

Day with Nausea

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Day with Nausea

by [fictetus](#)

Summary

Sequel to Dinner with Nemesis. Jaune wakes up in familiar setting with foggy memories of last night. What happened between him and Cinder? And more importantly, why does he want to see her again.

His Headache

Chapter Notes

Well, well, well, here is the sequel.

Someone called my previous fic bottle episode. No worries, now I have budget to afford more characters besides just two of them. Although Ruby didn't appear due to scheduling issues and demanding too much money (hopefully this will be fixed by the end)

Of course, I recommend reading Dinner with Nemesis first, but hey, can't force ya.

Either way, hope you enjoy it. Comments are always welcome.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Headache, Jaune's head hurt. His eyes were closed, but even small bit of light that entered the room irritated him. What happened to him? He had a vague recollection of last night. Dinner, Weiss, dawn, kiss, alcohol, lot of alcohol. Jaune tried to piece it together. Memory of inebriated Weiss leaning in for a kiss. No... it wasn't Weiss. Who was she? She had a white hair, but much sharper features, scar over her left eye. It was Weiss, it had to be her. Who else would it be? No, no, it was a different scar. It was a worn patch of damaged skin. Who was she? Eyes, no, just one eye. Amber sphere with gold dancing within it. It could only be one person. Her visage was engulfed in flames, revealing dark shoulder length hair and smile. It was Cinder Fall. But her smile, it was different. It wasn't a smirk, it was a genuine smile. What happened last night?

His musing was interrupted by loud sound of door opening, it was as if thunder crashed next to him. Crap, how much did he drink last night if simple sound of door opening was that loud. Where was he anyway?

"Good day!" Nora loudly proclaimed. It wasn't alcohol, thunder really crashed near him. "Is grandpa still sleeping?" Jaune internally groaned. This likely meant two things. One, he was in his dorm room back in Shade Academy. How he got there was anyone's guess. Second, someone else was also in the room.

"Nora, not so loud." Weiss spoke in hushed tone.

"Sorry Weissy, but he can't sleep all day. Someone needs to wake him up." Nora said, her voice louder and louder as she approached him.

"Maybe you should give him true love's kiss." Blake added. She was also somewhere in the room, probably teasing Weiss.

"Blake!" Weiss hissed at her, causing Blake and Ren to laugh. He was also in the room.

"Sorry girls, you had your opportunity. Now I'm waking him up." Nora's tone now was almost sinister.

"Nora wait." Ren pleaded. Jaune hoped Ren would save him from whatever Nora planned for him. He heard more footsteps approach the bed, but it was too late.

"Wakey wakey Jaune-Jaune!" Nora exclaimed, jumping his seemingly sleeping form. Her fingers dug between his ribs before starting to tickle him. He definitely didn't expect that. Jaune let out hoarse giggles as she tickled him.

His eyes had some trouble adjusting to his dim dorm room. Nora was in front of him, naturally still tickling him. Ren and Weiss were standing at the foot of the bed. They looked worried, but also smiling at Nora's shenanigans. Blake was sitting on sofa facing the bed, book in her hands. She shot a glance at him before going back to reading.

"Nora stop, stop, stop!" Jaune pleaded as he giggled.

"Nope, you should have woken up few hours earlier if you wanted to avoid this." She was relentless.

"Glad you are okay, you had us worried Jaune." Ren added. No wonder, he couldn't contact them while he was in that room. As far as they were concerned, he went to the restaurant and disappeared. Rooftop, dawn, kiss... He probably arrived in the dorm room early in the morning. Hopefully he didn't wake up Ren and Nora when he showed up.

Weiss just stood there silently. She looked like she was about to say something, but decided against it. Technically, she stood him up last night, although it wasn't her fault. Now he was a jerk, having a dinner with complete stranger, not even contacting any of his friends. Well, she wasn't a stranger, she was so much worse.

Jaune rolled as Nora tickled him. Hangover didn't affect him as much as he thought it would. Yeah, his head hurt and his senses were bit sensitive, but for the most part... oh no, his stomach was turning.

"Nora, stop, I'm gonna throw up!" He once again pleaded.

"Oh please, as if that's gonna wo... Oh shit." Nora let him go almost immediately. Jaune bolted towards the toilet.

"Be careful where you throw up. I'm not cleaning that!" He heard Ren's voice in the distance as he emptied contents of his stomach. Disgusting taste of acid filled his mouth, except his lips. Jaune licked his lips, they were sweet and smokey. Taste of Fall.

"I'm telling you, health regulations in this place are abysmal." He heard Weiss explain.

"That has nothing to do with health regulations." Blake stated.

"Then how do you explain what happened yesterday?" Weiss sounded annoyed.

Jaune eventually stopped vomiting and returned to the room. Everyone was smirking except Weiss, who was looking down. Understandable, she had a similar situation yesterday. What did she write him yesterday? That Yang told her they were now basically a couple because of that? Speaking of Yang.

"Could you... not tell Yang what just happened." Jaune wanted to keep some of his nonexistent dignity. Luckily she wasn't in the room when it happened.

"Not tell Yang what?" He heard a voice coming from kitchen. Oh no. "Not tell her that a new movie in Vomit Boy franchise just came out?" Yang said as she walked into the room. She was holding a sandwich, his sandwich.

"Did you really have to steal my sandwich?" Jaune said as Yang took a bite of it.

"Yes I did." She said as she took another bite of it. "Consider this a payment for me covering for you today." Yang explained. She must have mixed some things up.

"I wasn't scheduled for morning patrol today." Jaune corrected her. That's one of the reasons he even went to the restaurant last night. Room was filled with giggles. What was so funny?

"Hey VB, what time it is?" Yang smugly asked. What was he suppose to say.

"11 AM? 12 maybe?" Jaune tried. He took a longer nap than usual, so that seemed likely. Others were now loudly laughing. Well, that was clearly an incorrect answer. Wait, Yang said she was covering for him. That meant...

"Beeeeep, wrong answer!" Yang did her best to imitate quiz buzzer.

"It's 3PM Jaune." Ren finally answered. Well, he definitely overslept. He was suppose to be on two patrols this afternoon. Who was covering for the other one?

"I need to go... patrol..." Jaune said as he reached for a T-shirt, but headache forced him to sit down.

"Relax, Ruby covered for the other one." Blake said as she closed her book.

"Make sure to buy her some cookies, otherwise I'm gonna steal more of your sandwiches." Yang warned him.

"So..." Ren started. They wanted to know what happened last night.

"...How would you rate today's performance on VB scale?" Yang joked.

"Yang!" Weiss loudly groaned.

"What? I know it's hard to top the original performance, managed to vomit on my shoes after all, but still. Was it disappointing, was it average, was it a surp..." Yang continued.

"What exactly happened last night?" Weiss asked, interrupting Yang. She was worried about him.

What was he suppose to tell them? That he spent a night with Cinder, that they kissed? Yes, he should probably tell them that, but he wouldn't. That was their little secret. Her lips, her warm sweet lips. It's ironic, he was angry at Ozpin for keeping secrets, he wasn't any better than him. Something else interested him.

"How did I get here?" Jaune asked. He couldn't piece things together. Last thing he remembered was Cinder leaning for another kiss. Then, a warmth of embrace. Next thing he knew, he was in his dorm room, just in his briefs, getting tickled by Nora.

"Weiss got a call from the restaurant early this morning." Ren explained.

"We thought you got hurt so we rushed there. Weiss, Yang, Ren and me." Nora added.

"Headmaster Theodore borrowed us one of the Shade Academy cars. Guess who drove it." Yang said as she left the room before continuing. "You know what, taking another one of your sandwiches because of that." Jaune chuckled.

"Anyway, staff explained us you were drunk, sleeping on one of the sofas in the lobby. Me and Nora picked you up and carried you to the car while Weiss spoke with staff." Ren added. So he somehow got to the lobby. Maybe staff found him sleeping on the rooftop and called his friends. No, that didn't seem right. It was a secretive restaurant, he doubted they would dig through his scroll. That meant Cinder did it. She gave them Weiss' contact and instructed them to call her. Did that also mean she carried him to the lobby? He imagined Cinder carrying him in her arms. No, that was bit too silly. She likely called staff to the rooftop to pick him up.

"In that case, thank you all. Thank you Weiss for answering the call and organizing a rescue operation. Thank you Nora and Ren for carrying me. Thank you whoever undressed me." Jaune said before raising his voice so Yang could hear him as well. "And I'd thank the Driver as well, but she already stole two of my sandwiches!" Jaune added. He heard Yang's laughter coming from the kitchen.

"Now that that's answered, what happened last night Jaune?" Weiss once again asked. He had to come up with something quickly.

"After I read the message you weren't coming, I... I was about to leave, but then I ran into someone. She was without a partner and asked me to be her partner for a night. I was like... sure why not, might as well." Jaune narrated. Well, to say narrated would be a lie. It was a complete fabrication of events that transpired. But there was enough truth in it for him to say it with some confidence. She truly was alone looking for a partner.

"I couldn't call you because it was one of those Atlesian secret rooms. I drank a bit too much and you know the rest of the story." He tried to keep the story as brief as possible. They still looked worried.

"Secret room?" It piqued Blake's interest.

"Atlesian restaurants and hotels have secret rooms with minimal surveillance that are cut off communication wise. They are used for business meeting or..." Weiss explained before

gritting her teeth. "...affairs."

"Oh." Blake said before letting out an awkward laugh.

"Who was she?" Nora asked.

"She was..." Jaune began. This was gonna be bit tricky.

"No need, I asked staff about her." Weiss interjected before continuing. "Bleiss Regen, she was the one that made the reservation. Atlesian, wealthy, white hair, likely in her mid twenties." Luckily Weiss did his job for him. Was she jealous? Why would she be jealous?

"You said it was restaurant with secret rooms. How do you know all that?" Blake asked.

"Some information about person making a reservation has to be available. You know... legal reasons." Blake nodded at Weiss' explanation.

"How do you know she was wealthy? I doubt they gave you her credit card number." Yang asked, entering the room again.

"Well for start, that restaurant is not cheap. In fact, depending on what you order, it might cost you a small fortune." Weiss explained. Luckily Cinder paid the bill. "Second, look at this." Weiss said as she carefully picked up a glass iris Cinder made for him and showed it to others.

"Neat. What is that?" Yang asked.

"Glass iris. Masterfully made. This isn't some five minute craft, this thing was expensive to make." Weiss once again explained. Ironic, it was closer to five minute craft than she could have imagined. Something so elegant and refined was a child play for Cinder.

"So let me get this straight. Older Atlesian lady picks up Jaune and they have a date in a secret room, she gifts him an expensive flower and he ends the night pass out drunk." Blake said looking at Jaune. Barely holding back laughter, much to Weiss' chagrin.

"Well kind of..." Jaune started.

"Oh shit, she took the V out of Vomit Boy. No wonder he isn't talking about it considering he is now... Omit Boy." Yang joked, Blake laughing with her.

"Nice one Fearless Leader." Nora added.

"More like V-less Leader." Yang threw another pun, annoying Weiss even further.

"Would you stop!" Weiss exclaimed. She was clearly embarrassed. "Atlesians don't do that in restaurants, they have hotels for that." She clarified.

"Oh trust me, table can do just fi..."

"No! We are not having this discussion anymore." Weiss immediately cut off Yang's further attempt.

"Well either way, I'm glad you've met someone new Jaune." Ren said, shifting conversation away from raunchier topics. "But there is one more thing that got us worried." Jaune wasn't sure what was Ren gonna mention now.

"While we were in the car, you were talking in your sleep." Nora added. She was surprisingly somber considering she was laughing moments ago.

"You kept saying Cinder's name." Weiss muttered. Crap. Jaune wondered how much did they know.

"She can't hurt you here Jaune. She is probably not even in Vacuo yet." Weiss tried to reassure him. Oh how wrong she was. None of them knew that one of Salem's most important agents was strolling through Vacuo in disguise. And naturally none of them knew she had a dinner with him last night.

"Jaune, you don't have to face her alone. Let us shoulder some of your burden." Ren said as he put a hand on Jaune's shoulder.

"You may be fearless, but don't forget you still have us." Nora added. They were right, he was selfish in that regard. "Use them." Cinder's words from last night echoed in his head. No, he wouldn't use them, but he also wouldn't ignore them.

"Thanks team, I'm glad you have my back." He was glad to have them. Despite everything, they were still with him.

"Group hug!" Nora exclaimed before latching herself onto Jaune. Ren sighed before hugging him as well. One of his hands was hesitantly draped over Nora. Weiss was awkwardly observing the hug while Blake and Yang started walking out of the room.

"Nice to see you are okay VB. Gonna have to decline hug offer though. Got my own victim for that." As she said that, Yang embraced Blake before giving her quick kiss. Blake whispered something in Yang's ear, causing them both to giggle. Both finally left the dorm room.

"I have a feeling they they'll want some time alone now." Weiss sighed.

"You can always join the hug." Nora offered. Jaune nodded, confirming Nora's offer. Weiss hesitantly walked up, before embracing Jaune as well.

Jaune felt warmth. Why couldn't he always feel this warmth? He was empty, but fleeting moments like this served as a reminder that there was a hope for him. But it wasn't enough, he needed more. Even embrace of his friends wasn't enough for him. Her sweet and smokey lips. Why couldn't he stop thinking about her? Yes, he felt warmth being embraced, he felt warmth drinking a liquor last night. But with her, it was as if fire permeated through every fiber of his being. It didn't burn him, it fulfilled him. That night, he no longer felt emptiness.

But why her? Why now? She broke him, she made him empty in the first place. Maybe that was an answer in and of itself, only she could fill the void she created. Maybe he was always empty and she simply forced him to realize that. It could only be her and it could only be now. Eventually Ren and Nora backed away, while Weiss lingered for few more moments, caressing his arm. As they did, some warmth disappeared. He felt terrible. They cared for him, yet he couldn't stop thinking about Cinder.

"Alright, I'll be going. Jaune gets some rest." Ren stated before walking away.

"Just don't snooze all day grandpa." Nora followed Ren.

"Glad you are okay Jaune." Weiss had a light blush. She then turned around and left the room as well.

Jaune was alone now. His mind barely registered his friends leaving the room. He couldn't stop thinking about Cinder. What did last night even mean? Was it some kind of ploy to gain his trust and once again infiltrate his group? It wouldn't be too odd considering what she did back in Beacon. No, it was unlikely. It was a plan that primarily hinged on coincidences. There was no way she could have known he was gonna be in that restaurant. Well now that he thought about it, maybe she could have known. Salem had eyes everywhere and there were plenty of pro Crown Vacuans. However, it all came down to a massive coincidence, him mistaking Cinder for Weiss. And that was something she couldn't have predicted. How did he even make that mistake in the first place? Cinder was almost as tall as he was. Even if she somehow predicted he would mistake her for Weiss, there was no way for her to know Weiss would be late, or not show up at all.

No, it was all series of bizarre coincidences, Destiny if you will. He cringed at mere thought of it. Yes, perhaps it was Destiny, but in the end it came down to their choice. His choice to confront her and cling to her in hopes of foiling her plans. Her choice to tolerate him as her partner for a night.

Partners, it was almost unfathomable. In just several hours, their relationship was flipped upside down. They went from small talk to uncovering deep personal traumas. That was his fault in the end, he was the one slowly pushing the conversation in that direction. Although Jaune didn't mind it and seemingly neither did Cinder. Well, she did mind it at the start. He remembered her slamming him to the ground. He had that coming.

That might explain the headache. No that was a lie. That Atlesian gin, maple syrup whiskey and... what was it... rose liqueur, were the real culprits. It was certainly an experience. All that liquor made him feel warmth, but it came at a price. In the end none of that warmth remained and he was stuck with a headache. It was a vicious circle, you'd need to constantly drink to maintain that warmth. But he never saw a happy alcoholic. Perhaps it eventually went away and person was just left with more misery. Either way, he was glad Qrow stopped drinking. Jaune wouldn't let himself be trapped in that circle, he needed a real warmth, he needed her.

Well, that didn't help with his current predicament. His eyes were still sensitive and he still had a headache. What was he suppose to do now? Find her? Find Cinder Fall in Vacuo? If it was that easy to find her, they wouldn't have had any issues before. Hope she would find

him? That was his best bet. So annoying, all he could do was wait and hope Destiny would be in his favor.

He remembered something from last night. Cinder taught him how to manipulate his Aura. Might as well practice it to kill some time. Jaune set on his bed with legs crossed and closed his eyes. It didn't work, his headache and sore body were disrupting his concentration. She said it was all about visualization, but he simply couldn't properly visualize that beach.

That wasn't quite right, he accidentally created several Aura limbs last night when he hugged her without visualizing anything. Maybe he was thinking about it the wrong way. He tried something else. Jaune laid on his side, extended his hand forward and closed his eyes. He imagined Cinder laying next to him, her soft skin under his fingers.

Soon after he really felt it. There was a soft warm sensation under his fingers. His eyes remained closed. It would ruin the illusion of the moment if he opened them. He was likely just caressing round malleable piece of his Aura. It was much more lame when he thought about it that way. Lame and desperate, but it would do for now.

Jaune wondered if she felt the same way about him, if she woke up and imagined him laying next to her. Why would she? He was probably just a respite for her. Bit of warmth after years of freezing emptiness. They were both broken beyond repair.

No, he couldn't doubt her. He gave her his word. He promised he'd be there for if she made that choice. Arc always keeps his promise. Key word being if. As much as he'd want them to stop fighting, forcing her to make a choice wouldn't be right. All he could do is wait and hope for the best. It annoyed him how little agency he had.

Scroll's vibration alerted him. His eyes opened, briefly seeing Aura construct he made before it faded away. It was a replica of her face. He caressed it one last time as it vanished. Who was calling him now? Were they really bothering him for snoozing ten more minutes? Jaune checked his scroll. To his surprise it wasn't any of his teammates, it was an unknown contact. Could it really be...

Message simply read "I wnt us to talk." It really was her. She wrote a short scroll message, even made a typo. His heartbeat quickened. She must have took his scroll number while she was looking through his contacts. What was he suppose to write back? Obviously yes, but how? Straightforward answer? Short and sweet? Maybe play cool? No, last one was recipe for disaster. Straightforward would do.

"I wanna see you." Jaune wrote back. Part of him wondered if he sounded too desperate. Rest of him didn't care. Several moments passed, each feeling like a small eternity.

"Oh really. Have you asked yrself do I want to see you?" Cinder replied. She made another typo, although some of her snark returned.

"Wlel, you mesaged me." Jaune retorted. It would have been a wittier retort without typos. Stupid hangover.

"Two typos. Quite lightweight Arc. Or perhaps merely a consequence of your limited literacy." This was more like her.

"You made typo yrself." Jaune reminded her, using her previous typo against her.

"Oh shut up." Jaune chuckled at her response, if one could call it that.

"You know, one day I'll read that Ferb book you talked about last night. Soon you'll run out of things to make fun of me for." Jaune sent her a message.

"Oh please. There are so many things I can use to make fun of you that if I compiled them together it would have been a twelve volume collection." Cinder replied. It was a clever insult, he had to give her that.

"Also, it's Fern not Ferb. FERN." She added, angrily correcting him.

"How long would be a book about things that can be used against you?" Jaune asked. It was unlikely she would admit much.

"Well it definitely wouldn't be a book. Not even an essay. Two words at most." Cinder wrote back. Two words? There were definitely more than two words. What was she alluding to? Oh. Jaune giggled. She revealed bit too much.

"Can I guess one of those words?" Jaune went on an offensive.

"You said you wanted to see me. Video call?" Cinder ignored his question, confirming his suspicions what those two words were.

"Nah. I'm in my dorm. It would be bit too awkward to explain why am I having a video call with Cinder Fall." Awkward was an understatement.

"I see. So you want to see me in person?"

"Yup." Jaune confirmed.

"Me coming to your dorm would also be something one could refer to as, bit too awkward. My place or neutral location?" Cinder offered. Neutral location was tempting, but ultimately he didn't want to risk someone recognizing her or prying on their conversation. Odds were low, but someone he knew running into them would be disastrous.

"Your place." Jaune eventually wrote.

"Oh, how devious. Tonight or?" Cinder wrote back.

"I was thinking right now." Jaune clarified. It was probably not the brightest idea considering he was still dealing with a hangover, but he had to see her.

"My, my. Fine." She accepted. He was excited when he read it. But something was missing.

"Not gonna tell me an address?"

"You see, you failed your role as a Prince last night. You are gonna have to earn my address." Cinder explained. Things were never simple with her.

"How so? You said I was an excellent partner last night. You didn't complain when I kissed you." Jaune teased her.

"That part was adequate." Adequate? He turned her into blushing stuttering mess and she calls that adequate? Cinder then continued. "However, then you fell asleep... twice. And I had to carry you to lobby. How unprincelike of you." But she was unfortunately somewhat right. Her carrying him definitely accounted for lot of negative points on Prince scale. Well, at least now he knew he got back to the lobby.

"What do I have to do to earn it? Slay a dragon?" Jaune went along with her game.

"Dragon would be bit too much. Perhaps slay some Beowulfs. But I've never read a story about Prince saving a Princess from those mutts, so that won't do. You have to go on a quest." Cinder declared.

"Quest? Right now?"

"Well, you said you wanted to see me right now." She had a point.

"Fine. What kind of quest?"

"Naturally, to locate Princess' tower. Let me think about it for minute." Cinder wrote. There were no further messages, so he imagined she was truly thinking about it.

Jaune decided to put on some clothes while he was waiting for her instructions. He was only wearing orange briefs. It must have been awkward for others while they were in the room. First he sniffed his armpits. Not great, but acceptable. Smell of deodorant was still somewhat holding on. He reapplied it before rummaging through his clothes. Afternoons in Vacuo were scorching hot, he needed to dress lightly. In the end he chose honey colored cargo shorts and white T-shirt. Just as he finished dressing up, scroll vibrated. Jaune checked the scroll to see what she came up with.

"I'll send you riddles. Solving each riddle will bring you closer to my tower." Cinder explained.

"First riddle: I am in Atlas, you are in Vale. Take thousand paces towards me, and you will get there." Jaune read her riddle. It seemed relatively simple, it even somewhat rhymed.

Jaune left his dorm room and went towards the main entrance of Shade Academy. He tried to avoid his teammates and friends. Less he had to explain right now, the better. Luckily, most of them were either in cafeteria or in their rooms. Ruby and Oscar were currently on patrol, so there was no risk running into them. So silly. He felt like a kid sneaking out of his parents' house. However, instead of hanging out at his friend's house and playing video games, he was trying to meet his former nemesis and current... something. His head hurt. Before he could reach an entrance, he heard a familiar voice.

"Hey kid! Thought you were still in the bed." Qrow shouted.

"Oh well... I'm going for a bit of walk outside. You know, fresh air and stuff." Jaune awkwardly explained.

"Walk? Right now? Are you still buzzed?" Qrow rhetorically asked. Yeah, it was a dumb idea, going for a walk during the scorching heat.

"So you know." It wasn't that shocking to be honest.

"No shit I know. Who do you think persuaded Theo do borrow you car?" Yang mentioned they borrowed the car, that explained how.

"Weiss?" Jaune sarcastically asked.

"Nice try kid. So, why are you going for a walk?" It seemed like he couldn't dodge that question. He would have to use half truth.

"The girl from last night, she wants us to meet in a coffee place." Jaune explained. Qrow looked him in the eye.

"Right now? In the middle of scorching heat?" Qrow asked, still carefully observing Jaune's reaction. Jaune nodded at his question. He wasn't sure how Qrow would react. Suddenly Qrow smiled and patted him on the back.

"Lucky dog. Looks like being drunk wasn't the only first you had last night. Good for you." He added. Jaune wasn't sure what to say. Should he tell the truth or roll with Qrow's implications. He decided to go with former. What they had last night wasn't like that. He saw it as something pure and innocent. Well, she did slam him to the ground and violently made out with him, but that was besides the point.

"No, no, nothing like that. We just had a dinner." Jaune defended himself.

"Aw come on. Just a dinner? In one of those Atlesian secret rooms?" Qrow seemed interested in juicier details.

"Just a dinner. Besides, Atlesians don't do that in those rooms. They use hotels, right?" Jaune replied. He remembered what both Cinder and Weiss said about secret rooms. Qrow burst out laughing at his reply.

"Yeah, ok. I believe you kid... No way... you did anything like that... with that attitude." Said Qrow. After every few words he would burst out laughing, interrupting himself. Jaune tried to ignore the implications about Qrow's experience with Atlesian secret rooms. He felt throbbing pain in his head again. Well, person in front of him might have some advice regarding that.

"Hey Qrow, do you know any hangover cures?" Jaune asked.

"Best cure would be not drinking kid. But seeing you are way past that point, drink lot of water." Qrow explained. That was bit anticlimactic.

"Anything else besides that?" Jaune tried.

"Uh, I remember being piss drunk in Vacuo back in the day." Qrow started a story. This ought to be good. "Ate one of those local sandwiches. No clue how are they called, every time I ordered one it had a different name. Basically, shaved meat sandwich. I don't know do they do anything against hangover, but they felt just right to me." He finished. Not that helpful of an explanation, but it would do.

"Thanks Qrow. Also, could you not call me kid?"

"Nah, not happening." Qrow smirked before patting his back again.

"You know, I might be older than you after my exile in Ever After." Said Jaune. While he wasn't sure how long he was there, but it was plausible.

"Not with that baby face." Qrow pinched his cheek before adding. "Also take this." He reached for his pocket and gave Jaune pair of sunglasses. "Sun can be a nasty thing when you have a hangover." Qrow explained. Jaune put on Qrow's sunglasses. While it didn't make problem fully go away, it at least alleviated it.

"Thanks Qrow." Jaune said once again before walking past him.

"No problem. Just don't do this shit often. Only I could pull the role of dashing alcoholic Huntsman!" Qrow shouted at Jaune as he walked away.

Jaune finally reached the entrance of Shade Academy. He opened his scroll to check her riddle. Since it was about her location, clues were likely directions. She knew he was in Shade Academy, but she couldn't know where exactly. So starting point of his journey should be Shade's entrance, not his dorm room. She wrote he was in Vale while she was in Atlas. Second sentence was about distance, around thousand paces. Vale to Atlas relation likely meant direction. When looking from Vale, Atlas was north or northeast. So he was suppose to go in that direction. Paces could be converted to feet and miles. So location was half a mile north. Jaune oriented himself towards north, noticing a wide alley leading to the city's center. He started walking in that direction.

As he was passing by, he noticed several food stands on his left. They offered variety of items. Grilled vegetables, filled flat breads and some kind of fried balls. But what caught his attention was what he could only describe as a rotating meat pillar from which person running the stand would shave off thin bits. It must have been a sandwich Qrow was talking about. His scroll vibrated.

"How is my Prince doing? Is this quest perhaps too daunting?" Cinder taunted him.

"I'm doing fine. Just curious, do you want me to bring something to eat?" Jaune replied.

"Oh my. You got sidetracked."

"Nah, just found something Qrow described as good hangover food. Besides, you are more pleasant company when you are eating something." He added.

"I thought I was promised something else to eat last night." Cinder replied.

"Like what?" What did he promise her to eat last night?

"You. You said I should devour you." He remembered that. Last thing he said to her. Even though it was just a text message, he could imagine her licking her lips.

"Poor old me is hardly enough." Jaune wrote back.

"No, he is a perfect meal." He wasn't sure if she was serious or not. Line moved and Jaune was next.

"So I shouldn't bring food?"

"You are such a..." Her message read. "Just get to my place. Food or no food." She still didn't fully clarify. Oh well, he would buy it anyway. He ordered bit of everything before giving stand owner his hard earned lien.

Smell of meat and vegetables was tantalizing. Still, he didn't hunger for it as he did for her. Headache, nausea, eye sensitivity, all disappeared for a moment. Jaune glanced at his scroll, end destination marked as Hotel Re'em.

Chapter End Notes

That's a wrap for this chapter.

Bit different than usual, writing way more character interactions.

As for the headcanons:

-Jaune is painfully oblivious regarding Weiss' crush on him. He was fairly oblivious to Pyrrha's crush so I think this is logical. Especially since Weiss rejected him countless times during the Beacon era.

-Fern book Cinder likes to read is in-universe version of Goethe's Faust. I see it in line with the character, especially since she herself made a Faustian bargain. Mephisto is Goat Faunus in that story, tying together usage of goats in Satanic imagery as well as Atlas' xenophobia towards Faunus.

Hotel's name is very around the bush reference to unicorn. Re'em is creature mentioned in the Bible so it somewhat matches Vacuo's Middle Eastern setting. In some versions Re'em is translated as a unicorn.

Her relief

Chapter Notes

Well, well, well, long time no see. I mean technically, not that long, but still. Rating changed to M because of some horny.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"I was thinking right now." Cinder read Jaune's message. He was truly persistent. Right now? Just as she woke up? In the middle of scorching heat? Persistent wasn't a right word to describe him, he was a moron. Her moron.

"My, my. Fine." Cinder wrote back. It wasn't fine. She desperately wanted to see him, but she wasn't quite ready. Cinder sighed. She needed to take a shower after all. It was a silly idea to skip it in the first place. If anything, it would somewhat remedy her hangover. Their meeting needed to be perfect. She didn't want to greet him sweaty and weary.

She took off her sundress as she walked towards the bathroom. Just as she did, her scroll vibrated again. What did he want now? Cinder glanced his message. He wanted her address. Well, that made sense. But would she give it to him? No, she was feeling devious. He was gonna have to earn it. She was gonna give him a small quest before she went to shower. It would give her a bit more time to get ready.

"You didn't complain when I kissed you" His message read. He was right. She remembered taste of his lips, sensation of kiss. It was as if she drank from a cold spring during the scorching heat. However, she wouldn't give him an easy win. She wanted to tease him a bit more. How would she call that kiss? Adequate? Yes, that would do. She was feeling devious.

Cinder teased Jaune bit more before taking off her panties and stepping into the shower. She let a cold water wash over her. It was an old habit from her childhood. Back in orphanage, others would often waste all the warm water before it was her turn to shower. It only got worse during her stay in Glass Unicorn. Madame didn't want what she referred to as unnecessary expenses. So all Cinder ever got was two buckets of cold water. It didn't matter to Madame.

No, she didn't want to go back there. She wouldn't let Madame's rotting corpse control her decisions. She didn't want to think about her anymore, especially as she was getting ready to meet Jaune. Cinder adjusted the heat a bit, now water was almost tepid. That would do. Anything more than that would be distracting. Quick shower was all she could afford at the moment.

She would soon meet with Jaune again. Jaune. She felt tingly just mentioning his name. Her fingers drifted downwards. Peaks of her breasts were already stiffened. Her breathing

quickened as she touched them. Fingers drifted further downwards, touching her toned stomach and then... No, no, no. She needed to focus. Riddle, she was gonna think about that stupid riddle. She needed to control herself, as tempting as it was to succumb to pleasure.

He was likely somewhere in the Shade Academy. Where exactly, she didn't know. Cinder turned off the shower before reaching for a shampoo. She quickly lathered her body, trying her best to avoid certain areas as tempting as it was to rub them. Besides, that was reserved for his fin... No, she needed to think about the riddle. He was more clever than she initially gave him credit for, so he should be able to figure out the starting point without her explicitly saying it. Probably bit too clever for his own good.

She fell for his little roleplay game last night. She was aware what was he trying to do. However, she didn't think he would see through her little fake story. It wasn't the most creative thing she could have come up with. Maybe it was due to her inebriated state last night. Maybe it was the only thing she ever knew, a story about a girl locked in the tower. Of course, he didn't come out of that game unscathed. She saw through his story about fraud who always fails other people. Oh woe is me. His endless self flagellation annoyed her more than it probably should have. He still had so much, yet he refused to see it.

He saw himself as a monster, how absurd. Cinder looked down at her left arm. When he saw a real monster he refused to acknowledge it as such and offered her his hand. He was perplexing, living contradiction, knight who saw himself as being worse than the dragon he fought against. Perhaps that was the reason she wanted him near her, because he didn't make any sense. She believed everyone had a path in their life. His path was to condemn her, to oppose her, to fight her. His little speech back in Haven, barely any different than what Rhodes told her all those years ago. Then why didn't he hate her? Why did he offer her his hand? Why did he change? With his meager strength he accomplished something she couldn't do her entire life, defy Destiny.

Cinder turned on the shower again, tepid water pouring over her. No, she was wrong. She could still do it, she could still change her path. That's why she longed for him, that's why she felt warmth being near him, that's why her skin tingled every time she thought about him. Her body was telling her to fight against the current and take his hand.

She was done with the shower. Cinder hurriedly stepped out of it. Towel was unnecessary, she just used her Semblance to evaporate remaining drops of water. She typed out the riddle about her location before sending it to him. She was tempted to drop the pretense and just tell him where she was. Oh well, she was far too deep in their little game, she couldn't back out now. Just sending him the address would be a sign of weakness. Well, she was weak, that is, he was her weakness. But he didn't need to know that. Although she probably blabbed out too much already.

Jaune was clever, so he would probably quickly figure out her riddle. But that was the point. It wasn't suppose to be difficult, just enough to buy her some time. Cinder walked up to the dresser, all of her scars visible in mirror's reflection. She opened the underwear drawer. Not the biggest selection, but there was still some variety to it. Black, white, red, blue, cotton, lace, silk. In the end she picked simple blue cotton panties and bra.

She was tempted to pick the blue sundress she discarded earlier. But no, as much as she liked the color, blue on blue was bit too much. Was she suppose to change her underwear then? No, she already made her choice. Time was ticking, there was no point in second guessing her choices. Cinder glanced through her options. It was so much easier last night, she had a goal. She wanted to look like an Atlesian socialite, almost a mockery of Schnees and other such families. But now, how was she suppose to dress now? Formal? Casual? Seductive? So annoying.

Cinder picked up her scroll and messaged Jaune. What would he want her to wear? Of course she wouldn't ask him that directly, that would be too easy. She was also curious about his whereabouts. Did he already figure out her little riddle and was on his way to hotel? Her scroll vibrated shortly after a short pause. Unbelievable, he was buying them street food. He was complicating things, she didn't need that, she needed him. But that was simply who he was, caring to the fault. She wasn't sure why was she even annoyed, if anything his little detour bought her few more minutes. Maybe it didn't need to make sense. Logical part of her brain was arguing with childish impulse of wanting something immediately no matter what.

Casual wear would do for today. Not what she imagined all those years ago when she dreamed about her date with the Prince. Mostly because it wasn't. She was allowed to be herself with him, she didn't need to pretend to be someone else. And for that, he surpassed any Prince and any moment with him surpassed her childhood fantasy. He accepted her even when everyone, including herself denounced her as a monster, he would accept her no matter what she decided to wear today.

Of course that didn't meant she wouldn't put some effort in it. Cinder picked up one of the skirts. She didn't wear a skirt in a while, perhaps it was time to change things up. Cinder picked red velvet knee long skirt. She combined it with black sleeved crop top, leaving her midriff exposed. Collar and sleeves of the top were decorated with golden lace pattern. She left her legs bare for now and instead focused on makeup.

Just as she finished applying it, she heard knocks on the door. Cinder sighed, hotel staff was way too nosey. She kept her appearances at minimum as mysterious Miss Regen, only occasionally leaving her room. There was no way she was going to entertain their curiosity, but then she felt something. She felt as if part of her was on the other side of the door. Could it be, she wondered. Cinder glanced at her right wrist, it was almost pulling her towards the door. It was him, it had to be him. But why would he be at the door? She didn't tell him where her room was. It had to be him, even though I didn't make any sense. Cinder rushed towards the door. It was a reckless move, she didn't even put on her white wig. One wrong move and she could end up revealing her true identity in the middle of enemy territory. She hurriedly opened the door, taking a leap of faith.

In front of a door was Jaune. How did he get there was irrelevant.

"Sorry Ma'am I though this was my..." He started babbling something. Likely thought he knocked on the wrong door.

Cinder reached for his hand and pulled him inside of the room before closing the door. She felt someone was looking at her door. Was hotel staff really that desperate to find out more about her? It didn't matter, they couldn't bother her anymore.

She turned towards Jaune. He was also casually dressed, white T-shirt, yellow cargo pants, sneakers and sunglasses. In his hand was a plastic bag, likely food he ordered. None of that mattered right now. Cinder walked up to Jaune before grabbing him and pulling him in for a kiss. It was intoxicating. His soft lips felt like they were drenched with morning dew, fresh but sweet. One would think few drops of water wouldn't be able to satisfy person wandering through desert. They'd be wrong, just one droplet was enough to rejuvenate her very being. One droplet was enough, but that didn't mean she'd be satisfied with just one. Her tongue slipped into his mouth.

He told her she should devour him, and she would. Cinder pushed him onto bed, never breaking the kiss. He was now in the sea of black sheets, it was just as she imagined when she woke up. She could barely control herself, her talons were so close to digging themselves into his skin. He was on defensive, constantly being pushed back by her tongue. It was natural, he was her prey, little rabbit who wandered a bit too close. His hands latched onto her shoulders, trying to push her away. Was she perhaps bit too rough? Cinder pulled back her mouth, giving him some breathing room but still looming over his prone form.

"Glasses... glasses... Let me take off the glasses." Jaune gasped out. "Qrow is gonna kill me if something happens to them." He added. It was understandable. Cinder backed off bit more, giving him more room. Jaune took off his sunglasses revealing his eyes. She didn't know or care what he did with the glasses, she was mesmerized by his eyes. They were once again deep blue color she remembered from Beacon days. No longer looking empty or lifeless. Inside of them was a small spark. They were beautiful, she almost started crying when she saw them. How did it return? How did he fill the void she created? Was it...

While she was lost in his eyes, Jaune moved his hands to her hips. Just as she realized that, her flipped their positions. Now she was the one prone in the sheets while he was looming over her. He wasn't timid rabbit after all. She continued to stare him in the eye. He could have that small victory, she found a bigger prize.

"You got distracted." Jaune commented.

"Your eyes." It was all she could mutter. What was she suppose to say. There were certain things that couldn't quite be explained with words.

"What about them?" He asked.

"They are..." No, she still couldn't quite put it in words.

"I thought you said they were empty." He pondered. She simply shook her head.

"You have a spark in them again." She finally managed to say.

Jaune wondered what she meant for a moment before remarking: "I see." He looked her in the eye. What did he see? Did he also see something hidden? Perhaps he saw reflection of his eyes in her shiny amber mirror. Whatever he saw, he didn't linger on it for too long. He caressed her cheek before leaning in for a soft kiss. Just as she felt addicting sensation of his kiss, he pulled back. Cinder whined. He was being cruel, denying her what she really needed. Jaune smirked at her reaction before leaning in for another kiss, hungrier and deeper one.

This time she was the one on defensive as his tongue penetrated her lips. She didn't mind. As long as she got what she wanted she didn't mind losing to him.

Her body tingled, warm sensation pulsing through her. More, she needed more. It seemed like he understood what she wanted, what she needed. He moved his kisses lower. First kissing her bottom lip, her chin, then moving even lower. She felt his lips on her scar. Her scar? Cinder panicked. She forgot to cover it. No, no, no, he wasn't suppose to see it. She looked away trying to avoid his gaze while her hand moved to cover her scars. His hand caught it before she could hide it.

Jaune pressed his lips against her earlobe before whispering: "Relax, she can't hurt you anymore." Cinder froze at his words. No, she had no reason to doubt him. He saw her other scars, he saw her inhumane limb, he saw her at her lowest and at no point did she flinch. Jaune planted a kiss in the middle of her neck, place where that jewel was attached to the collar. Her skin shivered as he did. He planted more kisses, intent on covering every inch of her damaged skin with them. Each kiss was like a electric shock, small jolts traveling through her body. But instead of pain, they delivered pleasure. Every kiss he delivered made her forget about her servitude in Glass Unicorn, made her glad she met him. Just as she got used to his little kisses, he did something unexpected, he licked her scar. Cinder moaned as he did. All the pain she experienced led her to this moment, true pleasure. It far surpassed anything she achieved on her own. Jaune licked her neck again, Cinder once again moaned. She needed more.

"Can you... touch it with your Semblance." Cinder stammered, still consumed by pleasure. Jaune lifted his head and looked her in the eye. She expected a smug look after being able to reduce her to writhing mess with just simple kisses and licks. Instead, it was a warm smile. It wasn't some kind of competition, he just wanted to make her feel good. His finger touched her neck as he leaned in for another kiss. When she was a kid she read a story about a cursed prince. At the end of the story, prince's curse was broken by true love's kiss. She never quite understood the story. How could something as trivial as kiss break the curse? Of course, it was just a silly story, but she somewhat understood it now. This kiss made her believe. All aching stopped, for a moment she forgot who she was and all the things she has done, only thing that existed in that moment was the kiss.

Jaune's hand trailed lower while the other one remained on her neck as he continued kissing her. First he gently caressed her breast, then his finger trailed down her exposed midriff before reaching her thighs. It was everything she ever wanted, her body shivering at the prospect of his finger touching her mound. Cinder repeatedly moaned into his mouth.

No, she had to stop it. Yes, she wanted him, she wanted him to touch her, caress her, lick her, but it wasn't right. She was letting the pleasure cloud her mind. It was all wrong. She traded one obsession for another. There had to be more to this than just pleasure. It wasn't suppose to be just answer to her physical urges. Person desires food, water and shelter, but they don't love them, they just need them to survive. She wanted this to be more than that. Cinder pushed him away just as his fingers were about to reach their final goal. She sat up, laying beneath him would be too much of a temptation.

"I'm sorry, I messed it up." Jaune apologized. He was wrong, it wasn't his fault.

"No, you were doing an excellent job." She wanted to immediately dispel his doubts before continuing. "I want you, I want you to pin me down and do unimaginable things to me. It's just... I don't want it to be just urges. I want it to be more." She was embarrassed to even say it. Although she wasn't sure which part embarrassed her more, her depraved fantasies or admittance that in the end she was still that little girl who wanted to be loved.

"Oh." Jaune remarked before smirking. "So I was doing more than adequate job after all."

"Of course you only heard that part. Jaune Arc, oh you violator of Maidens! Yes, you did more than adequate job. Happy now?" He laughed at her jest.

"Yup." He simply concluded. "You know, it was my first time doing something like that. Next time will probably be even better." Was that even possible? She shivered at possibility. No, no, no, she couldn't think about that right now.

"You've never kissed someone before?" Cinder asked inquisitively.

"No, not kissing, I meant other things." Jaune clarified before somberly adding. "I've kissed someone before." That piqued her curiosity. Who was it?

"Schnee?"

"No." Jaune sighed. Oh, his somber tone now made sense. His first kiss was with his partner, Pyrrha Nikos. She snuffed out his first love.

"I see." She remarked before burying her head between her knees.

"It was a different kiss. She knew she was gonna die so she gave me a farewell kiss. I knew it moment we kissed, her lips were bitter." Jaune continued. If he was trying to make her feel better, he was failing miserably.

"Why me?" Cinder eventually let out. It still didn't make any sense. He would have been happier with Nikos, even with that Schnee girl. All she did was endlessly torture him, endlessly carved out his being until he became as hollow as she was.

"I don't know. Maybe it doesn't have to make any sense, maybe it was meant to be." He attempted. It was an unsatisfying answer.

"I thought you detested Destiny. You kept raving on about choice last night." She prodded him.

"I don't know. Maybe there are some things that were meant to happen, we were meant to meet. But in the end, how that meeting went was entirely due to our choices." Jaune explained.

"I see." She simply commented. His explanation was clumsy, but maybe there was no right answer.

"What about you? Have you done it before?" Jaune interrupted her musing with his question. Kissing? Petting? Sex? It didn't really matter in her case, it would be the same answer to all

of it.

"You know very well you can't ask a lady something like that." She hoped he wouldn't press her any further.

Jaune leaned in before mockingly whispering in her ear: "Virgin." Cinder blushed.

"That's a bit rich coming from you." She wouldn't let him fluster her that easily.

Jaune smiled. "True, I'm a virginiest virgin who ever virgined. But I can at least admit that." In a way, he was right, it was illogical to hide something like that when she already revealed some of her deepest secrets to him. Perhaps she saw it as something more embarrassing than some of her other secrets. Admittance that there never was anyone she allowed to get that close before him. That only he was able to jump through the burning wall she set around herself. It was an admittance of defeat, nothing more, nothing less.

Cinder sighed. "I'm a virgin and you were my first kiss. Do you have any idea how annoying you are?" It was a defeat, but she didn't mind losing to him. He smiled at her confession.

"I've been told that... several times. Are you embarrassed some of the people you called children have more sexual experience than you?" Now he was just being mean. She wasn't gonna let that slide.

"Oh please, you've spent more than a decade in that dimension. Are you embarrassed you are a forty year old virgin?" Cinder struck back. Jaune pouted at her joke. Her face contorted into mean smirk. This time he lost. That reminded her of something.

"How did you find me?" Cinder asked. Riddle she gave him should have only pointed him towards the hotel itself, not her floor or room.

"Instinct." Jaune shrugged. She wasn't sure was he serious or not.

"You cheated. You must have asked about me at reception desk." She accused him. It was the only logical answer she could come up with.

"No seriously, instinct. When I entered the hotel I somehow knew where you were." He somewhat elaborated. She looked at him incredulously. It didn't make any sense. Then it all clicked. He sensed her for the same reason she sensed him before even opening the door. She looked at her right wrist, patch of his Aura that covered her scar. Part of him was embedded in her.

"It's because of this." She said, gesturing to her wrist. "You somehow fused our Auras." Key word being somehow. She knew there was more to his Semblance than it met the eye, but this exceeded her expectations. He managed to create a small permanent Aura construct without any training or experience. Not to mention he managed to tie it to her Aura.

"Really?" He gently took her right hand to observe it closer. And the best part about all of it, he didn't even know he did that. He was a living anomaly, at the same time both prodigy and failure.

"I must have created this when I hugged you last night. I don't know how I did that, I just thought about us. I... I wanted to be there for you." Jaune explained, still observing her wrist. "How does it work?" He was asking her how his ability worked. Cinder sighed, he was truly a lost cause in some regards.

"It's a small piece of your Aura that's attached to mine. Because of that, I can maintain it using my own Aura." Cinder explained what she knew about it.

"Do you think it has any limits?"

"There have to be some limits to it, I doubt you can just infinitely bestow your own Aura. I'd say you ripped part of your own Aura to attach it to mine." She added. As she was explaining it, Jaune raised his Aura, trying to confirm her theory. He was looking at the wrong place. If he truly did that while he was caressing her wrist last night, then it had to be somewhere on his palm. "There it is." She found it after a quick inspection. There was a ridge in his Aura down the length of his palm. He was hurting himself to help her.

"So it has a price after all." Jaune remarked.

"Everything comes with a price." He hurt himself to alleviate some of her pain. If her theory was correct, destroying a construct would return the Aura to him. She was about to erase it with her Grimm arm when she felt his hand on her neck. His Semblance surged through it, soothing her pain. What was he doing? She tried to look him in the eye, trying to find an answer, but his eyes were closed. There was no way he was actually doing that.

"What are you doing? You do realize your Aura won't return as long as the construct lasts?" Cinder pleaded. She felt his Aura fill the scarred tissue left by shock collar.

"It's a price. Small price if you ask me."

"How is it a small price? You are hurting yourself, and for what? To mask some of my scars?" Why was he like that? Always obsessed with sacrificing himself for others. She wanted to stop him, but her hands were paralyzed. Part of her didn't want him to stop.

"I'm not hurting myself, quite opposite. You are hurting yourself. I'm simply returning what was stolen from you all those years ago." Jaune's eyes opened as he said that. His deep blue eyes, no longer lifeless and empty. She saw ripples in them, as if there was an entire ocean there. All around her were waves, never crashing or drowning her. They were gently carrying her across the ocean. He was cheating, he knew she couldn't resist his eyes.

"I don't deserve to have it back." Her voice was breaking. All the things she has done, she didn't deserve his kindness.

"You do deserve it. You didn't deserve to have those things happen to you. I know you've done terrible things. I know you think you don't deserve to have anything anymore." As he was saying that, his Aura filled the rest of her scar. "But you do, you've changed. And eventually, piece by piece I will return everything you lost."

Cinder collapsed as he said that, her head now resting in his lap. "Thank you." Cinder muttered. Jaune didn't say anything, he simply continued softly stroking her neck and cheek.

Chapter End Notes

Tried to have entire hotel sequence in this chapter, but this felt as an appropriate point to end it.

As for the clothes, I wanted them to return to their roots. So white and yellow for Jaune, Red and black for Cinder. However, both are wearing underwear corresponding to other's eye color... because horny.

Headcanons... horny edition.

Jaune is service top.

Cinder is sexually repressed, she often masturbates to vent out some of her sexual frustrations.

Both are inexperienced, but Cinder gets flustered much easier than Jaune.

Jaune's Semblance doubles as stimulant.

His relief

Chapter Notes

I'm back after roughly two weeks. Bit of a yapfest chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Jaune continued gently caressing Cinder's cheek. Her head was laid in his lap, left side of her face turned towards him. He didn't quite know what was she thinking about, but one thing was certain, she was at peace. Jagged burn scars at contrast with tranquil expression on her face. It surprised him how smooth her damaged skin was. He thought it would be rough, but apparently it wasn't. Every time he caressed her scarred flesh he made sure to infuse his touch with bit of his Semblance. He didn't want her to feel any discomfort from his touch. She mewled as he touched her.

It was an odd, almost unimaginable turn of events. Just a day ago, only way he could imagine touching her was in the heat of battle. But now, she was laying in his lap, relaxed while he touched her. He always knew, or at least hoped there was something behind her mask. There was a softness to her rough exterior. Sometimes it seemed like she was two different people. One side confident and mean, other soft and easily flustered. Both were her, she just couldn't afford to show the other side most of her life. Moments ago she was prone beneath him, letting him have his way with her. He couldn't imagine her that way with anyone else. She asked him "Why her," maybe a better question would be "Why him?" Why did she open herself to him? Why did she let him touch her?

Jaune moved his hand upwards, touching her hair. It was silky smooth, bit damp. She probably washed her hair just before he arrived. He imagined water pouring over her, Cinder lathering her thighs and breasts. Jaune sighed, it was a dirty fantasy, but he couldn't help himself. He didn't have any expectations regarding that. He was fine with just being with her, some touches and kisses. However, she was insatiable. Moment she grabbed him and pinned him against bed she awakened something within him. It was as if she transferred some of her hunger to him. Or maybe it was his hunger, he just didn't know he had that kind of hunger inside him. It felt right, it felt right to take something he wanted. Maybe it felt right because she wanted him to take her.

He needed to focus on something else. Last thing he wanted was more dirty thoughts while she was laying in his lap. Jaune moved his hand to her scalp, gently patting it. Surprisingly Cinder flinched as he did that. She shifted her position in his lap, now facing him. He was greeted by now familiar amber eye, there was unease in it. Jaune moved his hand away from her scalp, back to her cheek, much to her joy. Maybe head pat was bit too childish, maybe she didn't like it cause of some other reason. It was fine, he didn't have to know everything.

Jaune moved his hand downwards, feeling Cinder's neck. He traced his finger over her Aura filled scar. Cinder let out small moan as he did so. It was somehow even softer than rest of her skin. No longer jagged and broken, it was now almost completely smooth. He wanted to try something. Once again he traced his finger over it, causing another small moan from Cinder. As he suspected, she was sensitive to touch there. Jaune smiled as he moved his finger upwards. As tempting it was to turn her into moaning mess again, he respected her boundaries. Instead, he gently scratched area under her chin. Cinder let out a small chuckle as he did that.

"Do you think I'm a cat?" Cinder asked him with mirth. He wasn't quite sure what she meant, but then realized it was about position of his fingers. Jaune decided to play along.

"I don't know. Are you?" Jaune retorted. It was a decent comparison. She was moody, mean, fiercely independent yet clingy.

"Perhaps. Not something I'm usually compared to." She answered. She tried to pass it off as a joke, but there was something else present in her voice.

"Only one way to find out." Jaune ominously declared. As he said that he moved his fingers towards her toned midriff. Before Cinder could react, he delivered small feather like tickles to her stomach. Cinder's body jolted, as if she was struck by lightning. She was letting out mix of giggles and small moans. After initial shock, she grabbed both of his hands, before pushing him down on bed. Jaune struggled against her grip, delivering small finger taps against her stomach. Small shock made her release her grip, allowing him to tickle her once again. Eventually Cinder has had enough, she pinned Jaune against the bed, her Grimm arm holding both of his hands over his head. Game was over.

"Would you explain what was that about?" Cinder asked him, trying to keep a serious face. She was doing a decent job at it. However, light shivers on her skin and small smile betrayed her true feelings.

"Cat test. They both like and dislike when you scratch their belly. You are a cat." He explained.

"Cat, huh. Well not quite yet." Her eye lit up with mischief. "When you rub a cat on her belly..." She lowered her lips to his ear before whispering "She bites you." She lowered her lips further down until they were on his neck. Her fangs sank into soft skin of his neck. Jaune felt prickly pain as they sank more into his flesh. For a moment, he thought she was gonna go beyond just a play bite and tear off a bit of his neck instead. She was quite scary when she let her desires take hold of her. Well, scary wasn't a right word in this case, it was something else. Her Grimm hand gripped his hands, keeping him down. Not that he wanted to move anyway. Eventually, she pulled back, leaving a small bite mark coated in her saliva. She admired her handiwork for a bit before standing up and moving to the bottom of bed.

"I thought you were a Prince." Cinder mused. Jaune stood up and sat next to her.

"Didn't I prove myself worthy?" He retorted.

"I thought so too. But no, you aren't a Prince. You are a tempter, seducer, the one who makes people stray from their path." Cinder elaborated.

"Do you regret straying from your path?" Jaune wondered. She admitted at multiple occasions that she felt empty following her path, yet it at least gave her purpose. Sometimes that's enough. Maybe she wasn't quite ready for uncertainty that would inevitably follow her change of path.

"No. I'm more talking about us. I told you, every time you touch me I have an urge to take you." Cinder awkwardly explained. Maybe he was pushing boundaries a bit too far, maybe he really was the tempter and seducer. Well, not that last part, he had an awful track record regarding that. He cringed at his attempts to seduce Weiss back in Beacon.

"I'm not ready for that yet." Cinder continued.

"I see." Jaune remarked.

"I think we jumped into... this... bit too fast." She stated. It was funny she couldn't define what it even was.

"I agree." It was too fast. Yes, it felt right, but it wasn't natural to go from being an enemy to... this... in the span of hours. They went from animosity straight to revealing their deepest secrets with almost nothing in between. Jaune stood up and picked up his plastic bag. He almost forgot about the food he bought, hopefully it was still warm.

"What are you doing?" She asked him. Did she think he would leave after that? No, he would keep the promise he made to her.

"I bought us something to eat." Jaune simply stated. It felt almost like non sequitur.

"What about jumping too fast into things and me not wanting to...?" Cinder attempted.

"Oh sex is not that important. I went thirty years without it, I can wait a bit more." Jaune joked. She wasn't laughing so he got more serious. "Yes, it's all going a bit too fast. We went from being enemies to kissing, binding our Auras together and almost having sex. But that doesn't mean it's wrong. I'm fine with us slowing things down. That's why I brought lunch." He explained.

"So we are gonna ignore everything and have a lunch?" Cinder was confused.

"No, we'll talk. There are so many things we've skipped, I wanna know more about you." It was bizarre that he knew more about her childhood traumas than about trivial things like her favorite color or animal.

"Just talk?"

"Talk and eat. That went well last night." Maybe "went well" wasn't the best description. There was lot of shouting, kicking and screaming last night. But it was a step forward... massive step forward.

Cinder sighed. "Fine, but just to warn you, my dining table is cluttered." Jaune glanced at her dining table, it was truly a mess. At the head of table was sewing machine, while the rest of the table was covered with various fabrics.

"You sew?" Jaune asked her.

"Who do you think makes my outfits?" She proudly declared. He didn't expect that. Although it made sense, it probably wasn't easy to get a tailor made combat outfit when you are one of the most wanted criminals across the Remnant. So dining table was out of question. Where was he suppose to put food?

"Where do you usually eat?" Jaune asked her. Wherever it was, it was probably the next best option.

She pointed towards the couch and small table in front of it. It would hardly suffice. He needed to get creative. There was lot of room on the floor, that gave him an idea. Jaune took one of the blankets from her bed and spread it across the floor.

"What are you doing?" She was confused.

"Setting up the dining area." Jaune simply stated.

"On the floor?"

"Think of it like picnic." Floor was spacious enough for both of them to sit down. They even had a nice view of Vacuan desert through large balcony window.

Cinder gave him incredulous look, but went along with his idea. She cracked a smile as she sat down on the blanket. Jaune set the bag in the middle of blanketed area. They would still need plates, glasses and utensils. He gave her pleading look, but she just smiled at him as if to say "It was your idea." Well, it was his idea. He quickly rummaged through small kitchen her room had, bringing necessary equipment. When he returned, she already opened the large lunch box that was inside of the bag and was looking at food selection.

"That's a lot of food." Cinder remarked.

"I was only gonna get us some sandwiches. However, food vendor kept calling me Boss and telling me I need to try other things too." Cinder laughed at his explanation. Now that he thought about it, he likely got bamboozled by sweet talking owner. It didn't really matter, as long as food was good.

It was a large assortment of local cuisine, he wasn't sure what to even begin with. There were flatbreads, roasted eggplants, roasted bell peppers, roasted green peppers, what he assumed were meatballs and grilled meat slices.

He decided to try one of the fried meatballs. His fork went through the ball before he took a bite of it. Crispy outside, soft inside. It was delicious, nutty with lot of spices. He sensed garlic, chili, black pepper, parsley and who knows what else. It most definitely wasn't a meatball. Texture was similar, but overall different. He dipped it in white sauce before taking

another bite. It seemed sauce was sour cream based, with a bit of garlic and some kind of paste. Flavors nicely complimented each other.

Jaune glanced at Cinder as she neatly sliced one of the fried balls in half before spreading red sauce over it. Flavor seemed to surprise her.

"It's different than Atlesian food." Jaune commented.

"Different climate, different ingredients." Cinder said before continuing. "It's much easier to preserve ingredients in colder climate, so ingredients in Atlesian cuisine are generally of higher quality." It made sense, meat he ate last night was exquisite. "In hotter climates like in Vacuo it's harder to keep ingredients fresh, so they use lot of spices to mask the flavor." She explained.

"Really?"

"Indeed. Can you even guess what you are eating?" Cinder asked him. It was a test. If he couldn't identify what was inside of fried ball it meant she was at least partially right. He concluded it wasn't meat earlier. But then what was it? It had a creamy yet nutty texture. Maybe beans, even some kind of potato. It was hard to tell. In a way, even if he correctly guessed she'd be right.

"Fried bean balls?" Jaune guessed.

She smirked. "So close. It's chickpeas." Huh, that didn't cross his mind. Suppose it made sense, he just never had chickpeas prepared like that.

"There is also a different philosophy in Vacuan cuisine." Cinder continued. "Because Atlesian chefs have access to higher quality main ingredients, everything else is in service of elevating them. In Vacuan cuisine, main ingredients are vessel to deliver aroma of spices and herbs." She explained.

"So in Atlesian cuisine meat is the star of the show, while in Vacuan spice is?" Jaune asked her. He wanted to be sure he understood her correctly.

"Correct." She confirmed. "Something as simple as chickpeas could never be the star in Atlesian cuisine. Only the finest ingredients are worth of elevation to culinary masterpiece." There was an underlying resentment in her voice. He needed to pivot the conversation.

"You know a lot about different cultures." Jaune remarked.

"Naturally. It would be embarrassing if I didn't know those things after years of reading." Reading, that could be an avenue he could pivot towards.

"So you read more than those Atlesian classics."

"Of course. History, geography, strategy, anatomy, psychology, anything I could use in my crusade." As she said that she took another bite of fried chickpeas ball.

"Do you have a favorite book?"

"I do, Fern, I mentioned it last night. What's with all these questions?"

"I just wanna know more about you." Jaune explained.

"I see. So it would only be fair if I asked you some questions as well."

"Sure." He was curious what would she ask him.

"Can... you read?" She mockingly asked. Of course she would immediately take a jab at him.

"That doesn't even make sense. I got here by reading your messages." Jaune defended himself. Although he wasn't sure exactly why, he knew she wasn't serious.

"Perhaps it was a coincidence. Instinct, as you said." She continued teasing him.

"I do read books. I read comics and fairy tales."

"So only books that have a lot of pictures? You are not exactly beating illiteracy allegations." Jaune sighed and smiled. He walked into that one.

"Fine, I'll be gracious and give you benefit of the doubt. What is your favorite book?" She was far from gracious, but he had no other choice than to accept her mocking handshake.

"I used to like *The Girl Who Fell Through The World* a lot, but now..." Jaune started. He didn't have to explain her why he was no longer enthusiastic about it. She dropped her signature smirk in favor of something softer. "Maybe *Indecisive King*, it has grown on me over time." He finally said. It's not like he used to dislike it, story simply didn't resonate with him. He thought *Widow's and King's* relationship was contrived, in a way forced. It wasn't your usual true love's kiss story, it was about two troubled people coming together. No monster to fight, just accepting the life as it is and moving on. After everything he has been through, maybe that was what he truly needed.

"Interesting choice." Cinder commented. "I've been reading that one recently. It's a story about my Relic after all." She was likely gathering clues as where to find the Relic.

"What do you think of it?" Jaune asked.

"Interesting read, albeit very naive." She explained.

"How so?"

"King is put into impossible situation, yet to resolve it all he had to do was talk to Widow and hope for the best." Cinder elaborated.

"And that's naive how exactly?" He wondered if she saw the irony.

"That's not how real life works. You can't just..." Cinder started explaining her reasoning before abruptly halting. She must have realized an irony. Jaune started laughing. "Oh, shut up." There was no witty comeback from her side, she knew she lost this time. Despite that, she was barely holding a laugh.

They looked each other in the eye as they both took a bite of roasted bell pepper. Pepper itself was salty, sweet and soft. Char on it added lot of flavor and deep smoky aroma. She seemed to enjoy it as well. Jaune wondered what to ask her next. Since they mostly talked about hobbies, he thought it was appropriate to ask her this next.

"What do you do in your spare time?" Jaune asked her. Back when they first met, he would have likely assumed she spent her days sipping wine and hatching the next scheme. Now he knew her better, he wanted to know more. They were more alike than he initially thought, albeit their preferences differed. What was it like to be her, to be alone. He was empty like her, but he was never truly alone. He had his friends and family to support him. Even in Ever After he had Alyx, Lewis, Juniper, Cat and Paper Pleasers.

"I certainly don't scheme all day." She said. Did she read his mind? He was about to deny it before she cut him off. "Don't even try, I know you were thinking of that." Cinder smirked after she said that before continuing. "I mostly train, read and occasionally sew." As she said she pointed towards the table and fabrics that littered it.

"I see." Jaune commented. Mostly solitary activities

"Don't pity me Jaune, not everyone is surrounded by gaggle of friends like you are."

"What about Emerald and Mercury?" He was curious about what they were to her. Emerald mostly avoided Cinder as a topic.

Cinder sighed, she seemed to be contemplating should she say anything about it. Eventually she said: "It's complicated." That was hardly surprising.

They stood in silence for few moments before she continued. It seemed she was trying to find the words to describe their relationship to him. "When I found them... they were nothing. In a way they reminded me of me. They needed something... something to believe in. So I decided to be that something." She muttered. It seemed like something she didn't it give a proper thought in years, or at least didn't want to. Jaune just stood in silence letting her gather her thoughts.

"I decided to give them purpose through me... but they left me. I wasn't enough." Cinder tried her best to hide her emotions, but her voice betrayed her. She sounded pained. "They saw me at my lowest in Atlas... they saw god could bleed. Emerald left with you, Mercury joined Salem. I wasn't strong enough for them." She was done with pretense. Her teeth were gritted, face flushed and voice strained. She was falling apart.

"I think you are wrong." Jaune challenged her.

"How so? You may somewhat know Emerald, but I don't think you ever properly met Mercury." Cinder defended herself. How didn't she see it, she said it herself... they were like her.

"I think they wanted someone to understand them." Emerald didn't join their side because they were winning. In fact, she joined them in probably the worst moment possible. She wanted to be loved.

Cinder looked down, thinking about what he said. She didn't say anything, she just stood in silence contemplating his words. Maybe he was wrong, maybe Mercury wasn't like that, maybe deep down Emerald really was an opportunist. But on the other hand, maybe he was right, and that hurt. She already accepted herself as a failure last night, her inability to keep her team together. However, this made it hurt even more. She lost them not because she wasn't strong enough, she lost them because she wasn't there for them. Eventually she looked him in the eye, saddened, but it seemed she was reminiscing about something.

"We used to be closer... we would watch movies in the safe house. Well, Mercury watched them, I was mostly nitpicking them." She muttered. Painful realization that she lost something precious to her.

"You did what you thought was right." Jaune tried to console her. Yes, she was wrong and it was her fault. But at the same time, nobody was there to teach her any better. She was an orphan, her adoptive family abused her, Huntsman she knew didn't protect her. And only Gods know what Salem did to her. He had a vague memory of Cinder writhing in pain caused by the arm back when they fought on the bridge. What would a broken person know about fostering friendships?

"Do you think they'd accept that as an apology?" She rhetorically asked him.

"What's stopping you from trying?"

"It's too late now Jaune, they are better off without me." Cinder sighed. Sad truth is that they probably were... well at least Emerald was. He couldn't imagine Mercury being particularly happy about working for Tyrian. Still, there was always another chance, another opportunity to make things right. But he wouldn't push her there, she needed to make that decision herself. Instead he changed the subject.

"What movies were you watching?" It was a silly question, but he was curious about things she liked.

"Some dumb action movie. Lead actor was absolutely dreadful." Cinder commented.

"Action movie, dreadful lead actor." Jaune repeated. "Probably not Spruce Willis, he is amazing, maybe it wa..." He tried to deduce what movie it was, or at least what actor.

"That's the one." Cinder confirmed. No, no, no, no, no...

"Can't be."

"Spruce Willis. He was either acting more wooden than his namesake or chewing the scenery, nothing in between." No way, she was badmouthing one of his favorite actors.

"It's called stoicism." Jaune retorted.

"No, it's called bad acting."

"Spruce Willis is national treasure of Vale!"

"I agree. Lock him up in a safe and don't let him out."

"You can't talk about Spruce Willis like that. His movies are action masterpieces."

"Come on Jaune, he can't even jump over a fence without either using a stunt double or twenty scene cuts." Oh typical, everyone always brings up that one scene.

"That was a late career movie, you should see some of his movies from his prime years. They mixed emotion and pure brutality, it was awesome." Jaune remembered watching his first Spruce Willis movie, *Hard as Diamond*. Faunus terrorists try to rob Central bank of Vale to steal the most expensive diamond in the world. The one to stop them, former Huntsman, Jet McLime. He vividly remembers the scene of Jet gunning down the bad guys, followed by him throwing a cigarette but on their corpses. It was awesome... and probably kind of racist. Oh well, he was ten when he first watched it, what did he know about Faunus Rights Movement. He insisted everyone call him Jet days after that, much to his mother's dismay. He was surprised he even remembered those things, it was such a long time ago, almost in a different world.

His reminiscing was interrupted by Cinder's chuckle. "You remind me of Mercury, he would also get annoyed when I insulted those movies. Lets pretend I'm wrong..."

"You are wrong." He interrupted her.

"Lets pretend I'm wrong and that I missed what one would call Spruce Willis masterpieces." She was giving him a way out of conversation.

"Of course, you simply didn't know any better." Jaune commented, graciously taking a way out she gave him.

"Let's not go that far." She said as she took another bite of bell pepper.

"What movies do you like?" Jaune asked her.

"I'm not much of a movie person." She admitted.

"Really?" Everyone had a favorite movie, it was unusual to talk with someone who didn't. But then again, her childhood was anything but usual.

"Back in orphanage we had an old TV and some movie tapes. Mostly old crap, can't even remember what it was. And as you can imagine, Madame wasn't exactly keen on me doing anything except cleaning the hotel." Cinder took a bite of roasted eggplant as she explained. She seemed pleasantly surprised with it.

"I thought it would be more bitter. It seems salt and spices mostly covered it. You should try it." Cinder said as she gestured towards the eggplants. Jaune took a bite of it. She was right, it was delicious. Soft and spongy slices of eggplant nicely absorbed salt and spices. He could taste paprika and coriander, their flavor further enhanced by fire.

"Salem wanted me to focus on other things, sharpening my body and mind. So I never watched any movies." Jaune took another bite as Cinder explained further. "When I came to

Vale I watched some movies with Emerald and Mercury. I didn't really like them. I prefer books." She eventually concluded.

"I'm sure you'd find something you'd like." Said Jaune.

"Like what, Spruce Willis movie?"

"Hey, if you insist. I'd always recommend watching Hard as Diamond." Jaune chuckled. "But it doesn't have to be Spruce Willis. There are plenty of artsy fartsy movies you would probably enjoy." Cinder laughed as he said that.

"Artsy fartsy, really?"

"You know, melancholic lanky protagonist, probably in black and white and in foreign language." Jaune explained.

"Just because protagonist isn't balding neurotic forty year old doesn't make them bad." Oh no, she was insulting Spruce again.

"Aw come on, don't call him neurotic. Spruce was going through divorce when he filmed that. You really need to watch Hard as Diamond with me." Jaune offered.

"Only if you watch what you refer to as "artsy fartsy" movie with me." Cinder teased him.

"Deal." He said, much to her surprise.

"Oh really."

"Yup, you can pick the artsiest and fartsiest movie you can find and I'll still watch it." He postured.

"I'll keep that in mind." It was bit of a silly promise. The way things were, it was unlikely they were ever gonna have an opportunity to go to cinema. Hollow promise, or perhaps not. It was a hope, hope that someday they will be able to, hope that there will be tomorrow.

"What's your favorite color?" He asked her.

She thought about it for a moment before declaring: "Red." As she said that, she dipped one of the fried balls into the red sauce. It made sense, red was the first color he associated her with. No, perhaps not red. It was her eyes that stood out the most to him, that fiery orange.

"Mine is..." Jaune started before she interrupted him.

"Also blue, I like blue." She said as she looked him in the eye.

"Really, blue?" It was odd, outside of last night he never saw her wearing blue. Well, there was also that brooch she sometimes wore.

"Yes. It reminds me of something I like." She cryptically stated. Something she liked? Must have been the irises she mentioned last night.

"Mine is yellow." Jaune eventually said.

"I see."

"Wait... also orange." He added. If she could add another, so he could he. Warm colors were his favorites. Yellow used to be his favorite, but something drew him towards orange color. Maybe it was his hoodie with its orange interior or maybe... It was lame, he was lame... he liked it because of her eyes.

He dipped a fried ball into red sauce before taking a bite. It was a delicious combination. However it was too spicy, way too spicy. His mouth was on fire. It wasn't a warm sensation like the one last night, it was just unpleasant. He blamed his Valean blood for this, he was not built for spicy food.

Cinder noticed his reaction. "Take it easy." She said.

"How can you eat this?" Jaune asked her. She was unfazed when she took a bite moments ago.

"I was born in Anima. Eating spicy food is our thing." She explained. That was lame. "Here." She poured him some juice. It was a pomegranate juice he brought. It was sweet and refreshing, with bit of a sour note. He felt much better, his mouth no longer burning. As he took a sip, she poured herself a glass as well.

Jaune took a bite of roasted meat. It wasn't juicy like the meat he ate in restaurant last night. It was thin and bit dry, yet incredibly delicious. It was savory and spicy, yet not too spicy. He sensed aroma of paprika, garlic, black pepper, onions and probably much more. There was a charred crust to it, adding to the flavor. He wasn't quite sure what meat it was, probably beef, maybe lamb.

Jaune had an idea, bad idea. He dipped a piece of meat in a red sauce before taking a bite of it. Naturally it was delicious... and he still couldn't handle the heat. Cinder spilled a bit of juice as she watched him try it again. Why was she even surprised by her stubbornness at this point.

"Really? Again?" She asked him incredulously, red drops of pomegranate juice staining her lips and chin.

"I'm... building an immunity." Jaune tried, his breathing was bit strained.

"Immunity? How about a large dose then." As she said that she dipped roasted green pepper into red sauce and brought it to his lips. They were burning just from its touch. As he was about to bite it, she shoved it in her mouth instead. She then mixed two sauces together, creating a new orange sauce.

"Try it this way, light sauce will reduce some of the spiciness of red sauce." Cinder said as she was chewing the green pepper.

Jaune dipped a piece of meat into new orange sauce. It certainly added to the flavor. Instead of overwhelming spiciness, there was now some sweetness and creaminess to it. Still bit too spicy for him, but more manageable. He took a sip of juice and bite of flatbread to cool his mouth a bit.

"You don't have to eat spicy food to impress me. Know your limits with spice." As she was saying that, her face was getting flushed and eye teary. He wasn't sure what was happening, but quickly got an answer after she took a big bite of flatbread. Jaune laughed as she washed it all with gulp of juice. So much for knowing your limits.

"Too big of a bite. I blame your foolhardiness for this, it's infectious." She said, barely holding in laughter.

"I guess my foolhardiness will be the end of us both." Jaune joked.

"Maybe. But on the other hand, it's one of the things I like about you." Cinder confessed.

"Really? That?" Out of all of his traits she could have picked, she chose that.

"It's both your strength and weakness. You are stronger than you think."

"I'm not that strong, I'm probably the weakest on my team." Jaune admitted as he scratched his head. He had some unique talents, but he wouldn't call himself strong.

"Not that strength, you possess a different strength." She said before stopping to rethink. "You possess an incredible will, you always stand for what you think is right, even against impossible odds." Cinder elaborated.

"I'm not... Back then, I gave up. I was willing to stay there. I'm a fraud. You know I faked my Beacon transcripts." Jaune muttered. She saw things in him that weren't there.

"You are wrong. Do you have any idea how hard it is to admit weakness, to accept help?" Cinder asked him.

"I'm simply stating a fact..."

"No." She interrupted him. "You are just unable to see it. Faking transcripts? Who cares about that. Back when I was in Glass Unicorn there were dozens of Huntsmen passing by every day. Every day someone saw me and did nothing. All the licenses in the world can't buy true strength." Jaune stood in silence as she ranted. "You are not strong? If you aren't, then who is? Tell me, who can sit in the same room as their partner's killer. Just sit. Not many could even do that. You went beyond that, you... you saw something in me even I thought no longer existed." Her eye was tearing up as she was saying that. "So don't give me crap about stupid transcripts or compare yourself to others. Jaune Arc, you are strong." Cinder declared. As she said that, he felt tear running down his cheek. It wasn't out of sadness, it was something else. He wasn't sure what to say. Thank her? Argue with her? Change the subject? He did none of that, he just stood there and looked her in the eye, silently accepting what she said.

They stood in silence for several minutes, just looking each other in the eye and taking the small bites of the meal. It was a weird feeling. There were times last night when they also sat in silence, but this was different. There were no walls between them, no barriers to overcome. They were content to just sit in silence, enjoying each others company.

She said he saw things in her even she thought didn't exist, but she did the same thing for him. He always thought he was weak, that everything that happened around him was his fault. But she didn't believe that, she didn't allow him to take blame for things that happened. She taught him how to better use his abilities, things he didn't think were even possible. Maybe she was wrong, maybe he was weak. Last night when she asked him who he was, he said he was Herbert, weak pathetic man who lied his way to his status. But he couldn't afford to think like that anymore. He believed in her and she believed in him. And if he couldn't put his faith into what she saw in him, then he was no better than fraud he imagined himself as last night.

"I like your resolve." Jaune eventually said. As if to answer a question she silently asked. Cinder just stood in silence, letting him elaborate. "You have an incredible resolve to push forward, no matter what. Back when I was in Ever After... I envied you. You were able to push forward back then in Atlas, no matter how many times you got repelled."

"You like my resolve? Very thing that killed your partner and made you so miserable?" Cinder questioned him.

"Yes." For a moment he felt sick as he said that. It felt like he betrayed Pyrrha, betrayed all those people that died because of Cinder's actions. No, it wasn't like that. He didn't like Cinder because of things she has done, he liked her because of what she was deep inside and things she could be. "You were wrong... none of those people had to die. But..." He was having trouble finding words. "I can't condemn your resolve. You were pushed in wrong direction. If you... if you were given a proper chance, your resolve could have been used for great things." Eventually he explained.

"Me? As a model Huntress? How amusing." Cinder jokingly remarked.

"No, you don't have to be Huntress, you could be anything you want. You were never given an opportunity to put your resolve into something else." Jaune said. She could have been so many things. No, she could still be.

"Even now, you think I can be something else?" She asked him.

"Yes." Jaune simply answered.

Cinder chuckled. "In that case, I don't have much of a choice. You put so much faith in me." She sighed before continuing. "Call her." Cinder simply said much to his confusion.

"Call who?"

"Call Li..." She stopped, as if to correct herself. "Call Ruby Rose. I want to talk with her. I want to see paths my resolve can carve out."

Chapter End Notes

That's all for today. I decided to mix various Middle Eastern cuisine for Vacuan cuisine. So they are eating equivalents of falafel and kebab. Pomegranate is there for symbolic reasons.

Headcanons:

Cinder is a cat person, she just doesn't know that yet.

Cinder can take spice relatively well, but she'll often exaggerate how well to save face.

Jaune struggles with spice.

Jaune is Spruce Willis fanboy. He likes his old films and will argue with anyone who wants to badmouth him. He finds his new films kind of bad, but will still make excuses for him. Mercury is also Spruce fanboy, but he likes all of his movies as long as the action scenes are good.

Blue is Cinder's favorite color, she picked up red because of Salem's influence.

Cinder made all of her main outfits. It would explain why they are so customized to her needs.

Her headache

Chapter Notes

He, he, I'm back bit earlier than usual with this fic. Chapter count number is tentative. I'd like to say 8, but then again, Dinner with Nemesis was suppose to be 5 chapter story. I can't be trusted with these things. Had a lot of fun writing this chapter, hope you enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They finished eating their meal soon after that. It was an excellent meal, different than what they've had in restaurant last night. It felt more relaxed, more personal. She dreamt about a picnic trip with her Prince when she was a kid, just two of them on a flowery meadow. Instead, it was a blanket on the floor with view of Vacuan skyline through balcony windows. Absolutely ridiculous, albeit endearing.

Mood shifted a bit after she expressed a desire to talk with Ruby Rose. One of the rare times she managed to catch him off guard since they've met in Vacuo. More she thought about it, more it seemed like a terrible idea. Why ruin what they currently have, whatever that was, in favor of facing... her. No, it was the opposite. As long as she kept running away from her, she would never be truly free. As much as it pained her to admit, she needed to face Ruby Rose.

"You want to talk with Ruby on a scroll?" Jaune asked her.

"As amusing as it would be to prank call Little Red, I need to meet her in person." She would pay some good lien to see Ruby's face if she called her from Jaune's scroll. But no, she needed to see her in person, that was the only way to conquer her ghosts, to show her resolve.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" He trying his best to hide his worry. Of course it wasn't a good idea, but it had to be done.

"There is nothing to fear. Unless she developed a thirst for blood." Cinder joked. She had to, it was the only way to hide her anxiety.

"No, she still only thirsts for cookies." Jaune nervously chuckled, with Cinder laughing with him. Cookies, interesting bit of trivia about her adversary. Although hardly surprising, she was a child after all.

"Either way, Ruby is on a patrol with Oscar right now. They'll be done in around half an hour." Jaune explained.

"Message her that you want to meet with her." Cinder instructed him.

"Just me? Anyone else I should mention?" He rhetorically asked her.

Cinder sighed. "It's a bit deceptive, but surely you understand why you can't write "Hey Ruby, wanna meet with me and Cinder," right?" She did her best to mimic the way he talked.

"Right." Jaune simply stated as he typed away. "You know, I was suppose to be on this patrol with Oscar." He added.

"You overslept, didn't you?"

"Yup." Jaune said as he scratched his head.

"It certainly takes an effort to oversleep an afternoon patrol." She teased him. She woke up around 3 PM. Was she hypocritical? Yes. Was she gonna let hypocrisy stop her from teasing him? No.

"Oh really, and when did you wake up?" Jaune struck back at her with a small jab.

"Maiden can't oversleep something." Cinder chuckled at his question. Truth be told, it was probably the most sleep she had in her life. It felt relaxing, nothing and nobody pressuring her to wake up. If not for that ray of sunshine, she could have slept the entire day.

"Right..." Jaune sarcastically agreed with her. He seemed to be thinking about something else.

"I didn't thank you for taking care of me last night." He eventually said. It felt weird to hear someone thanking her for anything.

"No need. I don't think you could have afforded to pay the bill otherwise." She said. That dinner took a hefty chunk of lien she had on her bank account. It didn't matter, it was all worth it.

"Not that... you carried me to the lobby and called my friends."

"It was the least I could do." Indeed, it was the bare minimum. She did so much harm to him. There was something that interested her. "What did you tell your friends?" Cinder asked him.

"Don't worry, I didn't tell them about you. I said I met some Atlesian woman in the restaurant. Weiss found your alias and confirmed my story." Jaune explained. Ah, ever nosey heiress was interested in who he met with. Mean part of her chuckled at that. For the first time she took something from them, she has bested spoiled Atlesian elite. But there was also another part of her. Maybe he would have been happier with her, Weiss Schnee. It felt wrong on so many levels, they've met while she was practically impersonating her. He was oblivious, but it was obvious Schnee girl was setting up the dinner to be alone with him. He was denied all that, because he ran into her instead.

"That's not something I should worry about, you should." She sighed.

"I didn't know how to tell them. Lying felt like easier solution." He admitted. It indeed was. She was also tempted to live a lie, ignore everything just to be with him, but she couldn't. They needed to face reality, no matter how painful it would be.

"They'll find out eventually. Maybe even right now, as I'm meeting Little Red."

Jaune sighed. "You have it easy, you just have to face Ruby... I have to face all of them." He half joked. Even with those odds he was wrong. Things she had to face overshadowed his concerns. They would forgive him, maybe not now, but eventually they would. She knew that it was likely there would be no forgiveness for her, that only he was willing to forgive her for things she has done.

"Imagine them in their underwear, that should make it easier." Cinder joked back.

"You want me to imagine someone like Yang or Nora in their underwear?" He incredulously asked.

"It's figure of speech."

"Fine. But don't blame me when I notice some of their assets are better than yours." Jaune jokingly remarked.

"You are absolutely incorrigible." Cinder laughed as she said that. "I've changed my mind, you are only allowed to imagine Lie Ren and Farm Boy in their underwear. Now turn around, I need to change my clothes." As she said that she walked towards her dresser.

"What's wrong with your current clothes?" Jaune asked, ogling her body.

"Not suitable for occasion." Cinder retorted. Jaune murmured something. She wore this outfit for him, not for Ruby or other onlookers.

"You said you have seven sisters."

"Yeah."

"Then this really shouldn't surprise you." She undressed herself, leaving her only in blue set of underwear. Once again, she was in front of the dresser, wondering what to wear. And once again, she was tempted to wear that light blue sundress.

However, first she needed to think about her disguise. Meeting with Ruby Rose meant wandering into heart of the city. Many curious eyes would be on her, not to mention annoying hotel staff. They were likely camping her door, wondering when will enigmatic Miss Regen leave her room. This establishment had no standards. Madame would have likely punished her severely if she acted that way while she worked in Glass Unicorn. Her usual wig and perhaps mask were tempting choices, but she decided to go with something else. Her hand gravitated towards blue full body cloak. It was something she picked for scouting the desert. She saw locals wear similar clothes. It would be a suitable disguise.

Cinder draped herself with linen cloak before stepping in front of a mirror. She pulled her hair back before putting on a hood. For the most part it covered her dark hair nicely, there would be no need for wig. Usually she'd also need a scarf to cover her neck, but it seemed redundant. Thing her usual neckwear hid was no longer there. She traced her finger over her covered scar, feeling small tingles as she did so. He annoyed her to no end, but it felt nice

touching the Aura patch he left her with. She wasn't sure why. Was it inherent to his Semblance, or was it because it belonged to him?

"You know not all girls take forever to dress up. My sister Sandy was a bit of a tomboy. She'd put on whatever T-shirt and pants she could find. Sometimes even mine." Jaune's rambling interrupted her thoughts. She was envious. Whenever he mentioned his siblings and parents she wished she had his life. She wished it was her annoying tomboy sister who stole her clothes. She wished it was her caring mother that taught her about gardening. It also angered her. Not because she was denied all that throughout her childhood, it's because he didn't appreciate that. He was willing to throw his life away by fighting her in Haven knowing he had siblings, parents and friends who'd miss him. All because of misguided anger, because he felt he didn't deserve to live. Sometimes he was as selfish as he was selfless.

"I suppose you'd prefer your sister instead of me." She joked. What even happened to his family? Vale was recently destroyed, were they safe? He was fairly flippant about it, so she had to assume they were evacuated in time. Why was she so worried about his family? Maybe it was because of him, she didn't want to see him hurt again.

"Don't joke about that." He tried to shut down the conversation. She wouldn't have it.

"Oh really. Did Jaune Arc perhaps have a fantasy about his oldest sister. Perhaps promising to marry her when he was a kid." Cinder continued teasing him.

"Ew no. Not even as a kid." He was caught bit off guard, but then continued. "She is gay by the way." Jaune added.

"Really?"

"Yeah, Saphron is married and has a kid. They live in Argus." Jaune explained. Argus, it meant they were safe.

"So no sister complex?"

"Do you ask everyone you meet if they have a sister complex?" He asked her. It would certainly be an entertaining way to open a conversation.

"Who was your first crush?" Cinder asked him. She wanted to know more about him.

"Is this some kind of a trick question?" He carefully asked.

"Is it?" She rhetorically asked. As she said that she turned her attention back to dresser. She took off her cloak, leaving her once again in just underwear. It was a shame he was behind her, she wanted to see him squirm a bit.

"When I was thirteen I went for a walk in the woods. There was a Huntress Team. I've overheard them talk, Team MCDM. I had a crush on their leader, Mica. Well, they called her Mica, maybe that was a nickname. Maybe her name was Mikaela, who knows." Jaune narrated.

"What did she look like?"

He was silent for a moment, likely trying to remember that day. She couldn't blame him, because of his fall to that dimension, it could have been more than a decade ago. She rummaged through closet while he was trying to remember it.

"She had black hair, more of a grayish black and yellow eyes. Ugh... white dress and... breastplate over it." He finally remembered. That gave her an idea. Cinder pulled out a long white sundress. It was fairly plain, only having some lace pattern on the lower half. It had a short transparent sleeves and squared neckline. Perhaps it was too simple, but it didn't need to be anything spectacular. After all, she planned to wear a cloak over it.

"You know, she noticed me starring at her... she winked at me." Jaune reminisced.

"Oh my, bit of a cradle snatcher."

"Aw come on, not like that. She probably just thought I was cute. I don't know where was she from, I've never met her after that." Jaune explained.

"Have you picked what you gonna wear?" He asked. She felt him glancing at her turned back.

"No peeking." She immediately called him out. Devious chuckle could be heard from him.

"How did you know I peeked?" He was curious.

"Not gonna even try to deny it?"

"No. Your back looks incredible." He commented.

"My back? How interesting. Thought you'd comment something else." She prided herself on her backside. As she was saying that she started putting on her dress.

"You still didn't answer me." Jaune reminded her.

"Instinct." She chuckled. Bit of a tease about what he said when they met earlier today, but it was also the truth. "Something I've picked up throughout the years. When you have nobody to watch your back, eventually you develop eyes on back as well." Cinder boasted.

"I see." Jaune melancholically remarked. It was an impressive skill, but it came at the cost and he knew that. Everything she achieved came at the cost of something else. Maybe that's why she was attracted to him, because there was no cost to pay. Well, at least no cost to pay yet. He would never take anything from her, but there was a possibility reaper wouldn't be so forgiving.

"You know, someone from hotel staff was looking at the door when you arrived." She tried to change the subject.

"Really?" He sounded surprised, he really didn't notice them. Sometimes she wondered how did he get this far with such dulled out instincts.

"I rarely leave my room, so staff became curious. Obnoxiously curious." Cinder explained.

"Gotta admit, they are pretty stealthy. Maybe we could use some of them to spy on Crown members." She chuckled as he said that. Against Crown they could do work, but nothing got past Tyrian.

Cinder finally put on a dress. She turned around only to find him looking through the balcony window.

"You can turn around." She declared.

He was speechless, just stood there trying to find the words. "You look incredible." He muttered.

"Have I ever looked anything but incredible?" She always looked incredible. Still, it flattered her, someone else's admiration flattered her. No, his admiration. Blind admiration was boring, his one actually meant something. He was honest with her. Just as his words sometimes hurt her, they also brought her joy.

"Well, that outfit you wore in Atlas was kind of weird." Said Jaune.

"How so?"

"It was bit random. Shorts... knee high boots... cape... I don't know." Cinder pouted at his remark. Sometimes it was inevitable, sometimes he'd tell her things she wouldn't like. He was bit cheeky after all, bit mean. But she was meaner.

"I'm changing my clothes now. I'm thinking about shorts." She threatened. Jaune just chuckled, he didn't take her small tantrum seriously. Maybe he was right, maybe she was a cat. Dragon's outburst would be a cause for a concern. But cat's? weirdly endearing. She was defanged. No, not defanged, she still had her claws. He would just take her scratches and bites and still continued playing with her.

Cinder moved towards her shoe closet. There was no point in carrying out her threat, she needed to move on. Dozens of shoes were scattered across the closet. She could have picked a pair on her own, but she got a different idea. Cinder sat on a nearby bench, raised her bare foot towards him before asking: "What does my fashion critic think I should wear?" Her toes playfully wiggled as she said that.

"Fashion critic, really?" Jaune sighed, but still reluctantly moved towards her closet.

"Why not. You seemed fairly confident in your fashion knowledge when you trashed my previous outfit." She jokingly remarked.

"Hey, don't blame me if you leave the room with rubber boots." Cinder chuckled at his joke. There was no reason to fear anything. For a start, she didn't have any rubber boots. But that was beside the point. He carefully glanced each pair, observing them and imagining them on her. There was no reason to fear anything, whatever pair he picked would be picked with best intention. Luckily she had no rubber boots... just in case.

Pair he ended up choosing was simple pair of closed silver colored slippers.

"Silver? Curious choice." Maybe not something she would have chosen on her own, but it went well with her white sundress.

"I think silver would suit you well." He offered her shoes. It seemed he wanted her to put them on on her own. No, she was feeling devious.

"I suppose you are right. Kneel." She declared. He seemed confused so she clarified. "I want you to do it yourself."

He incredulously chuckled, but obeyed nonetheless. Jaune kneeled in front of her before taking her bare foot in his hands. His fingers gently caressed her sole, she bit her lip to hold the moan. No matter what part of her he touched it felt magical. She was tempted to see how far she could take this with him kneeling in front of her. Perhaps make him kiss her foot, Perhaps make him kiss something else instead. But that's all it was, a temptation. He slowly put on a shoe on her left foot. It fit like a glove, perfectly encasing her foot. Perhaps they were a better choice than she initially gave him credit for. He looked her in the eye as he was putting the other shoe. Her foot started slowly sliding into the shoe, his gaze never moving from her. Eventually both her feet were encased in silver.

Jaune stood up first, taking her Grimm arm and raising her to her feet. All she needed to do now was put on a cloak and they were ready to go. There was a sense of finality to it, it felt like an end of an era and start of something new. She pinned her cloak with a brooch before putting on a hood. "Let's go." She declared.

They walked out the door, Jaune in front of her. How cute, he thought she needed a protection.

"Is hood really necessary indoors?" He asked.

"Considering I've forgone a wig, yes. You'd be surprised how less welcoming staff is when you are a wanted terrorist." She dryly joked. Speaking of staff, she felt someone was looking at them while they walked down the hall. Obnoxious ingrates, what was the point of paying them good lien and demanding privacy if they were going to constantly annoy her with their prying eyes.

"And yes, staff is still spying on me." She added.

"Really?" Jaune looked over his shoulder, subtlety wasn't his strong suit. "Just some grandpa over there." Jaune remarked.

"Good afternoon Miss." Cinder heard an elderly voice in distance.

"Well, annoying grandpa."

"Hello Sir." Jaune exclaimed. Sometimes it annoyed her how talkative he could be.

"Good afternoon Mister, good afternoon Miss Regen." Man greeted back. Of course he knew it was her.

"What did I tell you." She hissed.

"Well, he is dedicated to his job, that's for certain." Jaune smiled. Indeed, dedicated in art of annoying her. She just grumbled and continued walking forward.

Every step she took forward she felt eyes on her. Always the same sensation. As if there was a phantom walking behind her, always staring, always judging. She was starting to realize what it was, it was her guilt. Closer she came to her confrontation with Ruby, more guilty she felt over things she had done. Ghosts of her past never left, they just followed her. It made her even more anxious.

"Ruby said she is done with patrol." Jaune remarked looking at his scroll. "Where do you want her to meet us?" He asked her. Public places were out of question, so many things could go wrong during this meeting. It needed to be somewhat private, few places came to her mind. She opened a map on her scroll to survey the potential areas.

"Tell her to go to Fajr district, it was mostly abandoned after Crown's coup attempt." Cinder instructed him. Jaune quickly typed out the message. "There is an abandoned Dust shop with the same name, tell her to go there." She added. They started moving towards it.

"Don't you think it's bit suspicious to ask her to meet me in abandoned Dust shop in the middle of nowhere?" He cautiously asked. He was right, it was incredibly suspicious.

"Tell her you need to talk with her about some lead you found about Crown. Or something between two of you. Tell her you wanted to talk about..." She stopped halfway through the sentence. She didn't want to remind him of what happened to Penny. "Lie to her, you are good at it." Cinder said instead. Jaune sighed, she didn't know what he told Ruby Rose.

She wondered if Penny was one of the phantoms haunting her. Of course she was. She relentlessly hunted that girl for Winter Maiden power she held. And in the end it was all for nothing. She never acquired the power she wanted, Penny died for nothing, she killed Penny for nothing. No, even worse, Penny's death broke him because he was the one who finished her off. Why was he like that? Why did he forgive her? He walked besides her in a hope she would be given another chance at life. Why wasn't he behind her, with the rest of the phantoms, judging her every move.

For a moment she saw every single one of them. Amber, the girl she took Fall Maiden power from. She never talked to her, she didn't even know who she was beyond sum of her movements. All she knew about her was where would she be that day. After that, she reduced her to a puppet, mere object to be used by that immortal leech. Nobody deserved that fate. There was of course Nikos, Jaune's partner, his first kiss. She took everything from her, her life, her Destiny, even Jaune. It was disgusting, every time she wanted something for herself she trampled on others. There were of course others... Rhodes... Vernal... Watts, no, she hardly regretted that one. But there were countless others, people who's names she didn't know, yet she still took everything from them.

She slowed down, it felt like something was holding her back. Last night he said he fell because something was holding him back after he killed Penny. She told him that was a good sign, it meant he still felt guilt, that he was still a human. How ironic, her words were being turned against her. She wouldn't have feel guilt if she were truly a monster. What she felt was

a weight of being a human. How frustrating. For a moment she wished she was truly a dragon, cold blooded monster roaming the world.

She felt warmth as he grabbed her hand. "Don't worry, she won't eat you... as long as you are not made out of cookies." Jaune jokingly reassured her. Monsters didn't feel pain, but they also didn't feel love. She was willing to feel that pain as long as it meant she would also feel his warmth. No, she was wrong. What dragged her back wasn't those people, they would want her to face the consequences of her actions. They wouldn't let her run away. What dragged her back were her self doubts, last shreds of existence that still persisted on that path. She couldn't doubt herself right now.

Yet she still felt eyes on her. If what she felt before wasn't real, merely a manifestation of her doubts, then what was this? It was a sensation as real as touch or sight. She allowed irrational thought cloud her mind. There were no phantoms behind her, it was person of flesh and blood following them. How bothersome.

"We are being followed." She whispered to his ear.

"Grandpa again?" Jaune jokingly remarked.

"No." Cinder simply retorted. He quickly realized she was being serious.

"Do we turn around or...?" He asked.

"Just continue forward for now." There was no point in turning around now. Turning around would just alarm them. She wanted to catch the person following them.

Her mind went into the high gear. Who was it? Crown member? Some particularly stealthy Huntsman? She needed to take a glance behind her.

"There." Cinder instructed Jaune towards an alley to the left. She took a glance while they were turning. There was no one behind them, at least no one suspicious. It could have meant two things. One, her instincts were clouded by her paranoia. Two, person following them had a way of masking their presence. For the sake of her sanity, she didn't want to believe it was the former, so Cinder went with latter instead. She had a limited knowledge of other Crown members, but she doubted they could afford to send someone with such a valuable Semblance to stalk her instead of enemy targets. Unless, they considered her to be an enemy target. No, she doubted Tyrian or Asturias brats would be aware of her current intentions. Then she figured it out, it was her second guess, stealthy Huntsman... or rather Huntress.

She somewhat forgot about her. Of course, she lamented her desertion, but she never perceived her as an enemy. It felt surreal, after all those years she became a Huntress. How ironic, she used to mock them and now she was one of them. Cinder wasn't quite sure why she didn't think of her sooner. It all made sense, she followed Jaune after she noticed something suspicious. She followed him to the hotel without him noticing anything. After all, stealth was her expertise.

But in a way, that made it bit easier. Cinder wasn't dealing with some unknown threat, she knew all about her strengths and weaknesses. Oh so many weaknesses. She grabbed Jaune's

hand and hurriedly led him into narrow alleyway.

"Where are we going?" He asked her, small bit of panic seeping into his voice.

"Trust me." That was all he needed to hear.

She needed to isolate her and force her forward. Hallucinations was powerful Semblance, but it required lot of concentration. They hurriedly walked down the abandoned alleyway. If her goal was to follow them, she couldn't let them out of her sight. She knew what was Cinder capable of.

They made one more turn to even narrower path. It was a small gap between destitute houses. She needed to pin her down. Soon enough her plan started working. Maintaining the Semblance on multiple people while also running was taxing. Cracks in her illusions started showing. She could no longer fully mask the noise of her footsteps.

As soon as Cinder heard footsteps entering the narrow alleyway, she sprung her trap. Her eye flared up with Maiden fire as she conjured a powerful gust of wind at the entrance of alleyway, pushing her stalker forward. Loud thud could be heard as she fell in front of them. Lapse of concentration stripped away the rest of the illusion, revealing Emerald's form. Cinder didn't want to take any chances and quickly pinned her former subordinate to the ground using her Grimm arm. Emerald's eyes widened, there was a fear in them, but also something else.

"My, my, prodigal child is back. Not even going to say hello?" She taunted her. Emerald made an uncharacteristically brash decision by following her.

Emerald just gritted her teeth at Cinder's taunt. No answer. Usually Cinder was fine with Emerald not uttering a single word, but this time it annoyed her. She moved her face bit closer to Emerald before taunting her again. "I cannot quite hear you."

"What are you doing Cinder?" Emerald muttered.

"Having dinners, sewing, reading. Surprised you would ask something like that." She wanted to see Emerald squirm a bit.

"What is your plan?" Emerald rephrased a question.

"Meeting Ruby Rose, if you would believe it."

"You are gonna capture her for Salem by using Jaune as a bait." Emerald guessed.

"Half right. I definitely need him to meet her, but I do not think any capturing will take place." Cinder smirked.

"You... you are gonna kill her." Emerald stuttered, panic setting on her face.

This time Cinder ignored her and turned towards Jaune instead. "Was I really that predictable as a threat?" She rhetorically asked him. He wasn't amused, it seemed he wasn't in mood for Cinder's jokes.

"Well, you did try to kill her several times. Now sto..." Jaune somberly stated before he was interrupted by Emerald.

"Where is Mercury?"

"He left, he is working with Tyrian and Asturias brats. But you already knew that considering how indiscrete their methods are." Cinder explained.

"So what now. Mercury left so Jax brainwashed Jaune to be your next minion?" She made a reasonable guess. After all, they were enemies last time they've met. But no, reality was much stranger than that. Brainwashed Jaune under he control, how entertaining would that be. Boring, awfully boring. As boring as Emerald's constant questions. She was starting to realize why she preferred when she kept her mouth shut.

"Look Emerald..." Jaune started before being once again interrupted.

"Sorry Jaune, not in a mood to talk with Cinder's sock puppet." Emerald lashed out.

Cinder's patience finally ran out. Her eye threateningly flared up with Maiden power as she pressed Emerald further to the ground.

"Pick your next words carefully Emerald." She warned the thief. Cinder turned towards Jaune, silently motioning him to continue.

"Cinder is giving up, she wants to talk with Ruby. And no, nobody brainwashed me..." He looked Cinder in the eye, as if to ask for help. "...it's complicated." He simply concluded. Perhaps that was the best way to describe them, complicated.

Emerald looked at both of them with confused expression. Almost as if she was trying to figure out if he was joking or not. He wasn't. She gave them resigned look, she didn't have much of a choice than believe them in this situation.

"No more questions?" Cinder mockingly asked her. Hopefully there would be none. This encounter has been a unnecessary distraction from her real goal. Emerald was silent. There was no point sticking around anymore, Cinder pulled back her Grimm arm.

Jaune gave her disapproving look. What did he want now? Emerald was in front of her, still on her knees with head bowed down. He was annoying her because she was mean to Emerald? This was barely scratching the surface of things she has done to the green haired thief over the years.

"I think they wanted someone to understand them." His words echoed in her head. Cinder sighed, he was an overgrown baby wearing an armor. What did he expect her to do? Hug her? Apologize to her? Tuck her in and tell her a bedtime story? "What's stopping you from trying?" Once again she heard his words in her head. What was stopping her? The fact she was a monster wearing a human skin. But she wasn't, that made everything harder. It was hard, but also necessary step. If she couldn't take a step here, what hope did she have when she eventually faced Ruby Rose.

Cinder took a step forward and extended her right hand to Emerald. Instead of taking her hand, Emerald slapped it away and stood up on her own. Cinder's eye briefly flared up with Maiden fire before being just as quickly extinguished. She couldn't blame Emerald for rejecting her hand. It was a small step forward, as much of a success as it was a failure. She turned towards Jaune with an intent of continuing forward.

As they continued walking towards the Fajr district, Cinder once again felt eyes on her as well as heard the soft noise of Emerald's footsteps. Her former subordinate said nothing, she just positioned herself on the other side of Jaune and walked together with them. It somewhat unnerved Cinder.

"What do you want Emerald?" Cinder asked her.

"I wanna see it, I... wanna see your supposed change." Emerald answered. She was trying her best to hide a small stutter with her confidence.

"Is it so hard to believe?" Cinder joked, earning a glare from Emerald and another disapproving nod from Jaune.

"You never cared for us." Emerald muttered, completely ignoring Cinder's question.

"I did." Cinder replied. She cared more about them than two of them could imagine.

"Tell me one thing about me." Emerald challenged her. This would be easy.

"We've met a week after Summer solstice..." Cinder started. It was in an alleyway not too dissimilar to the one they were currently walking in. Each year she would give her bit more allowance that month and be less demanding in her tasks.

"I know you collect gemstones..." Collect was a generous way to put it. She mostly stole them. "I know your favorite one is moonstone you bought last year." One of the rare ones she got through honest means.

"I know your favorite color is red..." Even though Emerald never wore that color. But there was something that kept drawing her towards it.

"I know you love trashy romance novels and movies..." She would often bicker with Mercury over TV remote. Emerald wanted to watch romance movies while Mercury wanted to watch another rerun of those brain rotting Spruce Willis movies.

"I know you read horoscope in newspapers every day..." She would often pretend she was reading the news, but would keep a finger as a bookmark on horoscope section.

"I know your favorite dish is Valean toast..." It was the first thing Cinder bought for her after she found her in that alleyway. Whenever she had a choice, Emerald would order a Valean toast.

"I know..." Cinder smugly turned towards Emerald. Her head was bowed down, she knew she was in the wrong. At least that's what Cinder thought. She didn't expect the thief to face her, face filled with uncharacteristic anger.

"Then why did you NEVER show that!?" Emerald screamed at her, interrupting her sentence. Cinder looked her in the eye, Emerald was shaking and her eyes were tearing up. How pathetic. But despite all of that, Cinder felt like she lost. Pathetic shaking form of green haired thief was looming over her. Cinder said nothing, she could say nothing. No mean jokes or witty comebacks, she had nothing.

Jaune was about to say something, likely defend her, but Cinder cut him off immediately. "You are better off without me Emerald." Cinder hid her face under cowl as she admitted defeat.

She could say nothing because words were pointless right now. All she could do right now is go forward and face the ghosts of her past. They turned around the corner, in front of them was an abandoned Dust shop, their intended destination. Two silhouettes were in front of it. Jaune grabbed her hand as they approached them. Small gust of wind blew, billowing red cape of one of the figures. It was her. Cinder moved forward to face the reaper.

Chapter End Notes

That's a wrap for now.

As for a Team from Jaune's past, Team MCDM (Macadamia) is a reference to Joan of Arc allusion. Joan saw saints when she was 13, Saint Michael, Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine. Those saints alongside of Saint Denis (patron saint of France) are adapted as team MCDM. So I had some fun with it, giving them all color based names. So they are Mica Angelos (mica is shade of black), Catalina Alexios (catalina is shade of blue as well as being another form of Catherine), Denim Sanctis (denim blue) and Margaret Ochre (ochre as a reference to Margaret's origin, from Antioch). As for where they are from, Mistral would be a neat reference to tie it back to Pyrrha considering Greek names as well as Pyrrha's role within Jaune's Joan of Arc allusion.

Fajr means dawn in Arabic. Bit of a reference to the first Dust shop in the series.

Headcanons CEM edition:

Cinder cares about Emerald and Mercury. Issue is that she had a hall of fame of shitty parental figures so she is oblivious to their emotional needs.

Cinder and Mercury have older sister/younger brother dynamic. Which is why they are more similar and why Mercury seems to know her better than Emerald. Emerald's relationship with Cinder is more of a as school friend or neighbour who idolizes her.

I gave Emerald moonstone as favorite stone due to color symbolism. It's something she likes but doesn't openly show.

Emerald tries to hide most of her interests because she finds them bit embarrassing.

Mercury is openly No.1 Spruce Willis fanboy.

Their Headache I

Chapter Notes

Relatively long delay on this one for several reasons.

1. Bit of a writer block
2. Changed my mind a lot writing this one
3. Wrote a Jaune/Cinder one shot fic
4. Started playing TFT again, it's fun.

With excuses out the way, here is the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They slowly approached Fajr Dust shop. As they did, Cinder started falling a bit behind. Jaune turned around, still holding her hand, still reassuring her. Closer she got to Ruby Rose, worse of an idea this all seemed. But it was too late now, she could no longer run, only way to go was forward. Two figures in front of the shop were no longer vague silhouettes, she could clearly identify her as well as lanky form of Farm Boy. Ah, Ozpin's container, Jaune was gonna have a fun time explaining the things to him as well.

She saw a smile on Ruby's face, wide, almost sickeningly sweet smile she remembered from her Beacon days. It meant one thing, Ruby Rose had no idea who Jaune brought to the meeting.

"Hi Jaune. Hi Emmy. Hi... Stranger." Ruby cheerfully greeted.

"Could you not call me that?" Emerald groaned.

There was no point in keeping the charade any longer. Cinder slowly took off her hood, revealing her face to her scarlet nemesis. Ruby's expression rapidly changed, her eyes widened while her saccharine smile turned into a frown. Her reaction change was certainly amusing to observe, probably the last entertaining thing she would experience during this meeting.

Rapid change of expression was followed by Ruby pulling out her weapon, comically large scythe. Cinder's immediate instinct was to retaliate, conjure a set of weapons to use. But she couldn't, that would defeat the point of this meeting. Jaune stood between two of them, halting reaper's advance, much to her confusion.

"Jaune, what the heck are you doing?" Ruby angrily asked.

"We came here to talk." Jaune retorted.

"There is a possibility he was brainwashed by Jax Asturias' Semblance." Farm Boy suggested. No, that wasn't him, mannerisms didn't quite match the body. The one suggesting it was the wizard inhabiting his body. Ruby grit her teeth, recognizing it as something plausible.

"What game are you playing Cinder!" Ruby shouted at her. What was she suppose to say here? Even if she denied it, there was no way reaper would believe her. Her hand twitched once again, she was moments away from creating a weapon to fight back.

"Ruby stop, I don't think Jaune is brainwashed... as weird as that sounds." Emerald interjected, much to her surprise. Well, it was to defend Jaune, there was no reason for Emerald to defend her anymore.

"Not brainwashed?" Ruby incredulously asked. "Then how... how do you explain all... THIS?" Reaper desperately tried to make sense of it. Cinder barely held off a smirk.

Jaune took a step forward, still standing between her and Ruby. "Girl I met last night was Cinder. We talked about some things and we found out we have lot in common." Jaune clumsily explained. Lot in common? Perhaps if one viewed their tragedies, but even that was a reach. "Now she wants to talk with you." Jaune finished.

"So last night you were chit chatting with Cinder?" Ruby glared him. "And that changes things... how exactly? Good for you for having a social life but have you forgot some things Jaune? She killed Pyrrha, she killed Penny, she..." Ruby started a tirade.

"I killed Penny!" Jaune interrupted her. Air around them immediately turned cold. It seemed Ruby Rose didn't know what exactly happened back on that bridge.

"You what?" There were so many emotions in her voice. She was panicked, angry, sad. Grip on her scythe tightened.

"We fought against Cinder... and... I... I..." Jaune started, hardly. Between every word was a pained stammer. He was blaming himself once again, she wouldn't allow that.

To Jaune's surprise, Cinder stepped between him Ruby. Reaper was caught off guard and immediately took a large step back, creating a distance between herself and Cinder.

"No you didn't." Cinder said to Jaune before turning to Ruby. "I killed Penny."

Ruby regained some of her composure before pressing her blade against Cinder's neck. "Is that suppose to make me feel better?" With corner of her eye Cinder noticed Jaune's panicked expression. He truly was an overgrown baby. She was hardly any different. Deep inside, every fiber of her being was shaking. But she couldn't and wouldn't show that. Not to Ruby, not to Jaune. She wanted him to see her resolve to move forward.

So she did. Cinder took a step forward, scythe's blade digging bit further into her skin. Ruby once again took a step back. Cinder wondered if reaper was familiar with sensation of blade digging into someone else's flesh. As far as she knew, she did sever Tyrian's tail. But that was

different. Would she be able to kill like this? Cinder took another step forward. She noticed Farm Boy pulled out a weapon as well, this would be interesting.

"What game are you playing Cinder?" Ruby repeated, this time with hushed tone.

"No games, it is as Jaune said, I want to talk with you." Cinder explained. Ruby flinched when Cinder said his name. It was an odd thing to hear coming from her mouth, yet so sweet.

Ruby lowered her scythe before concluding. "Fine."

"Ruby are you sure this is a good idea?" Farm Boy asked with panicked voice. This time it was really him. How cute, he was worried about her.

"Don't worry Oscar, if she tries anything I'll be out in a flash." Ruby smiled before doing her best to imitate the sound of electricity. How childish, she could hardly believe her nemesis was suppose to be almost an adult.

Smile quickly dissipated as she walked towards the Dust shop. A mask, that was all that smile was. Cinder followed her, leaving a few feet gap between them. As she was about to walk into the Dust shop she heard another pair of footsteps behind her. There was no need for her to turn around, she knew exactly who it was.

"No." Cinder simply stated.

"What?" He was bit confused by her rejection.

"This is a battle I have to fight on my own." She turned towards Jaune.

"What about..."

"I'll be fine, I'm not made out of cookies." Cinder jokingly remarked, trying to ease his worries. It didn't work. She was aware this wasn't the first time someone left him to face the challenge on their own. "Trust me." She added. As she said that, she gently caressed his face with her right hand. She was tempted to kiss him, but decided against it. It wouldn't feel right... it would be a bitter kiss.

Jaune relented. His worried face was the last thing she saw before she entered the abandoned building.

Cinder observed the remains of the Dust shop. Wooden shelves were damaged and empty, whatever Dust was there was stolen long ago. Only kind of dust remaining was a thick gray layer present on every remaining object in the shop. Ruby was no longer in front of her, she must have went forward while Cinder was arguing with Jaune.

She looked around, finally noticing her rival perched on top of the staircase's wooden railing. Scythe was no longer in her hands, now folded and put aside. Her posture was somewhat relaxed, but still ready to jump if need be. There was something imposing about Ruby's current position, she was above Cinder, observing her, judging her. It took an effort to make someone of her stature look threatening.

Cinder took a step forward, looking to follow Ruby upstairs, but was stopped by reaper's harsh tone. "I don't think you need to get that close if you wanna just talk with me." She threateningly reminded her. Fair enough.

She stood still, positioned beneath Ruby, contemplating her next move. What was she suppose to talk about with her? Usually she'd have no problem throwing taunts and mean jabs at her adversary, but this was different. She had nothing. It reminded her of conversation she had with Emerald minutes ago. She had an intent, resolve to meet her, but not much else beyond that. It was a reckless idea, concocted in the heat of the moment. Maybe he was right, his foolhardiness was both contagious and dangerous.

"Since you don't have much to add, maybe I'll start." Ruby interrupted the silence. It was unlikely she was gonna like what girl in the red was about to say, but it was a start.

"I wouldn't mind." Cinder concluded.

"Great." Ruby remarked, wide forced smile on her face. "How about we talk about Pyrrha?" That was inevitable. It was different with Jaune last night. While they did talk about redhead's tragic demise several times, they were rarely so direct about it. He kept blaming himself for it, so she avoided mentioning it. How foolish. Ruby had no such delusions, she knew very well who was responsible for Pyrrha's death.

"You know, small things. How she liked Destiny, how cool she was, how you murdered her in front of me." Ruby was barely holding onto her fake smile, glaring at Cinder. What was she suppose to say?

Just as she was about to say something, Ruby continued, completely ignoring Cinder. "Maybe about Weiss?" That incident was something she didn't discuss with Jaune last night. Heiress seemed secondary to everything else. But it was a miracle she survived, miracle Jaune awakened his Semblance there. Under any other circumstance, she would have died.

"I see. Weiss is bit of a boring topic to you." Ruby continued. "How about Penny instead? That could be fun. How you treated my friend like an object and didn't stop until you murdered her." There wasn't even a shred of that wide smile anymore, her teeth were gritted. Once again, Cinder had nothing to say. Technically she didn't kill Penny. First time it was Pyrrha, then it was Jaune. But that was a lie, both times it was her, they were merely the executioners. She could no longer do anything for Pyrrha, but she wouldn't allow Jaune to take the blame for Penny's death.

"Not gonna say anything?" Ruby shouted.

"What do you want me to say?" Cinder shouted back.

"How about... I don't know... Sorry?!" She was more and more agitated. And she was more and more annoying Cinder.

"What use is that right now?!" Cinder retorted. Words were meaningless.

"What use is you being here right now?!" Ruby questioned here. Maybe she was right, maybe this was all pointless. But she had to at least try.

"I wanted to make amends." Cinder tried, lowering her tone. There was no point in shouting, no matter how much Ruby annoyed her.

"Oh really? Tell me Cinder, do you have any idea how does it feel to lose a friend?" Another passive aggressive question.

She never had anything to lose to begin with. Emerald and Mercury were closest to something she had. They left her, she didn't lose them, it was different. They left her because of things she has done, or rather things she never did. How would she feel if someone killed them? She didn't know. She wanted to believe she would have felt something. It was frustrating.

"I don't know." Cinder shook head. In the end, she had no idea, she could only imagine. She walked towards an empty counter before crouching beneath it. "I don't know." Cinder repeated. She never had anything, yet now she found something. How would it feel to lose him? She'd probably become hollow once again. Mere thought of it hurt her, but that was all it was, a thought. Some people had to live with it.

Jaune watched as Cinder entered the building. Warmth on his cheek left by her hand quickly faded away. She said it was the battle she had to fight on her own. Battle? He scoffed. It seemed absurd to call a meeting with Ruby a battle, it was just Ruby, his gun obsessed Crater Face.

He sighed, it was perhaps a wishful thinking. To him Ruby was best friend, but to her... he was worried. Consequences of their last proper meeting were burned into Cinder's left side. Even if Cinder let go of her hatred towards Ruby, reaper still had valid reason to hate her. How frustrating, he was once again put into position in which he could only hope for the best. Put faith in Cinder, put faith in Ruby as well. She was better than him in almost every regard, hopefully she would understand.

He turned around, expression on Oscar's and Emerald's face was mix of worry and disapproval.

"Mister Arc if you don't mind me asking, what exactly is your relationship with Miss Fall?" Ozpin asked through Oscar. There was a fake courtesy to his question, he wasn't really asking, it was more of a demand. Fantastic, immediately a hard a question.

"Let me guess... complicated." Emerald chimed in.

"Yeah..." Jaune confirmed.

"I see." Ozpin concluded, not stranger to complicated relationships. "How long has this been going on?"

"Since last night." It was an easy question to answer for once. They looked at him with disbelief, almost as if he was telling some kind of a lame joke.

"You gotta be kidding me..." Emerald said looking at his deadpan expression. He just shook his head. When it was in his thought he could pretend it lasted their entire lives, but in reality it was just a single day. He felt almost insane saying it aloud.

"Last night, just last night?" Ozpin repeated in confusion.

"So what exactly happened?" Former Headmaster of Beacon asked another question.

Jaune contemplated for a moment, how much would he reveal to them. "I was suppose to meet with Weiss and Ruby in the restaurant, but Ruby cancelled." Both nodded, likely familiar with that part of the story. Jaune continued. "I ran into someone I thought was Weiss, but it was Cinder in disguise instead."

"How the hell did you mistake Cinder for Weiss?" Green haired thief interrupted him.

"Disguise... she wore a white wig." He added. Emerald shook head in disbelief at his explanation. Yeah even with white wig there was sizable height difference between the two.

"Lets not delve on such details right now." Ozpin interjected. "So you ran into Miss Fall, yet you didn't contact any of us."

"I thought I had it all under control, but then she brought us to one of the Atlesian secret room, so... I had no signal on my scroll." All of his explanations sounded shady, like he was deceiving them. But it was the truth, his foolhardiness sometimes just defied all rational thinking.

"Aw come on, you had sex, didn't you?" Emerald exclaimed. Why did everyone's mind immediately go there? Well, they weren't that far off, but still.

"If I may add, while Atlesian society is depraved in many regards, they don't use those rooms for that Miss Sustrai." Ozpin corrected her. "So you had a dinner with Miss Fall. How did that result in current predicament, especially knowing your past together?"

"We talked... we talked about lot of things. We eventually reached an agreement." He told an abridged version. There were too many personal details he didn't wanna talk about.

"You talked." Ozpin repeated after him.

"Yeah."

"Are you kidding me?! I spent years with her and... and... and then you have a chitchat with her and she is ready to turn a new leaf?!" Emerald shouted. It wasn't really meant for him, just another one of her grievances with Cinder. Of course, it was much more than just some chitchat, but he understood Emerald's frustration. She must have been Cinder's underling for years, yet Cinder never openly showed any appreciation for her.

"While I believe you did reach some kind of agreement, you having a chat with Miss Fall doesn't really put us at ease. After all, deception is one of her most proficient skills."

"It was more than just chat." Jaune cryptically added, once again avoiding details.

"Oh great." Emerald annoyedly muttered.

"I suppose that's even more unexpected." Ozpin commented, likely understanding what Jaune meant. "That still doesn't quite change the current predicament. Sometimes our feelings make us blind to the truth." He stated. In a way person in front of him understood the best what it felt like to have feelings for an enemy. Maybe he was right, but Jaune wanted to believe it was different. After all, unlike Oz and Salem, he only ever perceived Cinder as his enemy up until now. There was no false picture of her, he saw her at both her best and worst.

But before Jaune could say anything another person joined the conversation. "Don't you think people can change because of love?" Oscar chimed in, it was the first thing he said in a while.

"I believe people can change because of love, although I'm worried what kind of change that might be." Ozpin retorted. It felt weird to see them argue with each other considering they were in the same body. It was like looking at some weirdo talk to himself, exacerbated even further by their increasingly merged state. Well, who was he to judge.

"I wanna believe people can change for the better no matter what." Oscar's optimistically stated.

"So do I, but you know very well how many people changed for the worse. Not even an ancient history, just within this lifetime." Ozpin gestured towards abandoned buildings of Fajr district, referencing recent Crown uprising. Not just them, destruction of Atlas, near destruction of Haven Academy, all caused by people changing for the worse.

"But people also changed for the better." Oscar used the other hand to gesture towards Emerald.

"Glad to be the volume one of rehabilitation collection." Emerald sarcastically replied. Well she was wrong, there were several volumes before her. However, now was not the time for sarcastic back and forth. He was worried about what was happening inside of the building.

"Oscar, not everyone is like Miss Sustrai." Ozpin concluded.

"But where exactly do we draw the line?" Jaune joined the conversation. What it meant to be like Emerald? Before she joined them she was just another enemy. So what exactly was the difference? Brief silence followed his question, he caught them off guard.

"While I understand Miss Sustrai was also an enemy, Miss Fall is bit different." Ozpin tried.

"Jaune, she ran the show, I was just lackey. "Don't think"... that's what... that's what she told me all the time." Emerald muttered an excuse. She was probably right, he briefly saw an effect Cinder had on her, even now, but still. If that was a valid excuse then...

"But Cinder was also a lackey, to Salem. Doesn't that logic excuse her as well?" Jaune retorted.

"She..." Emerald started before changing her mind. "What's your point Jaune?"

"My point is that everyone deserves a second chance."

"Weren't you pretty pissed when I joined?" She jabbed him.

"I was." He vaguely remembered that moment, lot of things happened after that. "I spent years down there... I changed... and I know other people can change as well." He remembered Alyx, how much he despised her. Despite everything she has done, she was still willing to turn things around, to fix the damage she did. Cinder could change as well, she already did. "I'm sorry for being so... pissed about you joining, Emerald." He added an apology.

"Well I did call you Cinder's sock puppet and implied you are only doing this because you had sex with her so... I guess we are even." Jaune chuckled at her response.

"Still, what you are saying still hinges on us putting blind faith in Miss Fall."

"It's not a blind faith it's..." Jaune started.

"Cinder is someone we simply haven't met yet." Oscar concluded, earning him nod from Jaune and glare from Emerald.

"Sorry... I... I might be bit out of line here." He added with flustered tone, scratching his head. "She technically did kill me, but that was aimed at Oz... you all know her better than me."

"Her killing me is the reason we are in current predicament Oscar." Ozpin reminded him.

"It is, but without that I wouldn't be here. I would have never met... I would have never met all of you." Oscar explained.

"Ah, to be young and to be in love." Ozpin sighed, latter part likely aimed at Jaune. Oscar blushed at his remark.

"I'm too naive, aren't I?" Oscar asked no one in particular.

"Yeah." Emerald smiled.

"You are naive, but don't let that discourage you. Not much good came from my cynicism. Either way, we'll see what Miss Rose decides." Former headmaster concluded before seemingly vanishing. Or at least it seemed that way.

"He's gone?" Emerald asked. It appears he wasn't the only one who noticed the shift.

"Sort of, he took a rest." He explained.

"I didn't think that was possible in your current state." Jaune pondered.

"Think of it like... like... taking a dive. Every time I... he... takes a rest he dives beneath the surface." He clumsily explained before collecting his thoughts. "And more fused we are, shorter the dive is until eventually we are both always at surface."

"I see." Jaune simply commented. Looking at his recent interactions with Oscar situation seemed dire. He's been preoccupied so much lately with his own trauma and now with his affair with Cinder. Meanwhile Oscar was slipping away, rapidly merging with Ozpin. "I'm sorry." Jaune muttered.

"It's not your fault Jaune."

"I know but... Cinder put you in this situation and I..." He started.

"As I said earlier, I don't blame anyone for what happened to me. Sometimes things... just happen." Oscar took a stroll to building's front door, taking a peek inside. He wasn't alarmed, that was a relief. Instead he cracked a small smile.

"I see you are running your girlfriend's PR campaign." Emerald sarcastically remarked.

"She definitely needs it."

"Not gonna even deny "girlfriend" part, not gonna even call it "complicated." She put the air quotations at the last part.

"It is complicated, but I don't mind you calling her that. I don't mind you calling Cinder my girlfriend." Jaune smiled, he felt oddly possessive about her.

"It's so bizarre to hear that. I remember that time in Haven when you tried to kill her." Emerald reminisced.

"Definitely an awkward way to start a relationship." Jaune joked. Back then he was inch away from piercing her face when Ruby stunned her with silver eyes. To call it an awkward start would be an understatement of century.

"You had that whole speech about her killing your partner, Cinder couldn't even remember your name." She continued, completely ignoring his joke. "I thought she would tear you apart, but she was content to just toy with you. I had no clue why, she never toyed with anyone, she just... killed." He remembered asking Cinder about that last night, she didn't know why either. One of the anomalies that led them to where they were now.

"I thought you were pathetic, writhing under her boot, but other part of me was jealous. I was jealous because you had her attention, something I've never had." She admitted. "Maybe in a messed up way, you were meant for each other."

"Destiny." Jaune muttered. Everything eventually came back to it, as much as he hated to admit it. So many coincidences lined up, eventually leading to them meeting that night.

"Are you making fun of me for reading the horoscope?" She pulled him out of his train of thought.

"No, my sister Sandy does that as well. Besides, I once ate a truckload of cereal just to get a hoodie, so I can't really make fun of anyone." One of the first things she would do is read his section and tell him what ominous fate awaited him. She probably made up half of those things.

"Ah, typical Pisces." Emerald remarked, correctly guessing his sign.

"Wait, how did you..." She burst out laughing at his reaction.

"I read your file dumbass." Guessing a horoscope sign based on personality... He couldn't believe he fell for that.

"She was right though, I do read horoscope." She admitted, referring to Cinder's earlier statement. "Mercury would tease me about that. You know... I wish he was completely right, that Cinder truly never cared about us. I wish he was h..." Emerald stopped mid sentence, clutching her scroll. He somewhat understood what she meant. Cinder being uncaring monster was easier pill to swallow, significantly easier than trying to untangle complicated mess she was. He was similar in that regard, back then he tried to reduce everything to black and white, even himself. But reality was more complicated than that.

"I hope you'll find what you are looking for Emerald." Said Jaune. They both wandered for years, never truly finding what they wanted. He finally found a piece he was missing, hopefully Emerald wouldn't continue wandering for too long.

"Oh cut the mushy crap." She smiled.

Suddenly her scroll vibrated, she glanced at it, her expression quickly shifting. "Oh, I forgot about this." Emerald remarked.

"What is it?" What could it be now? Crown attack?

"I may have warned others I was tailing Cinder and broadcasted my location." She explained.

"Oh."

"Yeah." As she said that, he heard loud footsteps around the corner. Cinder described this as battle, in that case these were reinforcements.

Nora, Ren and Weiss were first around the corner, followed by Blake and Yang. There didn't seem to be anyone else there, other teams were either busy, late or weren't informed.

They silently approached him, weapons in hand. Standstill lasted for few moment before Yang stepped forward. "Where is she and where is Ruby?"

It was a long battle ahead.

It's kind of a shrinkflation, you are waiting longer for less Jaune/Cinder content in the fic.

Oscar and Ozpin's merged state might not be accurate to how it was portrayed in Beyond episode, but I wanted them to swap a lot with distinct perspectives.

I don't headcanon Emerald as being romantically into Cinder. I see it more of a platonic thing, although pre redemption Emerald would accept any form of relationship with Cinder.

headcanons... horoscope edition. (unless I missed someone's birthday in which case these headcanons are unnecessary and likely wrong)

Emerald is Taurus since that sign is associated with color green

Mercury and Oscar are Gemini for different reasons. Gemini as sign is associated with planet Mercury while with Oscar it's more symbolic.

Cinder is Sagittarius since it's late Fall sign, associated with fire and obviously archery. While reading horoscope Emerald would assume Cinder's horoscope sign (since she didn't know when was her birthday), usually assuming the one with the best connection with her one.

Their Headache II

Chapter Notes

Bit earlier than usual. Wanted to finish the negotiations within this chapter, but I realized it would drag out a bit too far, so it will be split into more chapters. Either way, hope you enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Cinder sat in silence beneath the counter in the dust shop, occasionally glancing at her red rival. Ruby Rose was still perched on staircase rail, also observing her in silence. Part of her wished they were fighting, it wouldn't have been this unnerving. At this point it didn't even have to be a fight, just a sound of any kind, gust of wind, creaking of worn out wood, loud footsteps, anything.

"You know... you are a lousy company for conversation." Ruby mumbled, finally interrupting silence. It wasn't much, but it was something she could respond to.

"I did not know my assignment was to entertain you." Cinder sarcastically replied.

"Considering this meeting was YOUR idea and that I could easily just call for the backup, I suggest you work on your conversational skills." Reaper said through gritted teeth. A thinly veiled threat, it appeared she wasn't in mood for Cinder's jokes.

"Fine, what do you want to talk about?" She asked.

"That's not how conversation works." Her rival let out a groan. "You are making me look like a social butterfly. Is talking like... comic book villain only thing you can do?"

"Comic book villain? I see myself classier than that." She never read much comics growing up. During her childhood it was mostly fairy tale books. When she grew up she read variety of literature, but never comic books. Comics seemed like a low brow literature to her.

"Again... again?!" Ruby once again audibly groaned. "It's not funny Cinder! I don't know what they taught you in... in... villain school... You killed my friends Cinder! It's NOT funny!" She shouted at her.

"I never went to school." Cinder remarked. She wasn't sure why she said that, it added nothing. Perhaps to correct her rival's presumptuous guess. Villain school, how absurd.

"Why are you here?" She asked, ignoring Cinder's remark.

"I thought we went over this, to make amends." Cinder explained.

"Not that... why now? You seemed satisfied cackling and... throwing us off the bridge last time. What changed?" Reaper inquired.

"It is as Jaune said, we talked last night."

"Ah yes, because you two are such good friends." Ruby sarcastically replied. Friends, huh. In ironic twist that was one thing they never were. They went from strangers, to enemies to... lovers? Soulmates? Boyfriend and girlfriend? Ugh.... to complicated. They kind of skipped the whole friends part.

"Of course not." Cinder scoffed. Would she be satisfied if they were just friends? She thought for a moment. Answer was simply no. Above everything she was greedy, she could never stop at something as mundane as friendship with Jaune. It was a twisted desire to take something that didn't belong to her, but she couldn't fight against it. All she could do was control her impulses. "We realized we are similar in some regards."

"Oh please, you are nothing alike. If you filled his head with that nonsense, I swear you'll regret ever coming here." She threatened, clutching her folded scythe.

"As I said, in some regards."

"Is this because of Penny?" Ruby stared at her before adding. "What happened back there?"

It seemed weird she was gonna be the one to explain it to her. But then again, maybe it was for the best she did. Jaune's version of events would be too biased, too guilt ridden. It wasn't his fault.

"After you fell, I fought Penny. I tore open her chest with my claws." She raised her Grimm arm while Ruby once again tightly clutched her scythe. "Schnee girl distracted me while Jaune attempted to heal Penny. When I finished my fight, Penny was already dead, Jaune stabbed her." Cinder explained.

"Penny didn't want you to have Maiden power." Ruby muttered.

"Admirable resolve." Cinder commented.

"Shut up." Her nemesis replied, venom dripping from her words. "That still doesn't make you similar, he killed Penny because she asked him to, not because he was... evil or anything."

"I know what it feels like to be forced to kill." Cinder added.

"Oh great, more excuses. Let me guess, Pyrrha rammed herself onto your arrow, you didn't mean to do it." Ruby's usually saccharine tone turned into complete mockery of it.

"I'm talking about my past, not making excuses. Nobody forced me to kill Pyrrha... or Penny." She elaborated.

"You like him because he killed his friend.... are you... are you..." Her tone was growing agitated, once again clutching her scythe.

"No." Cinder interrupted her. "I like him because he is strong. Every time he fell he stood up." He rose from the pit he fell into, his legs were weak, his resolve was shook, but he continued nonetheless.

Ruby gave her puzzled look. Maybe it surprised her Cinder saw Jaune as someone strong. If it did, she was truly a fool, not appreciating her friend. Maybe it was because she said something that Ruby didn't classify as "comic book villain" dialogue.

"What's your deal with Jaune." Ruby eventually asked. This was gonna be a tricky thing to answer.

"It's complicated." She reverted back to her usual description.

Ruby thought for a moment before turning her head away. "Ewww, just ewww." She childishly exclaimed.

"We didn't have sex or anything like that." Cinder stammered.

"That doesn't make it much better, it's still ewww."

"Grow up." Cinder retorted, fed up with her adversary's behavior.

"Me? Do you not understand how messed up this whole thing is? You killed Pyrrha and then you... with Jaune... ewww." She continued her tirade. Although she was acting childish, she had a point. It was messed up, sick and twisted in many ways. But then again, so was she.

"So let me get this straight. You were last night with Jaune, you did... you know what, don't wanna know... and now you want to... switch sides to be with him?" Ruby asked.

Such a ridiculous description of what they went through last night. However, it wasn't that far off. Cinder nodded.

"You gotta be kidding me... This is like one of those Blake's filthy books." Ruby sighed. She thought about it for a few seconds before concluding. "Fine, but I have some conditions." Of course, it was never gonna be that simple.

"What do you want me to do." Cinder inquired.

"Well for start..." Just as Ruby started her demands they've heard the sound of door opening. It was followed by several pairs of footsteps. Who exactly it was she wasn't sure, they were obscured by counter. Whoever it was, it likely meant bad news.

"You know, some of those books are really sweet." Voice interjected. It was Blake Belladonna.

"Really, that's your concern right now?" It was Xiao Long.

"Have to correct the misinformation." She seemed oddly flippant.

"Blake, could you take this more seriously, Cinder could be around the corner." Yang warned her.

"Relax."

"Ruby, where is she?" Schnee girl asked, much more cautious than her teammate.

"Behind the counter, right." Belladonna girl once again interjected. Ruby nodded.

"Alright." Yang declared. "Hey Cinder, could you take a peek? There are few rounds in this baby that would like to meet your face." She shouted, likely referring to her weapon. Great, now that knucklehead was here to fight. Cinder glanced at Ruby, silently asking for confirmation if it was still just a meeting.

"It's fine, she is just here to talk." Said Ruby.

"Oh really, scared perhaps?" Yang taunted Cinder.

"Do I need to remind you how our last encounter went Xiao Long?" She finally responded, fed up with blonde's loud mouth.

"With you hiding behind refugees and sending Neo to sucker punch me? I hate to disappoint you, but you won't be able to pull that little maneuver again." Yang retorted.

"I do not need Neo to beat you."

"We are ready for anything you can throw at us Cinder." Another taunt, this time from Schnee girl. "Blake, could you take this more seriously." She additionally hissed at Cat Faunus.

"I doubt that." Schnee's confidence was almost insulting.

"Could you stop that." Ruby glared at Cinder, fed up with their exchange.

"They started it." Cinder whined, earning disapproving look from Ruby. Bickering momentarily stopped.

"So Rubes, would you explain us why are you having a shrink session with this bitch?" Yang started again.

"Not my idea, she's the one that came here for that. You can blame Jaune for this." Ruby sighed.

"Figures, this is too reckless even by your standards." Blonde concluded.

"What do you mean "you can blame Jaune for this?" Weiss asked with alarmed tone. She got some satisfaction out of hearing her mask of confidence slip away. However, she wasn't in mood to waste time on her, or any of Ruby's teammates for that matter.

"Is peanut gallery really necessary?" Cinder asked.

"You are right, police and several Huntsmen squads would be more appropriate." Yang remarked, earning a groan from Cinder.

"I left my backup outside." Cinder said to Ruby with almost pleading tone. It felt weird calling Jaune her backup, but they didn't need to know anything beyond that.

Ruby looked her in the eye for a moment before concluding. "Fine. Team, you can leave, I'll deal with her myself." Ruby declared.

"Ruby, I don't think this is a good idea." Weiss warned her.

"Are you sure sis?" Ruby nodded at Yang's question. "Are you thirsty? Need some boba tea?" She then cryptically asked.

"I'm fine Yang." Reaper declared.

"Alright, we'll wait for you outside." Blonde answered. Cinder heard pair of footsteps slowly walking away.

"I don't like this." Weiss declared, also slowly walking away.

"Me neither, but Ruby seemed confident. Cinder said she had backup outside, do you think Emerald helped her?" Yang's voice was slowly fading as she walked towards the door. Emerald helping her? Wishful thinking at this point.

"I don't think she would after what she went through with Cinder." Weiss concluded. "Stop snickering Blake." It was the last thing Cinder heard as other three members of Team RWBY left the building. That left her and Ruby in silence.

"I'm surprised you went along with it." Cinder broke the silence.

"If you wanted to attack me you would have done it earlier." Surprisingly logical reasoning from her usually childish adversary.

"Perhaps I was just bidding my time."

"Again with that?" Ruby groaned.

Cinder sighed, there was no point in banter with Ruby, she needed to get to the point.

"You said you have some conditions for me to... switch sides." It felt odd to say it like that. Like it was some kind of comic book about heroes and villains or cliché TV show, neither being her cup of tea. But then again, not exactly surprising choice of words considering who suggested it.

"I do. Let me think about it for a moment." She started musing about it.

"I thought you already had this figured out." Cinder sighed.

"How was I suppose to anticipate this? Now shush and let me think about it."

All Cinder could do was once again audibly sigh. Obnoxious little twerp...

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All Jaune could do was watch as remainder of Team RWBY entered the building. If he wasn't worried before, he was definitely worried now. He wished he could follow them, but there was a firm hand on his shoulder.

"Jaune, what is going on?" Ren sternly asked. He might have sensed something, something with his Aura.

"Shouldn't we go in as well? Help kick her ass?" Nora asked.

"We are here in case she tries to break out." Ren reminded her.

Nora's hand twitched, he wasn't sure was it fear, excitement or something else. Ren probably knew what it was, but he was busy observing him instead.

"I'll ask you again Jaune, what is going on?" He repeated the question. Jaune stayed silent again.

"Relax Renny." Nora's hand twitched again.

"Jaune is hiding something from us." Ren accused him. "Jaune, please tell me what's going on?"

He was tempted to stay silent once again. His attention was on Cinder, worrying about what could go wrong in there. She was in the room together with four of her enemies. But that was the thing with faith, it sometimes required a person to believe in impossible. If his faith could falter that easily, then he wasn't as strong as she made him out to be. Her battle, his battle.

"Fine, in that case..." Ren started.

"I'm with Cinder!" Jaune shouted, interrupting him.

"What?" Nora and Ren asked in unison.

"This ought to be good." Emerald remarked.

"What do you mean you are with... so that's what I saw back then." Ren stated.

"Could you... could you let me in on a joke?! What's going on?!" Nora shouted, glaring at Jaune and Emerald.

"I-I-I only found out now." Emerald stammered, defending herself.

"Found out what?! Jaune what the hell is going on?!" She implored him.

"I'm with Cinder, we are... it's complicated."

"There it is again." Emerald groaned.

"What does complicated exactly mean? Gym partners? Partners in crime? Partners in bed?!"
Asked Nora.

"It's the latter, isn't it?" Ren added.

"Sort of, but not quite." Jaune sighed. Why did accusation always end up being that. "That dinner last night, it was with Cinder." He clarified before eventually adding. "I... have feelings for her." Jaune was filled with mixed emotions, shame of telling his friends he had feelings for Pyrrha's killer, but also pride, pride that he was able to say it loud and clear.

Nora's eyes widened, it looked like they were gonna pop out of their sockets. Ren closed his eyes and sighed in resignation. Emerald let out a small chuckle in a disbelief of situation. Meanwhile, Oscar slowly walked up, probably alarmed by all the commotion.

"Talking about Cinder?" He carefully asked.

There was no answer from anyone present. Atmosphere was like calm before the storm, any moment sky would split and let out a thunderstorm. Anticipation was killing him, who was gonna strike first?

It was Nora, but in unlikeliest way. She let out a giggle. It was a forced, unsettling giggle, far cry from joy ginger girl radiated with.

"Ha, ha, I get it. It's a joke. Ha, ha Fearless Leader." She continued giggling.

"Nora... it's not a joke." Said Ren, likely aware of Jaune's true feelings.

She let out another giggle as a response before suddenly shrieking. "Then why am I the only one taking this seriously?!" Sudden and terrifying, like a strike of thunder.

"Nora it's..." Ren started but was quickly interrupted.

"Jaune is smooching with Cinder and all of you are... you are... treating it like it's not big deal!" She accused them. "Ren is just standing and going: hmpf, ah yes, hmpf." Nora mockingly mimicked him. "Emerald is laughing, Oscar is using it as conversation starter." She angrily gestured towards them. "And... and... Mister over here, just dropped a bombshell that he has feelings for Pyrrha's killer!" Last vicious rant was of course saved for him. He couldn't blame her, it was too much to process, especially considering how close she was with Pyrrha.

Nora momentarily calmed down before adding. "Anything you wanna say in your defense Jaune?" But she was far from calm, ready to strike any moment.

"What do you want me to say?" He implored. Sorry that I fell for her? It was never gonna be easy to explain it to them.

"Did you... did you hit your head or something? Did Jax brainwash him?" She once again accused him before turning towards Ren.

"He is not brainwashed. Victims of Asturias' Semblance have specific Aura signature. This is all Jaune." Ren clarified.

"That's even worse. Since when Jaune! Since when! Did you at least wait for Pyrrha's body to turn cold bef..."

"Don't you dare talk about Pyrrha like that!" Jaune shouted at Nora, interrupting her rant. "You think I didn't care about her?! That I did this to... get laid or whatever?!" He understood her, in a way he was similar back then when he found out the truth about Salem. He lashed out at Ozpin. How could someone be in love with their enemy and hide it from their allies. But Nora went bit too far.

There was an awkward silence after their shouting match. Nora was calming down a bit, although still agitated. This time Ren tried to initiate a conversation.

"So for how long Jaune." He calmly asked.

"Since last night." It still sounded too ridiculous. Nora's eyes once again widened while Ren let out an exasperated sigh.

"I had a similar reaction." Oscar remarked.

Sound of door opening interrupted any further discussion. Weiss, Blake and Yang walked out. Their faces were mix of annoyance, worry and odd nonchalance in Blake's case.

"What's going on inside?" Oscar asked.

"Miss False Maiden wants to chat with Ruby alone. Said she left her backup outside as well." Yang explained, glaring at Emerald.

"Oh give me a break, I called you here. You think I still work for her?" Emerald defended herself.

"Then who is it?" Blonde brawler added causing an awkward silence. Of course, he was gonna have to step forward and explain. Great, just great.

"It's Jaune." Weiss said with pained voice.

"Wait what?" Yang exclaimed.

"That flower from last night, it was made out of black glass. You were with Cinder last night, weren't you?" Weiss added.

"Yes." Jaune confirmed. His confirmation seemed to pain Weiss even more. Yang was shocked, there were flashes of red in her eyes. Meanwhile, Blake had minimal reaction, as if she already knew that somehow.

"So you were what... banging Cinder this entire time?" Yang made a crass remark.

"No, we just had a dinner last night." He clarified for umpteenth time today.

"Yeah I bet. What exactly were you eating? Her..."

"Would you stop Yang!" Weiss shouted much to his surprise. "Now, would you explain what exactly happened Jaune?" She pleaded. It appeared abridged version wouldn't be enough this time. He sighed, hopefully they'd understand.

Cinder patiently waited as Ruby was musing about conditions of her defection. She started melting away spare change lying around, slowly fusing it into amorphous shape. What exactly was she sculpting, she wasn't quite sure. But considering how long was Ruby taking to come up with conditions, she'd have more than enough time to think about her sculpture.

"You said you didn't go to school." Ruby commented.

"Great, you are gonna send me to school as part of my rehabilitation." Cinder jokingly remarked.

"No, I... I was just curious." She clarified. "When I first met you I thought you were like Weiss, from some rich family."

"Reality is often disappointing." Cinder commented. Her mask did its job, it presented an image she wanted to project. Some time ago she would have been flattered by Ruby's remark, but it rang hollow now.

"I don't care that much about that" She said referring to status. "Not even being able to go to school. You didn't have much growing up." Ruby remarked.

Cinder sat in silence, her fingers started shaping a human figure out of melted coins.

"I understand if you don't wanna talk about that. When I was a kid, my mom... she never came back."

"I envy you." Cinder stated. There was so much to envy. Caring mother, protective older sister, group of friends, respect of others. But she didn't need to know that. "I wished my mother never came back countless times... it never happened." Every time Madame shocked her, Cinder wished for her to disappear alongside her daughters. That was when she was still hopeful that someone else would find her. It was a naive wish, she would have probably been adopted by another similarly awful Atlesian family.

"Oh. So Salem saved you?" Another question.

Cinder smirked. How idealistic, belief that someone like Salem went out of her way to save her. Salem found her when she was already forged into a ruthless killer. It wasn't a Prince saving a Princess from the tower, it was merely a Prince finding a useful weapon.

"You read too many fairy tales." Cinder simply answered.

"You don't believe in fairy tales?" Ruby asked.

"I used to." When she was a kid she thought Prince would arrive and save her from her predicament. It never happened... or maybe it did, just not in the way she thought it would.

"I think you are lying." Ah, she was annoying as ever.

"How so?" Cinder played dumb.

"I think you still do, I think you always did. You thought you were entitled to your happily ever after." Ruby elaborated. It was an interesting perspective. Was that what her quest for Maiden powers was? She thought they'd grant her freedom. But that wouldn't really be a happily ever after, it would merely be a beginning of the story. Now she no longer needed them, she finally had her story back. She added more fire to the molten mass, shaping out limbs of the sculpture.

"If you no longer believed in fairy tales you wouldn't be here." Reaper added.

"How so?" She was somewhat intrigued by her deductions.

"There is no... logic to your decision. Whatever you wanted could have probably been achieved easier if you stayed with Salem. Yet you came here. You must believe into something else." She explained. Has he really made her that irrational? Willing to throw away everything she worked for for.... something. But that was simply how it was, strongest faith sometimes required belief into irrational things.

"Did you come up with your conditions?" Cinder asked, not wanting to delve deeper into her motivations.

"Oh you know I'm right." Ruby smugly remarked much to Cinder's chagrin. "But okay, I'll list them now." Her adversary finally stopped wasting her time.

"Condition one is... that you can no longer remain Fall Maiden." It made sense. She did terrible things using that power. Way they saw it, it was never meant to be her power to begin with, it was suppose to go to Pyrrha Nikos. Power served its purpose, she no longer needed it, she more than that.

"Doctor Polendina made... some... upgrades to the machine so it no longer kills the user. Your power can be taken away without killing you." She clarified. There would be little reason for her to switch sides if death was guaranteed outcome. Machine taking away power without killing the user sounded too good to be true, but then again, Atlesian scientists were finest in the world.

"Is this fine with you?" She asked.

Cinder sighed before confirming with a nod. "I'll need a demonstration of that machine before stepping in." She was unwilling to step into what was possibly a death trap.

"Yeah... demonstration... of course, yeah." Ruby confirmed, sounding fairly insecure. She wasn't sure if Ruby was lying about machine or girl simply wasn't that knowledgeable about it.

"Condition two is... I'll use my silver eyes to remove your Grimm arm. I'm quite good at it now, it won't hurt." Another relatively reasonable demand. There was no point in removing Fall Maiden power from her if she had means of retrieving it back. As long as she had it, she remained a threat. It was unlikely Salem had a way of spying through her arm, but some precaution never hurt. She feared Reaper's silver eyes, but she couldn't let the fear cloud her judgement now. She didn't believe it wouldn't hurt, but it didn't matter. Most things hurt.

She made a small nod, confirming she was fine with second conditions as well.

Alright, and last condition is... you can't be with Jaune anymore." Cinder's face lost color, now almost matching color of her dress. "You two kind of creep me out together. He deserves better." She was split in two. One side was logical and understood the implications of this deal. Accepting it meant she'd be free from Salem and be able to do something else with her life beyond meaningless pursuit of power. But do what? Jaune was the reason she chose this path. Her hand quickly added more details to the small human sculpture. Was there a point in accepting Ruby's deal if she couldn't have him?

It was an irrational part of her brain, longing for him, desiring him. Claiming a man who's life she ruined, who she hollowed out. Her fingers added finishing touches to her little sculpture. She turned towards Ruby, there was only one answer she could give.

Chapter End Notes

That's all for today, as always comments are welcome.

Not much happened overall, but it's setup for where each character stands regarding Cinder.

Regarding some headcanons, comics are probably one of the last pieces of media Cinder would consume. But I could see her read comics to see what Jaune likes.

Their Headache III

Chapter Notes

This one was bit of a challenging write since I had to juggle lot of characters at the same time. Hope you enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Jaune finished narrating what happened last night. More detailed account than when they asked him about it earlier today. Well, he hardly said anything then, he mostly confirmed some of their suspicions. He couldn't quite do that this time, he needed to clear up some things. He needed them to trust him. So he told them most things that happened last night, outside of some intimate details. Even he didn't fully know what Cinder went through, so he kept that part brief. It was her story to tell, they just needed to know she went though hell growing up.

"So you bonded with Cinder last night... and she told you she was abused growing up." Said Weiss. "Has it occurred to you she was lying?" She asked.

"Of course, bitch sniffed a defeat coming and now she is a victim all of a sudden." Yang crassly remarked.

"She wasn't lying. You can't fake something like that." Jaune explained.

"Jaune, she is a manipulator." Said Weiss, as if she was stating the obvious.

"Come on Vomit Boy, bit of a touch here and there, she tells you a sob story and all of a sudden she is a good girl." Yang mockingly remarked. She was getting to his nerves.

Just as he was about to tell her to shut up, Emerald surprisingly interjected. "Cinder wouldn't do something like that. She..." Emerald stopped for a moment, almost like pondering what to say. "She never let me or anyone else touch her." He assumed that to be the case. It took a while last night before he was able to touch her without her burning his hand. Although with each touch she melted away and wanted more. She was a living contradiction, both rejecting and craving the touch.

"Still defending her." Yang sighed.

"What is that suppose to mean?" Emerald inquired, somewhat offended by Yang's backhand comment.

"Don't you think your years of working for Cinder make you kind of biased?" Blonde brawler elaborated.

"It means I know her, I know her better than all of you!" Green haired thief retorted. "Or at least I thought I did." She mumbled under breath.

"Even if all of that is true, that doesn't change the fact who she is Jaune." Weiss stated.

Weiss is right, there are no excuses. Some of us also had shitty lives, doesn't mean we can go around killing people." Nora interjected, now bit calmer.

"But all of you had someone. Nora had Ren, Yang and Ruby had each other, Weiss had Winter." Jaune defended Cinder.

"What about Emerald? She had Emerald and just abused her." Nora retorted.

"Nothing says victim quite like abusing others, right." Jaune sighed at another Yang's sarcastic jab.

"Do you think being raised by abusive slaver and Salem had positive impact on her?" Jaune rhetorically asked. He felt bit shitty about that last comment, almost as if he was excusing Cinder's abuse of Emerald. But it was true, she never had anyone to teach her how to treat others. All she knew was abuse.

"I saw Salem abuse her once. She made her repeat a phrase, without you I'm nothing, something like that." Emerald added. Cinder never told him that, although it was hardly surprising. She was never keen to talk much about her past.

"Still a shitty person." Yang stated.

"Would you stop?" Jaune was fed up a bit with her constant backhanded remarks.

"Look Jaune, I get it, you wanna be the good guy. But do you really expect me to take your little crush on serial killer seriously?" Yang asked. She tried to keep nonchalant attitude about it, but there was an anger in her tone. Probably even less happy about the fact Jaune brought Cinder to talk with Ruby behind their backs.

"I don't think it's just a little crush." Ren commented. He wasn't sure what exactly was Ren aiming at, and it seemed nobody knew either. There was a brief silence before Ren continued. "This morning when we picked up Jaune, he said Cinder's name. At first I thought he was worried about us, that she'd return."

"And what, he was having a wet dream instead?" Blake let out a small chuckle at Yang's question.

"No..." He stopped for a moment, perhaps taking Yang's joke bit too seriously. "I thought he was worried about us because of what I've read from his Aura. Sometimes I can only make assumptions. But with context added, I realize it was something else." Ren explained.

"Spit it out." Said Nora.

Ren sighed. "I think it's love, he is in love with her." It felt bit awkward to have Ren lay bare his feelings to others. Just awkwardness, there was no shame. Others didn't share his

sentiment. Weiss' face turned white, Nora was fuming, Yang seemed split between throwing a joke and throwing a punch. In a way, it wasn't a new information, more of a explicit confirmation that it wasn't just a night of passion or little crush as Yang put it. Oscar, Emerald and Blake had significantly more subdued reactions. Former two were already aware of his feelings after their conversation earlier, Blake's reaction puzzled him.

"No." Nora simply said.

"I'm fairly certain about it." Ren stated.

"It's probably true. I overheard Cinder talking about it with Ruby." Blake added. That would explain her lack of reaction earlier.

"That's why you were laughing? Really?" Yang asked incredulously. Weiss simply looked her friend with disbelief.

"It's weirdly amusing. Cinder is ready to give up because of something you'd only find in romance novel." Blake defended herself.

"Do you think it's genuine?" Ren asked her.

"Probably. If what Emerald said is true, that Cinder isn't type to manipulate people in that way." Cat Faunus explained.

"Sorry to interrupt your chit chat, but would you take this more seriously?" Yang interjected. "Ren, you chewed off Jaune's head over freaking... forged transcripts. And now that he decided to do something idiotic of this magnitude, you are... cool with it?"

"Forged transcripts, eh." Emerald turned towards Jaune. "Welcome to the club." It felt odd that only other people beside him that entered Beacon through trickery were Cinder and Emerald. In a way it reminded him, among other things, that he wasn't a true hero. But he was what was needed now.

"I don't like this situation either Yang, but if Jaune is happy and she genuinely wants to help us, I'm willing to put aside my personal grudges." Ren clarified.

"Is that really a priority here Ren?" Weiss asked. "Should she really just get off the hook that easily? What about Pyrrha?"

"It wasn't suppose to be her!" Nora shouted. "It was suppose to be Pyrrha. You were suppose to be together... go on a dance... go on dates together... get married. I was suppose to be maid of honor and cool aunt Nora to your kids." Her voice was strained. "I'm sorry Jaune, I would accept someone else, but I can't accept her."

"Nora it's not..." Ren started.

"She has a point Ren, this is not what Pyrrha would have wanted." Weiss interrupted him.

"And what do you know what Pyrrha would have wanted?" Jaune glared at Weiss. He was tired of her being used like a prop for argument against him.

"Well I know she wouldn't have wanted you to be with her murderer!" Nora countered.

"She would have wanted me to be happy." It sounded selfish, but that was what she would have wanted. She could have been with him, but she chose to protect him. He used to believe she cursed him, his weakness, his inability to be there for her. It was all a corrupted image of his deluded mind. Pyrrha wouldn't have wanted him to suffer, she would have wanted him to be happy.

"So you are just gonna move on, forget about her?" Nora continued.

"What do you want me to do!?" Jaune shouted. "Back then, when I fell, I thought it was an afterlife, that we all died. I was looking for her... I was looking for her for weeks, months... I don't know how much time passed." It was a saving grace for him. Everything went wrong on the bridge, he at least thought he would see Pyrrha again, return to happier simpler days. But there were no saving graces, it was only him and failures that haunted him.

"I didn't forget about her, she was always in my thoughts." Jaune continued. He didn't exactly know how long was he there, probably more than a decade. It was possible he spent most of his life thinking about her, never moving forward.

"So I'm sorry Nora. I'm sorry things didn't went the way you wanted. You already know I'm a shitty leader." Real leader would put interests of his team ahead of his own. But he was selfish, he wanted to be happy.

"Jaune you are not..." Ren was about to defend him but was once again interrupted.

"I'm sorry Jaune, I'm sorry for bringing up Pyrrha again. I know you didn't have it easy... down there. But I... I can't accept... her." Nora apologized.

"I understand... it's not something that's easy to accept. Even I had issues trying to understand her. We spent most of the night arguing." He would have likely had similar reaction if one of them said Cinder should join them just a day ago.

"You know, you could have at least picked someone easier to understand. Preferably not serial killer." Yang interjected.

"Says the girl dating a former terrorist." Blake said playfully.

"I thought you preferred the term Faunus rights activist."

"I do. But it doesn't change the fact I have some skeletons in the closet."

"Yeah, you have some skeletons. Lil' Maiden over there has four acres worth of gravestones." Yang answered pointing towards the building.

"And even if misguided, you were doing it for the right cause." Weiss added.

"That's the point, everyone thinks they are doing bad things for the right cause." Blake answered.

"Are you... seriously comparing yourself to her?" Yang looked at Blake with disbelief.

"I know what it's like to be manipulated into doing horrible things." Blake explained.

"Or you know... you are susceptible to being manipulated." Yang replied.

"That's a low blow." Blake glared at her.

"But it's true. She is not like you, she is like Adam." They continued their back and forth.

"Cinder is not like Adam, she..." Jaune interjected.

"Yeah, yeah, she has her sob story, big whoop. So did Adam, his eye was burned by slavers when he was a kid." Blonde rudely interrupted him. "Hey, you know who that reminds me of?" She tapped her chin with finger in a mocking manner.

"People are capable of change." Oscar entered the conversation.

"Some people are." Yang added, as if to correct him.

"Would you say the same thing about Ilia or Emerald?" Blake asked her.

"Call me biased, but I don't remember either one of them chucking us off the bridge or trying to hunt down my sister for sport." Yang retorted.

"Doesn't the fact Cinder is talking with Ruby without any incidents prove you wrong in that regard?" This time it was Oscar asking the question.

"You are too naive." Yang dismissively answered.

"So I was told, but that doesn't answer my question." He persisted.

"Whatever. Just don't whine to me when she inevitably backstabs us... again."

"I think it's possible she changed, her expressions seem genuine." Ren stated, peeking through the door.

"You've shown you can be wrong about reading the emotions Ren." Weiss re-entered the conversation, referring to what happened this morning.

Ren didn't say anything back, he just went back to his observations.

"Anything new going on?" Blake asked Ren, curious about what was going on inside.

"They seem to be discussing something."

"Any juicy details?" Her ear perked up.

"I don't think..."

"Just scoot over." Blake said as she walked up to the door, two of them now observing what's going on inside.

Yang groaned at their shenanigans before walking away. Emerald and Oscar were now chatting with Nora, trying to lift her spirits. That left Jaune alone with Weiss. He wasn't sure what she was gonna say. Maybe she wouldn't say anything. Her reaction seemed more subdued compared to Nora's or Yang's.

"Jaune..." Weiss said softly. "Even if what she said was true, even if she was abused and manipulated... It doesn't have to be you" He wasn't sure what she meant by that.

"Assuming she is capable of change, she'll find someone else for herself. You don't have to be that person." Weiss clarified. Jaune shook his head, she was wrong.

"There are countless other peop..."

"Yeah there were, and what did they ever do?" Jaune interrupted her this time. "She spent years there Weiss, thousands of people walked in and looked away each time. It has to be me, there is a reason why we met." He concluded. Cinder waited for years, waited for someone to notice her, to help her. Nobody ever came. To reject her now, tell her that someone else will appear one day... No, that would be beyond cruel. Weiss face scrunched at his response.

"She doesn't deserve you!" Weiss shouted. Gone was calm and logical mask she put on earlier, replaced by agonized expression.

"Since when did deserve have anything to do with it?" He shouted back. Cinder didn't deserve to be abused growing up. But she also did so many bad things that it could be argued that she didn't deserve a shred of mercy or pity. But that was the point, universe was unfair. Bad things happen to good people, but sometimes opposite also happens. In a way it was an equilibrium.

"Besides, I'm nothing to write home about." He made a self deprecating joke hoping to relax the atmosphere.

"Nothing to write home about?" Weiss angrily scoffed. "You are smart, you are selfless, you are brave, you are compassionate, you are... clearly stupid for even saying something like that!" She ranted.

"You deserve someone who will appreciate you, not someone who will just drain you to compensate for their traumatic childhood!" She continued.

"Like who? You?" Jaune asked half seriously. It was bit bizarre Weiss would feel a need to pick his relationship partner.

"YES!" She shouted. Oh, he didn't expect that. Her demeanor immediately changed, from angry to panicky, like she regretted saying that. How didn't he see that? She was clinging to him ever since they've met in Ever After, often glancing at him. That dinner last night, he felt really stupid about that now. Of course it was in a fancy Atlesian restaurant. Of course Ruby had to randomly cancel it. Of course it took Weiss that long to get ready. It was all a date set-

up. Even Cinder saw through it. Back then he thought she was just making fun of him. It felt like Pyrrha all over again, just less tragic this time.

"I..." Jaune started.

"Don't you dare apologize." Weiss immediately interrupted him.

"Sorry I..." She once again interrupted him, this time without words. She pointed her finger up, like a parent would silence their kid.

"So..." It was a force of habit. Weiss emphasized her finger to remind him to shut up.

"Next time it's glyph over mouth." She threatened.

Jaune sighed, what was he suppose to say. He kept Weiss at distance with his obliviousness only to drop a bombshell that he was now with one of their worst enemies.

"I didn't mean to hurt you." Jaune finally said.

"You are headstrong, both good and bad can come from it." Weiss sighed. She didn't seem exasperated, there was some mirth to her tone. "It can push you to do things that were deemed impossible, but it can also make you blind to dangers ahead." She continued.

"Cinder is not dangerous." He felt stupid for even saying that. Of course she was dangerous, one of the most wanted criminals across the whole Remnant. More accurate would be to say she wasn't dangerous to him, not anymore.

"I've seen this before Jaune, I've seen someone close to me pay the price for making a wrong choice. My mother was used by a someone she thought loved her." She explained, comparing Cinder to Jacques Schnee.

"She is not like your father." Jaune retorted. He didn't know much about Jacques Schnee besides his public persona and countless controversies. Perhaps Weiss was right, after all, she knew him better than he did. But she didn't know Cinder like he did, neither of them had a full picture. So in the end, it all came down to his faith in Cinder.

"For your sake, I hope she is not." She concluded before turning away.

White haired girl made several steps forward before turning around to face him again.

"Jaune, do you think.... anything would have happened between us if it was me at the dinner." She asked him.

"I don't know." Jaune simply concluded. He didn't expect anything to happen between him and Cinder either when they first sat down. It was impossible to predict. Maybe something would have happened between him and Weiss, maybe the night would have also ended with soft kiss on the rooftop. But he could no longer imagine it. Every time he thought about it, Weiss' light blue eyes morphed into familiar amber one.

She turned away from him before softly saying. "I'll still be there for you when it fails."

"It won't." Jaune corrected her. Weiss didn't say anything in return. Instead of walking towards Yang or Nora, she sat in a corner, back turned to everyone.

Ruby Rose dropped a quite of a proposal. Price for Cinder's desertion would be loss of Maiden powers, Grimm arm and Jaune. For a moment she was split, but ultimately there was only one correct answer.

"No." Cinder simply responded, tossing a figurine she made towards Ruby.

"What do you mean no?" Ruby was confused, observing a figurine she caught.

"I thought you know what that word means." She mockingly answered.

Ruby sighed. "What exactly is an issue here? You know I can't let you join us without some conditions."

"I'll reconsider it if you remove third condition." Cinder explained. First two were reasonable demands, third not so much. What exactly would be the point of deserting Salem's side without Jaune, he was the reason she was doing this in the first place.

"The one about giving up Maiden powers?" Ruby enquired. Was the girl stupid or just playing dumb.

"The one about Jaune." Cinder clarified.

"What's the problem here? You don't need him, I'll protect you in the case someone wants to hurt you. Not to brag, but I do have lot of influence." Ruby explained. Oh how humorous, her bodyguard would be a five foot girl that is addicted to cookies and still needs a bedtime story.

"Absolutely not. Remove the third condition or I'm leaving." She held her ground. That ridiculous irrational part of her brain was in control now. There was no reason for her to reject the deal. It would keep her safe and away from Salem. So what if she lost Jaune, she'd find someone else eventually. Yes, someone else she waited for years, someone else who never came to save her. No, it was clear, it had to be Jaune. Destiny she followed led her to him. There wouldn't be another chance, there wouldn't be another Prince.

Ruby said nothing, she just defiantly looked at Cinder, also refusing to budge an inch. It appeared deal could no longer be reached. Cinder was woman of her word, she stood up and started walking towards the door. What would Jaune think about this? Would he be disappointed about her inability to make a meaningful step forward? Or would he be proud about her refusing to abandon him. She was afraid it was former.

"Wait!" She heard Ruby's shrill voice as she was about to walk out. Cinder was intrigued, what more did the girl have to say? Perhaps Ruby wasn't as stubborn as she thought she was.

"I lied." She said. "Third condition was made up. I wanted to know if you would give up Jaune to save yourself." Ruby explained. Oh how sneaky.

"So other conditions still stand?" Cinder turned around. She should have been angry at the reaper for manipulating her like that, but at this point she didn't care.

"Yeah, although they are also lies." She admitted. No wonder it took her that much time to come up with them, they were all just tests for Cinder.

"There is no machine to transfer Maiden powers. I mean there is, but it drains all your Aura and... I guess you already know about that one." Girl started babbling. Of course she knew about the machine, she was there both times it was used.

"What exactly is true?" Cinder asked, slowly getting annoyed at Ruby's shenanigans.

"So Maiden machine condition was a lie. We can't take away your Maiden powers without killing you which wouldn't really make sense, cause you know..." She had an attention span of kid that ate too much sugar... and what do you know. "Grimm arm condition was kind of a lie, I think I can remove it, but I don't think it would be painless. I never tried to remove anyone's Grimm parts. Although I once used it on this big Grimm and it peeled away part of his..." Babbling continued. There was something interesting she heard between all that empty noise. She only partially denied Grimm arm condition, notably part it would be painless. Of course, Cinder wasn't naive, she never expected it to be painless. But that meant arm's removal was theoretically possible.

"So it's possible to remove Grimm arm with your eyes?" Cinder asked for clarification.

"It should be, but I've never done it before." Ruby explained.

"There is a first time for everything." She retorted.

"Really? I mean... I could burn you or something." Reaper added, referencing Cinder's scars. It was a possibility, but the one she couldn't dwell on.

"You could, but you won't" Cinder retorted.

Ruby walked down the stairs, finally lowering herself to Cinder's level. "You sure have a lot of faith in me." She sighed.

"I don't, I simply know you. If something like this was beyond your abilities I would have gotten rid of you ages ago." Perpetual thorn in her side ever since they first met during that botched Dust shop robbery.

"That sounds like faith to me." Ruby commented, now just a few feet away from Cinder.

"Semantics."

"Whatever you say." Ruby said, rolling her eyes at Cinder. "So... no faith in me, but apparently lot of faith in Jaune."

"I don't remember having a dinner with you."

"Oh I see, you are one of those "way to heart is through stomach" people." She remarked. That was... incorrect, wild extrapolation of what Cinder just said.

"No." Cinder simply retorted.

"Then what do you like?" She continued pestering her. What was she trying to accomplish?

"What do you want?" Cinder bluntly confronted her.

"I wanna know what you like."

"I mean why?"

"I don't like you. I don't like the fact you are with Jaune..." Of course, it wasn't really a shocking revelation. Girl clearly wasn't acting when she said she found their relationship disgusting. "But if we are to work together, then I wanna know more about you beyond the fact you... kill people and collect ancient powers." Ruby clarified.

"Like what?" Hopefully she wouldn't dig too much into personal details. Cinder really wasn't in mood for that.

"What's your favorite food?" Reaper blurted.

"I don't know." Cinder never really thought about food like that.

"What do you mean you don't know? Everyone has their favorite food? What did you eat last night? Spiced air?" So many unnecessary questions... With that being said, she did enjoy her meal last night, especially dessert. So perhaps it was that.

"I really liked dark chocolate cake I ate last night, it was creamy and topped with strawberries." Now that she thought about it, that wasn't her dessert last night, it was Jaune's. He took a pity on her and gave her half of his dessert because she really wanted those strawberries. And then he made that abomination on his plate. She chuckled internally.

"Ooh, strawberries. I like strawberries and cookies." Ruby admitted.

"Jaune told me you like cookies." Cinder added.

"Of course he did." She paused for a minute before continuing. "I'm still surprised you chose him in the end."

"I'm doing this for him. Don't flatter yourself thinking I chose this because I believe in your cause." She felt two pairs of eyes on her back. Did she really need an audience now? But she didn't feel any shame or embarrassment, she felt pride. So she added. "No matter what you offered, without him it would have been pointless."

"Just like that?"

"Indeed." She could have sworn she heard a giggle behind her after she said that.

"I've been in position to make similar choice... it's never easy." Ruby reminisced about something.

"That's because we are different. You asked me do I know how does it feel to lose someone. But let me ask you something, do you know how does it feel to not have anything?" Cinder asked her, catching Ruby off guard.

"I... don't." She said after some deliberation. There was no point in lying, Cinder knew she always had something, be it her family or her friends. "But I felt bit of that when I was..." She cut herself off mid sentence. Whatever it was it was either irrelevant or something she wanted to keep to herself. It might have had something to do with that dimension Jaune told her about.

"It was cold, wasn't it?" Cinder asked. Ruby shook her head.

"No, bitter." Ruby described it.

"I suppose everyone suffers in a different way." Cinder remarked. "Then you know why I don't want to go back to it." She didn't want to lose him. She didn't want to find out how it felt to lose someone.

"I thought you were content with just claiming Maiden powers."

"I thought so too. But person you lie to most often is yourself. They are tools and weapons. One can't find comfort in them same way one can't find comfort in their sword or bow." Cinder mused. In the end, she stopped. She stopped lying to herself. She would have been just as miserable if she had all four instead of just one.

"Hey, don't badmouth weapons like that." Ruby commented.

"Oh really, what are you, hoplophiliac?" She mocked the sniper. Some unpleasant images entered her mind, it was for the best to not think about what she just said.

"What does that even... you know what, don't wanna know. Probably something yucky." Well, she was correct in that regard. "Weapons are reflections of ourselves." She said, proudly displaying her scythe.

"My, my, my, now they even have a horoscope for weapon aficionados. You and Emerald could be friends in that regard." She was aware of that idea, something they taught Huntsmen and Huntresses in-training. In the end, weapons were weapons, they were fine in any shape or form as long as they did their job.

"Horoscope is silly, but this is real." Ruby defended an idea.

"Really, then tell me Ruby, great and powerful, what does my weapon tell about me?" She challenged her.

She thought for a bit. "Your weapons are made out of glass, which means you are sharp but also fragile." That was mostly correct, but then again, not that hard to guess.

"They are made out of magic and don't exist without it, which means you only see yourself worthy if you have power." Another technically correct observation, albeit even easier one to guess.

"And it's always something that looks like someone else's weapon. You are always imitating something else, someone else." This one was interesting. At first it seemed like something blatantly false, but when she thought about it, she did always look up to someone else. But then again, it could all be a coincidence. In a way, just like horoscope, sometimes it matches almost perfectly, other times it's hilariously wrong.

"Was I right?" Ruby asked. Cinder smirked at her question.

"Oh I was sooo right." She gloated, much to Cinder's chagrin.

"No." Cinder simply responded.

"Yes."

"No."

"Yes, yes, yes." She cheekily grinned.

She used to despise her smile, it made her sick to her stomach. Now it had a different effect on her, she started smiling with Ruby. She was infuriatingly childish, but charming to the same degree.

"See, you smiled. I was right."

"Perhaps you were right about some things. Mostly beginner's luck." Cinder refused to fully admit defeat.

They shared a laugh. It all seemed simpler this way, sharing a laugh with Ruby Rose. Not fighting, not hurting each other. Of course it was an illusion, Ruby temporarily putting her animosity of Cinder aside for the sake of fragile peace. But she wanted it to be real one day. Maybe just like she reached a connection with Jaune, she'd also reach it with other people. But for any of it to be real she needed to take one more leap forward.

"I'm ready." Cinder said interrupting their little moment. "Will you remove my arm?"

Bright light emanated from the inside of Dust shop. It was clearly Ruby's eyes acting up. For Cinder's sake he hoped they were used with an intent to help her, not harm her.

He rushed towards the building, Ren and Blake were still at the door, observing what was going on. Neither seemed particularly alarmed, which meant everything was likely fine. Others noticed bright light as well and followed Jaune towards the door.

However, just as it seemed everything was gonna be fine, wall together with doors collapsed. Rubble fell on Ren and Blake who were caught off guard. Luckily their Aura absorbed most

of the damage.

Out of building's now destroyed roof slithered out massive lizard-like Grimm, something unlike anything he has seen before. Its maw opened to growl out something resembling words.

"Li...Tl...Reeee." It reminded him of Hound, something of higher sentience forced into body of Grimm.

He heard Yang in background shouting how she knew this would happen, but he didn't care about that. He needed to find Cinder and Ruby.

Chapter End Notes

Bit of a cliffhanger in the end.

Yes, several comments correctly predicted it was all just a test. Couldn't really comment on them without spoilers.

Hoplophilia is attraction towards weapons.

As set up by last chapter, team Pro Cinder is Ren and Blake, team Anti Cinder is Weiss, Yang and Nora. I think Blake would be one of the first people to sympathize with Cinder due to her history with Adam and more radical version of White Fang. Ren can read emotions so he can see that Cinder's change is genuine. I picture other three as less forgiving due to Cinder killing Pyrrha and constantly trying to kill Ruby.

As for Ruby and Cinder, I kind of like sister like dynamic where Ruby is annoying to Cinder while Cinder is condescending to Ruby. I suppose that's a headcanon for today.

Their Headache IV

Chapter Notes

Shit, a month? Well, at least this one is fairly long. First time writing an action scene, so hopefully it will be alright.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Powerlessness, all too familiar sensation. Cinder felt powerless her entire life, no matter how much power she acquired it was never enough. But this time, it was different. She couldn't move, not even budge. It was different than being asleep, her eyes were open, forced to watch what was in front of her but being unable to do anything. All she could see was rubble, remains of the walls of Dust shop.

She wondered if this was what Amber felt after Cinder absorbed half of her Maiden power. If so, then perhaps this was justice being served.

Right now she shared her fate, laying limp on the ground as giant Grimm monstrosity wreaked havoc around her. She was felled by the same weapon that gave her Maiden powers all those years ago. Naive, she was naive, naive for thinking Salem didn't have any contingencies for her rebellious Maiden. As soon as her arm was blasted by light of Ruby's silver eyes what was inside of it was released. Giant reptilian Grimm ran past her, it was searching for someone else. Knowing Salem and her plans, it was after annoying little reaper.

It didn't even consider her worthy of killing, it was content with absorbing her Aura and moving forward. Why wouldn't it, dull weapons had no use.

Shadow loomed over her. Did it change its mind? No, that wasn't Grimm, sound of footsteps was softer. Of course, there was only one person still crazy enough to return for her. He kneeled next to her, his vibrant blue eyes finally visible. Jaune seemed shaken, he was worried about her. There was a thirty feet Grimm monstrosity on the loose in the middle of Vacuo and he was worried about her. She would have smiled if her lips weren't paralyzed along the rest of her body.

Cinder felt now familiar warmth of Jaune's Semblance, slowly recharging her Aura. She pitied Amber, nobody came for her in the same way Jaune did for her. She was just kept alive to maintain Maiden power in the hands of Ozpin's inner circle. To very end she was alone, awaiting sweet release of death. Cinder's fingers jolted, finally able to move again. She was grateful to have him. Perhaps it was unfair, she was given an opportunity that was denied to many others, opportunity she denied to many others. But truth of the world was simple, life was unfair. More of her Aura was replenished, allowing her to move her arm. She slowly moved her hand to his cheek, he somehow felt even warmer than usual. Jaune smiled, relieved that she was moving again, he continued using his Semblance on her.

Life was unfair, but that didn't mean she would just sit idly and watch it all burn. One unfair turn gave her Jaune, someone she didn't deserve but gave her a new purpose nonetheless. Similar turn could take it all away, leave her once again cold and hollow. She needed to fight. There was no way for her to undo things she has done, but she would make sure it wasn't for nothing. Everything she did slowly brought her to the path she walked now, her new Destiny. She needed to fight to remain on that path.

Cinder lowered her hand to Jaune's shoulder, using it as leverage to raise her upper body. Jaune looked her in the eye, momentarily halting before pulling her into embrace. Cinder would have been lying if she said she didn't want it to last forever, but they had a problem on their hand.

"What would your friends say if they knew your were hugging me instead of helping them?" She teasingly whispered, her voice returning. Noise of rampaging Grimm was in the background.

"They'll understand... eventually." Jaune retorted.

"I see. Talk didn't go so well?" She asked.

"It doesn't matter. What matters is that you are alright." He caressed the stump of her left arm. There were no traces left of rough Grimm limb. As she felt his Semblance touch it.. she backed away.

"You can't waste time on that now." Cinder stood up. He couldn't afford spending more of his Aura, they still didn't fully understand what they were dealing with.

"You are going in without your arm?" He asked her incredulously.

"I'll manage." She brushed off his concerns.

Arm was smaller concern compared to her other worry. She walked out of ruins of Dust shop, witnessing others in the middle of fight with the Grimm. It had long yet incredibly lanky serpentine body. It's face was almost flat, adorned with five horns. Similarly its maw had five massive teeth. It had a single bright eye in the center of its face, surrounded by three other closed eyelids. Its legs were slim, each ending with flat five toed foot. If it could even be called foot, it was an odd thing to see. It was unique for standards of Grimm, special monstrosity that had Salem's trust to finish the task if Cinder failed at it. Trust... no, that wouldn't be appropriate word. Salem didn't trust anyone. It was a creature that unlike Cinder couldn't disobey, it couldn't fail its Mistress.

It ran around chasing blur of rose petals. It was always about her, always about Ruby Rose. It seemed its mission for now was to capture her. Cinder carefully aimed with her remaining hand, hoping to scorch the creature with blast of Maiden fire. However, nothing came out of her hand. It was as she suspected, Fall Maiden power was gone. It was either absorbed within the creature or it sought out a new host.

She was back where she started all those years ago, powerless.

Jaune followed after Cinder. She extended her right hand aiming rampaging Grimm, but nothing came out of it. Fall Maiden power, it was no longer hers, she must have lost it when that Grimm attacked her.

Just as he was about to comfort her, Yang landed next to them.

"Oh Jaune, so great to see you. Wanna... I don't know... help in cleaning up your girlfriend's mess?" She sarcastically asked. Jaune sighed, there wasn't much he could do even if he wanted. Even if it wasn't broken, Crocea Mors was back in the dorm room.

Weiss also noticed them, glaring from her glyph platform. "What did you do?" It was aimed at Cinder.

"When Ruby tried to remove my arm that thing came out of it." Cinder explained observing her stump.

"Convincing story. Or you know, you sneak attacked Ruby." Yang wasn't buying it. It really wasn't a right time for an argument.

"You flatter me Xiao Long if you think I could have planned all of this." Cinder continued.

Yang angrily walked up to Cinder, ready to fight her as well.

"Yang we can't deal with her right now." Weiss reminded her.

Yang momentarily continued her standoff with Cinder before turning around to rejoin the fight. "Fine, but you better help out Lover Boy." She said to Jaune before walking away. It seemed she had zero hopes of Cinder helping out in any way.

"Weiss, what are its abilities?" Jaune asked, hoping for some useful intel.

"It has incredibly tough skin, we can't even scratch it." Weiss explained, she was looking away from him, he couldn't blame her. "Take care Jaune." She said before moving away as well.

It seemed situation was rougher than what he initially thought, Cinder lost her Maiden powers and they didn't have a good way of fighting this Grimm. He moved towards her, ready to create a new hand for her out of his Aura. Once again, she moved it away.

"No." She simply answered.

"What do you mean no? There is a massive Grimm on the loose in the middle of Vacuo and you only have a single arm." She was annoying him with her stubbornness.

"Me having or not having an arm doesn't change the situation."

"What..." He started, but she quickly interrupted him.

"There are several people fighting out there, each having a chance to win against it and each having a chance to get mortally wounded. You need to be ready to react accordingly. Don't waste your Aura Jaune." Cinder explained. It was a frustrating situation, but she did have a point.

"So what am I suppose to do now?" Jaune asked. Even at his best he wasn't that useful. But now he had neither armor, shield nor sword.

"Figure it out. You were suppose to be the strategist of your team... right?" She reminded him. He made way too many mistakes as leader for that title to still hold any weight. But so be it, he would take the mantle of strategist if it meant putting that beast down for good.

No, he wasn't useless. Jaune glanced at his hand, glistening with Aura. He had a talent that would make even experienced Huntsmen jealous. No weapon and no armor, all in service of forcing him to focus on his unrefined abilities. After being blinded, person's other sense would sharpen. This was his trial by fire, his eyes gouged out. Would he walk or stumble?

Jaune clenched his fist, he was done with stumbling. Cinder walked past him, she morphed her left arm into a blade using nearby sand. Jaune climbed on top of one of the nearby buildings. Proper strategist needed a vantage point.

Jaune observed the situation developing in front of him. Grimm was chasing Ruby, likely following Salem's orders. Luckily Ruby had her Semblance to create some distance, but that was only temporary solution. Her Aura wouldn't be able to sustain that much Semblance use long term.

Boosting Ruby's Aura didn't seem to be the best choice. Massive Grimm chasing her didn't leave enough room for him to intervene. And would boosting Ruby change that much anyway? Ruby wasn't really a power type, it was unlikely that if given an Aura boost she would be able to do massive damage to the Grimm.

One of the key weapons in this battle would be Ruby's silver eyes. She used them few moments ago on Cinder, so it was unlikely they were ready to be used again. If they were, Ruby would have already used them to counterattack in some way.

That brought him to conclusion, he needed to boost someone capable of doing massive damage. In best case scenario, they'd be able to finish off the Grimm, although he doubted it would be that simple. But even if they are unable to finish it off, damage would slow it down, give Ruby a breather and hopefully allow her to blast it with silver eyes. Worst case scenario, they would stall it until reinforcements arrived.

But there was another issue, speed. They were facing a Grimm that was capable of chasing down Ruby even after she repeatedly used her Semblance to gain distance. He watched as it smacked Yang away as she tried to intervene. Would just boosting someone be enough to overcome it?

Weiss' glyph momentarily trapped Grimm before it tore Schnee snowflake emblem apart. Cinder's glass shards and Blake's gunfire uselessly pelted its skin while it dodged fire from

Nora's grenade launcher. It didn't do much, but perhaps moment of immobility would be enough. Either way, it was worth a shot.

Jaune jumped down and ran past Ren, Emerald and Oscar. They took non combat role of evacuating nearby civilians. He continued running until he reached Nora. Just as she was about to fire another salvo, Jaune tapped her shoulder.

"Nora I need your help." He said.

"Oh reallyyy." Nora replied, somewhat annoyed by his presence.

"I'm gonna boost your Aura." Jaune explained. It was a choice between Nora and Yang, but he was more familiar with Nora's fighting style overall.

Nora nodded, so he placed his hands on her shoulders, slowly channeling his Semblance.

"Hope this isn't to make me forget about the whole Cinder situation." She said, her gaze focused on Cinder failing to slash Grimm with her blade.

"No." Jaune simply replied. There was no point in pretending it never happened.

"Good. Because I'm still pissed about that." He couldn't blame her, but he hoped she would understand it one day.

Chanel was completed, Nora's body shone with light yellow color of his Aura.

"Weiss!" Nora shouted. "Zap me!" She instructed her. "And don't hold back!" Weiss conjured a glyph laced with Lightning Dust below Nora's feet, electrocuting his ginger team member. Nora's body shook as electricity travelled through it.

Eventually it stopped, Nora's body surged with power while her face contorted into almost a crazed grin. Her scars were now filled with pink electricity, it was as if she was turned into thunder goddess. Small cracks of lightning could be heard as Nora lifted Magnihild, ready to re-enter the fight.

"Hey Fearless Leader!" She boomed. "If I smack Cinder's face hard enough, will you find someone better instead?" He wasn't sure if she was serious or just making a crude joke.

"Just focus on that Grimm Nora." He half smiled. It was irrelevant either way. No matter how she looked, he would still have feelings for her. Although she definitely wasn't hard on eyes.

Nora didn't seem to care about his answer either way, having already charged towards the Grimm.

Grimm jumped after Ruby, but before it could reach her Nora struck it hard across the face, sending it flying into one of the buildings. It got back to its feet, ready to chase Ruby again, only to be struck with another powerful hammer blow.

"Stop ignoring me you scaly freak!" Nora shouted.

This time she had Grimm's full attention. One of its limbs rapidly stretched out forcing Nora to block with her hammer. Beast used that as an opening to jump at Nora, its maw open, ready to devour her. She didn't have enough time to smack it away and was forced to keep its maw away with handle of Magnihild. Nora's leg dug into ground, her leg muscles expanding thanks to all the electricity she took, holding her in the place. It would have been stalemate, if not for Grimm's limbs stretching to grab Nora, attempting to drain her Aura.

Others intervened to help as much as they could. Ruby and Blake opened fire from distance, Yang and Cinder engaged in melee while Weiss summoned Queen's Lancer to fight. Gunfire proved to be almost useless, barely even flinching Grimm at this point. However, Grimm's vulnerable position allowed Ruby to land a perfect hit, destroying Grimm's single eye. It let out a pained shriek, its grip on Nora weakening.

"Li.. Tl... Reeel!" Grimm growled.

The rest capitalized on that opening. Yang and Weiss landed powerful hits on its head while Cinder used her Semblance to scorch limbs still holding onto Nora. Beast relented, it pulled back, freeing Nora. It continued angrily growling, swatting away with its elongated limbs as fighters surrounding it. Yang and Queen's Lancer were sent flying into the wall while Nora begrudgingly repelled blow meant for Cinder.

Arms flailing, standing still and growling, that left it wide open for another attack. Nora charged the Grimm, slamming its head to the ground with the hammer before swapping to grenade launcher and filling its maw with grenades. Grimm exploded from the inside, sound of flesh splattering filling the air.

But it wasn't over, far from it. Grimm rose up, smoke coming from its eye-socket and mouth. It charged Nora with even greater ferocity, forcing her to go once again on defensive. When smoke cleared Jaune noticed something, its eye was back. That Grimm had some form of high speed regeneration. This made things even trickier.

"It can regenerate!" Jaune shouted to others.

"Oh that's just fu... Great, just great." Yang grumbled, standing up to continue the fight.

"So it's like Salem?" Weiss asked.

"No, I don't think that's possible. You would be all dead ages ago if she had an ability to create something like that." Cinder explained.

"So it has to have some weakness or limit." Ruby concluded.

Jaune looked her in the eye, both reaching the same conclusion. "Head." They need to completely destroy Grimm's head.

"I have an idea!" Nora shouted, still fending off Grimm's attack. "But I need you to buy me some time!" That was the tricky part, Nora was the only one capable of holding back the Grimm. He needed to use his Semblance again.

"You got it!" Jaune shouted, running towards Weiss. Her strength was versatility, she'd be able to keep that Grimm down in variety of ways.

Jaune touched Weiss' back and started channeling his Semblance.

"It's bittersweet." She muttered.

"What?" He didn't quite hear her.

"Nothing."

Others were trying to buy time any way they could. Blake put herself between Nora and Grimm, allowing the ginger to create some distance between them. While she couldn't hold it with brute force, she repeatedly used clones infused with Fire Dust to momentarily stun it. Ruby continued firing from Crescent Rose, aiming for Grimm's eye, while Cinder supported her endeavor with barrage of glass shards. Yang got the thankless task of attempting to engage it in melee.

Chanel was completed, Weiss' body shone with yellow glow.

"I wish it lasted a bit longer." She once again muttered.

Weiss jumped onto one of the glyph platforms, positioning herself above Grimm. She created a massive glyph around the Grimm, successfully pinning it to the ground.

Beast desperately tried to escape with no avail. Skin of its back started bubbling, creating more and more limbs across its back. Each new limb created was paralyzed by the glyph, but as it created more limbs, effect of glyph seemed to weaken. Dozens of limbs were slowly crawling towards the edges of glyph attempting to destroy it. Others noticed that, everyone trying to stop them in their own way. But there was simply too many of them. Each time one limb was destroyed, several others took its place.

But that was all the time they needed to buy. Nora ran back into the fray, carrying a nearby car as a weapon instead of Magnihild. Grimm rose to challenge her, only to be pinned by another powerful glyph.

"Stay back everyone! Queen has a new weapon!" Nora boomed. It was such a crazy idea.

Nora used car she picked up as a hammer, striking Grimm's head, seemingly breaking its jaw. Each blow broke parts of the car, morphing it into more compact weapon. Beast growled in pain, chunks of metal digging into its flesh.

"Yeah, yeah, open you mouth!" She shouted before shoving what remained of car into Grimm's maw.

"Hammer!" Nora boomed. Ren was behind her, passing back Magnihild to her. She immediately swapped it to grenade launcher mode, shooting several grenades to Grimm's maw, blowing it up together with car that was shoved in there.

It was clear why Nora wanted everyone to stay back. Combination created a massive explosion that shook the nearby buildings and broke glass on their windows. Everyone let out sigh of relief. They caused quite a bit of property damage, but it was finally over.

Or at least that's what they thought. When smoke cleared, Grimm was still there, its mangled head rapidly regenerating. Before any of them could react, Grimm counterattacked, sending Nora flying into the wall. It jumped her, ready to devour her, only for Weiss to send in Queen's Lancer to fight it.

Grimm didn't seem to be interested in dealing with it. Instead it tore a chunk of destroyed building and hurled it towards Weiss standing on glyph platform. She didn't seem to expect that. Weiss managed to create a smaller glyph to defend herself, but it was only enough to prevent direct damage. Force of the hit sent her flying away.

Just as Grimm was about to finish off Nora, Ruby shouted to get back its attention. "Hey idiot, did you forget about me." Grimm turned his head towards Ruby, only to have its eye once again shot off by red haired sniper. When smoke cleared, its eye was furious and focused only on Ruby. With a growl it leaped towards her.

Their plan didn't work, they were back where they were when the fight started. No, they were in even worse shape. Nora's Aura seem to have been broken while Yang and Weiss took significant damage to it. Ren was next to Nora, making sure she was alright. Oscar and Emerald ran in, seemingly done with evacuating civilians.

Grimm continued on chasing Ruby, each Petal Burst creating less and less distance between her and the Grimm. He looked at Cinder, she seemed livid. They needed a new plan, they needed a new plan fast.

This fight brought unpleasant memories to Cinder. She was familiar with failure and defeat, despite possessing near godlike powers. As much as it pained her, failure wasn't an issue here, issue was the fact she was almost completely useless.

Enemy in front of her was contingency created by Salem, in case Cinder was taken out or strayed too far. It was her replacement. And unfortunately, all she did so far was prove Salem right, she truly was replaceable.

Her strikes couldn't even scratch it, her ranged attacks didn't even flinch it. At most, she made it briefly back away from Nora when she scorched it with her Semblance. But to achieve that she needed help of others and for Nora to protect her after that.

It was as if universe was making fun of her. Just as she concluded that she didn't need power it was stripped away from her, forced to be a bystander in the conflict. So it was all about power in the end. Person without power can't protect anyone, not even themselves.

No, it was a test, merely a test. Having or desiring power wasn't wrong, being consumed by power was. Parts of her mind were still consumed by it. She didn't have Maiden powers anymore, but that didn't matter. Back in Glass Unicorn she was in similar situation, Rhodes

seemed invincible, yet she was still able to win in the end. To overcome this test she needed to create a new power out of tools she already had.

In many ways her Semblance was underdeveloped. Ever since she acquired Maiden powers she barely trained with it, choosing to rely on her new powers. Now, it was ready to grow, because she herself was. Grimm was affected by fire, both by Cinder's Semblance as well as Dust from Belladonna's clones. It would be hers, it was hers to kill. By the end of the fight, she would be the one to burn it to a crisp.

She charged towards the Grimm, heat of her Semblance focused on her right arm. Punch landed on the Grimm's side, making it shriek in pain. It didn't do much damage, if any, but heat made it recoil. Cinder backed away before Grimm could counterattack with its elongated limbs. Not enough, she needed more heat.

Cinder focused even more heat into her fist and jumped back into fray. This time punch did way more damage. Smoked gathered around the point of impact as she felt goopy melted flesh underneath her fist. But before she could fully back away, tendrils formed around the wound trapping her hand. She channeled heat to her wrist to free herself, but not fast enough to fully avoid Grimm's stretched out limb.

Force of a blow sent her flying to the ground next to Emerald and Farmboy. She was improving, but not fast enough. But time was something they couldn't afford, Ruby needed a breather. They needed to distract Grimm in a different way. Cinder looked at her former subordinate and she got an idea.

"Emerald I need you to use your Semblance." Cinder instructed her.

Emerald glared her before asking. "What for?"

"We need to hide Ruby from that Grimm." She explained.

"I can use my Semblance for that." Ren chimed in.

"No, because Grimm still needs to think it's chasing Ruby." Grimm without aim would be more dangerous in this situation. Its mission made it manageable and predictable.

"Why do you want it to chase Ruby, isn't it better for..." Emerald started.

"Emerald, I want you to think. If that Grimm thinks Ruby is gone what happens next?" Cinder interrupted her.

"It might go on a rampage." Emerald concluded.

"Exactly." Cinder confirmed. "That's why we need to keep it here." And she had a perfect decoy in mind. "Belladonna girl, how long do you think you can distract it with your clones?"

"Just call me Blake." She sighed before giving Cinder's plan some thought. "Long enough." Blake answered. It wasn't an answer she was looking for, but it was good enough.

"Emerald, swap Blake's and Ruby's appearance during Ruby's next Semblance use." Cinder instructed her. She wasn't sure how intelligent Grimm was, but she needed to make sure it wasn't aware of their ruse.

"Yes Ma'am." She sarcastically replied before focusing on task at hand.

Blake ran parallel to Ruby waiting for her next Petal Burst. When Ruby finally turned into petals, they swapped trajectories and appearances thanks to Emerald's Semblance. Grimm was now chasing after Blake while Ruby regrouped with others. She seemed exhausted, her body drained after constant Semblance use.

"Explosion didn't work." Ruby commented.

"What if Weiss was right about it being fully immortal and you just released it here?" Xiao Long glared at Cinder.

"Could Salem create something like that?" Jaune asked.

"I don't know, ask your girlfriend." Yang annoyedly replied.

"That thing was fused to my arm for a year, I think I know how it works better than you." Cinder retorted.

"Then how does it work Miss Fall?" Ozpin interjected.

"To regenerate it needs to drain something. While it was fused with me, it used my Aura as a fuel." Cinder explained.

"Is there someone in there like with Hound?" Ren asked. That caught her attention. She was aware of that particular Grimm, but to think there was someone inside of it. Perhaps that could have been her destiny as well if she stayed on Salem's side.

"There shouldn't be anyone in there." But the again, she couldn't fully exclude a possibility. What if her former Grimm arm was created out of essence of human being? No. Even if something like that was possible, there wouldn't be anything inside to power it to this degree. To think stupid Grimm arm she was given to absorb Maiden powers would end up being this strong.

That was when she finally figured it out. Reason it initially went after her, reason it absorbed Maiden powers, reason it was this abnormally strong. Grimm was powered magic of Maiden powers. How delightfully ironic.

"It's Fall Maiden power. It's powered by Fall Maiden power it took from me." Cinder explained.

"Grimm using magic as its source." Ozpin commented. "In that case, its weak spot would be essence of Fall Maiden power. If we sever its link with it, it will collapse." He concluded.

"And where exactly is that?" Ruby asked. Ozpin didn't seem to have an answer.

"You know what. Feel free to chit chat whole day. I'm gonna go help Blake." Xiao Long annoyedly remarked before storming off to alleviate some pressure from Blake. Schnee rejoined the fight, successfully holding off Grimm with her glyphs for few moments.

"Yang is right, we are wasting too much time." Said Jaune.

"Maybe, but we need to know where is its weak point, otherwise we are gonna waste out attacks again." Ruby retorted.

"Could you blast it with your eyes?" Cinder suggested.

"They are not powerful enough to completely destroy it. It could work if I know where to aim." Reaper explained.

"What if I boost you?" Jaune suggested.

"I don't think your Semblance would work on magical abilities. Your Semblance is very valuable right now, we can't afford to waste it." Ruby concluded.

"How many times you think you can use it again?" Cinder asked Jaune.

He thought about it for a moment before concluding. "At most once." Thing weren't going well. Their resources were limited and their win condition was unclear.

"I think I might have a way of finding its weak point." Ren chimed in, perking Cinder's curiosity.

"I was taught two kinds of martial arts. One to kill Grimm, other to kill humans. Among the latter, there is an technique that bypasses Aura to directly attack beneath it." He explained. That's how all martial arts started. Initially a way for humans with no weapons to defend themselves against Grimm. But as with all tools, they were eventually used to fight other humans as well. She was aware of that technique, even tried to perform it when she trained in Evernight, but she lacked calmness and focus to execute something like that. So she knew what Ren suggested was no easy task. But if used correctly, it would be able to attack Grimm beneath its tough skin.

"You think it's gonna be powerful enough to destroy it from inside?" Oscar inquired.

"It doesn't have to be. If what Ozpin said was true then just hitting it could weaken it." Ruby concluded.

"And if Ren hits it, we'll know where the weak point is." Jaune added. It seemed they finally had a plan.

They charged towards the Grimm who was still chasing Blake, ready to support Ren's attack. Cat Faunus was faltering after stalling it for so long, her movements were becoming sloppier. They needed to swap her out soon. Ren activated his Semblance, colors faded from his body, ready to deliver the attack.

Schnee once again attempted to bind the Grimm with glyph. Naturally it didn't hold it for long, but it was long enough for them to coordinate their attack. Ruby destroyed its eye with well placed shot. Yang and Cinder followed it, landing powerful blows on its head. Grimm roared in pain as Cinder's strike melted part of its face. It worked, but heat still wasn't reaching desired level. Ren used the distraction to charge a powerful yet calm punch to Grimm's side. Area around the punch rippled, but there was no damage to Grimm's skin. It let out another roar, ripping glyph apart. Thick smoke poured out of its damaged skull as well as its gaping maw. It seemed Ren's attack successfully landed, albeit it didn't expose Grimm's weak spot. Cinder and Yang narrowly dodged Grimm's lunge. Blake, still disguised as Ruby, taunted it, making it chase her again.

This time, it was even more vicious, Blake was barely keeping up with its speed. When Schnee tried to bind it again it just ripped apart glyph before anyone could position themselves to attack. Seeing binding glyph no longer worked, Weiss swapped to time dilation glyph, boosting Blake as well as others to keep up with it. Cinder only managed to graze Grimm this time, it powered through pain as she burned it. Ren landed another punch, but this time it lacked precision necessary to do proper damage. Only small ripples formed around his fist.

Plan was falling apart. Schnee could only keep them sped up for so long and even with enhanced speed they were unable to land proper hits. On top of that, Grimm got used to her output, her strikes were no longer able to stall it.

Did she hit the limit of her Semblance? No, there had to be more to it. What fueled her Semblance? What made her awaken it? She remembered her time in Glass Unicorn, her Semblance heating up while she scrubbed the floor. Was that it? Rage? Frustration? Was that the fuel for her Semblance? Grimm shrugged off another flesh melting punch. No. She never lacked rage, all those years she had been furious, yet her Semblance barely grew. If it were about rage, she would have already set entire world on fire long ago.

What else could it be? What did she want back then? Freedom. She wanted to be free. How would that work? Did she need to physically free herself? Free her mind? She was more free now than she ever was before. Then why wasn't her Semblance any stronger? Did she need to free herself of others? No that also didn't make any sense. He made her stronger, not weaker.

Him. Jaune. He made her feel warm. Cinder had an idea. She once again warmed up her hand, this time thinking about memories of last night. The way he touched her hand. At first she reluctantly allowed it, before leaning more and more into his touch. Her fist flared up, burning with intensity. The way his lips tasted, like a fresh spring water on a scorching summer day. His intimate touches. Fire in her hand started to change color, shifting from bright orange to blue flame. It was like his eyes.

She finally realized what her Semblance was, flame fueled by desire. It was awakened by her desire for freedom. It stagnated with her hollow desire for power. Now, flame was reignited in all its glory.

Using last bit of speed granted by time dilation glyph, Cinder lunged forward, grabbing part of Grimm's face and melting its entire left side. Intense heat caught Grimm off guard. It

crashed down to the ground, allowing Blake to gain more distance. Using the opening, Ren landed two consecutive punches, damaging its insides.

Most of its upper body was now covered in thick smoke pouring from its wound. It served as a smoke screen allowing Grimm to counterattack using its stretchy limbs. Cinder was pushed back by the attack while Ren was slammed to the wall. She was now powerful enough to damage it, all she needed to do was work on her defenses. Cinder focused her Semblance into both of her arms as well as her legs. Her body was turned into aegis of heat.

"Emerald, swap me and Blake." Cinder instructed her

"What?" Jaune questioned Cinder.

"I am done running after it. I'll keep it in place here." She looked him in the eye. He was worried about her, but it was the only way. Blake was at her limit and they needed a change of strategy. They would have an easier time landing hits if Grimm was stuck in one place.

Emerald looked at Ruby and Jaune, asking for the approval. Both nodded, although Jaune still seemed worried about her idea. In that case, she would give him a spectacle.

Grimm's stare was focused on her. It was safe to assume she was now Ruby Rose, its target. Others surrounded them but kept their distance, almost like spectators in arena.

Instead of lunging at her, Grimm kept its distance and attacked by stretching its limbs. But she wouldn't fall for the same attack again. She blocked it with remainder of her left arm, fiery Aura completely melting Grimm's limb. As it roared in pain, Cinder ran forward, landing a kick on its face, heat erasing it. She then took a handful of sand, turning it into dagger, shoving it into Grimm's eye, destroying it and stopping its regeneration.

Enraged, Grimm created dozens of smaller limbs, all stretching to overwhelm Cinder. She couldn't destroy all of them, but she didn't need to. While Grimm was fully focused on her, Ren moved into position to land another punch, force of the impact making Grimm huff out smoke. He still wasn't able to quite nail its weak point. Ruby severed smaller tendrils aimed at Cinder, letting her land another fiery blow. Schnee's Queen Lancer and Yang moved in to assist them, pressuring Grimm even more.

Ren threw another punch, this time near the bottom of Grimm's neck. It didn't seem more powerful than previous ones, but this time Grimm stood completely still. As if force of the punch paralyzed it. Ren finally hit its weak spot, it was somewhere at the bottom of its neck.

Cinder ignited her body, Yang activated her Semblance and Ruby her silver eyes. All ready to destroy its weak spot and finally end the fight.

—

"En... Affff!" Grimm growled.

It seemed they finally had everything under control. Grimm's weak spot had been discovered and they had it surrounded. They were too optimistic. Jaune watched in horror as Grimm

sprouted massive hand on its back and attacked everyone with flurry of strikes. They lacked precision, they were desperate attacks of cornered animals. But those would suffice. Force of the blow pushed Ruby on her back. Cinder was swatted aside, blow to the stomach bypassing her fiery armor. Yang was similarly pushed aside, while Ren's Aura was broken by the force of impact.

Grimm continued its barrage of attacks, now targeting surrounding buildings. Jaune jumped in and carried Ren's motionless body to safety. Purpose of Grimm's attack became clear, it destroyed the building Emerald and Blake were standing on, disrupting Emerald's Semblance. Hallucination was finally lifted, revealing Ruby in front of it. Grimm charged her, ready to finally complete its mission.

Ruby used her Semblance to gain some distance, but she was nearing her limits. Grimm anticipated her next jump and surrounded her with its limbs, preventing any further Petal Bursts. Energy blast from Long Memory stopped them from fully enveloping Ruby. Oscar jumped in, forming a barrier around two of them. It wouldn't hold for long, cracks started to form in the barrier as Grimm dug its claws into it.

What was he suppose to do? Who was he suppose to boost now? More cracks started to form in Oscar's barrier. Yang and Cinder were flung away. Weiss was too far. Nora and Ren were knocked out. Emerald and Blake were still under rubble. Oscar and Ruby were unreachable. Maybe he should risk it, hope Yang or Cinder got there in time. Parts of barrier were already falling apart, there was no way it would hold long enough. He was out of options.

No. What was he even thinking about? He still had one option left, he could boost himself. Would that be enough? Weiss this time summoned Arma Gigas, sending it forward. Each strike of its sword was able inflict shallow cuts to Grimm's skin, each being quickly negated by its rapid regeneration.

Yes it would. It would be enough. He was done thinking he didn't matter. Jaune noticed Yang and Cinder standing up, rushing towards the Grimm. He was under delusion that he was the only one failing and falling. He wasn't. Each one of his friends did so, and yet they continued. Cinder fell into the darkest pit, yet she was willing to climb out of it because of him. Him. So he would stand up as well. Cinder said that was the thing she liked about him, strength of spirit.

Jaune activated his Semblance, this time using it on himself. It was his time to be a hero.

It was different than when he used it on others. Instead of it calmly flowing out his hands, his Aura burst up like a tidal wave. He was overflowing with Aura. Parts of it couldn't be contained to his skin, they started jutting out of his back like water jets. He didn't have any weapons on himself, right now he felt he didn't even need them.

Jaune rushed towards Grimm, landing a clean punch on its jaw. Grimm's jaw was dislocated, force of the blow carrying it to the nearby wall.

"Holy shit Vomit Boy!" Yang exclaimed. He turned toward Cinder, there was a small smile on her face. She seemed proud of him.

"Ar...ukh!" Grimm growled, turning towards him. It launched all limbs towards him, forcing him to defend himself.

Barrage of attacks started overwhelming Jaune. Arma Gigas rushed forward to help him, only to be slammed to the wall by Grimm's tail. Oscar moved towards Jaune, casting another barrier to help him contain the attack.

"You never fail to surprise me Mr... Jaune." Oscar and Ozpin simultaneously commented. Barrier managed to hold off Grimm's attack, forcing it back.

"Jaune! Catch!" Weiss shouted. Before he even realized what was going on, giant sword of Arma Gigas was thrown towards him. Jaune caught it. Despite its size, he wielded it with surprising ease.

Grimm launched another barrage of limbs towards him. Jaune managed to sever half of them, but the other half went through, slamming him to the wall.

"Catch!" He heard again, this time it was Cinder.

She threw a giant slab of metal towards him. It was the remains of the car Nora used, molten into makeshift shield. He picked up the shield using car's door handle.

With shield and sword in hand, Jaune charged in again. Shield managed to hold off Grimm's attack, allowing Jaune to get to position beneath Grimm's neck. Perfect position for one wide slash of his sword, severing its head.

Grimm's severed head twitched on the ground, letting out wailing sounds. Its body unnaturally contorted, creating countless limbs, all to push Jaune back. After a brief struggle, Jaune fell, finally hitting the limit of his Semblance.

He smiled. He didn't win in the end, but he put someone else in position to do so. In its tunnel vision to stop Jaune, Grimm forgot about Ruby in front of it, perfectly lined up to use her silver eyes. Beam of bright light enveloped the Grimm, burning away everything it touched.

What was left of it was half of its headless still twitching torso. It was still alive. Jaune noticed pulsing orange orb in front of them, sticking out of Grimm's mangled body. It was its weak point, finally exposed in front of them.

Ruby immediately shifted Crescent Rose to sniper mode hoping to finish it off, but Grimm swatted it away from her weakened grasp. Bastard was somehow still moving, still as desperate as before, even with missing head. Grimm's flesh started bubbling, smoke engulfing its flesh, it hoped to hide back its exposed core. Smoke and tendrils served as a dark curtain to protect it.

Arma Gigas jumped on it from behind, it couldn't quite reach Grimm's weak spot, but it tore into Grimm's flesh with its hands, slowing down its regeneration. Oscar shot several blasts from Long memory, but was unable to quite land the hit.

Jaune watched as Cinder walked past him, her left hand now morphed into glass longbow. She took a shot, managing to graze the orb. In retaliation, one of the tendrils was launched towards her, breaking both Cinder's Aura and right arm. Cinder winced, more at her failure rather than pain.

Yang jumped in, her hair raging inferno. She pulverized Grimm's tendrils, but before she could land a final blow, she was caught by brand new ones it created, tossing her away.

Half of Grimm's head regenerated, its maw almost grinning at their struggle. It was now or never. Jaune walked up to Cinder from behind.

"Together" He whispered to her. Cinder nodded.

It all depended on this final attack. Jaune gathered last bit of his Aura, shaping it into orb in his hand before caressing left side of Cinder's face. Orb moved up her face, eventually entering her empty eye socket. Cinder closed her eyes, when she reopened them, her amber iris was joined by yellow translucent one.

She took aim again, Grimm's weak point now more visible thanks to Yang's attack. Jaune's hand joined Cinder's damaged one, drawing a bow together. Grimm realized what was going on, it turned its attention away from Ruby and Oscar. But it was too late. In an instant, glass arrow pierced through Grimm's weak point.

Grimm let out one last growl, before its body collapsed, no longer able to keep its form. All it was left if it was goopy mess, slowly evaporating into smoke. It was finally over.

"Eat this!" Yang shouted, blasting goopy remains with shotgun blasts. Weiss and Ruby gave her puzzled look. "I'm double tapping it, just in case."

Jaune chuckled at Yang. They've spent everything to finally put down that Grimm. He was so spent he could barely move an inch, he could barely even stand. Oh.

He fell forward, dragging down Cinder with him. She yelped as her body hit the ground, Jaune laying on her back.

"Sorry." He mumbled.

"I was about to say you redeemed yourself as a Prince when you decapitated that Grimm... but then you had to mess it up." Cinder commented.

"Still, that attack has to count for something." Jaune retorted.

"Ugh, get a room." Yang complained.

"You are the one to say." Blake poked fun at her partner. It seemed she recovered from that hit. Next to Blake was Emerald, that caught Cinder's attention.

"Emerald." She called her.

"You are gonna have to find another idiot to carry you Cinder. Although I think you already found one." Green haired thief retorted and continued walking away.

"Not that... My scroll." Cinder clarified. "I want you to take my scroll." Emerald picked up Cinder's scroll with puzzled look.

"Mercury's contact is under Moonstone. If he asks any questions just say it is direct order from Salem." Cinder explained before adding. "Ignore all messages from Tanzanite if you want to keep your sanity intact."

Emerald glanced through contacts to confirm what Cinder said was true.

"Don't expect me to thank you for this." Emerald concluded their conversation.

In front of them, orange orb suddenly started jolting. Team RWBY surrounded it, in case Grimm somehow miraculously returned. But instead of black tendrils, bright energy poured out of it, eventually reaching Cinder. It was Fall Maiden power, it returned to her.

"You have your powers back." Jaune commented.

"Burden." Cinder groaned.

"I'm not that heavy." He complained.

"There are burdens we willingly carry, and the ones we have to carry." She cryptically commented. It was the last thing Jaune heard before he fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

That's all folks, one more chapter to go.

I wanted to focus more on Semblances compared to weapons while also giving each character something noteworthy to do.

As for wacky martial arts I gave Ren here. I wanted him to be useful beyond just being Grimm cloaking device since his combat prowess basically became butt of a joke in the show. The style he used allows him to bypass first layer he hits and was mostly developed to fight other humans since hits would bypass Aura. Against someone without Aura, they would bypass skin and inflict internal damage. Drawback is that Ren needs full focus for each punch and emotional tranquility. That also gives his Semblance an offensive use since he can calm himself to boost his prowess.

As for Grimm. It's basically Cinder's Grimm arm at full power. I decided to make it a sentient hand with reptilian features. Its ability is conversion of Aura and magic into power. When fueled by Maiden power it's almost invulnerable, has ridiculous

regeneration and full control of its body. If this Grimm had a name it would be Fafnir. Its personality is basically corrupted copy of Cinder.

All contacts on Cinder's scroll are coded. Mercury is Moonstone, Tyrian is Tanzanite.

Their relief

Chapter Notes

That's the final one, end of the journey.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

First thing Cinder heard was the sound of alarm clock. What on earth was going on? Where was she? She wasn't in her hotel room, it didn't have alarm clock. Has staff found a new way to annoy her? No, that didn't make any sense.

She opened her eyes and tried to rise up. As she did so, she felt pain in her right arm and... nothing in her left arm. She was in some kind of hospital room dressed in plain white shirt. Bed on her right was empty and in bed on her left was Jaune.

"Five more minutes." He muttered, annoyed by alarm clock waking him up.

She remembered it now. Their meeting in hotel room, meeting with Ruby and the fight with Grimm. That would explain why her left arm was gone. In that case, did that also mean...? Cinder closed her right eye. There was no darkness anymore, she could see. There was a bit of a yellow tint to her eyesight. She initially thought it was due to morning haziness, but it seemed to be a consequence of an Aura eye. It didn't really matter, she would get used to it. What mattered was having her eye back, she was grateful to him for that.

Cinder turned towards Jaune who was still trying to sleep. Of course, she chuckled to herself. Alarm likely meant they would soon have a visit from doctor or whoever was put in charge of her. She doubted this was an ordinary hospital considering her wanted status. Her attention shifted back to her plain white shirt. It was surprisingly comfortable for common hospital wear, but more importantly, it meant someone undressed her. Just thought of it made her almost sick to her stomach.

Finally, doctor entered the room. It was a tall muscular brown skinned woman. Cinder noticed several scars on her face. It was more likely she was combat medic rather than regular doctor. That just confirmed some of her suspicions.

"Good morning Miss Fall." She greeted her before turning towards still napping Jaune. "And to you Mister Arc." Doctor greeted him with much louder tone. That finally woke him up.

"I am Doctor Khadra, I was put in charge of you." She introduced herself.

Jaune looked around seeming bit confused. "This isn't a regular hospital." Considering his usual shenanigans, he was no doubt familiar how that looked inside and out.

"Correct Mister Arc, you are inside of specialized hospital within Shade Academy." Doctor explained. It seemed Cinder's suspicions were confirmed.

"Prison hospital." Cinder added.

"Not precisely, but it can be seen that way." Doctor added. Cinder sighed, semantics.

Doctor then approached Cinder with an intent of grabbing her right arm. Cinder moved it away.

"Relax Miss Fall, I just want to know how well did your arm recover." She explained herself. That made some sense, she remembered that Grimm breaking her arm during the fight. Cinder reluctantly relented, letting Doctor touch her forearm.

"It appears your forearm mostly healed, although I would suggest not exerting it that much in the near future." She added.

Doctor then shifted attention to Jaune, carefully observing him.

"Everything alright Doctor?" He smiled.

"It appears so." Doctor concluded. "You overexerted your Aura during the fight. However, it appears mostly normal right now." Aura overexertion. Of course, he never understood his limits. But then again, that was exactly what made him strong, time and time again refusing to back down.

"I went bit overboard there." Jaune laughed, scratching his head.

Nurse then walked in carrying two small bowls with some kind of porridge in them. She put bowls at their respective nightstands.

"It is for quicker Aura recovery." Doctor explained before turning around and walking out. "Visitors can come in now." She announced to someone outside. Oh great, that was precisely what she needed right now.

After Doctor and Nurse walked out, gaggle of Jaune's friends walked in. It was Farmboy, Blake, Xiao Long and Schnee. She was especially ecstatic to meet latter two.

"Hey!" Jaune greeted them. At least someone was happy about seeing them.

"Don't hey me Vomit Boy, you are in some deep shit." Xiao Long was as polite as ever.

Schnee walked up to Jaune, worried about him. "Are you alright Jaune?" She inquired.

"I'm fine, it's mostly just Aura overexertion. Cinder broke her..." Jaune started explaining.

"Glad you are safe." Schnee interrupted him.

There was something about her that made her presence obnoxious to Cinder. Schnee was too close to Jaune for her liking. Cinder glared at her. White haired girl felt eye digging in her

back, turned her head and glared back. Eventually, Schnee girl backed away, positioning herself next to others. Was she being too possessive? Perhaps. But it felt right to be able to claim something as hers. Jaune looked oblivious to small stand off that took place in front of him.

"So... Why exactly is Jaune in prison hospital with me?" Cinder asked. She was curious. Of course, she understood why she was here, but Jaune? By all accounts he should have been in regular hospital.

Blake smiled at her question while Schnee and Xiao Long let out sigh of annoyance.

"We had a late night meeting as what to do with you Miss Fall." Former Headmaster of Beacon explained.

"My, my, and what did esteemed council of Huntsmen have to say about me?" Cinder mockingly asked, maintaining mask of superiority.

"Nothing good, if you could believe that." Xiao Long mocked back.

"Ruby vouched for you." Schnee added, glaring Cinder again.

"You still owe her cookies." Yang threateningly pointed towards Jaune. "And you..." She pointed towards Cinder. "You owe her your life." As much it annoyed her to admit, she was alive thanks to Ruby Rose. Cinder nodded. There was no point in further agitating the brawler as fun as it was.

"So council believes Cinder has changed?" Jaune asked.

"Ruby made a strong case for her." This time it was Farmboy. "But..." He started. Ah, there it was. Ultimately it came down to pragmatism.

"I am too useful to get rid off." Cinder concluded.

"Yeah." Farmboy reluctantly confirmed.

"Headmaster Theodore is very careful man. Changed or not, he wouldn't be comfortable with wanted criminal joining his side." Blake explained.

"And Winter and Raven were against it for obvious reasons." Schnee added.

"So you convinced them by emphasizing my abilities and usefulness." It was logical, albeit tad annoying. In a way, she was still defined by her power.

"Well we sure didn't convince them by emphasizing your personality." Xiao Long replied.

"That's enough Yang." Jaune defended her.

"Whatever. I'm not tapping her, I don't have to be polite." Brawler retorted, earning a groan from Schnee.

"Additionally, information from Miss Fall's scroll could be useful in taking down Crown." Ozpin interjected before an argument could start. Of course, she gave her scroll to Emerald, but she didn't expect her former subordinate to hand it to authorities that quickly. She truly changed in her absence.

"What about Mercury?" Cinder asked.

"He arrived with Emerald and surrendered himself to authorities." Blake explained. So it wasn't for nothing after all.

"Mercury was also placed here. So you two will have a company once you recover." Farmboy added. Cinder very much doubted that. All she could imagine were two scenarios. One would be Mercury ignoring them and acting like a diva, the other would be Jaune and Mercury discussing those atrocious action movies. She couldn't decide which scenario was worse.

"So why exactly am I here with Cinder and Mercury?" Jaune asked, returning conversation to Cinder's initial question.

"Because someone had harebrained idea." Schnee annoyedly answered.

"Well, more like catbrained." Xiao Long added looking at her partner, much to Cinder's confusion.

"Miss Belladonna mentioned your involvement with Miss Fall. So council listed you as her accomplice." Ozpin explained.

"It was completely unnecessary thing to mention." Schnee added.

"I disagree Miss Schnee. Transparency was necessary in this situation, hiding things would do us no good." Former headmaster retorted.

"So I'm officially listed as criminal. Second Kingdom in the row." Jaune joked.

"Not funny Jaune. Either way, it's only a temporary decision. You'll be free to move around once you fully recover." Schnee clarified.

"Cinder too?" Jaune asked.

"Yes." Schnee confirmed, briefly glaring at her. "Cinder too." White haired girl's passive aggressive comment was secondary to the new revelation. She would finally be free.

"Well, we'll be going now. Glad to see one of you is fine." Xiao Long commented much to Cinder's annoyance. Blonde brawler had an innate talent to be the most obnoxious person in the room at all times.

"Glad you are fine too Cin... Miss Cinder." Farmboy diplomatically added. She could at least bother to remember his name for the next time.

"How are Ren and Nora?" Jaune blurted out.

"They are alright, we checked on them earlier. Both are just bit tired." Schnee reassured him.

"Ruby too. She stayed awake all night." Xiao Long added.

"Glad everyone is alright." Jaune said as he leaned back into pillow. Always worrying about others.

"Either way, we'll be going now. You owe me Jaune." Blake declared.

"You too?" He sighed. She wasn't sure what exactly did Jaune owe, but something else about Blake interested her.

"Get well, Jaune." Schnee wished him before her and Xiao Long walked out of room.

"How are you so flippant about this... Blake." Cinder asked her. It wasn't just this conversation, she was fairly carefree even while Cinder talked with Ruby in that Dust shop.

"I know how does it feel to be dealt a bad hand in life. Everyone deserves a second chance." Blake explained.

"That easily." Cinder smirked. Was the girl really that naive?

"Trust can be lost just as easily. if you ever cross Jaune you'll regret ever crossing my path." Cat Faunus warned her before walking away. Fair enough.

"Ha-have fun you two." Oscar? Oscar awkwardly added before also walking out, leaving Jaune and Cinder alone.

Both momentarily mused in silence. What would come next after this?

"Sorry for some of those comments they made." Jaune apologized. Cinder chuckled. He worried bit too much. While she did find some of them annoying, they had a right to be angry at her.

"It's not your fault. It's not theirs either. It's inevitable considering things I've done." Cinder retorted.

"Still... I hope they are gonna be more accepting of you as time goes on. He looked her in the eye before adding. "Of us."

"What will you do if they never accept us?" She was curious what he would answer.

"They will eventually." Optimistic option, how cliché of him. But ultimately that was the foundation of their relationship, hope for better tomorrow.

Jaune mused for a moment before asking her. "What does us even mean to you?" Oh. She hoped to avoid conversation like that.

"You and me. It's what word us means to most people." She was being bit of a smartass.

"I meant, what are we? What is our relationship?" Jaune clarified.

"Complicated." She wasn't even being a smartass anymore, it genuinely was complicated.

"That's an adjective, not type of relationship." Now he was being cheeky.

"In that case, how about wanted terrorist and her accomplice." She jokingly said referring to council's decision.

"Cinder." Jaune groaned.

"What do you want me to say?" Cinder asked him.

"That's not how that works. I want you to answer it yourself, not repeat something I said." He clarified. So it was up to her to define it, her choice.

Cinder sighed. There was a relatively simple answer to it, but would she really say it? His friends would make various jokes at their expense, Emerald and Mercury would say she has gone soft. But that was a minor thing overall, merely an external annoyance. There was a part of her that rejected that simple answer.

There was a lesson she needed to learn, temperance. By answering Jaune's question she would affirm her bloody conquest. Truth was, he was never meant to be hers, especially after everything he has been through because of her.

Cinder turned towards Jaune, ready to give him avoidant answer. However, she couldn't utter a word. He had the same dopey starry eyed stare she dreamed about back then, when they were still in Beacon. Shine in his eyes had returned. Yes, she hurt him, hurt him in unimaginable ways, but she also made him... happy. She was selfish. She was willing to hurt him again and for what... so she could cope better with things she has done. No, she couldn't undo those things, she couldn't give back things she took from him. But thing she could do, was make him happy, make herself happy. And candid answer to his question was a beginning.

"Girlfriend." Cinder triumphantly declared.

Jaune just looked at her dumbfounded. "Wait, really?" He finally said.

Now Cinder was confused. "What did you expect me to say?"

"I don't know. Sort of a yes but no answer." Jaune explained.

Cinder crossed her arms. "Perhaps I'll retract my answer and give you so called "yes but no" answer" She jokingly threatened.

He chuckled before apologizing. "Sorry for doubting you."

"I expect better than that Arc." She continued her act.

Jaune sighed. "What do you want me to do?"

"You need to take my on a date." Cinder declared.

"We are in hospital and under house arrest." Jaune looked at her incredulously.

"Get creative." She simply answered.

Jaune thought for a moment, looking around himself in the hospital room.

"How about dinner date with this luxurious hospital food?" He offered, holding up his bowl of porridge.

She grabbed a spoon and dug into her own bowl. She took a bite. It was a barley porridge with chopped dates and almonds with some honey drizzled over it. It was sweet, overly sweet.

"Hmmm, no. Dinner date is overdone at this point." He could do better than this.

Jaune then turned on the small TV they had in their room.

"How about movie date with... morning news? He sounded disappointed at available TV channels. That was an immediate no from her.

He leaned back, thinking what he could offer her next. After some musing, he turned towards her.

"How about handholding." Jaune finally offered. It was a compelling offer, she enjoyed his touch. However...

"That might be tricky on the account of..." She gestured at her left arm stump.

"Oh." Jaune simply said. "How about we switch beds?" That would put him on her right side. But she just got comfortable in her own bed. Cinder shook her head and leaned back into her large pillow.

Jaune accepted her lazy excuse, but didn't seem dissuaded. What was he up to now? He leaned towards her, his hand lit up by Aura. Was he really about to do that?

"Didn't Doctor just say you were here because of Aura overuse?" Cinder tried. Aura cylinder was forming in his arms.

"I'm criminal accomplice. I'm not good at following laws and orders." He jokingly answered, adding smaller cylinders at the bottom of his Aura construct.

Cinder watched as he worked. He was surprisingly precise for a novice. Maybe he was prodigy or maybe it was his conviction. Jaune added more details to it, until it eventually looked like an Aura arm.

He knelt next to her bed. His hands were once again lit up by Aura as he slowly attached new Aura limb to the stump of her left arm. At first she didn't feel anything, it was just a foreign

object. But as he worked more and more, she felt warmth at her forearm. First thing she felt was his hand in hers.

"Did it work? Do you feel..." He inquired.

"I feel you." She said softly. Jaune smiled, his blue eyes shining. He slowly returned to his bed, keeping his hand in hers.

"Satisfied with handholding?" Jaune asked. Of course, she was ecstatic. Where there was once pain and cold, there was now pleasure and warmth.

"I have to be. I'm afraid what were you going to do next if I said no." Cinder smirked. He tried to slip his hand away as a test, of course she wouldn't allow that. She gripped his hand bit tighter.

"Like what? Climb on top of you?" He inquired.

"Under these circumstances that would be too much even for you." Cinder retorted. Well, at least she thought so. Sound of her bed creaking as he climbed on it immediately proved her wrong. Jaune was now on top of her, leaning forward.

"Are you kid..." Before she could finish her sentence he shut her up with a kiss.

He never made any sense, she never made any sense. It was a paradox. In a world where nothing made any sense, together they were the only thing that did.

Chapter End Notes

That's all folks.

Khadra is shade of green in Arabic. Mercury got that off screen redemption, as he should.

Some final words. I'm thankful for all kudos, comments, subscribes this fic received. When I first started with Dinner with Nemesis I never expected this level of support. As I hinted in one of my comments and on my blog, next fic will likely be Ever After canon divergence fic. As always, feel free to comment and I hope you enjoyed this fic.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!