just something I need to do real quick." Jaune said.*

*" Well, alright. We'll see you at the dorm."*

*" I can keep you company, if you want." Pyrrha said, a small smile on the girl's face.*

*" No, it's fine. Thanks, anyway, Pyr." Jaune said*

*" Are you sure? I don't-"*

*" I said it's fine, Pyrrha." the blonde said, cutting his partner off.*

*" O-oh, okay... Sorry, I didn't mean to push." the girl said, the girl taking a small step back. Even Ren and Nora were slightly taken aback by their team leader's small outburst.*

*" No, it's just... this shouldn't take too long and I don't want to bother you." Jaune said, looking away from his team as he pocketed his*

*scroll, "I'll see you guys later, alright?"*

*" I wonder what that was about...?" Ren said.*

*" It's probably nothing. He did say it was just a quick call, after all." Nora said before she started dragging both Ren and Pyrrha towards the dorms, "Come on, let's go take a shower. Ants are starting to crawl up my leg and I am not a fan of this feeling."*

*Even as the three teens reach their dorm room, Pyrrha found herself unable to forget the brief look of anger in Jaune's eyes. Eventually, the small incident was forgotten as Team JNPR enjoyed their night out in Vale.*

---

"You're not actually serious about stealing an airship, are you?" Weiss asked as the group gathered around the Nikos dinner table.

"I fail to see the reasons on why we *shouldn't* steal an airship." Jaune said as he took in another spoonful of rice, "Do you?"

"Yes! There's a lot of reasons why this is a terrible idea!" Weiss said, the girl standing up from her seat as she glared at the blonde, "For one thing, it's the Atlas military we're talking about here!"

"It's just the Atlas Military. Nothing much to worry about there." Jaune said with an easygoing shrug.

"You've done all this before?" Ren asked.

"Well, duh. I wouldn't have suggested it if I wasn't confident it would work out."

"Setting your experience in crime aside, this is still the Atlas Military, Jaune." Pyrrha said, the girl upset at even the thought of committing such a crime, "Surely they would have security systems in place to prevent such an act."

"I don't doubt it but I'm sure it'll be easy." Jaune said, shrugging aside any worries at hand, "I mean, it won't be as easy as breaking past SDC security but it'll be fine nonetheless."

"I'd like to circle back to that comment you just made about SDC security." Weiss said from the side.

"Nevermind that. Jaune, what's your plan here?" Ruby asked before Qrow cut in.

"Alright, that's enough. I've been minding my own business for a while now but as the only *licensed* huntsman here, I feel like I need to say something." the man said as he tried his best to rub away the headache he was feeling, "What you kids are suggesting is... beyond reckless. I don't care if you've done it before, kid, but I'm not letting any of my nieces become criminals if I can help it!"

"Uncle Qrow, I think-"

"I'm *serious*, Ruby!" the man said, cutting the girl off as he sent a glare her way, "Even if we ignore the fact that this is the Atlas Military we're talking about, you guys are just kids. If this thing goes south - and trust me, it *will* - there won't be anything any of us here can do about it. Just take my advice and... drop it, alright?"

Silence reigned as everyone - except Jaune - around the dinner table wore an expression of defeat on their face before Ruby finally spoke.

"No." the girl said, standing up with a defiant look on her face.

"Ruby-" Qrow started to say before being cut off.

"I said *no*. We may be kids but we've come this far, haven't we? Most of the time, we didn't even *need* your help!" the girl said before gesturing towards Jaune, "If Jaune says he has a plan, then I think it's best for all of us to hear him out. If it's a sound plan, then we're going through with it whether you're with us or you're not."

Qrow stared at his niece in shock for a few seconds before letting out a defeated sigh. The man then took out his flask but before he could take a sip, Yang snatched it away from him.

"I think you've had enough to drink for one day, Uncle Qrow." the blonde said as her uncle let out a groan.

"Fine. I'll help you dumb kids help steal a stupid airship from the goddamn Atlas Military." Qrow said even as Ruby frowned at the man's choice of words. The girl then turned back towards Jaune.

"Jaune, you said you had a plan, right?" Ruby asked as the boy nodded in response.

"That's right. First, I'll need some sugar, some spice, and something that's-"

"Wait, hold on." Ruby said, the girl holding her hands up, "What are these ingredients for?"

"It's to make a homemade bomb, obviously. I would buy some but I doubt the grocery down the street sells any that's readily available." the boy said even as those around him looked at him in shock.

"A... bomb...? Why do you need a bomb?" Weiss asked.

"Why else? To blow up the Atlesian Military base, duh." Jaune replied, his head tilting in confusion at the heiress's question.

"Jaune, no! We're not blowing anything up!" Pyrrha said.

"Why not? You guys use explosions all the time!" the blonde argued.

"That's for when we're facing Grimm! A completely different story, you idiot!" Weiss said as the girl rubbed her face in frustration.

"Well, what about Blake? You let her blow stuff up!" Jaune said, pointing to the girl in question.

"What? No, I don't!" the girl said, surprised at the sudden accusation.

"Oh, right... I forgot you weren't a terrorist anymore." Jaune said.

"Um, what does he mean by terrorist, dear?" Pyrrha's mother asked.

"It's nothing, mother. He's just joking, that's all." Pyrrha said with a nervous chuckle.

"Not really." the blonde said with a chuckle as Pyrrha glared at him, "Just putting it out there, this whole thing would be a lot easier if you guys would just abandon your morals."

"Jaune, none of us are going to do that." Pyrrha said.

"Your loss." the blonde replied with a shrug.

"Jaune, *focus* . You said you had a plan for all this, right?" Ruby asked, "Would you mind sharing it with the rest of us?"

"Sure, I'll do that." the blonde said, taking another bite of his dinner before continuing, "Just as soon as I hammer down the finer details."

"This was *your* idea in the first place and you're telling me you don't have an actual plan?!" Weiss asked, the heiress growing increasingly annoyed at how easygoing Jaune was being at the moment.

"No, I *have* a plan. One that involves blowing up parts of the base-

"Which we're *not* going to do." Ruby said, cutting him off.

"-which we're not going to do." Jaune said, parroting the girl's words, "Because of that, I'm going to need an hour - two hours, tops - to come up with another plan that *doesn't* involve the Atlesian military suffering any sort of casualty."

"I can already see how great all of this is going to go." Qrow said, the man silently cursing at the absence of his flask.

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As Pyrrha was walking back to her room, she saw that the door to the second floor balcony was open. Her curiosity piqued, the redhead went to close the door before noticing that her ex-partner was currently sitting on one of the chairs set up outside. The blonde was unaware of her presence as he was staring at a pendant of the cracked moon in his hand.

"Jaune?" Pyrrha said, dressed in her red and green pajamas as she poked her head out the door. The blonde jumped slightly in surprise at the girl's sudden appearance.

"Pyrrha! Didn't see you there." the boy said as he quickly tucked the pendant back under his shirt, "Did I wake you?"

"No, you didn't. I just had to go to the toilet, that's all." the girl replied before she gestured to the second chair on the balcony, "May I join you?"

"Hey, it's your home. Who am I to say no?" Jaune said with a chuckle as Pyrrha sat down. The pair sat in silence for a few seconds before Pyrrha spoke up.

"Jaune, this plan of yours... Are you confident that it could work?" the girl asked as the two ex-partners gazed out into the city of Argus.

"I'd give it a seventy-five percent chance of working out." Jaune said with an easy-going shrug.

"And if it doesn't work?"

"If it doesn't work, then we'll probably be arrested." Jaune said, "If *that* happens, they'll either throw us in jail here at Argus or bring us to Atlas. Either way, everything works out."

"Still, stealing a Bullhead? It doesn't... feel very good." Pyrrha said, a worried frown on her face.

"You know, our chance of success would increase exponentially if you guys would let me-"

"No, Jaune, we are *not* blowing anything up." Pyrrha said, not even bothering to look at the blonde before quickly adding, "Nor are we killing anyone on this mission tomorrow."

"Suit yourself. Not sure why you'd choose to make your lives harder." Jaune said.

"What are you doing out here, by the way?" Pyrrha asked, "Nervous about the mission tomorrow?"

"Pfft, as if. What we're going to be doing tomorrow is like riding a bike to me." Jaune said, scoffing at the redhead's accusation, "I just couldn't sleep, that's all..."

Silence reigned for a few minutes as the two former partners gazed out into the city before Pyrrha finally spoke.

"Jaune, what... what do you honestly think our chances are going into all of this?" the girl asked as she looked towards the blonde.

"It's so close to zero that it's not even funny." Jaune replied without any sort of hesitation.

" *Close to zero?*" Pyrrha said, "Then, you still believe-?"

"Don't get the wrong idea, Pyr. We have a better chance of teaching a Grimm to talk than actually beating Salem." Jaune said, a frown on his face, "The *only* reason I believe we have some sort of fighting chance is the relics and even then, I'm still skeptical."

"And yet, you're still here with us." Pyrrha noted, an amused smile on the girl's face.

"Not like I could have just left, right?" Jaune said with a shrug, "Not without you guys bitching about it later or worse, Nora crying a whole waterfall."

"Oh? Is that some concern I hear from you, Jaune?" Pyrrha asked only for the boy to respond with a glare, albeit a half-hearted one.

"I don't remember you being this much of a smartass back when we were in Beacon." Jaune said.

"And I don't remember you being anywhere close to as cruel as you're trying to portray yourself, Jaune." Pyrrha shot back, "All this talk about killing innocent bystanders? It sounds to me like you're forcing yourself to say all that, Jaune, because I don't really believe you'd do those things when it really comes down to it."

"Let's get one thing straight here, Pyrrha, and that's the fact that we've only known each other for less than two years." Jaune said as the boy turned to face his former partner, "Not exactly a lot of time for you to know who I really am, wouldn't you say?"

"Perhaps but I know that everyone out there has the capacity for kindness. Even someone like you, Jaune." Pyrrha said, "No matter how far gone you may think you are."

Jaune went silent at the girl's words as he turned back to gazing out at the city of Argus, the city's bright lights dancing in the night sky.

"After all, if you are as cruel as you claim to be, then you wouldn't have convinced Cinder to spare any of our lives, would you?" Pyrrha said as Jaune's hand went for the pendant around his neck on instinct, an act that did not go unnoticed by the redhead.

"You should get some rest, Pyr. I have a feeling we won't be getting much sleep in the next few days." Jaune said as he got up from his chair before leaving Pyrrha alone on the balcony. A small smile graced the girl's face before she finally went back to her room.

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Jaune was currently whistling a catchy tune to himself as he climbed the ladder of the radio tower, the boy having just effortlessly knocked out a lone guard. Finally reaching the controls, Jaune was about to

start disabling the tower before a thud from behind made him flinch in surprise.

"Hello, Arc." a voice said from behind the blonde.

"Oh, it's just you." the boy said, turning around to face the newcomer before he leaned against the controls of the radio tower, "Is that a new look? Gotta say, I'm kind of digging it."

"Don't play games with me, *human* . I'm here for one person and one person only. Answer my question truthfully and I *might* just let you live. Now tell me," Adam Taurus said as his grip around his weapon tightened, "Where. Is. Blake?!"

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: And that's a wrap for Chapter 9. I hope you guys liked where I went with the final scene, with Jaune being the one who faces Adam instead of Blake. I'm very nervous about what comes next, as it's one of the bigger divergence from canon that I've wanted to do since the beginning. I just hope I can write it somewhat to my satisfaction as well as you guys and gals out there.**

**Not going to spoil what I've decided to do, obviously so just stay tuned and find out in Chapter 10. Hopefully, I can get that out before mid-March. Really excited and nervous to write that one.**

**One thing I did love writing, though, was the flashback for this chapter. That one was fun. Hope y'all liked it.**

**As always, fave, follows, and reviews are always welcome.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall**

## Chapter 11

*" Ugh... I don't think I have it in me to have any more of this stuff..."* Jaune said, the boy dressed in a pair of black shorts and a simple plain red shirt as he spoke as he placed the arcade pizza he and his team had bought back down on the plate all the while trying his best to hold back his lunch.

*" Oh, I don't know. I wouldn't mind another slice."* Pyrrha said, the girl dressed in a casual red blue blouse, jeans, a face mask, a snow cap, and a pair of glasses to disguise herself as she and her team went out into Vale for the day. Taking another slice of the nearby pizza, the redhead happily took another bite out of it.

*" You really don't need to force yourself to eat all this food, Pyr."* Jaune said, gesturing towards the plate of cinnamon sticks, spaghetti, and cheese sticks laid out before them, "That's what we have Nora for. That girl will happily wolf down anything remotely edible."

*" Speaking of, where is she, anyway?"* Pyrrha asked as she looked around the downtown arcade. To answer her question, Jaune simply pointed to an arcade shooter game called House of The Dead where Ren and Nora were currently spending their tokens.

*Ren, dressed in a simple green jacket over a pink button down shirt and a pair of black pants, was killing the enemies with precision and a sense of calmness that only he had. Meanwhile, Nora, the girl having chosen a dark red top to go along with her purple skirt, was jumping all over place as the two partners tried their best to complete the game.*

*Pyrrha couldn't help but laugh at how different yet at the same time how compatible those two were.*

*" You know, we still have a bunch of tokens left. We could play a few more of these games if you want." Jaune said.*

*" No, that's alright. I think I've had my fill, to be honest."*

*" Yeah? Well, we still have some time before we need to head back to Beacon. Any plans?" Jaune asked as he checked his watch.*

*" Jaune, can I... ask about your family?" Pyrrha asked.*

*" My... family?" Jaune repeated, the blonde confused more than surprised at the sudden topic, "Why do you want to know about them?"*

*" You've never really... talked about them to any of us and I get why you wouldn't want to but I just wanted you to know that if there was anything you wanted to talk about, I'm always here for you." Pyrrha said, the red tint on her face getting deeper and deeper before quickly adding, "As your partner, of course! I mean, that's what partners do, right? We help each other out however we can."*

*Jaune let out a small laugh at the girl's small outburst at the end, "It's alright, Pyrrha. I get what you mean. I was just a bit taken aback by what you asked, that's all."*

*" I'm sorry. I'd understand if you don't want to and I-"*

*" It's fine, Pyr. I don't mind telling you about them." Jaune said, waving away the girl's concerns, "Well, my dad was a huntsman. He wasn't as active as he used to be but he did still go on the occasional mission when funds were starting to run low. My mum ran a general store at my village. They weren't the most perfect parents in the world but they did their best and honestly, that's all I could have asked from them. My mom would have liked you, you know?"*

*" M-me?" Pyrrha asked, blushing at the thought of meeting her crush's parents even if they were no longer alive, "A-are you sure...?"*

*" Oh, yeah. You, Nora, and Ruby's team." Jaune replied, "I didn't really have a lot of friends when I was a kid much less any girl friends so I think she would be thrilled to have met you guys."*

*" O-oh, right... That's what you meant..." Pyrrha whispered,, the girl looking away in embarrassment as she chuckled to herself.*

*" Hmm? Did you say something, Pyr?" Jaune asked.*

*" No, it's nothing." Pyrrha said with a wave of her hand.*

*" Now, where was I? Right, my sisters. I had six sisters at the time, seven if you counted the one my mom was pregnant with." Jaune said, causing Pyrrha to recoil in shock.*

*" You had six sisters?!" Pyrrha asked.*

*" Yeah, that's that about reaction I expected." Jaune said with a laugh, "The eldest of us was Saphron and let me just say that she was the worst . I loved her, sure, but she used to pull all sorts of pranks on me. She and Sapphire, my second eldest, would just come up with different ways to torment me with whatever pranks they could come up with. Of course, I was never one to back down from a challenge so I fought back as best I could but that usually ended with all three of us getting our asses kicked by our mom."*

*Pyrrha and Jaune shared a laugh at that, the boy reminiscing back to simpler and happier times.*

*" After Sapphire, there was the twins, Diamond and Pearl. Where Saphron and Sapphire would play pranks on me, these two would cause trouble all over the village and it caused no shortage of headaches for my parents." Jaune said, the boy taking a drink of soda before continuing, "After those two came myself and then a year younger after me was Violet. She kept to herself most of the time and when you couldn't find her at home or at school, you'd more than likely find her at the local library with her nose buried deep in a book. Then finally, there's the youngest of us, Cyan."*

*At the mention of her name, Jaune took a deep breath as he seemed to be reliving a distant and joyful memory. Pyrrha was about to speak up before the blonde continued.*

*"Cyan and I were... close, I suppose. She was the outgoing type, always ready for the next adventure and more often than not, would drag me into it even if I didn't want to." Jaune said, "Usually, that meant coming back home with our clothes drenched in mud and getting an earful from our mom."*

*"They sound like wonderful people." Pyrrha said as Jaune finally finished telling her about his family.*

*"They weren't perfect but they were the best." Jaune said before Ren and Nora appeared before them. The two of them had won just enough tickets to win a warthog plushie that Nora had her eyes on. Once she claimed her prize, the four teens finally went back to Beacon, each of them happy with the day they had just spent together.*

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"Look, if you would just-" Jaune said, as he dodged a sword swing that would have definitely took a huge chunk of his aura, if not outright decapitate him, "- tell me what it is you want, then maybe-"

"I *already* told you what I want!" Adam shouted, growling in frustration at how easily Jaune seemed to duck and weave through his barrage of attacks, "I want to know where Blake is!"

"If I tell you where she is, can you promise me that you're not going to hurt her?" Jaune asked.

"*That* is none of your business, Arc!" Adam shouted once more before the Faunus dashed forward. Unable to react in time, it was all Jaune could do to block the Faunus's attack. Reacting quickly, Jaune delivered a kick towards the man's stomach that successfully put some distance between the two fighters.

"Okay, well, it's obvious that you're planning on killing her so I'm going to continue not telling you where she is." Jaune said, frowning at how little of an impact his previous counterattack had on his opponent. Just then, the sound of a large explosion came from behind the blonde. Adam and Jaune stared at each other for a few seconds, the silence looking like it would drag on forever. Finally, the Faunus became the one to speak first.

"That's her over there, isn't it?" Adam said, looking past Jaune to where the rest of his comrades were supposed to be.

"No. That was just a different group of people." Jaune said, lying as naturally as he breathed. Adam, not believing such an obvious lie, made to run past the blonde only for Jaune to get in his way.

"Out of my way, Arc. Or else." Adam said, the Faunus pointing his weapon at Jaune.

"Look, I think it's obvious from that little exchange we just had would end with at least one of us dead-"

"Hmph. If you think you even have any hope of beating me, then you're even more arrogant than I ever gave you credit for." Adam said, cutting the boy off.

"- *But* even if you did get past me, what's your plan?" Jaune asked in an attempt to buy some time to think of a way to deal with Adam.

"I *told* you, that's-"

"None of my business, I heard you the first time." Jaune said, rolling his eyes at the Faunus, "Hate to break it to you but even if you did reach them, chances are you'd fail to kill Blake even if you wanted to."

"You think a bunch of children would be enough to stand against me?" Adam asked, the man insulted at what he thought Jaune was suggesting.

"Obviously not. No, I'm talking about the veteran huntsman with them." Jaune said, "I mean, I don't know him personally - seems *and* sounds like a dick, if you ask me - but I'd bet good money he knows his way around a fight. After all, this career isn't exactly one where you're expected to grow old, don't you think?"

"Hmph. Even if that were true, I've faced countless huntsmen in my day. What makes you think this will be any different?" Adam asked as he took a step forward.

"Oh, that's an easy question: While you're fighting the huntsman, you'll also have to worry about Ruby and the rest of her gang of meddling kids." Jaune said as the blonde blocked the Faunus's path once more, "I'm pretty sure even someone like *you* would have trouble with those odds."

Adam growled at Jaune's words but even he had to admit that there was some truth to what Jaune was saying.

"What do you suggest, then?" Adam asked, "That I just sit down and talk it out with Blake? That I just let her off with a slap on the wrist for leaving the White Fang? For leaving the cause?! For leaving me?!"

"Sheesh, the red flags on you are practically crimson." Jaune said, "Also, that suggestion of actually sitting down and talking it out doesn't sound like the worst idea out there."

"Hah?"

"What's the alternative?" Jaune asked, "Either you go in there and kill her before getting yourself killed *or* you go in there, you *fail* to kill Blake, *and* you get killed in the process. You might as well just try the peaceful route where nobody gets stabbed."

"Then I'll just wait for them to leave for Atlas. I'll bide my time for a more opportune moment than I have now." Adam countered.

"Atlas? You mean the place where quite possibly every single member of the military has a kill on sight order for Adam Taurus?" Jaune asked, a self-satisfied smirk on his face as Adam seemed to consider the blonde's words, " *That* Atlas?"

"Alright. If I agree to this... ridiculous idea of yours, what would you suggest I do, then?" Adam asked.

"Well, first things first: Give me your weapon." Jaune said as he stretched out his hand.

"You're joking." Adam said, the Faunus clearly not amused by the boy's request.

"Look, if you go in there with the intention of 'talking things out' but you still have your weapon in hand, they're obviously not going to believe a word you say." Jaune said.

"Even if Blake is willing to talk things out, I doubt this would work seeing as I cut off that blonde's arm back during the Fall of Beacon." Adam said.

"Yeah, those were fun times," Jaune said to himself, "But hey, if that's how you feel then what do you have to lose by giving it a shot?"

"You mean *besides* being killed by a bunch of children and a veteran Huntsman?" Adam asked, a single eyebrow raised in question.

"Nah, those guys aren't like that. They may *threaten* to kill you but they'd never have the guts to actually do it." Jaune said as he stared at the coast where Ruby and the rest of the group were waiting for him to come back.

"And I suppose you do?" Adam asked only for Jaune to shrug in response.

"So, what's your answer?" Jaune asked, the boy's hand outstretched once more. Adam stared at the sword in his own hand, the Faunus gripping it tight before swiftly sheathing the weapon.

"You're to just hold it for me. Don't even *think* about unsheathing and using it for yourself." Adam said as he tossed Jaune his weapon. Catching it with ease, the blonde then strapped it to his side and the two of them were about to make their way to Ruby and the rest before Jaune abruptly stopped in his tracks.

"Crap, I almost forgot why I was here in the first place." Jaune said, the blonde swiftly turning around as he made his way towards the radio tower, " *That* would have been embarrassing, huh?"

"Humans. I swear..." Adam said, a sigh escaping his lips as he attempted to rub away the growing headache he was feeling.

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"Hey there, unimportant people. How's it going?" Jaune asked as he emerged from the bushes to join the rest of the group.

"Jaune!" Nora shouted upon seeing the blonde. Not a moment later, the ginger promptly launched herself at him, sending the both of them tumbling down to the ground, "We were so worried about you!"

"I wasn't." Yang said from behind.

"Nor was I." Weiss added.

"Get off of me, would ya?" Jaune said as he pushed himself up while having to scrape the ginger girl off of him at the same time. Dusting himself off, Jaune then addressed the rest of the group, "So, what have you guys been up to since I've been away?"

"Well, to stop Weiss and Maria from stealing an airship, Cordovin brought out a giant robot to kill all of us which forced *us* to try and bring it down. But because it's Atlas and they're the ones with all the

shiny toys, none of our attacks were working." Nora said, "Not even when I smashed Yang with my hammer."

"What was the point of that?" Jaune asked.

"To activate her Semblance, silly." Nora replied.

"Yeah, for all the good that it did." Yang grumbled in the background.

"Okay, and then what happened?"

"Well, after crashing the airship, Ruby made herself bait for the giant robot's canon. Using her Semblance, Ruby crawled inside the canon before firing an ice dust round, making the canon useless."

"Wait, you guys crashed the airship? So it's useless to us now?"  
Jaune asked.

"That's what we thought, too but apparently these Atlesian airships are super durable. Talk about lucky," Nora said with a laugh,  
"Anyway, after that, a *giant* Grimm came walking out of the water and is now headed straight to Argus. And then that's when you showed up."

"I wasn't even gone for an hour and you guys already messed up this bad?" Jaune thought aloud.

"Messed up? I'd like to see you try and handle a giant robot, you arrogant ass!" Yang shouted as Weiss held her teammate back.

"Well, I guess now we'll never know how that'll go, will we?" Jaune replied with an arrogant smirk. Yang was about to counter the boy's words before Blake spoke up.

"Jaune, t-that sword on your hip... Where did you get it?" the Faunus asked, eyes wide in shock at the sight of the familiar weapon.

"Oh, right. I ran into an old friend of yours back at the tower. Here, catch." Jaune said as he handed Blake the weapon with a toss.

"An old friend? You don't mean...?" Blake asked, her hands shaking as she stared at the familiar weapon in her hands.

"Yup. Hey, you can come out now." Jaune said as he looked behind him.

"Hmph. Took you long enough, Arc." Adam Taurus said as he emerged from the bushes behind the blonde.

"Adam Taurus?!" everyone besides Jaune shouted at once. Almost immediately, every single one of them shifted into a fighting stance as they readied their weapons. They were all about to rush forward and attack the newcomer only for Jaune to stand in the way, blocking their advance.

"Jaune, get out of the way!" Yang shouted, her eyes the color of crimson.

"Would you guys calm down?" Jaune said, his arms raised towards the rest of the group.

"What the hell are you doing, Arc? Are you protecting this terrorist?!" Weiss asked, the young Schnee heiress unsure whether to point her rapier at Jaune or Adam.

"Look, if everyone here could just chill out and listen to what I have to say, that would be great." Jaune said as he looked over the tense group in front of him. It took a few seconds as looks passed between the former students of Beacon before an unspoken agreement was reached.

"Alright Jaune, talk. What's he doing here?" Yang asked, the girl not taking her eyes off of the former White Fang leader for even a second.

"Well, he *was* here to kill Blake until I convinced him not to." Jaune said, winking at the girl in question, "You're welcome."

"I don't believe that for a second." Weiss asked, "You think a former terrorist like Adam Taurus would just lay down his weapon because you asked him to?"

"Hmph. Unlike you Schnees, I am a man of my word." Adam spat, a death glare sent the girl's way.

"As if your *word* holds any worth to me, Taurus!" Weiss countered as she reached for her weapon only for Jaune to stop her in her tracks.

"Look, we can spend all day arguing and threatening each other but the way I see it, we have a problem of giant proportions that urgently need to be dealt with." Jaune said, pointing towards the Leviathan Grimm that was slowly but surely making its way towards the city of Argus, "But good news: I have a plan on how to stop that thing."

"How do you already have a plan on how to deal with that thing? You just got here." Ren asked, the boy remaining silent all this time.

"Because I'm a genius, obviously. There was a reason old man Ozma made me team leader and not you, buddy." Jaune said, earning a frown from his former team, "Anyway, my plan here involves Adam."

" *Him* ? How?" Yang asked, skeptical at the blonde's words.

"That's very simple, Yang. My old friend here-"

"We're not friends." Adam said.

"-is going to be the one to kill the damn thing."

"This wasn't the plan, Arc." the Faunus argued.

"Relax. If you just kill this thing, then everything will turn out fine." Jaune said.

"You say that as if it's an easy task to achieve." Weiss pointed out, "How would you even go about doing such a thing?"

"Well, first of all, he's obviously going to need his sword back." Jaune said only for Yang to immediately protest that decision.

"You're insane if you think we're just going to hand him his weapon!" Yang shouted, Ember Celica primed and ready for a fight.

"Why wouldn't you?" Jaune asked, genuinely puzzled by the girl's reaction.

"Because... because he's a terrorist. He's killed people. *A lot* of people!" Yang argued.

"So have I as have Qrow, I'm sure." Jaune pointed out as the man in question merely shrugged at the accusation, "I never see you guys talking about that."

"That's different!" Yang shouted once more.

"Not really. Killing is killing, no matter the reason." Jaune said before pointing at the rapidly approaching Leviathan, "But that topic really isn't the issue at the moment."

"It doesn't matter! We'll just find *another* way to save Argus!" Yang shouted but even she nor did the rest of them believe they could.

"Will you? With the giant robot down and none of us here with an surefire and effective way to stop it, how many people will die before we kill it?" Jaune asked as he and Yang locked gazes, "Will you be able to live with yourself if that happened?"

"He cut off my *fucking arm* !" Yang shouted as Ruby flinched at her sister's cursing, "You really expect me to just hand him his weapon after all that?!"

"Not you. Blake." Jaune said, turning his attention towards the cat Faunus, "What do you say, Blake? It's all on you. You're the one with his weapon. If you choose not to give it to him, then we'll just find another way to deal with the Leviathan."

"What? After all that, you're willing to just follow whatever Blake decides? Why?" Weiss asked, confused at Jaune's decision.

"Well, Blake? What do you say?" Jaune asked once more, ignoring Weiss's question, "Will you trust that I have a plan to kill that thing and give Adam his weapon?"

The girl in question took a small step back as everyone suddenly shifted their gaze toward her.

"I... I don't..." Blake looked between Adam's weapon in her hands and the approaching Leviathan, the sound of her heart beating in her chest suddenly becoming incredibly loud, "I choose... I choose..."

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: Phew. I certainly took my time with that one, huh? Sorry about that. I just felt *super* un-creative during March and most of April. Anyway, here's Chapter 10. This is how I'm choosing to write Adam's fate. Obviously, the story will be shifting a lot more from canon from here on out so hopefully, I'll be able to write it well. I have some ideas on what to write so, stay tuned. Hope you guys and gals liked my decision not to kill Adam here.**

**This was certainly a fun chapter for me to write. Every single scene was a treat, from the flashback to the talk between Adam and Jaune to Nora explaining to Jaune what happened when he was gone. Just fun things all around.**

**As always, fave, follows, and reviews are always welcome.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall**

## Chapter 12

*Ducking under Cinder's swipe for his head, Jaune immediately went for the offensive not a moment later. An attack that was supposed to have hit his opponent in the hear ended up hitting nothing but air as Cinder swiftly sidestepped to the side while simultaneously parrying Jaune's attack.*

*Cinder then followed up by striking Jaune on the nose with a precise strike from her elbow that staggered Jaune back a few feet. Not letting the sudden opening be a waste, Cinder swiped the blonde by the feet that sent him tumbling to the floor back first before the woman prevented him from getting up with a blade to his throat.*

*" That was impressive, Jaune, but alas, it seems it's my win yet again." Cinder said, a smile on her face that was devoid of any sort of hostility. Offering the blonde her hand, Cinder continued, "Better luck next time, though. I'm sure you'll get your win eventually."*

*" Sometimes I forget how smug you can be. But-" Jaune said, grabbing the woman's hand before he forcefully pulled her down to the ground. The blonde was on top of her a moment later, a triumphant smile on his face and his own blade at Cinder's throat, "-I never said I surrendered, did I? That's your flaw, Cinder, you can be extremely arrogant sometimes. You should remember that, before it costs you dearly one day."*

*" Well, if you're that worried about me, I'll be sure to take it to heart." Cinder said, the woman unfazed at the dangerous glint of Crocea Mors at her throat as her lips and Jaune's own brushed against each other before the doors to the arena they were in opened with a slam. A moment later, Salem, Queen of the Grimm, entered the room as Jaune immediately pushed himself off of Cinder before helping her get to her feet.*

*A tense silence reigned in the arena as Salem looked between the two of them, both of whom had immediately kneeled before their Mistress . It felt like an eternity had passed before the Queen of the Grimm spoke, "It matters not to me what sort of interests the two of you share but understand that failure is not something I tolerate. Is that understood?"*

*" Yes, My Lady". came the reply from both Jaune and Cinder.*

*" Good. Cinder, how goes your search for the Fall Maiden?" Salem asked, the Queen of the Grimm studying the girl kneeling before her carefully.*

*" It's going well, My Lady." Cinder said as she looked up at her Mistress, "I've secured the assistance of two teenagers, a girl and a boy, to help me along the way."*

*" Have you now?" Salem asked, an amused smile on her face.*

*" Yes. The girl, Emerald, has a semblance capable of casting illusions onto others. Her ability is limited at the moment but I believe that with ample training, it could be a real asset to acquiring Beacon's Relic."*

*" That does sound useful. And what of the boy?"*

*" The boy was actually... not my intended target. I had sought out his father, Marcus Black, but when I arrived at his home, he was already dead. Killed by his son." Cinder said.*

*" Well, I'm sure you're smart enough to not be killed by your own subordinates, dear Cinder." Salem said, a chuckle escaping her lips. She then turned her attention to the blonde, her gaze lingering for a few seconds before the Queen of the Grimm silently left the arena.*

*" So, you're travelling with another man, are you?" Jaune said, the blonde breathing a sigh of relief as he attempted to diffuse the tense atmosphere they were currently in, "Should I be jealous?"*

*" Don't be a fool. Discounting the fact that Mercury is a cripple, I only have eyes for one man." Cinder said as she and Jaune stood up.*

*" Do you, now? Do I know this man?" Jaune asked with a chuckle as he sheathed his blade.*

*" Idiot." Cinder said, the woman sheathing her own weapons before the two lovers shared a kiss.*

*" Be careful, alright?" Jaune said, the blonde embracing Cinder as tightly as he could, "There's no doubting your strength but even the best of them can be brought down by a simple lapse in judgment."*

*" You could join me, you know?" Cinder said.*

*" I would but that insane bastard wants me to help him burn down a village." Jaune said, the blonde frowning at the thought of his "mentor".*

*" Why?" Cinder asked, as she and Jaune left the arena hand-in-hand.*

*" He said they disrespected Salem... or something." Jaune said with a shrug, "I usually tune out when he starts one of his sermons."*

*Cinder let out a small laugh at the thought of her beloved having to spend his days with the scorpion Faunus.*

*" Well, here's hoping your sanity isn't affected, what with you spending so much time with him." Cinder said.*

*" One can only hope." Jaune said as the two of them shared a small laugh.*

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*"I can't believe you guys are actually willing to trust this jackass with the lives of everyone in Argus!" Yang said out loud so that everyone*

else in the airship could hear her frustrations. As the blonde spoke, she had to physically hold her right hand from shaking.

None of them, except for Jaune, had taken their eyes off the former leader of the White Fang for a single second since the airship left the ground.

"Yang, I'm sorry but... I couldn't afford to let my personal feelings get in the way..." Blake said, the girl placing a hand on the blonde's shoulder for comfort, "Not with the lives of the people of Argus on the line."

"Yeah, I get it, alright? But just because I understand *why* we're doing this, doesn't mean I have to like a single second of it." Yang said, a heavy sigh escaping the blonde's lips. She then turned her attention towards Jaune, "Hey jackass, this better work or I'm going to-"

"Kill me? Good news is that if this doesn't work then we'll all be dead, either way." Jaune said, sending a wink to the girl, "Also, I believe the words you're looking for are 'thank you'"

" *Thank you?*"

"You're welcome, Yang." Jaune said, chuckling even as Yang let out a low growl.

"Why in the world would I ever thank you for bringing that damn terrorist to us?!"

"Well, for starters, now we *actually* have a plan for dealing with the Leviathan instead of just gawking around like a bunch of idiots, don't we?" Jaune said, the blonde unfazed from the death glare Yang was sending him at the moment, "And secondly, you should be grateful that I even stepped in to save Blake from her being killed. Again, you're welcome."

"I never asked for your help." Blake said.

"Yeah, well *maybe* if you had a better handle on your relationships, then I wouldn't have needed-"

"Jaune, that's enough. Please." Pyrrha said, the redhead stepping in between the two, "The situation's bad enough as it is."

Jaune clicked his tongue at the redhead before he let out a deep sigh, "Look, I get it. He cut off your arm. That sucks. I'd be pissed, too, if that happened to me but the way I see it, we don't really have a choice but to ask for his help, do we?"

"You don't know that. We would have found a way!" Yang growled, her distaste for the plan at hand obvious for all of them to see.

"We've been over this, Yang. People would have died in the time it would have taken you guys to pull a plan out of your collective asses." Jaune said before gesturing towards the former White Fang leader, "At least with his Semblance and the amount of energy you guys just gave him, we have a shot at taking this thing down."

"So all of a sudden you're overcome with the urge to save innocent lives?" Weiss asked from the side, the girl equally as unhappy as Yang on the whole situation, "Where was all that back at Beacon?"

"Hey, my innocence is a subject for another day, alright?" Jaune said but before the two of them could continue their discussion, Maria spoke up from the pilot seat.

"Heads up, boys and girls. We're coming up on the Leviathan any second now." the old woman said as Jaune made his way towards Adam.

"Adam, you're up." the blonde said with a pat on the Faunus's back. As the man in question stood up, it was with a pained look plastered on his face, "Everything alright? You look like you're constipated or something."

"Never had to... store this much... energy before." the man said as his weapon glowed a dangerous red and visibly shook in his hands.

"But it's enough to kill that thing, right?" Jaune asked. Adam merely shrugged in response before Jaune then turned towards Weiss, "Alright, Weiss. Your turn."

"I can't believe I'm actually lending a hand to Adam Taurus of all people." Weiss said with a deep sigh as the Heiress unsheathed her weapon. A few seconds later, Weiss then conjured a Queen Lancer right outside of their airship, "Don't screw this up, Taurus."

"Hmph. You're the last person... I want advice from, Schnee." Adam spat before he hopped onto the conjured Grimm. As he stood on top of the Grimm, Adam stared down the Leviathan in front of him as the man sucked in a deep breath. Before he could deliver his attack, however, the Leviathan struck first as it breathed a stream of electrified flames towards the Faunus.

Fortunately for him, the Queen Lancer he was standing on swiftly moved out of the way before the attack managed to hit him. Looking back at the airship, it was to see Weiss looking at him with a smug look on her face.

"You're welcome, Taurus." Weiss said as Adam growled, the Faunus annoyed at the unwanted assistance.

"I didn't ask for help." Adam whispered to himself as he came face to face with the Leviathan once more. The Queen Lancer dodged another attack from the Grimm as the Faunus held on as tight as he could while still managing to hold back the massive amount of energy in his sword.

Not too long after the giant Grimm had concluded its attack, Adam found himself staring at the back of its head as he prepared his blade. Taking in a deep breath, the former leader of the White Fang then unleashed a devastating attack as a surge of red energy was released from his blade as it cut deep into the Leviathan's head.

However, the Faunus's expression slowly turned to horror as his attack failed to deliver a killing blow as the Leviathan was slowly but surely regenerating back to full health.

"Damn it..." Adam cursed, the Faunus panting as he fell to a knee. Looking back at the airship, it was to see the rest of them with similar looks of horror etched on their faces. Turning back to stare at the Leviathan, Adam spoke to nobody in particular, "Any better ideas?"

"I'll take it from here!" a booming voice announced from behind him as if in response to his question. Turning around, it was to see a giant robot with one of its arms missing as it charged towards the Leviathan, "I was entrusted with the protection of Argus and protect it I shall!"

Leaping towards the giant Grimm, the giant robot thrust its drill arm into the Leviathan mid-regeneration causing it to scream in agony before it eventually disintegrated.

Adam found himself grateful for the sudden assistance from the Atlas military though he wouldn't be admitting that fact to anybody anytime soon. Breathing a sigh of relief, the Faunus tensed up as the giant robot approached him before the visor opened up to reveal the one in charge of piloting it.

"Taurus." the Atlesian officer said, glaring down at the former leader of the White Fang from within the giant robot.

"If you're expecting a word of thanks, Atlesian, then you're sorely mistaken." Adam spat as he tightened his grip on his sword, fully expecting an attack to come at any moment.

"Hmph. You should consider yourself lucky, Taurus, that the Atlas Military has a bigger problem to deal with at the moment."

Adam glared at the woman before the Queen Lancer he was standing on brought him back to the airship. As he stepped onto the airship, he was confronted once more by Yang and Weiss.

"Great, thanks for the help. Now get out." Yang said, Ember Celica primed and ready for a fight.

"I agree." Weiss said, her rapier pointed at the exhausted Faunus.

"Guys, come on-" Jaune started to say before Yang rounded on him.

"No! He is not coming with us to Atlas!" Yang shouted, her eyes a deep red. Jaune was about to reply before Adam tossed him his blade.

"I promised Arc that I won't fight you." Adam said as Jaune caught the Faunus's weapon.

"That and he's not a bad fighter. I mean, I'm pretty sure he could even kick Pyrrha's ass." Jaune said, an easygoing smile on his face as he patted Adam on the back, "Come on, what do you have to lose?"

"Are you seriously asking *me* that?" Yang asked as she poked Jaune on the chest.

"Okay, let me rephrase the question: What do you have to lose having him as an ally against Salem and her lackeys?" Jaune asked, "Look, it'll be fine. If it makes you feel any better, I'll be watching him closely."

"And we're supposed to just trust you to do that?" Weiss asked, Myrtenaster still pointed at Adam.

"Hey, you guys made it this far without me - literally and figuratively - stabbing you in the back, right?" Jaune said. After a few seconds of tense silence, both Yang and Weiss finally relented with a heavy sigh.

"Fine." Yang said before she delivered a heavy right hook on Adam's face, "That was for my arm, asshole."

Adam made to get up but suddenly found himself staring at the sharp end of Weiss's weapon, "One wrong move and I will *not* hesitate to stab you, no matter what Arc has to say."

"Hmph. How kind of you, Schnee." Adam said as Weiss went to take her seat. Looking around, the Faunus saw that most of them, even Blake, didn't even attempt to acknowledge his existence. The only one who even bothered to try was Arc.

"Ah, don't let it get to you, Adam. Weiss has always been that way." Jaune said, "That's why we call her the Ice Queen."

"You know I can hear you, right?" Weiss asked only for Jaune to ignore her question.

"Anyway, let me be the first to offer you a not-hostile welcome." Jaune said, the blonde offering his hand to the Faunus only for Adam to slap it away.

"I'm not your friend, Arc." Adam said, the Faunus getting back to his feet as he looked at Blake, "I told you why I'm here. Once I'm done with that, I'll be out of your way for good."

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"Hmph. For once, I'm actually grateful for Watts' technological expertise." Cinder said as she and Neo stepped into their new and luxurious base of operations, "What do you think?"

Neo stared at Cinder before shrugging with an unimpressed expression on her face. Scoffing at the woman's reaction, Cinder made her way to a window that overlooked the rest of Atlas as she stared at the giant pictures of Jacques Schnee and Robyn Hill. Smiling to herself, the Fall Maiden gripped the pendant of the sun around her neck before she turned to face Neo.

"So, shall we get started?" The two women shared a smile before Cinder went into the details of her plans for Atlas.

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: And that's a wrap for Chapter 11. I had a tough time writing this one, particularly the middle part where they were killing the Leviathan. In the end, I'm happy with how it came out and really excited to write their adventures through Mantle & Atlas. Next chapter, we see them arrive there. I already have some ideas on what to write for next chapter and beyond so, stay tuned.**

**As always, faves, follows, and reviews are always welcome.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall**

## Chapter 13

*Jumping back away from the glass arrows hurtling towards him, Jaune immediately regained his balance before going back into the offensive as the blonde quickly made his way into Cinder's blindspot - that is, her left side - before delivering a flurry of swift blows with Crocea Mors.*

*In response, Cinder formed a sword in her hand before she clashed with the blonde, neither of the two willing to give even a single inch during their intense duel. Finally, after being in a stalemate for what seemed like an eternity, Jaune found the opening he needed when he ducked under one of Cinder's attacks before crashing into the woman with his elbow.*

*The attack sent Cinder crashing to the ground before she rolled back up. Not willing to give the woman any time to recover, Jaune immediately continued his offense.*

*Clicking her tongue in annoyance, Cinder backed away as the woman made use of her Maiden powers to float a few feet off the ground, a triumphant smirk on her face as she looked at the blonde.*

*"Hey, that's not fair! You said you wouldn't use your Maiden powers!"* Jaune protested through heavy breaths as he pointed his sword at the Fall Maiden.

*In response, Cinder merely quirked an eyebrow before summoning a fireball in the palm of her hands.*

*"Really? That's how you plan on doing this?"* Jaune argued once more only for his words to fall on deaf ears as Cinder hurled the balls of fire at the blonde. Eyes widening in terror, Jaune was barely able to dodge the woman's attacks before the spot he was just standing on exploded into rubble.

*Another fireball came hurtling towards him not a moment later. Thankfully, Jaune was able to raise his shield just in time as Cinder's attack sent him flying across the arena.*

*" Alright, alright! I yield, I yield!" Jaune shouted out just mere seconds before Cinder was about to resume her offensive. A triumphant laughter echoed throughout the arena as the blonde stood up with an annoyed frown on his face.*

*" Oh, Jaune. You should have given up the moment I was ten feet above the ground." Cinder said, a self-satisfied smile on her face as she floated back down.*

*" I was told that you weren't going to be using your powers. That this was to strictly be a normal fight." Jaune said as he dusted himself off.*

*" And you believed me?" Cinder asked, a playful smile on her face as she approached the blonde.*

*" I don't remember you being this petty." Jaune said as he put Crocea Mors back in its sheathe.*

*" It's good to know that even after all this time, I can still surprise you." Cinder said, a playful look in her eyes as Jaune rolled his own, "Come on, lets go. After that satisfying win, I feel the need for a relaxing bath."*

*" Hey, do you mind if I ask you something?" Jaune asked as the two of them left the arena behind.*

*" Not at all."*

*" What do you plan to do after... all this is over?" Jaune asked.*

*" What do you mean?" Cinder asked, a confused look on the woman's face.*

*" I mean what do you plan to do after getting all four relics and the remaining Maiden powers for yourself?" Jaune asked as he looked at the woman beside him, "Have you ever given that any thought?"*

*" Not particularly, no. I consider myself as someone whose sole focus should be on the here and now." Cinder replied, "And right now, that focus includes the Spring Maiden and the Relic of Knowledge. Why? Do you have something in mind?"*

*Jaune was silent for a few seconds before the blonde finally spoke.*

*" Let's get away from all of this, just you and me."*

*"... Huh?"*

*" You and me - maybe Emerald, too - let's get away from here, start a whole new life together." Jaune said, completely missing the bewildered expression on Cinder's face.*

*" Jaune, what are you talking about?"*

*" Exactly what I just said. Away from all this magic crap and most importantly, away from Salem." Jaune said before Cinder halted in her tracks as the woman stared at the blonde, a frown on her face.*

*" That fireball must have done more damage than either of us thought." Cinder said, "You might even have to go to Watts for a checkup."*

*" Cinder, I'm serious." Jaune said before he was cut off.*

*" Well, don't be." Cinder said, an exhausted sigh leaving her lips, "Jaune, where would we even go? What would we even do?"*

*" I don't know but we won't find the answer staying here." Jaune said, "Cinder, we could-"*

*" Jaune, stop." Cinder said as she rubbed away an incoming headache, "We'll discuss this later."*

" But-"

" I said we will discuss this later." Cinder said before she stormed off, leaving the blonde behind.

" That could have gone better." Jaune said to himself as Cinder disappeared around a corner. The blonde was about to follow after her before he was interrupted.

" Oh, my. Might there be some trouble in paradise, Jaune?" Tyrian asked as he slid up beside the blonde.

" No, everything's fine." Jaune said.

" You know, I've been known to give excellent advice, if you need any." the scorpion Faunus said.

" Tyrian, the last time I took your advice, Cinder laughed in my face." Jaune said before he started to walk away, "Also, leave me alone."

" Well, my offer stands, child!" Tyrian shouted before the man descended into a fit of maniacal laughter.

---

Cinder scowled as she stared down at the city of Atlas, the woman having forcibly rented a suite of a prominent hotel. Her mind wandered as the woman thought back to the events that had transpired the past few weeks. The *failed* attack on Haven Academy where she and her companions *failed* to retrieve the Relic of Knowledge. Losing against Raven wasn't even the worst of it.

" *The worst thing is...*" the woman said, her thoughts trailing as her grip around her Sun pendant tightened. Her expression worsened as her new companion strolled up beside her.

"Neo." Cinder said, not bothering to take her eyes away from the skyline of Atlas, "Have you located the Winter Maiden yet?"

The petite woman nodded, a sly smile having formed on her face.

"Excellent." Cinder said, her expression unchanging, "Now we move on to the next step."

Neo, in response, held up her scroll for Cinder to read.

*"And what is this next step of yours, Cindy?"* Neo asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Don't call me Cindy." Cinder said as she sent a death glare at Neo before she turned her attention back towards Atlas, "This next step is where we meet... an annoying associate of mine."

Before Neo could respond, the door to their suite opened as Cinder's associate stepped inside, "And I do believe that is my cue to make my entrance."

"Watts. Must you make a spectacle of everything?" Cinder asked, the woman's mood instantly becoming worse upon Watts' arrival.

"My dear Cinder, how nice to see you again." the man said, ignoring her question, "I must say, when Hazel returned from Haven without you, we all feared the worst. I even shed a tear at your... supposed demise."

"I'm sure you did." Cinder said, the woman rolling her eyes at the man's idiocy, "Did you bring what I asked for?"

"Straight to business, is it? Not going to ask me how I've been lately? It has been quite some time since we've seen each other, after all." Watts asked, a mocking smile on his face as Cinder slammed the window in frustration.

"I don't have time for your stupid games, Watts!" Cinder shouted, the woman's right eye quite literally blazing with anger, "Do you have the program or not?!"

"Is it just me or has your temper become worse since we last met?" Watts said, a chuckle escaping his lips before he fished out a thumb drive from his pocket, "As for the program, of course I have it."

"Good. Then we can proceed to next part of the plan." Cinder said, the woman snatching away the thumb drive from the disgraced Atlesian doctor.

"Sheesh, somebody sure is in a mood tonight." Watts asked as Cinder walked past him. Looking at Neo, the man asked, "Do you have any idea why she's more... irritable than usual?"

Neo typed her response on her scroll before holding it up for Watts to read.

*"It's because she misses her little blonde boytoy."*

Watts and Neo shared a small laugh at the woman's response.

"Ah, that would explain it. I *did* notice a lack of blonde clinging to her like a lost puppy." Watts said aloud before he addressed Cinder, "Which reminds me that on the way over here, I heard some interesting news about him."

"About Jaune?" Cinder asked, the woman immediately rounding on Watts, "What did you hear?"

"Well, if that isn't the quickest mood change in history, then-" the man was interrupted as Cinder formed a ball of fire in her hands.

"Watts, if this is another one of your stupid attempts at playing games, I will not hesitate blasting you out of that window. Now, tell me." Cinder said, the woman stepping towards the man in question, "What did you hear about Jaune?"

"Yes, o-of course... I'd forgotten how sickeningly lovestruck the two of you were for each other." Watts said, the man taking a small step

back, "Well, from what I've heard from my sources in Argus, Jaune has been very busy these past few days."

"Explain." Cinder said, the woman narrowing her eyes as she extinguished the fireball in her hands.

"Not only did he and his little group of friends successfully broke into the local Atlas military compound and stole an airship, they also successfully killed a Leviathan in the process."

"Heh, of course he did." Cinder said, a small hint of pride in her eyes as she heard the news, "You mentioned he was with a group of friends. Am I right to assume you're talking about Ruby Rose and the other students from Beacon?"

"Them and one Qrow Branwen. An interesting group, if nothing else."

"That's certainly one word for it." Cinder said, the woman frowning at the memory of Qrow's previous interference of her plans.

"There is one more name you'd be surprised to hear that's travelling with them." Watts continued, catching Cinder's attention, "The former leader of the White Fang, Adam Taurus, has joined up with them."

"Adam... Taurus? I don't... understand..." Cinder said, a look of confusion etched onto her face as she tries to make sense of the new information she just received, "You're sure about this?"

"On my honor, I swear that is the truth." the man said.

"You have no honor, Watts." Cinder replied.

"That's harsh but also true."

"And you say they're on their way here?" Cinder asked as Watts nodded in response, "Good. I suppose I'll just have to ask him myself when he gets here, then."

Turning around, Cinder made her way towards the bathroom, eager for a bath. Unbeknownst to the other two, a small yet bright smile had appeared on the woman's face at the news she had just received from Watts.

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"Sheesh, talk about third rate room service, am I right? I mean, what even is this stuff?" Jaune asked aloud, the blonde looking at the contents of his bowl with disgust before turning towards the Faunus in the cell next to him, "How's your own food looking? Better than mine, I hope?"

Silence was the only response Jaune received.

"Okay, I guess you're giving me the silent treatment now, is that it?" Jaune asked only to receive more silence in return, "Look, you're angry. I get it. But how was I supposed to know that the General was just going to throw us in jail without letting us defend ourselves?"

This time, there was a response as the Faunus growled as he glared at Jaune.

"Maybe it's because I'm a Faunus and you're part of the people responsible for the Fall of Beacon?" the Faunus asked only for Jaune to bark out a laugh at his statement.

"Come on, Adam, do you really think *that's* the reason why Ironwood threw you in here?" Jaune asked before the Faunus clicked his teeth in response, "Yeah, that's what I thought."

Adam was about to respond to the blonde's provocations before the doors leading to their room slid open as Blake stepped through.

"Hey, hey... It's Blake." Jaune said, an amused smile on his face as his eyes darted between her and Adam, "You came all this way just to visit me? I'm flattered, Blake."

In response, the cat Faunus merely sent a short glance at Jaune before making her way in front of Adam's holding cell.

"Just ignore him. I find that's the best way to handle whatever garbage he has to say." Adam said, the man standing mere inches from Blake with the only thing separating them being the invisible walls of his current prison.

"How are you? Are they... treating you well?" Blake asked, a hint of nervousness in her voice.

"I'm fine... At least, as fine as any Faunus who's stuck in an Atlesian prison." Adam said with a humorous shrug, "The food could be better, though."

"You're telling me." Jaune said, his mouth full of porridge as he interrupted the two of them, "This thing is the blandest crap I've ever tasted."

"It's not like we've never had worse." Blake said to Adam, a small hint of a smile on her face.

"I'm not sure if that's even a good thing at this point." Adam said with a chuckle before an awkward silence dropped between them.

"Adam, I-" Blake started before being interrupted.

"I'm surprised you're here, actually." Adam said, the man turning his back to her before taking a seat on the chair in his cell, "I assumed that once Ironwood threw me in here, you'd just up and forget about me."

"I'm not sure what you expected. For the General to just let you roam the halls of Atlas?" Blake asked as the man in question snorted in response, "Even I have a hard time believing you're here right now."

"Then why are you here, Blake?" Adam asked.

"I... I just wanted to-" whatever Blake had to say was cut off as the doors behind her suddenly slid open as General Ironwood himself stepped into the room. With Winter to his right, the General glared at the two prisoners in front of him before his expression softened as he turned his attention to Blake.

"Miss Belladonna, may I ask you to step out for while? If you don't mind, I would like to speak to Adam Taurus and Jaune Arc regarding... past events."

"I understand." Blake replied after a slight hesitation. Sparing one last glance at Adam, the Faunus then left the room behind.

"See ya around, Blakey. Tell everyone not to worry and I'll see them later, alright?" Jaune said from within his cell, the blonde lying down on a bed after having finished his bowl of porridge earlier.

"Mr Arc." Ironwood said with a stern voice.

"That's me. What can I do for you, General?" Jaune asked.

"I want you to tell me exactly what it is Salem has planned not just for Atlas but the whole of Remnant."

"What makes you think I have the information you want?" Jaune asked.

"You worked for her, didn't you? Surely there must be something you know that would help us in this fight."

"First of all, I was working with Cinder, not Salem." Jaune said, "Secondly, what's in it for me if I tell you anything?"

"Your freedom, for one thing." replied the General even as Winter gasped.

"Sir, you can't be serious?! After what he's done?!" the woman asked and was about to continue before the General held his hand up.

" *Limited* freedom, is what I meant. You're too much of a risk for me to allow free roam so you *will* be accompanied by my soldiers for every second you're awake."

"So many resources spent just for me? You flatter me, General."

"I would do *anything* to thwart whatever dangers that would threaten the safety of Atlas and its citizens." the General said as he glared at the blonde lying down a few feet in front of him.

Jaune stared at the man for a few seconds before letting out a small laugh, "I notice you didn't say Mantle. What, are *they* not worth saving to you, General?"

James was about to respond before he was interrupted by the other prisoner in the room.

"What did you expect, Arc? The people of Mantle don't have the valuable resources for the military to plunder so they obviously won't rank very high on the good General's list of priorities." Adam said, a chuckle escaping his lips, "That and the fact that most of its populations are composed of Faunus doesn't seem to be doing them any favors."

"Adam Taurus." James said, the man turning his attention towards the Faunus now.

"General Ironwood." Adam said, a deep frown on his face, "It's a shame we missed each other in Beacon. I would have loved to take your head that night."

"I'm sure you would. I assume it was because you were so busy killing innocent civilians and students, correct?" the General said. When he received no response from the Faunus, he then turned towards Winter, "Winter, we're leaving."

"Already, sir? But we've not learned anything from either of them." Winter said, confused at the General's sudden decision.

"Arc, think about my offer. I can guarantee you that a room in Atlas Academy is much more comfortable than in here."

"If you say so, General." Jaune said as both James and Winter left the two of them behind.

---

**A/N: Finally, Chapter 12 is out. Boy, this one sure took a while, huh? I apologize for that. The creative well was just so dried up these past two months.**

**Anyway, I hope you guys like this chapter. I've been trying to take some creative liberties in this one, where I have Cinder meet up with Watts (at least, I don't remember if they met this early into Atlas).**

**Next chapter, we see what both Adam and Jaune have decided to do about their time in prison. Here's hoping the next chapter isn't too far off.**

**As always, faves, follows, and reviews are always welcome.**

**Praise be to Cinder Fall**

# Special - Meeting the Parents

A/N: Enjoy

---

Cinder Fall was nervous.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the Fall Maiden could gradually hear the sound of her heart beating in her ears grow increasingly louder. Sweat was pouring down her forehead even if the air-conditioning in the taxi was put on full blast. Honestly, the woman preferred facing down Salem than-

"Hey, how are you feeling?" came the voice of her beloved as he unknowingly interrupted her train of thought.

"Hmm? Did you say something?" Cinder asked as she turned to stare into the deep blue eyes of Jaune Arc, her boyfriend. The Fall Maiden chuckled internally at that. If anyone had said that to her five or ten years ago and she'd have reduced them to ashes in an instant for even suggesting someone like her would end would with a fool like him.

Now, however, those same blue eyes that she had despised so long ago seemed to have the magical ability of turning her legs to jelly and not in the bad way, either.

"I asked you if you were alright. You seemed to be freaking out a second there." Jaune asked as he took her hand into his own.

"I *am* freaking out, Jaune!" Cinder shot back as she went back to try and fix her hair, "I told you I didn't want to do this!"

"I know but I also know that you'll be fine. I just know they're gonna love you." Jaune said with all the confidence in the world. How he could say that with a straight face is something Cinder will never understand.

"You don't know that. What if they hate my guts?" Cinder asked as she stared out the window of the taxi they were currently in, "I mean, I *am* an internationally wanted terrorist."

"You were pardoned, remember?" Jaune said, "Besides, Saphron likes you."

"Because I saved child's life. I don't think that's going to work this time around." Cinder said as she thought back to that incident a few years ago, one where she nearly lost her right arm from saving the young Adrian from a Grimm attack. The rest of the taxi ride to Jaune's house was spent mostly in idle chatter as Jaune attempted to calm his girlfriend for the eventual meeting.

Surprisingly, Cinder found that his attempts were working as she found her breathing had slowed and her heart wasn't beating as fast as it was before.

"Tell me about your sisters." Cinder said just as the taxi rounded a corner. Before Jaune could say a word, however, the taxi they were in slowly came to a halt as they reached their destination, "Oh, crap! We're already here?! Quick, how do I look?!"

"Cinder, you'll be fine. Besides, you look stunning as always." Jaune said, taking the Fall Maiden's hand into his own in an effort to calm her nerves. Unsurprisingly, the blonde's small gesture did wonders to calm Cinder's heart as the two lovebirds stared into each other's eyes, both of them oblivious of the driver's attempts to catch their attention.

The calmness, however, didn't last very long as Cinder shook her head in disagreement.

"As much as I love to receive compliments, Jaune, it's not you I need to hear from right now." Cinder said as she glanced at the house outside, "It's your family that I need to impress today."

"I don't have a single doubt you will. Come on, let me introduce you. Knowing mom, she's probably already waiting at the door." Jaune said, the blonde paying the taxi driver his fare before he exited the vehicle. Quickly making his way to the other side of the car, the blonde then opened the door for Cinder as he offered the Fall Maiden his arm, "Shall we?"

"Such a gentleman." said Cinder with a roll of her eyes before the woman linked her arm with his own. With the sound of her heart growing louder as the distance between the couple and the house in front of them shrinking, Cinder didn't even register the fact that the taxi behind them already left.

Before she even knew what was happening, the two of them were already mere inches from the door as Jaune knocked on it three times. Not even a single second passed before the door slammed open and a woman with the same shade of blonde hair as Jaune appeared at the doorway.

With shoulder length hair, the woman was wearing a simple red-colored long sleeve shirt, a pair of jeans, as well as a pair of slippers.

"Hey, m-" before the words could even leave Jaune's mouth, the blonde woman had quickly wrapped him in what looked to be a very tight and loving embrace.

"Oh, my baby boy! You're finally here!" the woman shouted out as Jaune returned the hug as best he could.

"Mom, please. I'm not a baby anymore." Jaune managed to say.

"Hush, now. You'll always be the little boy who would come crying to me whenever your sisters would make fun of you." the woman said as Cinder cracked a smile.

"That was a long time ago, mom. I'm all grown up now. I'm even a licensed Hunter now."

"That doesn't matter. Not to me." the woman said before her attention was suddenly focused on the other person standing in front of her house. Flinching at the sudden attention, the Fall Maiden had to fight off a very strong urge to turn around, run, and never look back, "And you must be Cinder."

"I am, ma'am. Cinder Fall. That's me." said Cinder, who had stiffened under the woman's gaze as she offered the woman her hand, "It's very nice to meet you."

"Oh, put that away." the woman said as she shoved Jaune out of the way. The next moment, the woman then slapped Cinder's hand away before pulling her in for a hug, "After what you did for Saphron and Adrian, you're family. And now with Jaune, that's doubly so."

"O-oh, well... um... It was nothing. I just... did what anyone else would have done at that moment..." Cinder said as her cheeks reddened slightly. Jaune, the bastard, had a teasing grin on her face as he stared at her, "*Help me, you grinning fool!*"

"Nonsense. You really shouldn't sell yourself short, dear." the woman said as she tightened the hug while patting Cinder on the back, "Without you, I would have lost my grandchild and eldest daughter."

"Cinder, this is my mom. Claire Arc." Jaune said, an amused grin still plastered on his face even as he took a quick snapshot of the situation, "And mom, you can let her go now. I think she gets it."

His piece said, the blonde then took the bags they had packed for the trip before he stepped inside the house.

"*No! Don't leave me alone out here!*" screamed the voice inside Cinder's head. Fortunately, the blonde woman seized that moment to end the hug.

"Well, that's enough reminiscing about the past, wouldn't you agree?" the woman said as she held the door open for Cinder,

"Please, come in. Make yourself at home. Everyone's eager to meet you."

With an audible gulp, Cinder did her best to hide any sort of fear from leaking out of her as she took the first step into the Arc household. What grabbed the Fall Maiden's attention immediately upon entering the house was the multitude of picture frames that decorated the walls.

Her amazement must have shown on her face as Claire immediately started telling her about the pictures.

"As you can see, I am extremely proud of all my children." the woman said as she continued leading Cinder deeper and deeper into the Arc household, "We have pictures of all of them hanging on the wall, documenting their life from the time they were barely able to walk to - in Saphron's case - them getting married."

"It certainly is... impressive, Mrs Arc. Indeed, it's a sight to behold." Cinder said, the woman meaning every word that just came out of her mouth. As the two women entered the living room, they were then greeted by the rest of the Arc family. The sight of six women and one man suddenly appearing before her caused Cinder to flinch slightly.

"Cinder, dear, allow me to introduce to you the rest of the Arc family." Claire said as she pointed at the six blonde women in front of her, "Jade's the second eldest of the family then after her we have the twins, Violet and Viridian. Then there's Scarlet and finally the youngest is Cyan."

"It's very nice to meet you all." Cinder said as she greeted them with a bright smile.

"And over there on the couch is my husband, Arthur Arc." Claire said.

"It's nice to finally meet you in person, Cinder. I hope my son has been treating you like a proper gentlemen would." the man said as he and Cinder shook hands.

"Everyone, meet-" Claire started to say before one of the six blonde women in front of her spoke up.

"Cinder Fall. We know who she is, mom." said one of Jaune's sisters, the woman's eyes narrowing as she stared at Cinder, "Hard not to when her face and name was plastered all over the news when Beacon fell."

"Also when Mantle was wiped off the map." said another one of the sisters, "You know, because she dropped Atlas on top of it."

Cinder's smile slowly dropped as the two women started recounting her past crimes.

"Not to mention everything that happened in Vacuo when-"

"Violet. Jade. That's enough." Claire said, chastising her daughters as an uncomfortable silence washed over the room.

"It's alright, Mrs Arc. What I've done in the past is-"

"No, it's not alright. We've all made mistakes - some more and bigger than others -but even so, doesn't everyone deserve a second chance?" Claire asked as she turned to face Cinder. Before the Fall Maiden could answer, however, Jaune suddenly appeared behind them.

"So, I've just unloaded all the luggage by my self - thanks for that, by the way," Jaune said as he sent an accusing stare at his six sisters, "What were you guys talking about?"

"We were talking about how nice it is to finally meet Cinder." said the only other male in the room, "Especially since you couldn't stop talking about her every time we called, son."

"Come on, dad. She doesn't need to know that." Jaune said, an embarrassed look on his face as he scratched the back of his head.

"Yeah. Real nice to meet her." said one of the two sisters from before as she along with the other one who hadn't taken too kindly to Cinder's presence left the room behind. Before anyone else could speak up, another of the sisters took the opportunity to walk up to her.

"Jaune, you go help your dad set up the table for lunch while Cinder here freshens up. I'm sure she's tired for the journey." Claire said as she led Cinder towards the stairs.

"I'm tired, too." Jaune said in protest only for it to be ignored.

"Your room is the second door on the left while the shower is the third door on the left." Claire said as she and Cinder reached the bottom of the stairs, "Freshen up and once you're done, then we can all have lunch together."

"Thank you, Mrs Arc. And sorry... for-"

"You don't need to apologize. I meant what I said, you know? We all deserve a second chance in life." Claire said, "And stop it with all that Mrs Arc nonsense. Just call me mom."

"Thank you... mom" Cinder said as she climbed the stairs towards her room as a small smile formed on her face.

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As Cinder entered Jaune's bedroom after a quick but refreshing shower, the Fall Maiden could not help the worried look that appeared on her face as she stared out the window. Her mind kept going back to what Jaune's sisters had said earlier.

"... This was a mistake..." Cinder said to herself with a sigh.

"What was a mistake?" the woman jumped at the familiar voice of her boyfriend behind her as she didn't hear him come in.

"It's... nothing. The others are waiting for us, right? We should join them." Cinder said, the woman turning around before quickly making her way towards the door. She would have made it had Jaune not stood in her way.

"Cinder, talk to me. What's wrong?" Jaune asked. When her eyes refused to meet his, the blonde placed a comforting hand on her shoulder, "Hey, you can trust me."

"You wanna know what's wrong? It's this whole trip, Jaune. I told you this was a mistake." Cinder said as she took a step back, "The things that I've done... They're not so easily forgiven and why should they be? I've taken countless lives and for what? The meaningless pursuit of power."

"Cinder, I-" Jaune started to say only for Cinder to cut him off.

"The governments of Remnant may have given me a pardon - for what good it's worth - but that doesn't mean everyone else is ready and willing to forgive me." Cinder said, "Least of all your family."

"Someone said something to you, didn't they? I'll talk to them and-" Jaune said only for Cinder to cut him off once more.

"That's not the problem, Jaune!" Cinder shouted loud enough that it would have definitely been heard by the rest of his family downstairs, "Don't you get it?! I don't... I don't have the right to be here!"

Tears had started to form around Cinder's eye before the Fall Maiden quickly wiped them away.

"Cinder, I'm sorry but that's just not true." Jaune said as he and Cinder took a seat on the edge of his bed, "You're welcome in this house just as much as I am."

"There you go again, saying stuff like-"

"It's doesn't matter if what I'm saying is stupid or foolish or even crazy." Jaune said, cutting off whatever the Fall Maiden had to say, "What matters is that it's true."

Before Cinder could respond, however, Jaune immediately got up before the blonde stood in front of her. Offering her his hand, the man said, "Come on, get dressed. We're going on a short trip."

"Where? To your kitchen?" Cinder asked as she put on a plain grey shirt and a pair of black pants.

"Nope. We're going to go on a short adventure." Jaune said, his hand still outstretched and waiting for Cinder to grab it.

"What about lunch? Your mother's worked so hard to prepare it, I wouldn't want her efforts to go to waste." Cinder said as she finally took the blonde's hand.

"Ah, I'm sure mom will understand." Jaune said as he led the woman out of his room, "Besides, where we're going is much more important than food."

"I am both deeply afraid and yet also strangely intrigued by whatever it is you have planned." Cinder said, a small smile appearing on her face as she wiped the last few tears away.

"That's the spirit. Quick question, though: You know how to ride a bike, right?" Jaune asked only to receive an eyeroll and a deadpan stare in response, "Hey, just making sure."

When the two of them reached the bottom of the stairs, they quickly bolted out of the front door.

"Jaune?! Where are you going?!" his mom asked.

"Sorry, mom! We're going on a date! You guys have lunch without us!" Jaune shouted into the house as he slammed the door behind

him. A moment later, the door opened once more as Jaune poked his head inside, "Scarlet, is it okay if I borrow your bike?!"

"Absolutely not!" his sister shouted in response, "I just had it cleaned, Jaune!"

"Okay, thanks, you're the best! Bye!" Jaune shouted back as he took his and Scarlet's bicycle out of the garage before he and Cinder used them to ride away from the Arc house as fast as they could.

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"So, here we are." Jaune said, the blonde getting off his sister's bike before leaning it against a nearby tree.

"Where is... here, exactly?" Cinder asked, the woman finding it surprisingly easy to ride a bike even with one hand.

"I don't know the official name of this lake so I just call it 'The Lake'." Jaune said, looking at Cinder with a look of pride on his face.

"Truly, your mind is just brimming with creative imagination, Jaune." Cinder said as she snickered at her boyfriend's terrible naming sense, "But that does bring me to my next question: What exactly are we doing here?"

"Well, this is one of the places I usually come to unwind whenever I'm feeling stressed out." Jaune said before he took a seat on the grass by the lakeside. Looking at her with a smile, he invited her to join him by patting the spot next to him.

Rolling her eyes, the Fall Maiden joined him sitting on the grass without another word. A few seconds of silence passed before Cinder decided to speak.

"What's supposed to-" Cinder started to say only for Jaune to cut her off.

"Shh... Just... Close your eyes and feel." Jaune said, the blonde's eyes closed as a serene and calm look was etched on his face.

"Feel... what?" Cinder asked, still not seeing the point of this little excursion Jaune had brought her on.

"Everything. The feel of the wind blowing past your ears, the sun shining down on your skin." Jaune said as he gently took Cinder's hand into his own, "Even the sound of the lake in front of you."

Not seeing the point of the exercise, Cinder followed her boyfriend's instructions regardless. Taking a deep breath, the Fall Maiden started to steady her breathing as she did her best to take in the nature around her. A few seconds of silence passed before the sounds of a bird chirping a few meters away reached the woman's ears.

As she strained her ears further, the sound of a group of people fishing and laughing further down the lake brought a small curve to the edge of her lips. As the seconds ticked by, the wind seemed to pick up as it rushed faster and faster past her ears.

"Feel better yet?" Jaune suddenly asked, breaking her out of the trance.

"A bit." Cinder said before grabbing Jaune's arm as she laid her head on the blonde's shoulder, "There. Now I feel a *lot* better."

"So cheesy." Jaune quipped, a small laugh escaping his lips as the couple enjoyed the moment of peace he had bought them.

"Jaune..." Cinder said.

"Yeah?"

"I've done... a lot of terrible things in the past."

"That's an understatement if I've ever heard one but yes, you have." Jaune said as he squeezed the woman's hand, "I was there for most

of it, remember?"

"Even after all that, you would still have me?" Cinder asked, her heart beating just a little bit faster at the thought of whatever answer she was about to receive.

"Without a second thought." Jaune answered, the blonde not letting the question hang in the air for even a moment.

"Why?"

"Cinder, look at me. Look into my eyes and tell me if I'm lying." Jaune said before the Fall Maiden did what he said. Turning her head, the two of them locked eyes before Jaune continued to speak, "I love you. I don't see that changing anytime soon and I also don't need a reason to love you as much as I do."

Taken aback by what he had just said, Cinder fell silent as the two of them simply continued staring at each other's eyes. Their faces grew closer as their lips were about to meet before the sound of a bicycle bell ringing reached her ears.

"I thought I'd find you two lovebirds here." said an unfamiliar voice.

"Hey, Cyan." Jaune said, the blonde breaking away from Cinder as he stood up to greet the new arrival. Cinder, meanwhile, could only scowl at the sudden and incredibly unwelcome intrusion, "What are you doing out here?"

Getting up herself, Cinder dusted off her pants before turning around to face the new arrival. With a blonde hair the same shade as Jaune's and covering one eye, the woman in front of her was wearing a plain purple shirt along with a pair of purple pants.

" *There's definitely a resemblance to Claire Arc in there.*" Cinder thought to herself before chuckling internally, " *Well, she is her daughter, after all.*"

"I'm out here because of you, you blonde-haired idiot!" Cyan shouted as she kicked Jaune in the shin.

"Ow! Why?!" Jaune wailed as he rubbed the sore spot on his leg, "Also, you have blonde hair, too."

"Because you stole Scarlet's bike, mom made me go after you." Cyan said with a deep frown, "You know how much I hate the outdoors. You owe me fifty lien for this."

"I see that hasn't changed about you." Jaune said before turning the attention to Cinder, "By the way, this is Cinder. My girlfriend. Have you two met?"

"Eh, not officially. Violet and Jade kind of-" Cyan started to say before cutting herself off with a shake of her head. The woman then offered Cinder her hand, "I'm Cyan, by the way. It's nice to finally meet you."

"Likewise." Cinder said as the two women shook hands.

"Now, come on. Mom is making everyone wait until you guys get back before we start eating lunch." Cyan said. Sharing another look, both Cinder and Jaune let out a small laugh as they got on their bikes and started cycling back towards the Arc house.

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: So, this is a wrap on the first chapter. I've wanted to post this for a very long time now. Originally, I wanted to post it as a single one-shot but instead, I'm just gonna post it in three parts. Consider this a very late Valentines special. Or something.**

**Just in case anyone's missed it, I am a GIANT Knightfall shipper. Also, if you need help imagining what Claire Arc looks like, just imagine Claire Dunphy since that's who I used as reference.**

**As always, faves, follows, and reviews are always welcome.**

**NoXIV Signing Off**

## Special - Meeting the Parents 2

"Mom! I'm back!" Cyan shouted out as she pushed open the front door of the house, "And I brought your little baby boy with you!"

"Don't mind her." Jaune said, rolling his eyes as he turned to face Cinder, "She never learned to grow up and be a mature adult."

"What, like you?" Cyan asked as she looked over the shoulder at Jaune.

"I'm very mature, thank you very much." Jaune said

"If you say so, big brother." Cyan said with a snort before entering the kitchen.

"You two seem to get along well." Cinder said as she and Jaune strolled through the house before finally ending up in the living room.

"Ugh, she used to be a lot worse." Jaune said, pulling a face that earned a giggle from the Fall Maiden, "Very insufferable."

"You know I'm still within earshot, right?" Cyan asked as she poked her head into the living room.

"See what I mean?" Jaune said as he took a seat on the sofa before Cinder promptly dropped herself on the blonde's lap. Initially surprised, it didn't last long before she found his arms wrapped around her midriff, "You know, there *are* other places to sit, right?"

"I know but I somehow always find this spot to be the most comfortable." Cinder said with a sly smile. Turning her body to the right, she wrapped her arm around Jaune's neck before leaning into his shoulder, "Plus, I don't hear you complaining."

"C-Cinder, m-maybe it's-"

"Thank you." Cinder said, cutting off whatever Jaune was about to say.

"For what?" Jaune asked as he looked at the woman currently draped all over him.

"For the short trip you just took me on." Cinder said, placing a quick kiss on Jaune's cheek, "It helped, even if a little bit."

"No problem. Like I told you before, I'll always be there for you." Jaune said as they locked gazes. Their lips were mere inches from meeting before once again being interrupted.

"Jaune, when are you gonna get your-" a voice unfamiliar to Cinder said before a vaguely familiar head poked itself into the living room. Silence reigned in the living room for a few seconds, as the new arrival exchanged glances with both Jaune and Cinder before a mischievous grin appeared on her face not long after, "Oh, my. Jaune, I didn't know you were so bold. Well, continue. Far be it from me to interrupt you two lovebirds."

With her piece said, the woman then left the two alone, each with a combined look of embarrassment and shock.

"V-Viridian, wait! It's not like that!" Jaune shouted as he and Cinder stood up.

"It wasn't?" Cinder asked, a disappointed pout on her face.

"Cinder, please don't start." Jaune said as a tired sigh escaped his lips. Letting out a small laugh, the Fall Maiden simply walked past her boyfriend as she made her way to the kitchen.

"Now come on, lunch is waiting." Cinder said as she started making her way to the kitchen, "Honestly, Jaune, what kind of son are you to make your whole family wait for you?"

"And whose fault was that, I wonder?" Jaune shot back with a roll of his eyes. Entering the kitchen together, the two of them found that his family had just finished setting up the table and were neatly seated around a large round table made of wood, "Hey, mom. Sorry for making you guys wait. Cinder and I just needed some fresh air, that's all."

"You couldn't have done that with someone else's bike?" asked one of Jaune's sisters. Wearing a red blouse with a pair of blue pants, Cinder could only assume she was Scarle. Sending a smile at the rest of the family, Cinder promptly took her seat right between Jaune and Cyan.

"Sorry about that, Scar, but Cinder was using mine. What was I supposed to do?" Jaune asked as he took a seat between Cinder and Scarlet, "Run?"

Before his sister could answer, however, Claire suddenly placed a steaming hot serving of shepherd's pie in the middle of the table.

"Right then. Cinder, make yourself at home. Plenty of food to go around." Claire said as she took a seat beside her husband, "We have shepherd's pie, cherry pie, chicken curry, some roasted vegetables, bread, and fresh watermelon grown from our very own garden."

"Where's Violet and Jade?" Jaune asked, the blonde grabbing a serving of shepherd's pie before placing it on Cinder's plate.

"They're... uh... busy." Claire answered as she grabbing serving of chicken curry for herself, "Something about meeting up with a group of friends in town. You know how young adults are."

"They couldn't even spare some time for their beloved brother?" Jaune asked as he feigned a look of shock, "I knew they were my least favorite sisters for a reason."

"Jaune! You love *all* your sisters." Claire said as she glared at her son.

"Yes, mom." Jaune said as his sister's laughed at his little misfortune. As lunch went on, Cinder couldn't help the smile appearing on her face as such a cheerful scene played out in front of her. The Fall Maiden also couldn't help but think back to her own childhood with her stepsisters and stepmother.

All the times she had to eat alone in her little room in the attic. The food that she received wasn't even prepared fresh, it was mostly just leftovers.

Cinder's musings, however, were suddenly interrupted as Viridian's next question caught both her and Jaune completely off guard.

"So, Jaune, are the two of you gonna bone in your room later?" asked the young woman. Wearing a purple overall over a white shirt, Viridian Arc didn't look the slightest bit embarrassed at the question she had just asked.

Jaune and Cinder, on the other hand, were choking on their food as they tried to process what the woman had just asked them.

"Viridian! Don't ask such insane questions!" Claire said as she smacked her daughter on the back of her head, "And don't talk with your mouth full!"

"What? We were all thinking it." Viridian said with a shrug, swallowing the contents of her mouth before turning her attention back to Jaune, "I'm just saying, if you are going to do the deed, try and keep it quiet. I need a full night's sleep, after all."

"Viridian!" Claire hissed out before turning to face her husband, "Arthur! Say something."

"Oh, um... Remember to use protection, Jaune. As long as you remember that, then you'll be fine." Arthur said, the man nodding

proudly to himself as his wife tried to rub the headache that was quickly coming her way, "After all, nothing's worse than having an unexpected pregnancy. How did you think we got Saphron?"

As those words left his mouth, gasps could be heard from each of the Arc children around him.

"You guys weren't planning to have Saphron?" Cyan asked, shocked at this sudden news.

"No but that doesn't mean we don't love her." Arthur said, "All I'm saying, Jaune, is that I don't mind if you do the deed in your bedroom - you *are* an adult now, after all - but do remember to practice safe sex."

"I would have... chosen a different time *and* place to say that but your father's right." Claire said even as she gave her husband the stink eye, "You're both adults. You know the consequences and trust me, raising a child is not easy. Unless you're prepared to bring a child into this world, wear a condom, Jaune."

"Guys, can we not... talk about this? Especially during lunch?" Scarlet said, the woman looking like she'd just suddenly lost her appetite.

"Oh, grow up, Scar. You're twenty-four." Cyan said from the side, the young woman not looking bothered at all by everything going on around her, "Sex is a natural part of life."

"I'd rather not talk about it if it involves my younger brother!" Scarlet shot back, "I changed his diapers when he was a baby, for God's sake!"

Before Cyan could say something else, Jaune finally took the moment to step in even as his face was still as red as a tomato.

Cinder meanwhile, continued eating her lunch as the Fall Maiden watched the scene play out in front of her with a joyous smile.

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"Sorry about all that." Jaune said as he and Cinder went back to his old bedroom, "My sisters - Viridian, especially - gets excited when meeting new people."

"I'll take that as a compliment." Cinder said with a small laugh, "But really, I didn't mind it at all."

"Really?" Jaune asked as he plopped down on his old bed, "Having my parents give me "the talk" when I'm in my twenties is bad enough but during lunch *and* when I have my girlfriend over? I was half hoping an Ursa would just appear and wreck the whole kitchen when they started saying all that stuff."

"Oh, they weren't that bad. I just met them but they're good people. Even your sisters." Cinder said as she laid down next to Jaune, "Certainly better than mine ever were."

At that mention of her family, a sad look washed over Jaune's face before the blonde grabbed Cinder's hand.

"Well, *this* is your family now." Jaune said, the blonde propping himself up by the elbow before giving Cinder's hand a kiss.

"You know, I'm starting to think this whole trip wasn't a mistake, after all." Cinder said, the woman pulling Jaune in for a kiss.

"I knew you'd feel that way eventually." Jaune said. Not wanting to end things with a kiss, the blonde then moved so that he was now on top of the Fall Maiden. Locking eyes, the two of them were about to lock lips before the door to his bedroom was abruptly pushed open.

"Oh, Jaune, I brought the two of you some snacks for if you're-" said Claire Arc, the woman stopping mid-sentence as the scene in front of her finally registered in her mind. Putting the tray of biscuits in her hand down on the floor as quickly and carefully as she could, "Oh, my. I expected this to happen but not so soon. And after lunch, too."

Well, you can have the snacks after you're done. Scarlet, Viridian, Cyan! Don't come up anytime soon, you hear?!"

Closing the door shut behind her, Jaune and Cinder shared a look full of regret at almost being caught doing the deed.

"I-I'm sorry about that." Jaune said, a pained expression on his face as he did his best to forget what just happened.

"I-it's alright." Cinder said with a nervous smile, "I suppose it is our fault for not locking the door in the first place."

"Now then, where were we?" Jaune asked with a grin, the blonde moving in for a kiss before being interrupted once more.

"Jaune, dear, you do remember my advice, don't you? About using protection?" Claire Arc asked as the woman poked her head inside the room, "Because if you don't have a condom, I have some morning after pills that Cinder could use. Cinder, dear, do you want my-?"

"Mom! Get out!" Jaune shouted, the blonde jumping out of bed before shoving Claire out of the room, "Get out, get out, get out!"

Slamming the door shut, Jaune quickly locked the door to avoid any further interruptions.

"I take it back, this trip was definitely a mistake." Cinder thought aloud as Jaune turned to face her with a look filled with hope.

"So, you want to get back to where we left off or-?" Jaune asked only for Cinder to cut him off.

"The mood is gone, Jaune." Cinder said as she stood up from the bed. The woman dusted herself off before leaving the bedroom, "Try again later."

"Man, cockblocked by my own mother." Jaune said to himself as he sat on the edge of his bed with a disappointed frown, "That's gotta

be a now low for me."

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It was late in the evening and the sun was starting to dip below the horizon. With the family having gathered in the living room, Claire Arc shot a worried glance at the clock on the wall.

"It's starting to get late and Violet and Jade still aren't back yet." Claire said as a worried frown appeared on her face. Getting up from the coach, the woman then picked up her purse, "I'm going to go look for them."

The woman would have sprinted out of the living room had Cinder not stood in her way.

"It's okay, Mrs Arc. Jaune and I can go look for them." Cinder said as Jaune appeared by her side a moment later.

"Oh, I can't possibly ask you to do that, dear." Claire said, "You're our guest, after all. Besides, these are my daughters so it's my job to kill them for making me so worried."

"It's fine, mom. Besides, I've been wanting to show Cinder around Orleans, anyway." Jaune said, "You can kill them *after* we get back home."

"He's right, dear." said Arthur Arc as he placed a comforting hand on his wife's shoulders, "Besides, you spent the whole day preparing that feast for us this afternoon so I think it's time you get a well-deserved rest."

Claire was about to offer her protest before the sound of the doorbell ringing reached all of their ears.

"That must be them right now. I'm gonna go sharpen the family sword." Claire said before she was held back by her husband once more.

"Honey, relax. Calm. Deep breaths." Arthur said in a calm and soothing tone as he guided her to the sofa, "And besides, we can't kill them when we have a guest to impress."

Cinder let out a small laugh at the man's joke, the woman leaving the living room and making her way towards the door. Turning the knob, the Fall Maiden did not expect to see the face of the eldest Arc sister in front of her.

"Surprise!" Saphron Arc shouted, the woman immediately putting Cinder in a tight hug.

"Saph?" Jaune asked from behind Cinder, "What are you doing here?"

"What, does a woman *need* a reason to visit her parents?" Saphron asked as she released her hold around Cinder, "And look who I brought, too."

Stepping aside, Saphron revealed her wife, Terra, carrying the sleeping form of their child, Adrian. Beside her was a young woman with blonde hair tied into a long braid that reached well past her shoulders.

Wearing a purple blazer over a white shirt and a red necktie, a pair of purple shorts, knee high socks as well as a pair of sneakers, the woman was the spitting image of Jaune had he been born a woman.

"Hey, Jaune." the woman said, a smile on her face.

"Joan. It's so good to see you!" Jaune said, the two twins embracing each other in a hug.

"Sheesh, he never hugs me like that." Saphron said with a pout.

"Good evening, Cinder. Jaune." said Terra as she stepped past Jaune and Joan and into the house, "It's nice to see you again."

"Likewise." Cinder said, giving the woman a side hug while being extra careful not to wake the sleeping baby in her arms.

As Jaune and Joan ended their hug, Saphron then shoved three suitcases into Jaune's hands.

"Thanks for bringing these to my room, Jaune." Saphron said. Before he could offer any protest, the eldest Arc sibling then rushed into the nearby living room to announce her arrival. Judging by the response, Cinder could only assume it went well.

Letting out a defeated sigh, Jaune then made his way up the stairs as Joan, Terra, and Adrian joined Saphron in the living room.

Cinder, meanwhile, waited for Jaune at the bottom of the stairs before the both of them left the house behind to search for the two missing Arc sisters.

"Your family is certainly an incredibly fun bunch." Cinder said with a small laugh, "I'm glad I got to meet them."

"Ugh... Try living with them." Jaune said as he closed the door behind them, "That'll change your opinion in a heartbeat."

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"So, are we here to look for your sisters or do you have some more treats to buy for me?" Cinder asked, the Fall Maiden having used her powers to create a temporary arm for herself so she could have an easier time eating the various food Jaune kept buying for her.

"You said you were feeling peckish." Jaune said with a shrug, "Besides, I wouldn't worry about Jade or Violet. This isn't exactly the first time they're out late. They'll be back sooner or later, most likely when they're hungry."

"Maybe not but the reason they're even out here in the first place is..." Cinder said, letting her sentence hang in the air as she wore a

downcast look. Jaune, noticing his girlfriend's distress, turned around to face her before taking her hand.

"Hey, I know this whole thing couldn't have been easy for you but look what's happened so far." Jaune said as he gently squeezed her hand, "My parents practically adore you. Cyan, Scarlet, and Viridian likes you. Not to mention Saphron, Terra, and Adrian."

"I mean, I get that but... It's just..." Cinder said with a sigh, unable to finish her train of thought.

"What, are you one of those people who wants to be liked by everyone?" Jaune asked, chuckling. When Cinder wouldn't meet his gaze, however, the blonde let out a laugh, "Oh gods, what am I saying? You're exactly the type of person who wants to be liked by everyone."

"Shut up." Cinder said, a frown on her face as she shoved her boyfriend before walking away from him.

"Cinder, don't be like that." Jaune pleaded as he caught up to her.

"If you want my forgiveness, then..." Cinder said as she scanned the plaza around her. When her eyes finally landed on her target, the Fall Maiden then pointed at it before saying, "Buy me whatever that person is selling."

"What, you mean octopus balls?" Jaune asked as he followed her gaze, "You've never had them before?"

"Jaune, I'm someone who's only ever dined with people from high society." Cinder said, "They were under Salem's orders, yes, but they were the elite nonetheless. They didn't have things like... octopus balls or frozen yogurt when they hosted galas."

"Right away, your Majesty." Jaune said with a roll of his eyes, "One hot serving of octopus balls coming right up."

As the blonde made his way to the nearby stall, Cinder seized the moment to take a seat on a nearby bench. Not long after she did, however, the Fall Maiden noticed two familiar heads of blonde hair among a group of three young men she did not recognize walking past not far from where she was standing.

"*Ah, there they are. Violet... and Jade, if memory serves.*" Cinder thought to herself, realizing that they hadn't spotted her yet. A frown formed on the Fall Maiden's face when she saw that the small group went into an alley. Without wasting another second, Cinder did her best to discreetly follow them from a distance.

As she got closer to the group, the sound of an argument starting had reached her ears.

"Hey! Leave my sister alone!" one of the Arc sisters shouted as Cinder crouched behind a dumpster to avoid being seen. The woman regretted her choice a moment later, however, as the wretched smell caused the Fall Maiden to gag in disgust.

Doing her best to not cause a scene, Cinder poked her head over the dumpster to get a better view of the scene playing out in front of her.

A young woman dressed in a similar outfit to what Viridian Arc was wearing before was currently being held back by a man in a hoodie, the woman's legs kicking nothing but the air in front of her.

The other blonde-haired woman in the alley - dressed in a brown jacket over a black shirt, a pair of blue jeans and a pair of sneakers - found herself surrounded by two young men.

"Come on, Dave. Knock it off, alright?" the woman said as she tried to back away from the two men in front of her only to hit a brick wall, "Let my sister go. This isn't funny anymore."

"Only if you come to this party downtown." one of the men currently surrounding the woman said, "Come on, Jade. It'll be fun. Just like

old times."

"And if I say no?" Jade Arc asked, standing her ground even as Dave slammed the wall beside her head with his palm.

"Don't be like that, Jade. We're old pals, aren't we?" Dave said, "There's no need to be so-"

"Excuse me, is there a problem here?" Cinder asked, choosing this moment to intervene before the situation could escalate. Her arms crossed, Cinder sent a glare at the three young men in front of her.

"Friend of yours?" Dave asked as he looked between Jade and Cinder.

"No." Jade Arc said, a disgusted frown on her face as she refused to make eye contact with Cinder.

"Look, lady, I don't know who you think you are but-" Dave started to say only to stop mid-sentence as Cinder brought her hand up.

"You have two choices, boy: One, you willingly let these two young women leave in peace and without harm or two, I *make* you." Cinder said, venom in her voice as a small flame appeared around her eye, "Choose wisely."

In response, the three men shared confused looks before they all burst into laughter.

"Take care of this old hag, would you?" Dave said with a wave of his hand.

"With pleasure." one of the men said. Cracking his knuckles, he swung an extremely telegraphed punch at Cinder's head only for the Fall Maiden to dodge it without effort. Cinder then followed up with a blow to the man's stomach that was heavy enough to knock him out in one hit.

Staring at the unconscious body in front of her, Cinder stepped over him without much thought as she stared at the two shocked young men in front of her.

"Fucking kill this bitch!" Dave shouted. With a nod, the young man who had his arms around Violet Arc let the woman go before charging at Cinder with a rusted pipe he had picked up from the ground.

Rolling her eyes, Cinder dodged the man's wild swings with barely any effort. This continued for a few more seconds before the man found himself winded after hitting nothing but air.

"Pathetic." Cinder spat out as she delivered a powerful slap to the man's right cheek.

"This." Slap.

"Is." Slap.

"For." Slap.

"Assaulting." Slap.

"Two young women!" Slap.

"P-p-please... H-have m-mercy..." the man managed to squeak out through all the bruises he had just suffered. Cinder thought about his plea for but a fraction of a second before delivering one final slap to the man's face that ultimately knocked him unconscious.

"No." Cinder said, watching the body slump to the side without a single care in the world. The Fall Maiden was about to step over the man's body before she halted in her tracks.

"D-don't move, bitch! Or blondie it!" Dave shouted as he held a small knife to the woman's throat. When Cinder didn't register the threat, he pressed the blade against Jade's throat, "You think I'm playing with you?!"

"Alright, alright. Calm down and let's be smart about this. There's no need for us to spill any blood tonight." Cinder said, her arms raised in surrender before looking back at the two unconscious bodies behind her, "Well, not anymore than what's already spilled, that is."

"You think you're so smart, hag?!" Dave shouted once more, "Well, how smart would you feel if-?!"

The man's rant was cut short by a swift kick to his crotch area courtesy of Violet Arc. Keeling over to the ground in pain, both the Arc sisters wasted no time in raining kick after kick on the man's body. After what seemed like an eternity of punishment, the two young Arc women finally relented before turning their attention to Cinder.

"We didn't need help." said Jade as she and Violet walked past her and out into the plaza, "Certainly not from a terrorist like you."

"I love your brother." Cinder suddenly blurted out, the words making Jade and Violet halt in their tracks.

"What?" Jade asked as the three women turned around to face each other.

"Your brother, Jaune Arc... I am in love with him. Head over heels." Cinder continued.

"I don't... see what's the point of-" Jade started only for the Fall Maiden to cut her off.

"I'm going to continue loving him and staying with him, even if that means..." Cinder said, taking a deep breath before continuing, "Even if that means the world continues to prosecute me for my past actions. They're justified, of course, because why wouldn't they be? That doesn't mean I can't atone for my sins."

"And you think our brother is your path to redemption?" Jade asked, crossing her arms as a skeptical look formed on her face.

"It's a start. He's the one who showed me there's more to life than just... wasting my own away in the kingdom's outskirts." Cinder said as she recalled their first meeting after Salem's defeat.

"My brother deserves better than you." Jade Arc said and was surprised to see Cinder nod in agreement.

"He does and I hope to be that person in the future" Cinder said, "But to put it bluntly, your acceptance of our relationship is appreciated but not necessary."

Jade and Cinder glared at each other for a few moments before the blonde turned around with a huff, leaving the Fall Maiden alone with her sister.

Violet Arc, on the other hand, stared at Cinder with a curious expression on her face for a few moments before offering the woman her hand. Confused, Cinder took it, regardless.

"Thank you for... saving us." Violet said as she grasped Cinder's hand tight, "This doesn't mean I've accepted you into the family yet, though."

With those parting words, Violet then let go of Cinder's hand as she ran to join her sister. Smiling to herself, Cinder left the alleyway behind to see Jaune hounded by both Jade and Violet.

"Oh, hey! There you are. I was wondering where you'd gone off to." Jaune said before the food in his hands were snatched away by Violet, "Also, look who I found."

"More like I'm the one who found them." Cinder said with a roll of her eyes as Jaune's protest regarding Cinder's stolen food went ignored. Walking up to the trio, Cinder put out her empty palm towards Jaune, "Well?"

"Well... what...?" Jaune asked, looking at Cinder's outstretched hand with confusion.

"Where's my food?" Cinder asked.

"Jade took it."

"And?" Cinder asked as she raised her eyebrow.

"You could share it with her." Jaune said causing Cinder to raise her eyebrow even higher. Letting out a defeated sigh, Jaune turned around and started making his way back to the stall selling the octopus balls, "I'll buy you a new plate."

"Aww, thank you, Jaune." Cinder said with a beaming smile, "How lucky I am to have such a caring and understanding boyfriend."

**[Chapter END]**

**A/N: That's a wrap for this chapter. I hope you guys enjoyed this one. Also, I made a blunder last chapter in that I only introduced five of the seven sisters. In comes Joan, twin sister of Jaune. If you need a reference for her, just think of Jeanne D'Arc from Fate/FGO. As for Arthur, just picture Proto Saber who is also from Fate.**

**I'm also planning for the next one to be the last one for 'Meeting the Parents'. Stay tuned for that one.**

**As always, faves, follows, and reviews are always welcome.**

**NoXIV signing off.**

## Special - Meeting the Parents 3

Cinder let out an annoyed groan as the mid-morning sun pierced through Jaune's bedroom window and hit her directly in the eyes. Turning around to bury her face in her boyfriend's chest, the Fall Maiden was surprised to find the other side of the bed empty.

Opening her one good eye, a frown formed on Cinder's face to find no trace of Jaune in the bedroom. Sitting up on the bed, the Fall Maiden grabbed a nearby towel before stalking her way out of the bedroom and into the nearby bathroom.

Opening the door, Cinder's eye widened to see the naked ass of one Jade Arc staring at her face.

"Hey! Occupied!" Jade shrieked. Barely able to register what was going on, the Fall Maiden was wholly unprepared to defend against a shampoo bottle that was suddenly thrown at her face, "Get out of here, perv!"

"Alright! I'm sorry!" Cinder shouted, the woman slamming the door shut before pressing her back against it, "I didn't know anyone was in here!"

"Learn to knock next time!" Jade shouted, "Or is basic etiquette something completely foreign to terrorists?!"

Growling, Cinder rubbed her face in frustration before stomping back into Jaune's bedroom.

"This is *his* fault somehow." Cinder growled to herself as she closed the door shut, "I'm gonna make him pay for this."

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Cinder let out a loud yawn as she stepped out in front of the mirror of Jaune's bedroom. Having chosen to go with a cream colored shirt

underneath a red jacket and a pair of black pants, a self-satisfied smile formed itself on the woman's face.

Soon after, the Fall Maiden then entered the kitchen only to be greeted by the eldest Arc sister.

"Well good morning, sleepyhead." said the familiar voice of Saphron Arc, the woman currently busy preparing breakfast. On the table behind her was her wife with a newspaper in hand.

"Good morning, Saphron. Terra." Cinder said as she took the seat on the other side of the table and across from Terra.

"Someone's certainly had an eventful morning, haven't they?" Saphron said with a small laugh as she placed a plate of toast, eggs, and bacon in front of the Fall Maiden.

"I'm... sorry...?" Cinder asked, taking a bite of toast with a confused look on her face as she stared at the two women for answers.

"Jade was in here earlier screaming our ears off. Something about a terrorist walking in on her while she was naked." Saphron said, laughing to herself as Cinder choked on a piece of bread.

"T-that was an accident!" Cinder protested much to the married couple's amusement. Letting out a tired sigh, the Fall Maiden continued eating her breakfast before noticing how quiet the whole house was, "By the way, where is everyone? With so many people living here, I expected the mornings to be a lot more livelier."

"Mom and dad are out right now. Went to the market to buy stuff for the party tonight." Saphron said, "They should be back in an hour or two."

"I'm sorry, did you say party?" Cinder asked with a tilt of her head.

"Oh, did Jaune not tell you? Of course he didn't, the goofball." Saphron said with a chuckle, "Mom and dad always throws these

parties whenever the family gets together."

"She says party but really it's just a barbecue." Terra added, "Nothing too special."

"Well, tonight's going to be a *little* bit special." Saphron said as she received confused looks from both Terra and Cinder, "Dad hired a photographer for tonight. He's planning to take a new family photo with all of us."

"Oh, that's wonderful." Terra said.

"Will I be in it?" Cinder asked with a worried frown.

"Of course you will, silly." Saphron said, the woman confused that Cinder would even think to ask such a question, "Why would you not be in it?"

"Well, I mean... What if things don't work out between me and Jaune?" Cinder asked, "Then I'd just be some random woman in an important family picture hanging above the fireplace."

As the Fall Maiden said her piece, Saphron looked at Terra before the two women shared a small laugh.

"Cinder, I've seen the way he looks at you whenever he thinks nobody's looking." Saphron said, " *And* I've seen you look at him the same way whenever *you* think nobody's looking. It's the same look Terra and I used to give each other before we got married and had a child."

"And if that isn't the look of two people in love, then I don't know what is." Terra said, chuckling as Cinder blushed in embarrassment, "Speaking of our child, where *is* Adrian?"

"I... don't know..." Saphron said, the blonde ducking her head under the table before bringing it back up with a shrug, "Well, I'm sure he's here somewhere."

---

Leaving the Arc household behind her, Cinder made to leave for town to meet up with Jaune before a familiar voice called out to her.

"Morning, Cinder." a woman with long blonde hair dressed in a red t-shirt, a pair of black pants, and a pair of white sneakers said as she strolled up to the Fall Maiden on her bicycle, "You heading somewhere?"

"Oh, good morning... uh..." Cinder said, her sentence trailing off as she wracked her brain to remember the woman's name, "... Viridian...?"

"Close. I'm Scarlet." the woman said with an amused chuckle, "Viridian's the little gremlin in human form. Totally different."

"Right, sorry about that." Cinder said before Scarlet waved it off.

"Don't be. It took Terra a whole month to get our names right." said the Arc woman, "So, are you headed somewhere?"

"Just to town to meet up with Jaune. He forgot his scroll so I'm going there to give it to him." Cinder said as she held up the scroll in question, "I was also hoping to do my part to prepare for tonight's barbecue."

"What a coincidence. I'm headed there myself." Scarlet said as she pedaled the bicycle slowly enough to not leave Cinder behind, "I'll go with you."

"You really don't have to." Cinder argued, "I wouldn't want to keep you, after all."

"No, it's alright." Scarlet said before pointing to another bicycle lying down on the nearby grass, "It's not like I have anything better to do, anyway. Here, you can take Viridian's bike."

"Won't she mind?" Cinder asked, the woman approaching the bicycle regardless.

"Oh, it's fine. After all, it's not like she's never done stuff like that before." Scarlet said as the two women left the Arc house behind and started making their way to town. Their journey started in silence for the first few minutes before Scarlet turned to Cinder with a question, "So, Cinder, how *did* you and my idiot brother even get together in the first place? I only ask because when he left Orleans, he was determined to, as he put it, "cut off your head and feed it to the wolves"."

"Well, it's a bit of a... long story." Cinder said.

"Hey, it's still a while until we reach town so you might as well tell me a story." Scarlet said.

"Well, when your brother found me, it was far to the north of Anima. It was during the winter season and as you could expect, there was a snowstorm." Cinder said as the two of them cycled past a vast field of flowers, "To keep myself from freezing to death, I was huddled deep in a cave with nothing but a warm fire and beef jerky to keep me company."

"That sounds lovely." Scarlet said as the two women shared a small laugh.

"In spite of all that, however, Jaune still managed to track me down as he stood at the entrance of the cave, shivering wildly and covered from head to toe in snow." Cinder said, a smile on the Fall Maiden's face at the fond memory of their sudden reunion, "After giving some silly speech about justice and retribution that I can hardly recall, he charged at me with his sword in hand, fully intent on taking my life. Of course, I wasn't going to let him do that so I fought back. One thing led to another and I accidentally blasted a hole in the ground through which the both of us fell into."

"And then what happened?" Scarlet asked with a gasp and a horrified expression.

"Well, we both fell a long ways down and we were knocked out for quite a while. I was the first to get up but as I was walking away from the scene and I looked back at the prone and unconscious body of your brother, a feeling of... guilt, for lack of a better word, suddenly came over me." Cinder said, the Fall Maiden taking a moment to reminisce before continuing, "I'm not even sure *why* I decided to save his life. After all, he was there to kill me."

"Well, I'm thankful that you did." Scarlet said as she faced Cinder with a smile.

"So am I. After he woke up, we... got into a heated discussion- no, not a discussion. It was more like a screaming match, the both of us blaming the other for ending up in that underground cavern." Cinder said, "Ultimately, we decided to begrudgingly postpone our hatred for each other as we started looking for a way out. Once we did, I fully expected him to resume killing me but he... never did. We ended up helping some villages along the way. After that, one thing led to another and now here we are."

"Wow... I don't know what I was expecting but it certainly wasn't that kind of story." Scarlet said as she stared at the Fall Maiden, "But that doesn't really explain how the two of you are madly in love now, though."

"Sure, I'll tell you only after you tell me some embarrassing and/or interesting stories from Jaune's childhood." Cinder said with a coy smile, "After all, it wouldn't be fair if you were the only to gain something from this."

Scarlet could only laugh at Cinder words before the woman nodded, "Okay, that's fair. What do you want to know?"

"What was he like growing up?" Cinder asked, "I've only ever known about his life after Beacon but nothing before."

"Ugh, he was such a huge crybaby and a giant pain in the ass." Scarlet said, "No offence."

"None taken." Cinder said with an amused smile.

"During first grade, Jaune just would not stop crying as mom and dad left him in school." Scarlet said, "When the bell rang, the damn kid started to latch himself onto mom's legs. It took dad and another teacher to finally pull him and mom apart. Finally, mom and dad were so fed up with it all that they just left him there for the teachers to handle."

Cinder, meanwhile, couldn't stop herself from laughing herself silly from hearing the woman's story.

"I have a hard time picturing any of that, to be honest." Cinder said as she wiped a tear from her eye while still trying to contain her laughter.

"It's true, though." Scarlet said just as the two women finally reached town, "Well, here we are. Did Jaune tell you where he was headed to specifically?"

"Not exactly, no." Cinder said as she looked around town in search of her boyfriend.

"Well, guess we better start looking for him, then." Scarlet said, "Trust that idiot brother of mine to forget his scroll at home."

The two women spent half an hour strolling through town on their bicycles before Cinder finally spotted a familiar mop of blonde hair leaving a butcher shop. Jaune was made aware of their arrival when Scarlet dashed in front of him while ringing the bell on her bicycle.

"Remember to bring your damn scroll next time, idiot." Scarlet said as she tossed him the scroll.

"Whoa. Thanks, Scar. You're the best." Jaune said as he narrowly caught the scroll in his hands, "And Cinder. You're here, too?"

"Is that a problem?" asked the Fall Maiden with a raised eyebrow.

"Well, no. It's just... I wasn't expecting to see you here, that's all." Jaune said.

"You would have if you hadn't been such a forgetful dork." Scarlet said.

"Heh, sorry about that." Jaune said.

"It's quite alright. After all, Scarlet and I have had the most wonderful time talking about you." Cinder said with a smile that sent shivers down Jaune's spine, "Stories about how a certain blonde boy wouldn't stop crying through the first day of sixth grade."

"Scar! You told her that?!" Jaune asked as the man rounded on his sister.

"Oh, lighten up, Jaune. It would have come up eventually." Scarlet said.

"No need to be embarrassed, Jaune. Everybody cries on their first day." Cinder said as she placed a comforting hand on Jaune's shoulder.

"Maybe but Jaune was crying in class throughout the whole week." Scarlet added from the side.

"Scarlet! Shut up!" Jaune shouted, the man's face red with embarrassment as Cinder and Scarlet shared a laugh.

---

The barbecue was in full swing now as Cinder and the Arc family gathered at their backyard. On one side, Jaune and Arthur were

standing in front of the grill as the two Arc men tended to the hot dogs, burgers, and chicken in front of them.

On another side of the party, Claire, Joan, Violet, and Terra were busy playing with Adrian as the four women shared a laugh over something the young boy had said.

Cinder, meanwhile, was sitting on the table alone as she stared at the scene in front of her with a happy smile.

"Enjoying yourself?" asked the eldest Arc daughter as Saphron took the seat in front of her.

"Very much, surprisingly." Cinder said with a chuckle, "I'll admit, it is peaceful out here. Even with the Grimm all over the world slowly dwindling in numbers, you'd be hard pressed to find a scene like this anywhere in Remnant."

"I suppose we have you to thank for that, don't we?" Saphron said, "You, Jaune, and all his friends."

"No... My part in Salem's defeat wasn't as important as you're making it out to be." Cinder said as she looked away from the blonde's gaze.

"Don't sell yourself so short, Cinder." Saphron said.

"I'm really not." Cinder said with a shake of her head, "Jaune and Ruby... They were the real heroes that day. I don't even think my actions can be counted as providing support."

"You think so?" Saphron asked as Cinder responded with a nod, "Because that's not how Jaune tells it."

Before Cinder could ask the woman what she meant, the two of them were suddenly joined by Viridian, the young woman pointing a camera at the both of them.

"No, don't look at the camera. Just pretend I'm not here and continue talking about... whatever it was you were talking about before I got here." Viridian said, "You were talking about how Saphron is just the *worst* big sister ever, right?"

"Hey!" the woman in question said as Cinder let out a small laugh.

"No, no. Saphron's actually been quite welcoming." Cinder said with a laugh as she sent a grateful look to the eldest Arc daughter, "Something I've come to really appreciate."

"That's because you've never had to live with her before this." Viridian said as she turned her camera at her sister, "Did you know that one time, in high school, I caught her and her girlfriend in the library-"

"Okay! I think that's enough of that, don't you?" Saphron said, the woman standing up before making a grab for the camera. Viridian, however, simply stepped back and away from the woman's reach.

"So, Cinder, what about you?" Viridian asked as she pointed the camera at the Fall Maiden once more, "Any cool stories to share? Jaune tells me you can do magic. Is that true?"

"That is correct, yes." Cinder said. To demonstrate, the woman held out her hand before a ball of fire appeared in it.

"That's cool but it could just be a semblance." Viridian said. In response, Cinder then froze the ball of fire in her hands before letting it drop to the ground, shattering it into a million tiny pieces, "Huh... Okay, that was pretty cool. What else can you do? Oh, Jaune tells me you can make a thunderstorm appear out of nowhere. Do that!"

Before Cinder could respond, however, Scarlet entered the backyard with a man who had a camera in his hands.

"Mom! Dad! Photographer's here." Scarlet announced before taking a seat beside Cinder, "Hey, Cinder. Is that little imp bothering you

again? I've been telling mom and dad to hire some pest control lately."

"Huh... Since when were you two close?" Saphron asked, the woman eyeing the women as Viridian stuck out her tongue at Scarlet before scampering off to bother her other siblings.

"You'd be surprised what the power of embarrassing stories about Jaune can do to strengthen a relationship." Scarlet said as she and Cinder shared a nod.

"Right then, everyone, gather 'round." Arthur Arc said, getting his family's attention by hitting the glass in his hands with a spoon, "As you all know, every time we Arcs gather, we take a family photo together. To Jaune, Joan, Saphron, Terra, and Adrian, we are so happy that you're here with us again."

"And to Cinder, as well. We couldn't be happier that you are here with us." Claire added, "I can see just how happy you and Jaune are. For that, we welcome you to-"

Before the woman could finish her speech, however, the sound of a chair toppling over caught everyone's attention. Heads turned to see that the source of the commotion came from Jade as she stood up while glaring at her mother.

"Jade? Is everything alright?"

"No, mom, everything is *not* alright." Jade said in a low voice before she turned her gaze towards Cinder, "How can it be when this... this... *murderer* and *terrorist* is out here with us in our very own backyard and my own *family* is acting like that's okay?! She's killed people! Men, women, *and* children! How is everyone acting like that's not a big deal?!"

"Jade, please-" Claire started to say only for her daughter to cut her off.

"What, just because she helped Jaune and his friends kill Salem that it's suddenly okay for her to be part of a family?!" Jade shouted, "A part of *my* family?! With *my* brother?! No. If you guys want to take this family picture and insist on having *her* in it, then I won't be a part of it."

With her piece said, the young woman then stormed off into the house as silence fell over the backyard.

"I'll talk to her." Jaune said, the man giving Cinder's hand a squeeze before he went into the house.

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Standing in front of Jade's room, Jaune took a deep breath and was about to knock on the door before a voice from within stopped him.

"No, you can't come in." Jade said from behind the door.

"Jade, it's me. Can I come in?" Jaune asked.

"What did I just-?" Jade said with a sigh, "Yeah, alright... Come in..."

Pushing the door open with a creak, Jaune poked his head inside to see his sister hunched over her desk while an empty briefcase lay open on her bed.

"Hey there, superstar. How are you feeling?" Jaune asked before receiving a half-hearted glare from Jade.

"Don't call me that."

"Why not?" Jaune asked as he took a seat on the foot of her bed, "You used to *love* that nickname when we were kids."

"Yeah, exactly. Kids." Jade said, the woman not bothering to face her brother, "We're not kids anymore, you idiot."

"No but that doesn't mean we can't be young at heart." Jaune said, "Remember? When you used to strap me to a chair and force me to

listen to you sing all the latest pop songs?"

"I was there..." Jade said.

"Personally, I thought you sounded great and I was also your number one fan." Jaune said, "Actually, I was your only-"

"Jaune. I know what you're trying to do, alright?" Jade said as Jaune's mouth closed shut, "Well, you can stop it because I'm not going back down there."

"It seems like it." Jaune said as he ran a hand over the inside of the empty briefcase beside him, "Where are you planning to go, anyway?"

"I don't know. Somewhere far from here." Jade said.

"And what are you planning to do once you get to wherever it is you're going?" Jaune asked as Jade finally turned to face her brother.

"Don't you dare try and lecture me on my actions, little brother." Jade said, the woman getting up from her seat, "I'm not the one who's in a relationship with a goddamned criminal!"

"She's trying her best-" Jaune started to say before Jade cut him off.

"*How* can you even stand her after what she's done to you let alone be in love with her?!" Jade asked as she towered over her brother, "After *everything* she's done to Vale... To Atlas... To *you* ."

"I know, Jade... I know..." Jaune said as he took her sister's hand before guiding her to sit beside him, "Cinder and I, we've talked about it at length and I... don't think I can ever forgive her for what she did to Pyrrha."

"Then *why* ?" Jade asked in an almost pleading tone.

"I guess, the simplest and most infuriating answer I can give you is that love... doesn't make sense." Jaune said, "It doesn't *need* to."

"Gods, that is... the most asinine answer you could have given me." Jade said.

"Probably but it's the truth." Jaune said, "Meeting her again after Salem, I saw that she was trying to atone for her past mistakes. I saw how genuine she was with that."

"And that's how you ended up inviting her to stay with you in Vale?" Jade asked, disbelief on her face, "Just from a simple gesture like that?"

"We spent a lot of time together in the wilds of Mistral, actually." Jaune said, "We talked a lot about things... Our childhood, our goals for the future and I realized that... I wanted her to be part *my* future."

"Gods, that was so... so cheesy." Jade said with a small laugh as she laid her head on Jaune's shoulders

"Cinder said the same thing when I first told her that." Jaune said, the man laughing at Jade's shocked expression. Squeezing the woman's hand, Jaune continued in a low voice, "Please be okay with me and her. Please don't make me choose between my favorite sister and the woman I love."

"That's not fair, calling me your favorite sister." Jade said as she squeezed his hand.

"Don't let the others hear me say that but it's the truth." Jaune said, "Even when we were dumb kids, you were always there for me. From helping me lie to mom about the broken vase-"

"Viridian still hasn't forgiven you for that, by the way."

"-to lending me the money I needed to get to Vale, pay for my fake transcripts, and enter Beacon." Jaune said, "I hope you'll... continue

being there for me even after I become an old man."

Jade was silent for a few seconds before she finally spoke.

"Fine. I still don't like her - and I don't think I ever will - but if she's that important to you, I'll... *tolerate* her. For you." Jade said as Jaune gave the woman a big hug.

"Thank you, Jade." Jaune said as Jade wiped a lone tear from her eyes, "Now come on, I'm starving and I think the food's getting cold."

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"Hey guys, we're back." Jaune said as he stepped back into the backyard followed by Jade. The young woman silently took a seat beside Saphron as she refused to meet anyone's eyes. The awkward silence from before continued for a few seconds before Jade spoke up.

"Well, what are we waiting for? Let's take that picture already before the food goes freezing cold."

"Jade's right. This guy doesn't come cheap, you know?" Arthur said with a chuckle.

As the family gathered around for the picture, Cinder took Jaune's hand in her own before whispering into his ear.

"Is everything alright?" Cinder asked, a hint of nervousness in her voice.

"Everything's great." Jaune said, the blonde giving the Fall Maiden a kiss on the cheek just as the picture was taken.

**[Chapter End]**

**A/N: And that's a wrap on the *penultimate* chapter of "Meeting the Parents". I really hope you guys enjoyed this little short story of mine as much as I enjoyed reading it. In case some of**

**you are wondering why I didn't bother delving further into Jaune's reunion with Cinder, it's because I've planned on doing a prequel of sorts detailing exactly that. Maybe it'll be another three chapters, maybe it won't. Who knows, right? What I do know is that it will be its own series.**

**In any case, stay tuned for Knightfall - Origins (title is tentative).**

**As always, faves, follows, and reviews are always welcome.**

**NoXIV signing off.**

## Special - Meeting the Parents 4

Cinder woke up in the middle of the night with a jolt, the woman straining her eyes as she surveyed her surroundings. Turning to face the other side of the bed, the Fall Maiden was surprised to see that Jaune was missing. Frowning, Cinder sat up on the bed, put on a robe over her night gown as well as a pair of slippers - all of them provided to her by Claire - before leaving the room behind in search of her boyfriend.

As she reached the living room, she heard the distinct voices of Jaune and Saphron talking to each other. Judging by the atmosphere, the Fall Maiden could tell they were talking about something heavy.

"Honestly, were you *really* surprised by how Jade acted today?" Saphron asked. From where Cinder was standing, the two of them were sat in the middle of the living room where a fire was healthily crackling in the fireplace in front of them.

"Well, no but..." Jaune started to say before letting his sentence trail off.

"Mom and dad like her." Saphron said before the silence between them could stretch on any further.

"No, *dad* likes her. Mom *adores* her." Jaune said, "If she had her way, she'd have married the two of us during the party."

Cinder, meanwhile, could feel the blood rushing to her face at the thought of marrying Jaune. The very idea of starting a family with him was enough to make the Fall Maiden's heart flutter but before it could get out of hand, she quickly shook those thoughts away.

"How is Jade feeling about all this?" Saphron asked.

"She's... tolerating her." Jaune said, "For my sake."

"It's hardly surprising. After all, she is a wanted terrorist." Saphron said.

"She's been pardoned. That and the fact that she helped us *kill* Salem, the Queen of the Grimm herself." Jaune argued with a scowl on his face, "Isn't that enough?"

"For a lot of people, it is, but that still doesn't change the fact that she has killed a lot of people in the past." Saphron added, "You should know, since she *was* the one responsible for your partner's death."

"I know and... we've talked about that..." Jaune said as he let his sentence hang in the air once more.

Cinder could feel her heart wrench as the topic changed to Pyrrha. They had made plans for the two of them to visit her monument but Cinder felt she wasn't ready... that she wasn't worthy. Unworthy to even step foot in Argus let alone in front of Pyrrha Nikos's statue.

"And? How did *that* go?" asked Saphron. In response, her brother simply stared at her before letting out a heavy sigh.

"Look, the point is, I love this woman and, if we're being honest, I was prepared to have *none* of you approve of this relationship." said the blonde.

"What would you have done then?"

Jaune stared at the small fire in front of him, the silence in the room suddenly incredibly deafening, before he finally gave his sister an answer, "I would have chosen Cinder without a second thought."

The heart in Cinder's chest soared at the blonde's words, the Fall Maiden barely able to remain standing as she tried her best to remain in hiding.

Saphron, however, let out a small laugh at her brother's decision rather than be offended.

"I can't say I'm surprised. The way you look at her is the way I find myself looking at Terra and Adrian sometimes." Saphron said with a soft smile, "But you have nothing to worry about from me, little brother. To me, that woman is practically family already."

"Thanks, Saph." Jaune said as the two siblings shared a smile.

"You should probably get some rest. It's getting late and you have a big day tomorrow, right?" Saphron said as Jaune's eyes widened as the man realized what the time was.

"Oh, crap. You're right. I really don't want to be sleepy for tomorrow." Jaune said, the man getting up from the chair as he raced out of the living room. As Cinder prepared to leave for the bedroom herself, the sound of Saphron speaking up froze the Fall Maiden in her tracks.

"You know, eavesdropping on a conversation between a brother and his sister is pretty rude, don't you think?" said Saphron as Cinder flinched at the woman's words.

"H-how did you...?" Cinder asked.

"The mirror." Saphron said as she pointed to a mirror behind Cinder.

"Sorry. I wanted to say something but-" Cinder started to say only for Saphron to wave her concerns away with a laugh.

"It's fine. There's nothing to forgive." Saphron said, "So, it seems my brother really loves you."

"It certainly seems that way." Cinder said as a slight blush appeared on the woman's face.

"He's a good person. Always has been ever since he was a kid." Saphron said, the woman getting up from her chair before putting out the fire, "I'm certainly the last person on Remnant who could threaten you but I hope this doesn't end badly for either of you."

Her piece said, Saphron then left Cinder and the living room behind.

" *I certainly hope so, too.*" thought the Fall Maiden to herself as she made her way back to Jaune's old bedroom. Entering the room it was to find the man himself laying on his bed, wide awake and staring into his scroll.

"Oh, hey. I was wondering where you went." Jaune said as he put the scroll away, "Couldn't sleep?"

"Something like that." Cinder said, the woman crawling into bed beside the blonde. Giving him a quick kiss on his cheek, the Fall Maiden then made herself comfortable as she and Jaune eventually fell asleep in each other's arms.

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"You know, if you told us we were going on a hike, I'd have chosen a much more comfortable outfit." Cinder said as she and Jaune trekked through the woods of Orleans.

"I did say we were going on a picnic." Jaune said, the blonde holding a branch over Cinder's head for the woman to walk under.

"Picnics usually involves lounging on a park with other people around us."

"True but you *hate* other people." Jaune said, "Besides, why would I want to share your beauty with others when I can have it all to myself?"

"Aww, how sweet of you." Cinder said, the woman wearing a small smile on her face. Not a moment later, she then gave the blonde a thumbs down before blowing a raspberry in his face.

"What? What was wrong with that?" Jaune asked, Cinder letting out a laugh as she walked past him.

"Too cheesy. *Way* too cheesy."

"I thought it was a nice thing to say."

"Jaune, the amount of cheese it had was enough to make me lactose intolerant." Cinder said as the couple shared a small laugh. Before long, the two of them finally managed to leave the trees behind as they stepped onto a clearing on the side of a cliff. On the edge of the cliff stood a mighty oak tree that seemed to overlook the entire village of Orleans.

"So, what do you think?" Jaune asked, the blonde stepping past Cinder as he started to unload the contents of his backpack, "Nice view, huh?"

"That's certainly one way to put it." Cinder said as she made her way to the tree in front of her. Placing her palm upon it, she took a few seconds to admire the tree as well as the village of Orleans, "How did you find this place?"

"I used to come here when I was a kid. Usually when I was bored or was just sick of bullies." Jaune said, a nervous chuckle escaping his lips, "Usually the bully thing."

"Nobody ever found you here?" Cinder asked.

"Nope. It's a stupid thing to be proud of but this was sort of like my secret hideout." Jaune said, a hint of pride in his voice.

"Then, thank you for sharing-" Cinder started to say, the woman rounding on her boyfriend only to find the blonde kneeling on one knee in front of her. His hands were outstretched towards her with a little black box on the palm of his left hand, "Jaune, what-?"

"Cinder Fall." Jaune said as the feeling of pure joy started forming within the pit of the Fall Maiden's stomach. A second later, Jaune then opened the box to reveal a beautiful and glistening diamond ring, "Will you make me the happiest-?"

Cinder didn't let the blonde finish as she tackled him to the ground, the couple instantly locking lips. The two of them broke away a few

moments later as they laid down on the sides, staring into each other's eyes for what felt like eternity.

"So, is that a yes?" Jaune asked, breaking the silence as Cinder rolled her eyes.

"Yes." said Cinder Fall, a warm flame burning in her eyes as the Fall Maiden positively - and literally - glowed in delight.

"I love you, Cinder Fall."

"And I love you, Jaune Arc."

Jaune and Cinder stayed at that spot long after the sun had set, the couple professing their love for each other well into the night.

**[Chapter End]**

**A/N: And that's a wrap for "Meeting the Parents". I really hope you've all enjoyed reading this little short story I came up with. I certainly enjoyed writing every single word of it. Will there be more Knightfall stories in the future? Absolutely.**

**As always, faves, follows, and reviews are always appreciated**

**NoXIV signing off**