

Obsidian Tear

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In which Cinder Fall's cries were heard, and she was able to start living for once, for real, surrounded by a real family that would help patch up the hurt deep within her fragile, wounded soul. Now she's enrolling for Beacon Academy with lifelong confidant, Jaune, ready to make a change. But first thing's first, she just needs to partner up with him...

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Open Day

Wow, it's been a year. Sorry for not uploading, for you long-term fans out there. Which is zero, because who wants to be my fan? Nobody, exactly. Anyways, this is a fic I wrote literally after like 2 or 3 thoughts, and I just used it to capitalise on getting past my writer's block. So no promises, basically. If you haven't read my bio then basically just know that my author's notes are gonna be less grammatically correct since it's really just me treating it as a mind dump. I also do the same for my reviews, just felt like saying. I hope I don't offend the grammar police.

Oh yeah, I don't own RWBY, even if I did I think the writing would still be kinda ass.

Idle chatter, the sound of footfalls on the metal floor, the quiet but present whirring engine of the bullhead, none of those noises helped in distracting his mind away the sloshing sensation churning in his stomach, and the feeling of breakfast creeping up his throat. At his side Cinder watched wordlessly, amused.

"Hnrk," Jaune keeled over himself, arms folded on top of his abdomen. His face went another tint of green.

"Hnrk," Cinder copied. She smirked as she watched Jaune glare at her provocative remark, knowing well she was pushing his buttons.

"Not... helping..." Between stifled groans, Jaune complained. Now he laced his mouth with his gloved fingers, looking at the aircraft's ceiling and praying gravity push down the chunky bits of cereal he ate this morning.

"I know." Cinder smiled smugly. She watched Jaune roll his eyes. She giggled as he took sharp, deep breaths to control and compose himself. "But, who forgot to bring their pills today?"

"There was no time, Cinder!" Jaune muffled between his fingers.

"Ah, but who woke up late?"

"It was Ansel's idea to host that goddamn annual village festival *the* day before we go to Beacon! And Saph kept insisting we go!" Jaune swallowed some bile down, and the horrific after-taste left to burn in his throat made a bit of his soul die inside. "We slept at three in the morning! Three! And I don't know how *you're* coping so well, because you slept *last* !"

"I'm just built different, I suppose." Cinder puffed herself up, standing straighter. She found joy in how Jaune's face looked like a blood vessel could burst.

There was just something so fun with winding him up as opposed to the rest of his sisters.

"You say that every time. Every. Time." Somehow it was the clearest he spoke in the past few hours. And judging by how she kept giggling like a quiet maniac, he knew he lost this one. "One day, Cinder, I promise this cruelty will come around and bite you in the ass. Karma's a bitch."

Cinder merely raised an eyebrow. She slid a hand down from her waist, down to her very attractive and envious rear, and gave it the most seductive, teasing caress, so much so that she unintentionally drew the eyes of quite a few student bodies.

Jaune very much felt conflicted inside. "Oh my Gods, Cinder..." He pinched the bridge of his nose, massaging it. That seemed to be the final straw, because his sickness had released the biggest onslaught yet, one that not even Jaune's self-control would be able to handle.

His eyes darted across the room. There's a bin in the corner! He charged it, discarding tact and discretion altogether, and as soon as he felt he got into range, he let it *rip* .

Cinder winced at the noise of the wet splatter making contact with the empty bin, the wicked stuff collecting in the black bag and hitting the bottom of the basin with a plop. She had already begun her walk to check on him, but hearing some of the other, irrelevant faces on board laugh at him? It added more purpose to her stride. As she approached closer, however, two particular voices stood out.

"Eewwwww, Yang! There's vomit all over your boots!" The first voice belonged to a short girl, with short hair just at the middle of her neck. All Cinder saw was red and black, with her corset, her skirt, tights, and her weapon holstered to her right hip. That girl was probably left-handed. Either way, she looked like a dark-red highlighter.

Wasn't she a little too young to be here?

"Yes, Ruby. I can see that." The second voice was deeper, and by logic, older. She had wavy, free-flowing hair like a lion's mane, cascading down her shoulders and past her waist like licks of blazing fire. She had a tan jacket which bore her midriff, undone enough to expose some chest, had orange thigh-high socks, and tan boots which reached to her knees.

"I- uff- sorry 'bout that." Jaune fished a handkerchief out his pocket. At least Yang wasn't snobby in that she took it and promptly started cleaning them.

"You better be..." The tall girl muttered under her breath as she bent one knee, cleaning the bits of food off. The red girl watching behind failed to suppress a giggle, coming as a snigger. "Looks like someone forgot their travel sickness pills, didn't they?"

"That's what I'm saying," Cinder strutted towards them, and she handed Yang a few tissues. "I'm Cinder, and this clumsy oaf is Jaune."

"Yang Xiao Long, at your service. And shortstuff over here is Ruby." Yang grinned cheshirely. "Now, if Ruby would like to introduce herself to you both personally."

Ruby froze. "H-hi-hi!" Her voice cracked so unnaturally, even if she had the same pitch as a mouse. And she swore she said hello twice. Now she felt like an idiot. Thanks Yang. Great big sister you are.

"Aww... If you can't tell, she's not quite good with people." Yang cooed, before chuckling. Ruby retorted with an 'I think they can see that, Yang!'

Cinder hummed. She turned to see Jaune still head-first in the bin, almost eager to puke his guts out. She heard Yang speak.

"Uff, he really does have it bad, doesn't he?"

"He has pills, but he seems to have forgotten to take them today."

"I wouldn't be lying if I said I'm not pissed over him throwing up on my babies. 'Cause I totally still am."

"Meh." Cinder saw the logic behind that. She also tuned into minor talk Ruby started about how Yang said everything was her 'babies'.

"These're gonna stink for the next few hours... I need to find some soap and a sponge when we get there." She tapped her boot against the floor in a rhythmic beat. "Welp, we best be gone. Until next time, Cinder!" But before they truly were out of sight, she yelled: "And tell Vomit Boy I said hi!"

Jaune wiped the corners of his mouth with his sleeve. He faced Cinder, looking like he saw the rear end of death. Then, realising there were bits of green stains on his hoodie, he fell into the second, deeper pit of despair.

"Ooohohoh, no! This is my favourite oneeeee!" Jaune spoke drowsily, zapped of energy, words dragging and slurring.

"Maybe it's a blessing in disguise. If it means you wear that *outrageously* childish hoodie less, then let fate take its course of action."

"Hey! No badmouthing the hoodie! Doing that insults Pumpkin Pete, my pride, hard work and dedication!"

Now it was Cinder's turn to massage her temples. "Jaune. It's literally *just* a black hoodie you get for cheap at any thrift shop in town. And it has the most baby-looking bunny outline on it." She exhaled, her breath coming out her nose like the steam from a steam train. "You look like an oversized child with it."

"Well that's just your opinion, isn't it? You don't like it? Well, that's tough because I'm keeping it on for as long as I possibly could."

"I'll tell you what; this weekend we go shopping in Vale. Nice stores, new clothes, all of that."

"ETA scheduled to be at 12:30." The monotonous voice of the ship called out inside.

"Half twelve. So that's thirty minutes longer." Cinder spoke aloud.

"No..." Jaune quietly muttered. "That's thirty minutes longer on the bullhead!" Or: that's basically thirty more minutes in hell!

"Yes, Jaune, that's thirty more minutes. To get from twelve o'clock to half past twelve, that takes thirty minutes." Cinder looked smug, and Jaune felt his chest constrict.

"Shut it, Cinder!" Jaune stared at his dirty hands, the dull reflection of his messy self on the body of the bin, and the inside of the bin itself. It took a lot of willpower to hold back the ocean of emotions.

"NOOOO!"

"YEEESS!"

The very moment the aircraft touched down on the grassy floor, the Jaune-gurnaut had bowled over anyone in the way, the unstoppable

force being the first to feel the organic texture of grass. It felt wonderful. He was kissing and hugging the earth beneath him.

"Ohhh..." Jaune drawled on the floor. "I'll never leave you agaaaaiinn!" People circled past and glanced like they saw a lunatic, some laughed at him, but none of that mattered because he was reunited with sweet Mama Remnant.

"You're making a right show of yourself, Jaune." Cinder quipped. She grabbed his hood and yanked him up, but not without a struggle; entire patches of grass (and dirt, seriously?) ripped out the ground and into his hands.

Jaune rubbed at his neck. "Ack, that hurt, Cinder." He stuck his tongue out, making a gagging motion. That seemed to trigger something in Cinder, because he saw how she froze up, and he picked up on it instantly.

"H-hey! But it's not that bad! It's not something to fuss so much over, Cinder." He tried to calm her down, and when she relaxed, his chest fell, releasing a breath he had just realised he had not been holding in.

"R-right. Sorry," she itched the back of her hair, and so did Jaune.

"They look like a new couple..."

A forgettable voice trailed with the wind, but it had left its mark - Jaune, bright as a tomato, and Cinder, who cleared her throat as if nothing had happened.

Her face said something definitely happened.

"Are you even listening to me!"

At the corner of Cinder's eye was Ruby and another girl who looked like she liked the colour white a little (i)too much. She was also really short, but it proved her previous point on Ruby being younger than

the rest of the first years, because she just looked shorter and, assumptions made, her and Jaune's age too.

Even if it was just the back of her head Cinder could tell she had a snow-white complexion, so imagine her surprise at just how *unnaturally* red-faced someone could get, let alone her. She was crimson-red like a beet. She was *fuming* .

"Is any of this sinking in?! Do you have anything to say for yourself?!"

Do you?

And now Cinder was irritated. Her voice was so perfectly whiny it grated at her ears like a blunt pencil on a smooth table, or chalk on a blackboard. It made the back of her skull itch. Cinder looked at Jaune, who watched the scene unfold tentatively. She grunted, clenching her teeth and closing her eyes, facing away as much as she can. She began strutting away towards the exit, when an eruption of flame, snow and cracking electricity snapped her eyes back open, and her attention was brought back.

Ice, Cinder nicknamed, was covered in soot. "Unbelievable! This is exactly what I was talking about!"

"Now's our time to move, Jaune." Cinder walked towards the gates again, but quickly felt her partner's absence. "Jaune?" She turned around. "Jaune! Why are you going there-?" She turned quickly with a fast pace to catch up. She realised she was the one to be dragged along for this one.

"I said I'm really, *really* sorry..." Ruby spoke meekly, her face pink with the humiliated type of embarrassed.

"Ugh! You complete *dolt!* What are you even doing here-!"

"Hey, hey, hey!" Jaune stepped between them; it was obvious he was here to ease up the tension. "Why don't we slow things down,

get to know each other well enough *before* throwing names towards one another." He smiled, but it felt like a practiced, patient kind of smile. Secretly Cinder felt he was siding with Ruby, defending her.

"Uh, did you not see that Dust explosion just then!" The snow girl spoke to Jaune like he was stupid, and that seemed to get on Cinder's nerves. The girl acted like she had a migraine. "How did *nobody* see that! How come it's only you two?!"

Ice faced Ruby. "And you! Aren't you a little young to be here?" She pointed accusingly at the red girl, but without Jaune sticking himself in front: even with the distance, he towered over the midget girl.

"Woah, woah woah!" Jaune started. "I don't know Ruby that well, but even if she stammers quite often, even if she's shy, I wouldn't think she's *stupid* enough to take the wrong bullhead to go to school." He glanced at the girl in question, that back at the pale woman.

"If she's here, then that's because she worked hard to be here; she's as capable as all of us - so don't throw accusations around, instead, we should help her feel welcome. If anything, that makes her special, like a child prodigy of sorts, but that's taking a wild guess."

The silence created was ungainly, and it dragged on for a few seconds. Seconds that were already too long.

The girl grabbed her luggage and, with an aggressive stomp in her walk, stormed off.

Jaune rubbed his cheeks and pulled down at his face, making a droopy, tired expression. "None of that got through her head, didn't it, Cinder."

"Not one bit." She watched as Jaune offered a hand to pick Ruby up, who took it and was holstered up.

"You alright?"

"Y-yeah..." Silence again, but this time comfortable. "A-and thanks for sticking up for me."

"Aw, it's nothin' much. Don't worry about it. Actually, where is your sister?"

"Oh, Yang? She left me here! On my own! To fend for myself!" Ruby ranted. "What kind of big, responsible sister does that? *Oh, it's so that you can make new friends. Oh, so that you can finally break out that shell of yours!* Well I'm sorry that I don't have a social life as good as yours, Yang!"

"Yeesh, that had some venom behind it." Jaune mock-wincing. He knew it wasn't really *that* bad. He smirked. "Well, I guess she's one to talk because who was the one stuttering on the airship?"

Ruby stuck her tongue out as her response. They started laughing.

"Well, I think we'll get along just fine. And I think, now that hopefully I got you a bit more in the mood for talking, we should introduce each other (i) *properly* ." Jaune stuck his hand out. "I'm Jaune Arc."

Ruby was glad to take it, enthusiastic. "Ruby Rose."

"And the girl next to me is Cinder."

"Woman, actually." She corrected, and Jaune stuck his tongue out like Ruby did. "Cinder Fall." For a second, she thought back a few moments, how quickly Jaune trusted Ruby, how quick they were able to mesh together, to form that chemistry at such little time. They seemed comfortable around each other, smiling and laughing already like well-acquainted friends. Ruby Rose... she certainly felt like someone she could get along with.

She had a small smile for Ruby, and it seemed to brighten up the short girl's day.

"Weiss Schnee." The three looked to another girl who held up the once-full vial of Dust that irritated Ruby's nose. "Heiress to the Schnee Dust Company." She wore predominantly a dark purple to black colour of style, with her distinctly large bow sitting like a tiara on her head. She faced the three, and they faced back. "One of the largest producers of energy propellant in the world."

"Weiss... Schnee..." Jaune's face paled. "Oh my Gods, I pissed off somebody important, didn't I?"

"Depends how you interpret it. They're the same company infamous for their controversial treatment towards their labour force and their shady business partners." The equally shady girl walked away.

"So she comes from a greedhouse. Detestable," Cinder spat. "Absolutely detestable."

"Hmm." Jaune hummed. "Let's go in."

Cinder found herself staring at the moon of Remnant, chunks of rock slowly drifting from the main body, a dim blue light tinting the darkness. But she felt unsettled, she felt an ominous feeling loom over her, control her, dominate her. Then, she felt something coil round her neck - a snake, grey and cold, slithering around her collarbone, hissing, constricting her. She felt like she was going to die. Then, the snake's head rose to her ear, and whispered, so quietly and so cunningly:

"Cinder."

Cinder couldn't answer, not like she couldn't, anyways; she was too busy yanking off its body. But it was too strong, too secure on her, too controlling of the situation - and she felt helpless. She closed her eyes, hoping to wish everything away, hoping that everything disappeared. It was what the powerless did when push came to shove.

Then everything changed.

The leathery body of the snake changed, and in its place was a cold sensation, one which felt so cold it burned to the touch, and it was all over her neck and collar. It was the feeling of metal on her neck.

And suddenly, everything became sickeningly familiar: she suddenly found herself in a claustrophobic closet room, and suddenly she was seeing the moon through a window frame rather than out in the open. And she felt short, far too short for her real age at that time, so short, so puny. She could feel her bones, frail and angular; she was very malnourished.

The Glass Unicorn was a house of horrors. It was anything but the glamorous, almost child-like facade built with by how its name suggested. Unicorns were creatures of fairy tales, a beautiful manifestation created by humanity's short-lasting innocence.

It was the Glass Unicorn which almost stripped Cinder of her innocence, she knew.

At the click of the devil's button her neck would explode with a pain of a hundred scorpion stings, and the agony of a thousand bullet ant bites. The slightest error meant punishment, and punishment would only bring you so close to death before you longed for it, before you saw it as a reprieve, a way to alleviate from everything. And even then, their cruelty knew no bounds for her - they denied her even that.

Cinder's surroundings warped, melting and merging and bending unnaturally like mixing paint. Now she was in front of the devil and her two offsprings, all with the same, malevolent smile which spelt sadist, which was wicked and evil. Next to her was a broken vase, and a new one, judging by its new polish, its great shine, now in a million pieces. She knew where this was going.

"Is any of this sinking in that thick, stupid skull of yours!? Do you understand any of what I'm saying?" Madame screamed in her face,

uncaring of the spit flying at her cheeks. She most likely meant that. And her two baby demons stood at each side, grinning like the cat caught the mouse, sniggering. "Is it!"

"Yes, Madame," Cinder replied, but it was a motor response; something trained in her head, drilled and ingrained and forever to stay. The first shock taught her never to argue back, only comply.

Say yes, apologise, and things wouldn't be bad. Punishment could be lighter.

Madame grinned with a fire in her eyes.

"Hmm, I should leave it to my two beautiful babies to decide; should Cinder be punished, dears?"

"Mama, look at the vase!" The first demon on the left of Madame started. "She clearly broke it! She must hate this job and this place, and by virtue she hates you!"

"What! That was a lie! I literally saw you push it over-" those words fell on deaf ears.

"I concur; ungrateful swine, Mama's generosity reaches out for all, and all you've done is ride that wave. Leech." The one on the left sneered.

Madame grinned, her teeth bare. "Well, you heard the girls." And without a single word more, Cinder's breath hitched, and her metal collar came to life, humming and cracking, the pain so staggering, so overwhelming that the blackness in her vision spread, and that the tears began to form. They always formed.

Cinder didn't even notice things had changed. She lay back in her room in a fetal position, her sharp spine bent forward. Her crying was quiet, always quiet because Madame didn't want her to disturb the guests. Her bedsheets were damp and addled with all sorts of stains, blood, dirt, and she felt cold. So cold.

She hated when things were so cold.

"Cinder." A voice called out her name, whispered for her, but she never bothered to look.

"Cinder." It hissed in her ear.

"Cinder." Now it was clearer, more formed, like the voice actually belonged to someone.

"Cinder!" It's Jaune.

"CINDER!" At this point Jaune was shaking her shoulders; he was distressed, and wore it all over his body. Some of that slipped when he saw her shoot her eyes open.

"Oum's life, Cinder! Do not do that again! You gave me a heart attack!" He held her in a tight embrace, a very tight one. "You're sweating all over! It's like you came down with a fever!"

Cinder believed there was no light at the end of the tunnel, that things really were hopeless for her. But then again, fate played its game, and Cinder found her light at the end. They were a three-letter name, and that name was Arc. Especially now, with that nightmare she just had; Jaune's hair glowed under the natural light of the sun like a halo. Like an angel. Her angel.

Jaune holstered her up, holding his palm over her forehead. "Thank the older Brother you're not sick. Now let's go, we have the Initiation test in a bit!"

The Glass Unicorn's effects would always be there, deeply rooted into her soul. Nothing could change that, the damage done was already too deep. As much as she didn't like it, it was something she was going to live with. But with Jaune at her side at Beacon, she was confident he was more than enough to help her see things through.

"Where is everybody?" Cinder asked.

"They're not here because *someone* decided to sleep in for ten minutes extra!" Jaune grumbled. He muttered on about having a panic attack afterwards. "Don't ever do that again, by the way."

"It was just a bad dream, Jaune." At Cinder's words, they both stood there for a few moments.

"Oh... well, I'm sorry for that." Jaune looked her in the eye. "But just remember that I'm always there for you, no matter what."

Cinder broke the contact, before smiling. "Aww, Jaune! Way to swoon a grown woman's heart!" She took pleasure in how Jaune winced at that, only just realising the sheer *cringey* nature of his line. "That was so full of corny, tooth-rotting goodness! I may have a cavity now."

"If it gets you to shut up then I wish."

She gasped. "How rude! And I thought we had something!"

"... You seem especially chipper today." Jaune commented. Cinder didn't know whether to interpret that as dodging her provocation or not. "I thought bad dreams meant bad mornings for people. Obviously not for you."

"Yeah, I'm just-"

"-Like that. Sure. Cool."

Cinder blew raspberry, and so did Jaune.

They prepared quickly and after a short breakfast they found themselves trying to locate their gear lockers, Jaune holding his Scroll, scrutinising it in detail. Cinder hovered at the side, peering.

"I am so confused," Jaune grumbled. "If I got locker #10, shouldn't it be the tenth locker I see when I get here?"

"I don't think things work like that. Besides, Beacon's a large place, I think it's acceptable for new people like us to get lost on the first day." She consoled. "Plus, everything's moving around more to accommodate the needs of the new first years, and we had to hand in out stuff for checks and regulations. Things'll get misplaced through one way or another."

"Mmm." Jaune tilted his Scroll to the side as if it would give him any form of marginal help. "But still, it would be more understandable to struggle finding locker #636 than #10." Jaune scanned around his area. "There it is!"

Jaune approached and opened his locker, and there was this magic he felt when Crocea Mors was clasped into his hand, how it came into contact with the cross-guard and hilt. The same applied for his heater shield, which was augmented to function with Dust. Like an artist with their brush, Jaune felt he was most expressive when he had them in his arms and hands, the most creative.

"Ah, it feels so good to have them here." He faced Cinder. "We applied together at the same time, so your locker should be right close to mine. Locker..."

"Locker #7. It has my name at the back of the door in print. Yours should, too."

"Oh yeah. Huh. Well, that's close enough." But that still meant #8 and #9 were right between them. She now had Midnight in her possession: there was a certain (i)trickiness to it, in its form as a bladed dagger, but even despite its obsidian body, she knew to make no mistake; you would never underestimate its capabilities, because while the blades looked thin and fragile, they would always hit home, they would always strike true and find a way to penetrate and get the job done.

The swaths of Grimm she had killed at that point as training with Jaune and Papa would concur.

"So, Pyrrha, have you any thoughts on whose team you'd like to be on? I'm sure that, with a strong individual with an even stronger reputation, people are quite keen on joining forces with- *you* ."

"That's me?" Jaune instinctively called out, even if he didn't know who, and when he saw who it was, his face deadpanned. "Oh. You."

It was the white-haired girl from yesterday. She snuck a discreet but dirty glare at him, something he noticed, before she went back to talking to the green-eyed girl. She was locker #8, Jaune noted, and all he could do at that was sigh.

"Hmm, I'm not so sure... I was planning on letting the chips fall where they may." The other unknown girl possessed locker #9, and she armed her body with a bronze corset-like chestplate of intricate design. The same went for her greaves, which covered most of her legs.

"Well, I think we should get on the same team." Weiss spoke.

"That sounds grand!" The strain in the Pyrrha girl's eyes spoke otherwise, he acknowledged. She was making her feel uncomfortable, and that wouldn't go on for any longer as long as Jaune had a say in things.

"This will be perfect! The smartest girl in class combined with the strongest girl in class! Together we will be unstoppable! I can see it now! We'll be popular! We'll be celebrities! We'll get perfect grades! Nothing can come between us now!"

Something did come between her and Pyrrha, and his name was Jaune. From the side he spoke. "Hey, aren't you that girl on the front covers of Pumpkin Pete's cereal boxes?"

"O-oh. Yes, I am." This time her smile was more genuine.

"Aw, that's cool; my little sisters love it, even if it's apparently really bad for you." He mock-whispered as if calling out the cereal was

some form of taboo.

"I heard they tried hiding how much sugar they actually use," she giggled, following on with Jaune's conversation. The information was top-secret, not to be disclosed to anyone but those caught up in the circle of conspiracies surrounding Pumpkin Pete's cereal-

"Ahem." The Schnee cleared her whiny throat. "Mister..."

"Jaune."

"Well, Jaune. Do you know who this is?" She gestured at the red-haired girl.

"No, I don't," Jaune replied, "But you say that as if I'm supposed to."

"This," her hand waved, pointed from her head to heel, "This is Pyrrha Nikos."

Palpable silence.

"I think I missed the punchline. O-oh, and hi, Pyrrha."

Jaune didn't know why, but it seemed Pyrrha's grin beamed brighter at that. Weiss stared dumbfounded at him, her lips parted ever so slightly, and it seemed she decided to restart.

"This is Pyrrha Nikos, who graduated at the top of her class at Sanctum."

"Oh!" For some reason his expression caused Pyrrha's smile to dim by just a bit. "Cool." Jaune brushed the fact off, and Pyrrha returned to smiling at a hundred percent. "Never heard of it. You've heard of it, right, Cinder?"

Cinder shrugged.

Weiss scoffed. "She's won the Mistral Region Tournaments four years in a row! A new record!"

"Impressive!" Jaune exclaimed. "I still don't know what you're getting at, though!"

"I think she's trying to say Pyrrha's a celebrity," Cinder concluded. Weiss felt some tension leave her head, exclaiming how there was at least one person who could think logically. The former did not like that sentence at all.

"Either way, Pyrrha, you're still up on that proposition from earlier, aren't you?"

"Like I said, team or not, I think it shouldn't allow that from stopping me and you from getting to know each other better." Pyrrha silently prayed, hoped she could be on a team with people unlike Weiss in front of her. She already had an eye out for Cinder and Jaune: Cinder acted like she didn't care about her status; Jaune looked like he didn't even know she (i)was famous at all.

"Would all first-year students please report to Beacon Cliff for initiation? Again, all first-year students report to Beacon Cliff immediately."

Glynda's voice invaded the halls and signalled into the ears of every soon to-be first year. Equipped and ready to go, many flooded through the doors in rough lines, a cacophony of weapons large and small, a swarm of heavily-armoured brutes and pint-sized, agile assassins, a diverse future for Remnant, taking its first, few steps.

Pyrrha walked away to join the file of people, and Weiss clung close to her as if they had already established so much together in such a short amount of time. It was either she didn't have the voice to speak about the latter's actions or she didn't care enough to do so. Jaune was close to follow the herd, but it was instinctively correct to lag behind by a minute or two.

"Hey Cinder," he gestured. "What's up?"

"The ceiling." Her voice lacked that sass and bite he came to familiarity with.

"Cinder, I know something's wrong, and it needs to be resolved; especially now, because we're about to start our Initiation."

She gave Jaune the most cautious look into his eyes, as if there was an uncertainty to it, as if she was afraid of the unpredictable - it was like she wanted the answer to be a certain thing. Her lips parted, and she spoke:

"What if..." She paused, stuttered ever so minutely. "What if we're *not* on the same team?"

Jaune smiled at that. "Honestly, that's been the first thing on my mind. Before Beacon, before we filled our application forms, back when it was just me and you training with Dad, the moment we became good friends, it's always been there: what if we can't be always be there together, for each other?"

"Because even then, we'll still be friends and family together, right? Besides, we'll make new friends to keep us company, so cheer up, Cinder."

Cheer up?

"Worst case scenario is we only get to see each other during breaks and lunches and after school hours. So it's not something too major to worry about."

Cinder wished she couldn't. It felt like a dull ache in her chest, because who else could she talk to, someone to confide in with such confidence and reassurance she had build up with Jaune and his family for so many years.

Cinder didn't like what she didn't know.

Even with Jaune's talk, with the confidence and excitement brimming and the eagerness of a child, it just wasn't enough to inspire her. So she put up her best act, a false sense of security, that nothing concerned her.

She stuck close to Jaune throughout the waves of moving bodies.

And there we have it. Dear lord I have basically nowhere to go with this while at the same time I have like 3 main plot paths the story could take. It's either we keep it Slice of Life-y and more light-hearted like the first few volumes, or we could make it more angsty, like have another character replace Cinder's original role as Salem's little Maiden hunter, blah blah you get it. Or we can mix both, but then I'd actually have to *think* when writing the story, and I hate thinking widnsnasb I'm havin an aneurism (is that how you spell it?) This could affect tags n shit, but I don't think anybody bothers enough for that.

Oh, and I hope you like my interpretation of Cinder. I'd imagine that her abuse in the Glass Unicorn is cut short, only to be saved and taken under the Arc family; that doesn't change the fact that it's abuse, and that stuff just doesn't go away. I mean you could dull the trauma made by it, but it's still there. It explains why I wrote Cinder to basically be glued to Jaune, because she only trusts her family, she only trusts Jaune as of now. And remember, Jaune lived a sheltered life in Ansel, a countryside, so by extension Cinder lives it too.

I also added a certain snark/sass with Cinder, seeing as she won't really be a manipulative villain anymore. I mean, she probably has it in canon, but now you're gonna see a lot of it if I ever get to building the story.

There's also a reason why Cinder has the #7 and Jaune has the #10 locker. It ultimately doesn't mean anything, but it's just my reference at something really big. A little hint is my profile picture...

One thing I do want to keep is Knightfall - I dunno how but I am (i)really into Knightfall, at least Knightfall fics. Basically this is a Knightfall fic. If Knightfall happens in the actual canon I will shoot myself in the nuts but wouldn't even be surprised if they did, because realistically speaking how tf is Jaune gonna forgive the murderer to his partner?

Anyways, things I've learned from my last batch of stories was that crossovers kinda smell. Especially when you got SEVERAL new main/supporting characters (I mean, look at my Mob Psycho 100 x RWBY crossover, now I have what? Twelve characters to write, 8 if I completely ignore Team JNPR). That shit's time-consuming and hard, and I don't like time-consuming and hard shit because that sucks and I have tests.

Another thing is time commitment. If you really wanna flesh out stories, you gotta start sacrificing time for them. For me it's the little things like gaming, watching Netflix n stuff like that, but you always gotta have to think about where to bring the plot next, with obvious breaks. I mean it's fanfiction, not an essay on proving Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

I'll see how much reception this'll get, but either way a chapter 2 might come in like 5 days. No promises. This might stay as a one-shot in a perpetual purgatory of waiting for an update.

Oh, and Happy Christmas to you, stranger reading this. I think that's it, really.

Initiation

I asked yesterday in my author's notes on which direction to set the story at, and only like 2 people answered. I mean it's useful, but that's just 2 people; what happens if everyone else wants it darker-themed?

Maybe I should learn how to do a poll...

But yeah, I think the Slice of Life direction has my vote as the author, literally all of the Knightfall stories have the depression aspect in bundles. Not saying they're bad stories, they're certainly good ones but good god can we just have one where Cinder is happy from the start of the story? There's only, like, 2 off the top of my head where Cinder doesn't have to be a sad sack of angst.

I'll ramble more at the end of the chapter.

"That being said, the first person you make eye contact with after landing will be your partner for the next four years."

The Headmaster's words were met with a very mixed reception. Nevertheless, the student bodies murmured and whispered to themselves in a mix of complaints and friends wanting to get on the same team with each other.

There was some optimism in Cinder's eyes, there was a fire in her eyes; she *could* be on Jaune's team, there was a chance, and she figured things would be fine if it all played out correctly. All she needed to do now was make the plan, and then get it into motion. She faced Jaune, who was hopping to warm up, loosely kicking and stretching his limbs and twisting his armoured torso. There was an unnatural squeak and bounce underneath his feet, and she took note.

"After you've partnered up, make your way to the northern end of the forest..."

"Jaune," as the Headmaster went through the precautions Cinder whispered, pointing at a certain direction in the distance. "We should pick a spot where we'd be able to meet and partner up easily." There was a small patch of ruined land, with uprooted bushes and trees left as stumps, with spoiled soil and jagged chunks of rocks easily the size of boulders.

"How about there?"

"I mean, I'll try. It's southwest to the temple Headmaster Ozpin wants us to go to, so it should work." Jaune mumbled. "But there's so many factors to think about, and I think it's highly unlikely everything goes accordingly."

Cinder gripped the hem of her red, gold-trimmed dress. It was as if Jaune *didn't* want to be on the same team as her. But she let herself cool, because Jaune was right - too many things that could play a part, that could change the outcome. They had spent five years together, and have become very comfortable around each other, so clearly her first thought was wrong. It didn't stop her from thinking it though, even if she knew otherwise.

She nodded resolutely, and stared at the chosen land with a passion so hot it could catch a fire.

"... Now take your positions."

"PositiooOONS-?!" The first student was flung, and it seemed to startle quite a few others. This was when things started ramping up, and was when the next few hours would determine what school life at Beacon would be like.

Heads were perked to the sound of Yang's howling, soaring through the air as her wrist bracelets turned to gauntlets.

"Huh, so that's all he meant by a 'Landing Strategy'?" To finish things off, Jaune clicked his neck and a few finger joints. "We're up any second now..."

The ground beneath them felt like it came to life - it rose with an energy, and it launched them into the air, Jaune first, Cinder following suit. The wind was more punishing than expected, beating their fringes into their eyelids, making things very difficult to see. They were at a compromise - keep their eyes open, and the moisture building up would blur things, but there certainly was no good in keeping them closed, was there?

The wind whistled in their ears and it stole away their words to incomprehensible noise. Despite this lack of communication, it didn't stop Cinder from sticking out Midnight's bow form out, even if the sheer force they travelled was trying to force her arm down. Jaune grabbed on, flattening the rest of his body before angling himself to shoot down at the forest like an arrow in motion.

"CHKRAWWW!"

It was enough to render eardrums deaf. Four or five nevermore in their flock came straight for the two, and faster than they anticipated; without time to react properly, one burst right in the middle, breaking the connection between the two. It barged its behemoth wings at Jaune's shoulders, sending him completely off his original course.

As this happened, Cinder shattered Midnight into tiny fractions, hundreds of tiny bits, and hurled them at the perpetrator, each shard of obsidian glass sizzling clean, permeable holes through the wings and talons and some of its body, rendering flight impossible. It headed downwards like a crashing plane, felling a few unfortunate trees.

Those fragments and shards came back to her, and they became a greatsword, just in time, too; the trees grew bigger and thicker, and the idea of crashing into one grew into prominence as she drew nearer. She arched her back up and both hands clasped the handle

of her purple-black weapon, and with a decisive action stabbed the long trunk of the first tree she came up across; she slid down the tree akin to how a knife would run down the carcass of a dead animal when butchering.

She heated her sword so it would burn through the wood and so it would be an easy draw out. Small wisps of smoke fizzed, and a few embers glowed a hot orange. Semi-alert she walked, aimless and her sword dragging across the mud and grass, leaving a line for a trail.

It seemed that mother fortune decided today wasn't going to be the greatest day for Cinder, she realised. Things have completely derailed: she wasn't in her desired location at all, and Jaune was just *somewhere* . Just somewhere. And that irritated Cinder, because anything could happen to him, he could get into a fight with a powerful, unmatched Grimm one-on-one, and he could get hurt.

She shut that thought off. Concerning too much was unhealthy. But what went on happened, as a moderate snarl rustled through the shrubs - two beady, glaring eyes staring through cracks in the bushes, the redness blending and almost imposing as the rest of the forest berries had there not been such a prominent, vicious glow to them.

She disassembled Midnight into a bow, but the beowulf was even quicker; it lunged forward with horrible teeth bared, ready to leave her as ground meat and bone. Cinder responded conservatively, using the beowulf's momentum to duck under the monster with a relatively low-energy slide, and right into her trap of obsidian shards, which she left inanimate and floating into the air. Some burned through the hide, skin and bony plating of the monster while other pieces stayed chipped in.

Cinder pirouetted on one foot and latched atop the beowulf's back, and it shook and made her wobble and was being difficult all-round. She stuck her hand out as if to hold an invisible weapon; bursting through the Grimm was not one but two handles of Midnight's

dagger form, and with it she cut so deep, making incisions, tearing muscles and melting through bone with the superheated blades. Soon it stopped, disappearing to an ash nothing more than a sinking pile on the grass.

Under her high-heeled shoe she stepped on it, grinding it deeper into the earth like it never even existed. She marched southwest, head straight high and with plenty of purpose; she would go to the marked spot first, and then meet up with Jaune and hopefully they'll be on the same team together-

"Ouch! Hey, that hurt!" The voice belonged to someone who looked like a grown lady with dwarfism. Or a womanchild. She was really tiny, and Cinder stumbled her over.

She was surprised to see the girl, barely at her chest, with black hair and green eyes, and a very bland-looking black outfit.

"What? You're not gonna say anything?"

Oh. Right. She forgot about apologising. Tiny people, tiny problems. It wasn't anything too bad.

"Sorry about that." Cinder remarked off-handedly.

"From the heart!"

Is she being serious?

"This is no time to mess around! We're- *I'm* training to be a Huntress, so I think the little things are the least of my concerns-"

"Yada yada yada," The girl rolled her eyes. "I did not come here to get lectured!" Either way, she stuck her hand out, an open handshake.

Cinder squinted, then massaged her forehead. "I've got no time for this. I'm finding someone else with higher aspirations, or better yet, my *actual* partner." She waved off the offer, and walked the other

way. She was surprised because somehow she appeared right in front of her again, with that same insistent hand.

"A handshake is a sign of trust; you not shaking it implies you don't trust me, do you?"

Cinder resisted the urge to roll her eyes so hard they'd fall out their sockets. *I can't even see your weapon, for the Brothers' sake!*

Nevertheless, she felt she wouldn't let things slide, so she took the palm of the little girl's hand.

"Well, my name's Trivia but you don't need to know me any longer."

Cinder was enthusiastic about that. Maybe she read the room, or forest, for once. "How's that?"

Trivia grinned. "Because I'm not real!"

And like that, Trivia cracked like the image of a broken mirror, like Midnight when made into dozens of pieces. Cinder jolted to that, retracted her hand, and Trivia was gone to the wind.

But leaning on the side of a tree was a tri-coloured girl: chocolate brown, strawberry pink and vanilla white, like the colours of ice cream flavours. The large, pink umbrella she had cast a shade over her, leaving her a darker tone like the saplings under the shadows of the large tree. Her outfit was prim, proper and stylish, with a white blazer-jacket which would have exposed her midriff had there not been a dark coloured corset underneath. Her boots with many laces travelled up to her knees, and she had gloves.

Her hair was pink on one half and brown on the other, with a streak of white running on the former side. Most notably the short girl had different eye colours for different pupils - pink on the right, brown on the left - and it made her stand out even more in Cinder's mind.

The shit-eating grin on her face said way too much.

"That was you, wasn't it?"

"Yep." Her voice was light like it didn't develop for a few years, that its growth was stunted. Or it missed two or three years of puberty.

The silence was affable, but it seemed the tri-girl wasn't fazed by it.

"What the actual fuck just happened?"

"So all of that," Cinder pointed in a general direction. They had gained a mile or two from where they last stepped off. "All of that shit *was you*?"

Neopolitan, they introduced themselves earlier on, laughed like a hyena. "Yes! Yes, oh, it was! Did you like it?"

"No." Blunt as a hammer, Cinder responded. "That was all part of your Semblance?"

"Yyyep."

"It's illusion-based as you said, right?"

"Uh-huh."

"But it makes physical illusions." Cinder itched her head. "But physical illusions can't exist - if it's physical, then it exists, and that literally goes against what illusions are because illusions are fake and don't have a physical form and- oh my Gods, I'm having a migraine."

"Just don't think about it too much. It all boils down to 'physical illusions'."

"But that doesn't work! If you can manifest something and give it a physical form then isn't that just creation?"

"I guess so?"

"So your Semblance is to do with creation, then."

"Nope."

" *What ?*" They trudged on.

"Still doesn't change the fact that you're my partner."

Yeah. That too. Cinder forgot all about that, and the cameras fixed everywhere meant there was no lying out, and that she was going to be stuck with this annoying and confusing little goblin for possibly four years. They made eye contact, and she had been insistent of reminding her that.

She was praying an arm that Jaune's pair would get paired up with hers.

"Your voice is naturally irritating," She walked in slow steps, and her heels felt they were sinking into the ground with each stab. Jaune probably was onto something about heels being a self-inflicted detriment to herself.

"Then it must be doing its job." She grinned just like a goblin would. "La la la la, la la la la, Elmo's World-!"

"Shut up!" Cinder wailed. "Nobody can have a voice as annoyingly high-pitched as yours!"

Neopolitan dialed up the 'annoying' in her voice by five. "We're supposed to continue to the northern part of the forest. To get to the temple. Which is north. Get it? Because if we wanna go to the northern temple, we go north because it's in the same direction-"

"I get it!" Cinder resisted the urge to burn the whole forest down as things were standing. "I've got someone in mind that I want to partner with. We chose a spot to meet up at, so I'm going there." She started walking. Without Neopolitan.

"And what? Go there on the basis of *chance* ?" Neo stopped Cinder's resolute stride. "Whoever you're looking for might not even be there! We all went in different directions! I know that for a fact! Cinder, it's a *gamble* !"

"Then don't come with me." Gold eyes stared into pink and brown ones. "I never said you had to. And cut it out with the voice! It's hurting my ears!"

"If it gets you to listen then I surely won't." Neopolitan cleared her throat. It did the opposite. Her voice was disgruntled, and her vocals came in patterned cracks. "La LA IA LA, la LA IA La, eLMO'S WORlD-"

Cinder shot an arrow at the closest tree, her rage superheating it. "You. Are frustrating. Me!" She spoke in seethingly short sentences. Single sounds, even. "Cut it out with the act, because you sound like a child. Actually, you sound worse than one; your voice isn't even *real* at this point!"

At that, it sounded like breaking glass. Neopolitan's sing-song was cut short, and her words shattered, made to echo silently before dissipating.

Cinder went silent too. She watched the shorter girl gesture, sticking her index finger out and miming 'any second now'. Any second now.

Any second now.

Aaaaaanny second now.

"Knnr-hak-cak," Neopolitan coughed through a balled fist. "Ah. Oh wow. Guess the secret's out of the bag already..."

"What secret? What was that?" Cinder blinked rapidly. "Can you please *elaborate* ?"

She sighed exaggeratedly, like she was given a burdensome labour. "Because you asked," she twirled her folded umbrella. "Truth is, I can extend my Semblance to pretty far lengths - my voice included. I can make it *appear* as if there is noise coming from my mouth and throat."

"But you actually can't, can you? At least, not physically-! You're mute!"

"Uh-huh."

"And this whole time it's just been an illusion, hasn't it?"

"Jackpot!" Neopolitan hopped giddily.

"I'd have been more impressed had it not been for your abrasive personality."

"Er- your temper lights like a dry matchstick, so who're you to speak about who has a shit personality and who doesn't?"

"With all the shit you've pulled off, I think my reactions are more than justifiable, might I say, *lenient* ."

"Keep telling yourself that, Miss Matchstick." There was the slightest hint of burning smoke Neopolitan picked up, and a distant rumbling shaking the foundations in which it shook their feet and made them lose some balance. "Speaking of matchsticks..."

It was relentless. It was on a rampage. It was an ura major, and it was huge; a towering figure which would scare small buildings, which was a feat which was impressive on its own, as tall as the tallest trees, with the same bony armour and twisted teeth and meat renders for claws as the rest of the Grimm have, this was a standout creature of the darkness. Its snarling snout told clear that this was what rage and fury and despair looked like.

"Oh,"

And most of all...

"My,"

It was burning a bright, hot blaze of fire all over its body.

"Head north!" Cinder beckoned.

"Fucking,"

"NEOPOLITAN! I SAID HEAD NORTH!"

"GODS!"

Running away felt like saving a breath, if anything, firing at that thing from range was wasting energy. The ursa slammed a hand down and Cinder felt she suffered under a mild vertigo, her vision shaking slightly at a fixed point. It was rapid, and she weaved under a hand of five deathly claws, afterwards daring to spin and fire an arrow; it hit the impenetrable body and shattered wholly, the glass bits scattering. Still in control, she honed them in, superheating them to beyond-blistering temperatures.

They didn't cut through fully, still stuck, and if anything the damage looked more like tiny little scabs on its right leg, but if anything that was perfect, because...

Tsss...

BWOOM!

While still attached, the ursa's leg was made useless. A considerable amount had blown off clean, gone to the detonation of Cinder's make-shift bomb. So much of the forest had been burned and scarred at this point, the crackle of burning flames eating away at the forest. And that wasn't considering the Grimm itself, whose lit body left a infernal trail. But that might have made it all the more terrifying; with its new, limping run, it was like a beast from Hell was clawing its

way to this Remnant, a hanging jaw giving the impressions of a breath of fire.

Suddenly, a flock of other candidates pass by - Cinder had no time to question how they ran past the ursa, the fire, the whole scene itself as if it never even existed-

Neo.

But what could they do? This was just buying time. It was just an illusion, it would wear off when the criteria, whatever they were, were met, hers never lasted forever. They had no proper planned course of action.

As if she read her mind, Neo fretted. "How can we come up against that! Just us two, alone!" They stretched their stride for as far wide as their bodies humanly could. "A weakness to my Overactive Imagination is proximity! The illusions will just shatter when we get far enough! *We* have no game plan!"

"All we can do is go north. For our lives. There's gonna be students collecting relics there already. We can beat it with them, whoever they are."

"And what if there isn't any! What if we're the first ones to make it to the temple! What if it's still us two!"

"The sun's already at its highest point. Enough time has passed to let me confidently come to the conclusion that there's already people collecting relics, ready to form teams." Cinder finalised. "Just head north, and we'll be fine. Even if you don't trust me on this, just have a little faith."

Neo thought Cinder was perceptive on that last part. This was just the Initiation, and things were already getting so brutal; it made so much sense to feel less than optimistic about the Huntsman's trials, about everything. But the saying said 'work hard, or die trying', something along the lines of do or die, she wasn't completely sure,

but all it meant was that for once, she tried to find the confidence in Cinder's barked commands. So she just kept running forward, just as she had always been from the start, from minutes ago. She ran. Pat-pat-pat-pat, the footfalls of her heeled boots on the floor.

Neo didn't think about attacking, Neo funnelled all the other noises from her surroundings and got what she assumed was tunnel vision - the temple appeared through cracks of the currently-spared forest, and all that was there was the finish line. She wouldn't tire. She refused to. But the ursa was getting fearfully close, that its melting body was nearing and its heated breath would brush and push against her back and Cinder's. It was doubt versus resolve, and the chance of death was looking just as equal to the chance of finding others that could potentially lessen her chance of dying.

Her eyes gleamed for a second as she saw many heads of hair, white, grey, black, blonde, red; following Cinder's gambit was making steps to paying off! All she had to do was tell Cinder to grab their attention and maybe they'd be able to fight the ursa major together-

An explosion of amber flanked her side, knocking her to the side and into the open concrete field, a hair's razor away from knocking her into a boulder. Using the momentum she skidded twice, positioning herself to land on her feet by the third.

"Yeaahh! More people!" A hammer-wielding girl cheered like a brute - the bombs belonged to her, Neo guessed.

Cinder got half what she wanted. People at the temple before them, but at the cost of more Grimm. There was a nevermore, three beowulves and a particularly large deathstalker. There was enough people to make two and a half teams, so ten people overall.

Back to the headcount, she tried recognising faces. There was Ruby and Yang, Pyrrha and the bitchy heiress and there was Jaune-

Jaune!

"Jaune!"

And true to Neopolitan's word, Jaune was here and definitely not back at where they were supposed to meet up. She would not give that point to the girl mainly due to personal reasons like pride, but! But, really she wouldn't hear the light of day with the yapping Neopolitan would drag out. (i)I was right! You were wrong!(i) It sounded insufferable.

But no time for that; things were getting sticky, and Jaune might just be the key to breaking it down.

"Cinder?!" There was a sigh of relief and a tiny bit of guilt in Jaune's exclamation. "CINDER-!"

Instinct and reaction made her leap, and Cinder would gracefully flip over a swinging arm of one of the beowulves; mid-air, her right foot was clustered in obsidian glass, and the Grimm's all-attacking mentality would be its fatal flaw as it tried to chew her alive, as her superheated leg swung down at its head and cleaved it off with a fine strike. A perfect bicycle kick.

One Grimm down didn't mean much in the grand scheme of things, especially when that one was the 'fodder' of the bunch. Jaune would parry the stinger of the deathstalker, and using his Aura in his heater shield bludgeon a leg with lightning Dust, sending a current and making the monster twitch and convulse in paralysis.

More grenades and explosions went off and even more things went flying, and at this point was insensitive to the ringing in her ears and rumbling under her feet. A small boulder flew at her head, and she had to disintegrate it with the touch of her palm. Cinder tended to the deathstalker first, helping Jaune by hacking at the extra four or so joints.

Jaune stabbed the head of the scorpion Grimm; it seemed to damage a lot of nerves, and its body collapsed, unable to command itself to stay upright. It slowly started to decay.

Feathers for arrows rained down in torrents, and Jaune barked. "Cinder! Under me!" He used some hard-light Dust to increase his shield's surface area, and despite hitting like strong bullets, nothing else happened. Jaune lowered his shield and they looked up, and saw Ruby riding the nevermore with Crescent Rose's hooked blade lodged deep into its beak.

It looked like Ruby was on a kamikaze mission, because the big bird was a jet crashing down at a hard angle, and judging by looks it felt the girl was about as much of a passenger (unwillingly) as anyone could be. Her trajectory was a certain triple-coloured girl running away from a Grimm on fire that somehow nobody noticed.

Jaune saw another direct copy spring forth and draw its attention, keeping the ursa's trajectory straight into a crash course with, well, the crashing nevermore. He assumed it was some kind of material clone, because she was more than fine with neglecting whatever happened to it next.

More debris went flying, as if things haven't enough, and Neo was launched up with the rubble, spreading her parasol and floating gently down. For Ruby it was quite the opposite, tumbling and rolling in a rather ungraceful manner, only stopping once she hit a pillar softly. The nevermore hit the bucket, but the ursa hadn't.

At this point it was addled with holes like swiss cheese, you could see the view through the wounds it possessed. Not even that would stop it. It would charge as it always would, but Cinder would make sure it was its last.

"I have to use my Semblance on it. But I need yours to amplify the potency."

And so they ran, and Jaune raised a block against a flaming hand, and Cinder would grab the other arm, the fire harmless to her. It was her domain after all. Jaune would stab Crocea Mors into the ankle, anchoring the ursa major to the ground, and would hold Cinder by her back, his Aura gleaming a brilliant white and gold.

Then Cinder's Aura, amplified by Jaune's, seared a scorching orange, and a great light was made so blinding that Jaune had to bark at everybody else in the temple.

"Cover your eyes!"

And the Grimm was nothing more than a few free-falling ashes. It had been vapourised, and all that was left was the charred cobble for a shadow. Everything seemed to slow down now, everyone was done with their own share of Grimm and they could relax after all. Now it was just a matter of trying to strike up a conversation...

"Ahem." Jaune nervously cleared his throat.

"Hm?"

"About the whole 'pick a spot and find each other to partner up' thing, I had that huge deathstalker chasing me and Pyr throughout the forest,"

"Pyr?" Cinder was intrigued with the nickname.

"Oh yeah, just a nickname I made up for her on the spot. She likes it, so I think it's gonna stick," Jaune put himself back to his first train of thought. "Anyways! We basically got launched straight next to Ren, who had a few beowulves and a king taijitsu on him, we ran as a three, found Nora on the way who kept throwing bombs at them, made it to the temple where Ruby and her team played pony with a giant nevermore, then you guys came in with that massive ursa, which I have to ask, why was it on fire?"

Cinder shrugged weakly, which said quite a lot.

"Huh..." Jaune walked closer to the centre of the temple, which had chess pieces on a stone podium of sorts. How they haven't been justled and knocked into the ground, he didn't question. "The Headmaster said to get a relic after getting here, I'm guessing these are it?" He itched his neck before picking up a knight.

"That's it?"

"That's it." Cinder reiterated. The storm was over, and they had passed the Initiation test. They both made it out alive and whole, and that was all that mattered for Cinder.

"Hm, you reckon we'd be put on the same team? I mean, it's not out of the question, is it? Especially after that link-up we did."

"It's highly likely." Cinder assumed with a strength and confidence that made it seem almost like fact. "We work well together, and they'll definitely take that into consideration when forming teams. They should think we have a strong chemistry working between you and I, and it's only sensible if Beacon capitalise on our synergy. We can achieve things in great strides with the academy if we're put together."

To her shock, Cinder and Jaune were unironically *not* put on the same team. Jaune Arc, Nora Valkyrie (that was the name of the explosions nutjob), Pyrrha Nikos and Lie Ren all made up Team JNPR (like the berry shrub). It was a JNPR that did not have a 'C' or 'F', and it most certainly did not have Cinder Fall in its list of teammates.

There was RWBY which had Ruby, Yang, Weiss and that mysteriously broody girl they saw yesterday after Crater Face blew a crater in the face of the ground. Sorry, Ruby. There was also Team CRDL, which looked like a team full of bigots. Everything about their leader, Cardin, screamed 'all bark, no bite'.

"Now, I'd like the students: Cinder Fall,"

As the Headmaster spoke, Cinder dreaded. Her team. It was bad enough with the midget pantomime, and she gave no consideration to the second pair of students that would ultimately create the team she'd be on.

"Mercury Black, Emerald Sustrai and Neopolitan to come up front for me."

As they did, Cinder analysed the other two faces. Mercury was the tall, pale male, with grey hair, grey eyes, grey trousers, grey jacket, grey *everything* . Emerald had a bit more flair in her appearance, with an olive crop top exposing a lot of chocolate skin, white shorts with gold chains, and vibrantly short green hair.

As the other students in the theatre cheered, Cinder adopted a stoic face of indifference, which Emerald and Mercury had also, staring impassively at any direction in general. Neo grinned like a child.

"This team will go on as Team CMEN, led by Cinder Fall."
Headmaster Ozpin concluded. They were the last team formed, and were excused as such. Every team leader's Scroll would alert as to the location of their dorms, and they were given the rest of the day to gain familiarity with the school's facilities, time to adjust to the Huntsman life.

At the noise of footfalls and voices, Jaune struck up a conversation. "It's cool that we're both leaders to our own teams, don't you think?"

It would've been even cooler if we were on the same team. "I guess..."

"Come on, Cinder, it's not that bad; it's not like we're islands apart. We probably share classes together, we're in the same year so we share the same breaks and lunches and you've got new people to make connections with!" Jaune smiled, but couldn't help a tired sigh. He continued:

"Look, if things are really bad and you're that anxious about not being in the same team then I'll try arrange something with my team so you can sleep in our room."

"... You know I'll genuinely try to take up on that offer."

"Yeah, very much like you to."

"..."

Jaune found his room. With his open Scroll he placed it over the scanner, and the door unlocked with a click, two at most. Conveniently enough, it was the room opposite Cinder's, who also opened her door in the same manner.

"See, it's not *that* bad. We're just a corridor and two doors apart!"

... *That's the whole issue, knucklehead!* "I suppose so."

"Welp, me and my team's gotta unpack, so... see ya in a few?"

"See you in a few." She repeated. She entered, as did the rest of her team, and saw their suitcases on four beds, one each. Hers was black with a yellow zip, as appropriate to herself. The room was dead silent aside from the shuffling and moving of things and the occasional pop of Neo's bubblegum. It seemed everyone's ideas on which dresser and wardrobe aligned perfectly, because nobody fought over it.

Unpacking took little more than twenty-five, thirty minutes? The point was that it was quick, and Cinder now didn't have the luxury of having a distraction to help her put off speaking to Mercury or Emerald. Oum forbid speaking to Neo. She thought of many ways to address her team, being leader, but her closest attempt was left as nothing more than a hitched breath.

There was something *off-putting* about the sight of Emerald on her Scroll with earbuds plugged in, and Mercury sleeping the hours away. Neo was away doing her own thing around the building, but even her lack of presence added to what she felt; invisibility. It was like she wasn't even there to them, so it didn't take long for her to abandon her efforts. Brooding teenagers looked scary, she concluded.

She laid in her bed on her Scroll, staring at the clock at the top right hand side of the screen. She had one last glance at the two, and they were completely absorbed in their own worlds, one in slumber and the other in the blue light of her screen. She sighed, somehow feeling more exhausted than when she outran an ursa.

Things are going greeeeaat.

And that's chapter 2. Poor Cinder, now that's four years without Jaune in the same room as her. That's an L on her behalf.

I've always wondered, couldn't Neo just use her Semblance to make herself her own voice? I mean, the wiki says they can affect "the person(s)" she's targeting, and are "highly convincing". As for the glass-breaking part... well, everybody knows that.

Back to what I was saying at the top, I'm all for the Slice of Life route (unless the poll I'm gonna do says otherwise, and my own decision-making comes to play), but that shouldn't affect all the conflict in the story. After all, a story can't go far without conflict, whether it be the obvious fight scenes and arguments, to the more subtle ones like small actions which could set up larger conflicts. We need them for the story to progress.

When I refer to Slice of Life, I meant a lighter tone that stays a bit truer to the original RWBY; even the light-hearted first few volumes had some dark issues like racism, physical and verbal bullying, upbringing and political viewpoints etc etc, but a lot of that also comes with the show's funny moments between characters, which seems to move the show towards a lighter comedy feel when you think about it.

Plus the fight scenes, now that's some real eye candy. I miss you Monty, Shane.

Boiling things down, all I'm asking is for some clarity: the better question I should've asked was "How light-hearted should it be?", because I feel a true 'Slice of Life' story would be strictly no dark themes at all, and that would take away a lot from RWBY, and by extension most forms of media.

This is the grim world of RWBY, not Winnie the Pooh.

Like I said, I'll just throw a poll after this gets uploaded.

And happy New Year's Eve!!!

Day One

When I said 'A few days, maybe a few days past a week', I did not mean basically two weeks. Oops . Its a mix of life happening and me feeling uninspired enough to not be productive, including this among many things I have. Anyways chapter 3 yayyy.

The Glass Unicorn again. Madame and her daughters. They were worse than any Grimm, any monster, and Cinder resented them with every breath she could make. Past, present, future, there would always be that little hole in her chest, a void made by them of irreparable damage that would be so, so difficult to rectify.

She lived a life without a childhood: illness, beatings and being overworked meant she was always close to death's arms, and when she was, that was when they would relent their abuse, just by a little bit, so that her broken body would recover partially, and by then the cycle repeated. Madame would call them 'virtuous acts', as if they were virtuous at all, and as if they were an act in the first place. Being given time to recover shouldn't be a luxury, it should be a standard, something every human had the right for.

But Cinder wasn't a human, not in the hotel, not certainly in the eyes of cruel Madame, she was a worker. Their little worker, who they would overwork like a machine, only tending to their maintenance when she was failing to even walk. But poor performances meant disciplinary action, the hotel owner would call it, which really was just more bruises and collar shocks.

It brought her to where she was right now, on the dirty wood floor of her closet-room being kicked and whacked with anything remotely rigid. They made sure it was blunt as not to cause stab wounds because that would kill her, and they wouldn't want to lose their little dear family member. But the point still remains, her frail and delicate

body gaining spots in shades of purple and blue again, because this wasn't the first, and it almost seemed like it would never reach an end.

Madame bludgeoned her ribs at the side with her wood broom, and Cinder's eyes went to the back of her head, and she had died-

Cinder awoke with a quiet but startled gasp, beads of sweat everywhere on her body, she could feel it, her hair splayed all over her pillow. Her bed meant she was right beside the window, and she would see the little blanket of yellow sunlight over the school campus. Her Scroll read quarter past five. Everyone else was sound asleep, especially Mercury, he snored away to Vacuo.

This time there was no Jaune to scramble and panic over her, *for her*, to ramble frantically and tell her off for having such nightmares which made her look at death's door to them, that she gave him and his family a higher blood pressure. She knew that they cared for her, that she was just another sister in the household, she appreciated that.

But waking up without that, without the responses she was so used to seeing by now, it left quite the hollow feeling in her chest.

It was better not to dwell on sad things for too long, Cinder remembered what Dad used to say.

Cinder entered the bathroom and went through the intricate, well-drilled procedure of stretching, brushing her teeth, washing her face, doing her hair, changing, and hoping all of that would wake her up just enough to get some caffeine. The cafeteria should be open by now...

As she left she was greeted with the sight of three students in their uniforms and one in their pyjamas, albeit they looked to nice to be clothes to crumple and sweat and stink in. Not that the girl was unhygienic or anything, but they looked so *designer*, with some posh Mistrali brand patterned all over.

Their eyes met briefly, and that was more than enough to start on another topic.

"Guys look, it's *that* new freshmen team's leader." They all spared a glance at Cinder as the brown-haired girl spoke. Hanging on the collar of the girl without her uniform on was a pair of black aviators.

"What do you mean by *that* team?" Cinder was puzzled, there was some context going around that she certainly did not catch on.

"Why, you're captain to Team *Semen* !"

Cinder's eyes widened. C-M-E-N. She felt her jaw drop, and she covered that with the palm of her hand.

"COCO!" The rabbit faunus had the decency to shriek in horror while the male half of the four did show disdain, but less obviously so.

"Apologise right now!"

"Sorry, I just had to..."

Coco did apologise but she had a little giggle in her words. Cinder felt she was mischievous in nature, and that this definitely wasn't the first time she had crossed boundaries like just now. She was too shocked to be angry either way.

Coco headed for the cafeteria with a slight skip in her step, and it was instinctive that the two boys went after her before she'd cause more carnage.

"Sorry about her," the other girl stayed behind, obviously for Cinder. "Coco can be a bit... *unhinged* with no filter, but she's a really nice person below her surface value."

"I hope so." Still, that didn't stop her from feeling sour about things, even if it was by just a little. Things went silent with a pregnant pause and added with the girl's apparent shyness (Cinder assumed), all that girl did was shuffle between her feet uncomfortably.

"I didn't catch your name. Would you... Tell me it?" Her rabbit ears drooped, intentional or not, nobody else knew.

... *Cute*. Cinder would've felt incredibly guilty not to say, so she relented. "... It's Cinder."

That raised the girl's spirits. "Cinder, huh? Like the glowing embers of lit coal? Well, I think it's a nice name and it definitely suits your look," the girl rambled, "You know, because you have black hair and amber eyes, and you got red and yellow sleeping clothes on..." The girl groaned into her hands.

"I'm humiliating myself, I know! I'm just not that good with people, so I'm really sorry a-and I think I'll just go-"

"I never said that." Cinder cut her short.

"Huh?"

"About you embarrassing yourself. I never said that." Cinder pointed at her chest. "You did. It's got nothing to do with me. You just assumed it."

"... Sorry-"

"Ap-pap-pap, don't go apologising again. An action loses value when you do it too often, especially asking for forgiveness."

"I guess you're right."

"Those words came out your mouth, not mine. You put that on yourself. Your shy, introverted demeanor screams insecurity in my face, so it's easy to see why you'd say such a thing about yourself." And Cinder was hitting all the right spots, judging by how she'd shift and look down.

"But that's not what I'm getting at." At this, Cinder sparked curiosity in the faunus. "Take it from me, a first year who hasn't even had their first hours in class yet - you're a second year, you've went through

your own Initiation, you've attended a year's worth of lessons, a year's worth of lunch breaks, a year's worth of *growing* in Beacon. And that's no easy feat.

"The fact that you're a second year shows me you've got grit, courage and plenty of drive to stay here and follow your aspirations, because the weak-willed would have walked away by the second day. And you have not. You're tougher than you look, so conduct yourself to appear more like it."

The faunus girl was stunned. They were words she'd hear from Coco, Fox and Yatsunashi often, but they were people she was familiar with; people that got to know the real her, that got her to open up to her all that time ago.

So there was a new value, a new weight, hearing that same message of belief and self-confidence from a complete stranger she'd only known five minutes ago that made those words resonate so strongly within.

The next thing she knew was her hugging Cinder, and tightly too. The latter nearly fell over by surprise, but after she saved herself, she was awkwardly patting her on the back.

"I think- I *know* you've just made my day!" The rabbit faunus had a sharper edge with her brown eyes, they were more clear, more brave. "Hearing that from someone I barely even know just- just warmed my heart! Thank you!" The girl skidded down the hall to the dining area to join her team.

"And it's Velvet! Velvet Scarlatina!" She waved, and she disappeared, too small and far for the eye to see.

"Aww..."

Jaune. Cinder didn't know when, but looking at his coy smile meant he had at least seen Velvet hugging her.

"Did you see-"

"-All of it? Yeah." He looked at her like how a proud parent would look at their child when they took their first steps. "Super cute. Making people's days already, huh?"

Cinder thought she might as well go with it. Better than Jaune's cooing voice cooing her in a cooing fashion. "Of course. I've made your day every day for the last five-and-something years."

"Yeah yeah," he rolled his eyes. "I was gonna ask if you wanted to go to breakfast now. It's early so there's no queue yet."

Her and Jaune. Just them two, as things have always been when it wasn't her and the whole Arc family, as things should've been. But the school had the last laugh for that.

"Y-Yeah! I can come right now, actually."

"You're not gonna invite your team?"

Cinder looked at her team, all still asleep. "I think they wouldn't mind." At that they went to breakfast, Team JNPR plus one Cinder Fall.

Unknowingly, Emerald Sustrai was playing possum, she wasn't actually asleep, and she heard everything.

Professor Port and Professor Oobleck were *weird* .

The first lesson was Grimm Studies, and it ended up with Miss Prim and Proper going toe to toe against a small boarbatusk that somehow was her height. The student won, but at the cost of Cinder losing like five pens because all the wind pressure was blowing her stuff away. You'd think that was bad enough but there was one student unlucky enough to have some of the arena's floor thrown into his face when the Grimm did that spin attack.

The fight lowered what respect she had for Weiss in the first place below the ground. Being angry at your *leader* for trying to help? She didn't deserve Ruby.

Back to Port, the man did not stop rambling about his prime days, back when he had the 'mightiest Grimm grovelling at his feet', back when 'everyone remembered the name that was Peter Port'. Well, she certainly did not hear his peers talk about him so highly, if not *at all*, and it seemed he was more of a glory hunter in his day, looking for the thrill and reward. Not Huntsman material.

After that was History with Professor Oobleck, and Cinder had to say, he was a complete *nutjob*. To him, coffee was some sort of highly volatile fuel that kept him going. His lectures were more like incoherent rambles and his pacy walks between his desk and board left after-images. That lesson they learned about a faunus-human war, and it seemed that Cardin from yesterday was raised really traditionally, faunus hate-boners and all that.

She was going to keep him in mind as someone not to associate with.

But that wasn't even the real highlight of the lesson. No, it appeared the stupid hunk of conceitedness mistook her distasteful stare as fluttering her pretty eyelashes at him. He winked like he could actually get women, and the wanted to hurl right there and then. Best case scenario, it got all over him.

That was besides the point. For the number one preparatory school for juvenile Huntsmen, these teachers seemed... less than what you'd expect. But there was a reason for everything, Mom always said, so there was a reason these people were qualified to teach her and not some other teacher. Either way, they were very full of character, even if some traits were questionable at most and less than desirable at worst.

First years didn't even have half the lessons they were supposed to have, another luxury under the excuse of adjusting to life at Beacon.

But even then, those two lessons alone felt like two blasts of fatigue right at her eyes. It was a miracle she even made it to twelve-thirty, which was the only lunch break they'd get for the whole day.

Cinder sat on a lone table with the other two females of her squad, Neo and Emerald. The loudest noise they made between each other was Neo eating her fries at an obnoxiously loud volume. That was definitely her Semblance, and it was itching her brain.

"Neo! Can you shut up! This isn't ASMR!" She snapped.

"You finally spoke!" Neo sighed. "Holy Oum, the silence was worth a year of straight teenage angst!"

"So..." This time it was Emerald to speak. "We didn't really get to introduce each other yesterday. Uhm, I'm Emerald Sustrai."

Cinder raised an eyebrow. That's a bit odd. She seemed like the scary type of passive, 'don't care' type of girl. Now things seemed otherwise.

"I'm Cinder Fall, nice to meet my teammate for the next four years."

...

"... So, Cinder, do you have any personal hobbies, interests, or-"

"Heya, Cinder!"

Jaune. He arrived with his team, consisting of Pyrrha, Nora and Ren, if she remembered properly. Team RWBY were *somewhere* doing RWBY stuff, which could only go so well seeing how Ruby's confidence would crumble at a few bad words, and Blake, assuming from her more-than-eager participation in Oobleck's class from before, would mean she and Weiss would be at each other's necks over faunus rights.

That team was going to implode just by the look of things.

Poor Yang.

"Mind if we sit here?" He asked.

"No, not at all."

"Wait, there's only seven of us. Mercury, right? Where's Mercury?"

"He went-"

"-To the toilet. I dunno, somewhere around the toilets. Most likely the toilet." Neo cut Cinder off. Cinder assumed she meant that.

"It's been half our lunch. That's thirty minutes." Jaune had a look of concern. "What's he doing?"

"Smoking. Vaping. Drugs."

Prft!

Cinder wiped any juice from her mouth. *Argh, Neo! You made me spit all over the table!* She got a paper towel and started wiping down anything she got her drink on, which luckily enough wasn't much.

Jaune cringed at the scene. He faced Neo. "I wouldn't think a Huntsman to-be would drink, smoke and take drugs, especially when that would hurt them more than help."

"What, you *didn't* see the pills on his drawer?" Neo said it like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Cinder told herself it was a joke, that she was messing with her screws, but that didn't stop her from going slightly paler than usual.

"Neo, do you *want* to destroy our reputation on the first day? Do you know how bad things can get for us if everyone thinks we've got drug addicts for teammates!?"

"Alright, alright, I get it! Jeez, chill your chili beans." Neo rolled her eyes. But a part of her knew that her leader was right, it was dangerous to say things like that aloud.

After all, the Old Man said that reputation is something you should keep the tightest grips on.

The table was silent again, save for Ren and Nora's animated chat with Neo (then again, that was just Nora and Neo with the occasional Ren comment), Pyrrha resting her head face-down on the dinner table, and Emerald glancing at her-

"Oh. Right. You were saying something before Jaune came?"

Emerald's eyes widened ever so slightly in surprise before she composed herself to talk. "Oh, right. I... I was asking i-if you had any personal hobbies or interests, I'm just trying to get to know my team better, and what better way to start than with my captain herself."

"... If you consider glass-making a hobby, then there you go."

"Nice," Emerald said, albeit a bit forced for the likings of smooth, coherent conversation. "So, how does it work? How do you do it?"

Cinder told herself that she'd might as well explain it fully. "Well, it starts by making the glass malleable like any moldable material. You heat it in a furnace of about two-thousand degrees and the glass should be paste-like, and after that, well... you mold it to your heart's desire. That's the craft of glass-making."

"Cool. Cool." Emerald took a breath as if to steady herself, but the reasons to Cinder were unknown. "So... knowing that, how come you've chosen the path of the Huntsman?"

Cinder squinted her amber eyes into Emerald's blood-red, curiosity and the oddest suspicion evident in the former. Why the sharp turn?

"What's with the question? Is there anything you need to know from me?"

"Just... Curious is all..." Emerald had a very subtle shift in her body, leaning forwards. "I mean, if you're good at glass-making, then why not pursue it as a job? If it's a hobby you're good at, then why choose Beacon Academy? Why?"

Where Emerald was going with this was clear as mud, but she decided to go along with it. Cinder responded:

"Think of it this way." She raised two fingers. "A hobby and a passion can lead to the same thing, but for me personally, they're at different places on the scale. Your hobby can be boxing and you can certainly have a passion for it, yes, but you might be working in an office to get by.

"For me, things are different: my hobby is glass-making, but my passion lies elsewhere. I can certainly glass-make, but I don't particularly have that spark, that passion that makes you dream of it at night, that makes you work hard for it. My passion, calling, my *vocation* is to be a Huntsman, and to get by, I've come to Beacon, acting on that drive that I have."

That seemed to satiate Emerald's weird curiosity for the time being. She was in a state of pondering, thinking about what had just been said. Those reasons were lost on Cinder but ultimately chalked it up to Emerald's questions having no real, deeper meaning.

So there was nothing happening again in the moment, and the heavy silence between her and the mint-haired girl prompted her to tackle a problem she'd been having for quite a while now.

Cinder pulled out her Scroll under the table and messaged Jaune, rather bluntly:

I've been having nightmares recently.

To Jaune's credit he didn't react obviously, only slightly raising an eyebrow. That was a trait Cinder liked about Jaune; he was reliable, especially when you needed him to be. He responded:

Jaune: Again? And how frequently?

Twice as of now, one on the day we had our Initiation and today .

It was an issue that surprised Jaune more than it should've; when Cinder finally opened herself to Jaune, when she told him about her past, her *awful* upbringing (it would leave the sourest, most horrible taste in his mouth and leave his core broken every time he reminded himself of what she'd told him), he made it his mission along with his family to more than make up for the years of pain, neglect and sadness.

But with his family he slowly healed her, she found strength and had something to look forward to when she woke up.

But that was the whole point; it basically had been a while since she last had nightmares, Cinder wouldn't hide them from him, she was very honest about herself to him, so he was confused as to why the sudden resurgence.

Jaune: That's weird, you haven't had them in a while.

That's why I'm telling you this.

Jaune: I don't think it's best to talk about it here, as in at lunch with people who could look at our Scrolls quite easily.

Can we talk about it tonight, then?

Jaune: But where though? I don't think our dorms are the most private of places .

I'll think about it in the rest of our classes. I'll ping you where to go.

Jaune: Alright.

Taking everybody completely off-guard was the voice belonging to somebody much older, out of their prime years with grey hair and black spectacles. It was Headmaster Ozpin. "Quite the big table we have here."

True to his word, most tables were occupied with just four people, a single team. The joint table of CENJNPR stuck out like a sore thumb.

"Y-You see, me and Cinder are siblings. We're relatives." Jaune found himself quite nervous in his presence.

Ozpin took a glance at Cinder Fall, then Jaune Arc, and his wise old years told him not to question it. For him, there was a reason for everything.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, sir." Cinder answered. She watched him swirl the coffee in his mug and drew a comparison - if it was a fuel for Oobleck, then for Ozpin it was a fine beverage, an elixir for him. He treated it like the most golden wine.

"Well, I'll leave you students be." Ozpin drifted more than walked away, almost like a phantom. It was like his age and intellect created a shroud of mystery for him.

Maybe he's just old.

Neo spoke again. "Do ya reckon he lies about his age to people?"

"You mean 'do all teachers lie about their age'?" Nora broadened the other girl's question.

"Nora, that's not nice." Ren chastised his childhood friend, and all Nora could do was grin ferally.

Elsewhere, other first years were heard moping and complaining.

"We were supposed to be doing Combat lessons this week but they pushed it to next."

"What? Why?"

"We were supposed to be doing some practical work in the Emerald Forest but we all know what happened there."

"There was some huge fire which burned down a lot of the forest, nearly half of it, actually."

It could be anything, Cinder said internally. Fire Dust, explosions, anything.

"You'd think anything would set the forest on fire, but David heard Professor Goodwitch say it narrowed down to a single student."

It could be anyone.

"I'm pretty sure her name was 'Cinder Fall', though he said he couldn't hear them properly."

What.

How!

It was also one of those odd moments when everyone in the dining hall just so happened to pick up on what was said. Now everyone was talking and conspiring with each other on their on benches.

"Cinder Fall?"

"Who's Cinder Fall?"

"I swear she's her team's leader. What was the name of it, again? Team... Team Semen, yeah!"

All Cinder could do to hide her pure embarrassment was put her head on the table. There were laughs and there were people

genuinely feeling sorry for her. At least they sympathised.

"Bro, it's Cinnamon, not Semen," that student's partner corrected him.

"Oh, my bad." The former said. "... B-But when you think about it, the mnemonic, though! C-M-E-N! SEMEN!"

"Dude, shut up! Everyone can hear you!" His teammate hissed through a whisper-shout. Either way it garnered more laughs, which certainly didn't help Cinder in the slightest.

Cinder groaned through her arms, which she used to hide her face.

All Jaune could do was gently stroke and play with her hair to soothe her, running streaks down to the hairband which started her braid ponytail. Jaune didn't see it, but that put a small smile on her face.

She liked it when Jaune played with her hair.

The breeze of the cold air did nothing against Cinder's coat, the one Chelsea gave as a present for her birthday. She stared at the broken moon which seemed to hang head and shoulders above all the stars in the midnight sky. The white colour was as pure and brilliant as Jaune's Aura, and by extension his soul.

She picked up on Jaune's footfalls and turned around, seeing him with his Scroll on one hand and his sword in another. He said: "You'd think that Beacon's rooftop would be more restrictive to student access... I guess I'm wrong." Jaune sat next to her, flourishing his sword. "So what're we doing with these?"

"We'll ride them like ponies and play pretend, you'll be the knight in shining armour and I'll be the damsel in distress." Cinder rolled her eyes. She found it perplexing how someone like Jaune could be so inquisitive yet oblivious. "We're gonna be sparring up here, Jaune."

Another thought crossed her mind. "Unless you don't want to! We don't have to if you don't!"

"It's a good thing I'm in the mood, then." Jaune popped a few joints, rolling his shoulders and bouncing up and down. "Besides, it'll just be like old times!"

"Old times..." Old times. Cinder reminisced.

The bludgeoning sounds of wood on wood and the sounds of her own grunting filled her ears. Cole Arc, father to the Arc household, Dad to Cinder, barked assessments of improvement.

"You open your body too much when striking; you like going on the back foot a lot, and you easily lose balance with power strikes. I want you to copy this..."

Cinder was panting, tired beyond the hours, with her bones aching deep into the marrow, the pain hurting like a million needles. But perseverance willed her to keep standing. Dad would tilt her shoulder or raise her chest, lift her back, position her arms, posing her like a still mannequin, teach and train her

She would glance at the side and see Jaune, the only male child in their family staring out through the kitchen window, a myriad of all sorts of unreadable emotions to the girl. Jealousy, envy, admiration, wonder? One thing was for sure; he was heavily invested, having a studious gaze in his eyes.

"I remember for the first few weeks that Dad would only train you." Using the shining finish of his sword, Jaune stared at a reflection of himself.

Cinder was surprised - it was as if they had been thinking of the same thing, the same memory.

"I'd always ask Mom: why her? Why would Dad train her and not me? Why couldn't I join in?"

In truth, Dad only complied to sparring with Cinder because that was the only way to truly interact with her at the time; she was so shut off from the family at first, so paranoid and scared of talking and connecting with them that she barely left Jaune's room, only going to eat and to use the toilet. It was like her sacred den.

"When Dad brought you home for the first time during the summer holidays, you were so tired that when he told everyone you needed to rest, you walked right to the first room you saw, which was mine."

It was almost anomalous at first when she wasn't always living like a hermit in Jaune's room. There was one case where, instead, she was in their large garden, not playing on their large swing but slicing and stabbing and attacking the base of their large and only tree with a branch the size of her leg. It was Mom's idea for Dad to give her a lesson or so on how to swing a sword, basic combat lessons. Dad was reluctant at first, but he eventually caved in to those requests.

Mom said it would be easier for her to open up if we invested in her interests.

"Dad already knew you had unlocked your Semblance before living with us, and I think that was the final nail in the coffin."

"He was the only one who saw." Cinder remembered. "My Semblance set the whole hotel on fire, everyone saw that, but only Dad picked up on my glowing hands." She clasped her hands together, feeling the texture of her own palms against each other. The whole building had been evacuated, Cinder included, and she bumped into Cole Arc, who had also been staying.

"I was so desperate - Dad was the first person I bumped into, and I just begged him to take me, take me away from that house of monsters. I got so lucky, looking back now, that I was taken in by you guys." She remembered Cole's conflicted face when he saw her state, her brutalised, weak state.

Their idle talk had become solemn and Jaune instinctively put an arm around Cinder's shoulders, in which she'd lean into. They just sat there for a good minute or so, enjoying each other's company.

Jaune stared at Crocea Mors, continuing after what he felt was the passing of an appropriate amount of time. "Either way, I wanted to take matters into my own hands."

"U-Uhm, Cinder?" Jaune fumbled his thumbs together, making circles around each other. A nervous tick. All her got was a look that was unreadable to him from her gold eyes, and there was a churning, chewing sensation forming a pit of anxiety in his stomach.

Jaune cleared his throat, trying his best to form concise words. "My D-Dad wouldn't train me, no matter how much I asked, n-no matter how much I'd beg him to. A-And I always see you training with him. So can you teach me what he taught you?"

There was no more words exchanged, and Jaune felt it was best to call it a day: why would Cinder go out of her way to teach him after all? Dad was right, he wouldn't be able to make it without a Semblance-

"I'm not a good teacher." Cinder rose from her bed, getting close to Jaune, who felt a myriad of emotions at that split-second. She got Jaune to hold his toy samurai sword. "But erm, your Dad got me to get into this stance whenever fighting anything."

She posed Jaune like a mannequin, a bright-red, blushing mannequin who was very much unaccustomed to the touch of anyone other than his sisters, parents and his very few friends, let alone a really pretty girl his age.

"That really got us close, y'know." Jaune smiled at her; it was that pure, syrupy-sweet smile that just brought a warmth to her. It beamed a bright gold to her.

"I'm glad it did."

Days would pass to weeks, and every time Cinder learned something new, Jaune would get it, too. It wasn't the same, they both knew that, but it was better to get something over nothing. That was obvious in itself.

The Arc family at this point were quite aware of the fact the two would spend an increasing amount of time with each other, almost to the point they were superglued at the sides. They'd use the swing together, eat together, play the same games together, and Jaune really brought out the beautiful, vibrant side of Cinder Fall. The happy side.

The day Dad discovered their little 'secret' together was on an early Christmas morning. He had their presents wrapped, as was everybody else's, ready to place it under the big tree they bought for that year. Everything was silent, save for the smacking of a plastic lightsaber and samurai blade and grunts of exertion.

It came from Jaune and Cinder's room. Conveniently they hadn't locked their door properly, so the little gap between the door and its frame was small enough not to reveal him, but big enough to let him see at a reasonable clarity.

He had to blink twice to see it; Jaune and Cinder, using toy swords, dishing it out against each other, Jaune moving and defending and attacking exactly as he taught the girl, holding his own quite well, even if Cinder appeared to dominate the whole time. How they were able to work in such a small space was a mystery in itself, but it explained why their room was practically beige and all his toys were in his chest and cupboard.

It was the day Cole had been proven wrong; he underestimated the tenacity of his son, that his desire to be a Huntsman wasn't some spur-of-the-moment dream that would fleet away with time - this was something Jaune wanted, Jaune craved, and he capitalised on every chance he was able to get his hands on.

"When I found my Semblance, that's when Dad trained us both seriously."

Cinder opted to do the dishes of her own will, seeing Mom and Dad, who usually did it together, went straight to bed. It had been a long day for them, so it was the least she could do. Jaune would help with wiping and drying.

Washing the dishes meant Cinder had a lot of time to think to herself, especially when there was eight plates, cups and almost double the cutlery. Her thoughts drifted and thought of certain... things, and before she knew it she had mishandled the large knife used for cutting the turkey, getting a rather large slit on her palm.

"A-Ahhh!" The pain was searing, and Jaune caught on almost instantly. He ran the tap's cold water, and beckoned at Chelsea to get first aid. Cinder hissed at the feeling of water hitting her soft, open wound, the crimson of her blood staining it a ruby red.

Jaune gently held Cinder's wrist as this happened, and shouted: "Chelsea! What's taking so long! Cinder's bleeding! Hurry up!"

Then something would happen. A revelation.

"Hurry... up..."

Out of Jaune's fingertips was a dazzling white, spreading across Cinder's cut hand. It was like magic, defying science by closing the wound, forming the scab, then falling off; it was so potent that it didn't even leave a scar. The pain Cinder had was gone, and in its place was, quite simply, shock.

"N-No way..."

"Jaune... that's... that had to be your Semblance. You have a Semblance!"

"That could just be my Aura!" Jaune said, but everything else said otherwise.

"Jaune! You can't use Aura to heal another living being! That's your Semblance! To channel Aura in ways nobody can!"

"Actually, what were you thinking of, on that day?" Jaune wondered.

"That... is, that is something you will learn someday, when I feel like saying."

Jaune laughed. "Well, we've been doing more sitting than moving, so how 'bout we start now?"

They got up, and got into their own fighting stances. Jaune ruled out: "No Semblances, I wanna gauge how well we do without them and I don't wanna attract attention."

A breezy gust of wind was all it took for them to charge at each other, Jaune parrying Midnight's jab. Cinder used that momentum to swivel and attempt another strike at Jaune's back, only for her wrist to be caught by Jaune's.

Suddenly they were in a deadlock, bodies stuck in a physical match of stamina. Who would last longer? Eventually Cinder toppled over, intent on swerving so she could turn and pin Jaune down. Jaune caught on, mimicking the same action.

Cinder was on top. They disregarded tact altogether, their weapons strewn on the side, fingers locked together and arms pushing. This had become more of a wrestling match, their bodies rolling all over the rooftop, fighting for who'd be on top.

Cinder gave Jaune the slip, getting out and kicking Jaune's side, sending him a yard or so far. Cinder didn't relent on her pressure, immediately charging Jaune. He was prepared for this; just as she was to strike a finishing blow, he grabbed her shoe, pulling her down and landing flat on her back with a thud.

She wouldn't go down, grabbing Jaune's shirt by the hem with visceral strength, throwing his punch off completely to the blank air and flooring him with a sweeping kick. He landed face first, a hard disadvantage. He rolled away from a stomp, standing back up and blocking a side kick, following through with an unexpected left hook which landed at Cinder's ribs.

They engaged in hand-to-hand and were visibly equal, nobody seeming to have the stronger, quicker or smarter punch. Cinder broke through with a punch at his chest, sending him back by quite a bit. They met gazes, and charged into each other again.

Jaune threw a faint which Cinder fell for, weaving below her arms and chest. But before Jaune could capitalise on that, she had locked her arms on his head, spinning and throwing him again. He landed against the door leading to the rooftop with a hard bang, groaning.

"Dear Oum my back's killing me." He pushed his hips forward and leaned back, cracking a knot in his spine. That felt good. Jaune was back to business.

This was the third charge, and he was intent on making it the last. This would decide the victor of the spar, this would decide who had bragging rights until the next one, this would probably settle other things that Jaune just couldn't think of off the top of his head.

A small puddle said otherwise.

A complete slip, Jaune stuck his hand out for balance, only for his hand to touch something very soft. Jaune's eyes widened. He tackled them both onto the ground. Objectively speaking, he touched the hills on her chest. Dad would say he struck gold.

"I'm starting to think you're doing this on purpose," she grinned like a hyena. "You sly dog, you!"

And Jaune more than fell for her tease. He went so red he was practically apple-skinned, being left a sputtering mess.

"Uh-I-but-uhh-..." He quickly rose to her side, rambling and apologising as if he hadn't done so already. He promised that wouldn't happen again.

"Mm, you said that the last time you slipped, and yet here you are, feeling my maidenhood." She sighed. "Men are really ravenous beasts after all..."

"Alright, pack it in, Disney princess." Jaune rolled his eyes, but it was still quite clear to the girl that he was flustered.

"... So, rate them out of ten-"

Jaune did a spit take. "CINDER!"

Cinder's teaching lessons to people older than her already, Neo says Mercury does drugs (hopefully not), Emerald's trying to connect with everybody, specifically her captain, though whether it's a good or bad job is up to you. Then Cinder gets some alone time with Jaune on the balcony, because where else.

I dunno if I'm sticking too closely to canon or not and whether doing so is a good or bad thing.

Anyways, I remember viewing a comment saying Neo caused the burning Ursa, I think it was my writing which made it unclear. Sorry for that. Though with the way Cinder lands by digging a thousand-degree knife into a tree and letting it slide her down to lose momentum, that tree just had to catch on fire. And a fire in the forest is gonna spread like crazy. In the episode it wasn't raining too, so it was very dry that day.

I took down the 5 day poll thingy, it should no longer be in effect. I got the answers.

Also, I have no idea how I have 100-plus favourites already, and 150-plus bookmarks on Obsidian Tear - this makes it the most out of all the other works I did, and it's only been slightly over half a month. I dunno if that's fast or slow or anything, someone please tell me.

I think that's all I have to say, really.

Oh actually, maybe not.

CMEN. Ha ha.