

## Twelve Months of Pollination

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# Twelve Months of Pollination

by [Dark\\_Dhampir](#)

## Summary

Beacon never fell. The Brother Gods and Salem may or may not exist. Team Ruby lives a (mostly) normal life. A series of snippets from four years of Beacon, with Team RWBY celebrating various holidays together and falling in love. Won't be twelve months in a row; it's twelve months over the course of 4 years.

Underage because Ruby (at least at first)

Also, shameless experiments with the pop culture of an alternate universe. Parodies and Pastiches abound.

# Haunting Night

## Chapter Notes

Someday I'll write a fanfic that isn't based on RWBY again. Or at least do a proper crossover.

This is mostly an excuse for me to play around with ideas for art, culture, and folklore on another world. If any of my ideas for holidays of these tickle your fancy, don't be ashamed to use them in your own stuff—just remember to give me credit, and maybe let me know so I can check it out.

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

It was Friday night during their first autumn together as a team and as roommates. Weiss walked in to see Ruby and Yang squirming together in a bizarre wrestling maneuver. The blonde looked up and grinned. “Hey Weiss, give us a hand over here, will you?” she said, waving Ruby’s right hand at her.

“. . . What are you doing?” the heiress asked. “And *what* are you wearing?” This last was directed at Ruby, who was wearing a neon-yellow monstrosity rather than her usual red cloak.

”Do you like it?” the younger girl asked. Squirming free of her elder sister she straightened up and flung her hands out in a “ta-da” gesture. “It’s my Jubilee Crepsley outfit!”

Weiss blinked. ”Your what?”

“I’m guessing the ice princess doesn’t read anything written less than a hundred years ago,” Yang snarked.

Weiss would have commented on that—or at least protested the “ice princess title”—but she was a little distracted by Ruby’s current outfit. The team leader had ditched her normal combat skirt and corset plus cape and hood ensemble in exchange for a dark purple catsuit with an eye-catching (or eye watering) yellow coat along with a pair of hoop earrings and big purple sunglasses. “What . . . Is that?”

“Do you like it?” Ruby asked, twirling. The coat billowed around her, inadvertently showing off how well the catsuit hugged her developing curves.

Weiss flushed (something she did more often than she’d like to admit around Ruby) and found her tongue again. “That’s not—Ruby what is going on?”

”Where going to the Haunting Night party,” Yang explained. “You need a costume for that.”

Right. That was tonight. Weiss was familiar, vaguely, with the Valish holiday of the Autumn Equinox; after the Great War, Vale had exported its favorite secular holiday to the world at large. Atlesian high society had so far ignored it, but Weiss was exposed enough to popular culture to know a little about it.

“I guess I should have expected you would love a holiday dedicated to the unbridled consumption of sugar.” Weiss winced as she realized how harsh she sounded. That comment was more appropriate to the person she’d been before coming to Beacon. She’d promised Ruby she’d be better. “I’m sorry. What I mean is, why are you getting so excited about a holiday that’s clearly aimed at children?”

“Because everyone likes to pretend to be someone else from time to time,” Blake said, coming out of the bathroom. Weiss turned to her and immediately did a double take. Blake was wearing a long white gown with gold embroidery. A gold tiara rested on her brow. She smirked. “Do you like my costume?”

Weiss knew she should answer. Really, this shouldn’t have bothered her; she shared a room with Yang Xiao Long! She’d seen Yang in various states of undress! If that wasn’t enough to inoculate someone against female beauty, nothing was. “You look . . . Very nice.”

“Thank you,” Blake replied, taking some of the gown in hand and giving a courtly now.

“Nice?” Yang asked. “She looks perfect! Blake, I’m afraid to let people see you; you’ll have to beat them off with a stick!” She elbowed her sister in the side. “Right, Sis?”

Ruby was blushing. “Yeah. You look great, Blake, just like I always imagined Nerwen look like.”

“Nerwen never wore a bow,” Weiss pointed out on reflex.

“So you have read something recent,” Blake teased, clearly unperturbed at Weiss' criticism.

“Please! The *King of the Crowns* books are more than 80 years old,” Yang countered. “I was reading the books to Ruby when she was 6.”

“Did either of you even understand them at that age?” Weiss asked, genuinely intrigued.

The sister’s looked at each other. “Eh,” the blonde said, wobbling a hand in a so-so gesture.

“Yang skipped a lot of stuff,” Ruby said. “It was like the abridged version. I read them myself later.”

“When did you read them?” Blake asked, turning her attention to Weiss.

“Well, I . . .” Weiss shuffled uncomfortably.

The Cat Faunus grinned. “You watched the movies, right?”

“What are you even doing?” Weiss asked, desperate to get the conversation back on track (and trying to ignore the laughing sisters).

”Jubilee is a vampire,” Yang explained, waving a bottle of dark lip gloss. “I’m trying to draw the scars on her finger tips, but Rubes is too ticklish, and I keep messing up.”

“Ruby reads teen vampire novels,” Weiss drolled. “Wow. I’m actually surprised.”

Ruby blushed again. “Hey! *The Saga of X-23* is really good! And Jubilee is a great character!”

”Right . . . Shouldn’t you have purple skin if you’re pretending to be a vampire?”

”That’s only the ones that kill people,” Yang corrected her. “Like, a lot of people. At least that’s how it works in the books.”

”Right, so Jubilee is all dark and tormented by her temptation to kill people and the need to be a sacrificial martyr warrior.”

The other three burst out laughing. “Heck no! That’s her girlfriend!” Yang laughed.

”Yeah,” Ruby added between giggles. “Jubilee is kind, loyal, friendly, and yeah *sometimes* she gets a little sad over what she’s lost as a vampire, but she’s positive! She tries to get X-23 to be more outgoing and confident—X-23 is a cloned Wolverine Faunus whose Dad well actually he’s the guy she was cloned from it’s complicated is this sort of legendary warrior, and she has a regeneration Semblance and retractable metal claws built into her arms and feet and she has this berserker mode because she was raised by this evil organization . . .” Ruby gushed.

”Ruby, breathe,” Blake ordered.

”I’m sorry,” Ruby squeaked. She hung head in a poor attempt to hide her blush.

“It’s a series about a teenager who was raised to be a tool for other people who ran away from that and spends the rest of her life getting into Sci-Fi and magic adventures with her friends,” Yang explained. “Rubes picked up the first book ages ago, and now she’s got a whole shelf full of them.” The blonde smirked and leaned over to whisper in Weiss’ ear, “That’s how I figured out Ruby was into girls.”

Weiss blushed at the implication (and at the parallels she was noticing between the plot of the books and *someone’s* real life). “That’s nice,” she said at last.

“Anyway, do you think you could use your Glyphs to hold her still while I draw draw a bunch of fake scars on her finger tips.”

Weiss considered chastising them for reducing her family’s Semblance to a cosmetic trick but decided against it. It wasn’t worth it, she told herself. Instead she instructed Ruby to hold her hands out and conjured a Glyph around the fingers, locking them in place. She noticed that Ruby was wearing fingerless gloves which looked surprisingly nice on her.

“They’re you go, Sis,” Yang announced free drawing the last line across Ruby’s pinky. “One sexy Vampire costume complete.”

"Yang!" Ruby yelled, blushing again.

"I'm kidding, Rubes," Yang laughed. "Like you'd ever wear anything skanky. Or I'd let you."

Then why is she wearing the catsuit? Weiss wondered. Even obscured by that hideous yellow jacket, it was distracting. So distracting that Weiss didn't realize that Yang was asking her a question. "Wha-what?"

The brawler rolled her eyes. "I wanted to know if you needed to use the bathroom. You should use it now, because I'm about to change into my costume, and then I'll need to use the mirror to do my makeup.

"No, I'm fine. Thank you."

Weiss sat down at her desk and began reading. "Weiss, what about you?" Ruby asked.

"What do you mean, what about me?"

"Don't you want to join us?"

"I have more important things to do than go to some dress-up party," Weiss said.

"Come on, Weiss, please? Think of it as a team-building exercise," Ruby pleaded.

"No."

"Consider it a way to learn about other cultures," Blake argued.

Weiss frowned at that. "I don't have a costume," she said, trying to avoid the question.

Yang grinned, and Weiss became very, very afraid. "I have an idea."

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A few hours later, Weiss stood in the assembly hall which had been converted into a "spooky" part atmosphere. Jack-o-lanterns, rubber bats, and fake cobwebs decorated the corners while a giant Gaudy Banner read "HAPPY HAUNTINGS! 101!" She couldn't even find it in herself to complain about the misuse of the exclamation mark. Possibly because she was more concerned with the pounding music blaring from the speakers. Weiss promised herself she'd take part in the organizing of the next big event.

The heiress stood the back of the room, hoping desperately that no one would see her. *Then again, nobody could recognize me, right? Right?* The costume Yang had made for her was assembled from various things in the four girls' wardrobes. She was dressed in a bright pink party dress. That alone was out of character for her, but over it was thrown her school jacket as well as one of Ruby's combat skirts. Her socks and shoes were likewise mismatched. The key part was her face; Weiss was now wearing two different shades of makeup, divided down the middle. The good news was that it hid her noticeable scar. The bad news was her hair was still Schnee-White. She'd changed the style, but not by much. She had a single pigtail on her right side, and the rest hung loose about her shoulders.

Speaking of unrecognizable, Ruby was darting around the room showing off her costume and admiring others'. Where was the shy introvert who could barely talk to her on their first day?

"Uncanny, isn't it?"

"WHHHAAAAHHHHH!" Weiss shrieked. Turning around, she saw Blake had snuck up beside her. "... Wha ... What do you ... Think you're ... Doing?" She forced out as she struggled to regain the breath she'd lost in that scream. It actually made her glad for the music.

Blake smirked. "I was asking if you thought Ruby's transformation as uncanny as I did."

Weiss looked back at the group. She spotted her younger partner's bright yellow coat as the girl chatted it up with Team JNPR. Both Jaune's blocky robot costume and Nora's sloth suit did nothing to dissuade her that she'd stumbled into a children's party; on the other hand, Ren was dressed in an elegant kimono inspired by the nobility of feudal Mistral, and Pyrrha had donned pale grey makeup and a white gown to create a haunting rendition of a ghost bride.

They all seemed to be having a good time. Ruby did another twirl to show off her costume. Weiss wondered (annoyed) how many of the students had taken the opportunity to ogle her in the catsuit. It was tempting to go up to her partner and lecture her about it, but ... "I've never seen her so comfortable around so many people."

"I know," Blake said looking out at the party herself. "Maybe she's one of the Belonging Kind," The Faunus suggested.

"What is that?" Weiss asked.

"You don't know? It's what your costume is based on."

"No." Weiss shrugged. "I've heard of it. I believe it's some Valish urban legend about imposters or something, but I've never cared much for those."

"You're not completely wrong," Blake teased. "The story goes that the Belonging Kind is a kind of monster or fairy that's adapted to live in cities. It feeds on alcohol, produces counterfeit money from its own cells, and can shape-shift into anyone: changing its appearance, clothes, and even its behavior to perfectly fit into whatever social environment it finds itself in."

Weiss looked down at her costume again. Then she looked out at the people around her. She saw the way they all mingled together so easily. So many different costumes and ideas. Yang was walking around in a pink leotard that exposed her stomach, matching knee-high boots and elbow-length gloves, and a cape of the same color. Penny was dressed as some kind of zombie nurse. Sun and his partner Neptune were dressed like pirates (probably an excuse for the Monkey-tailed Faunus to continue avoiding to button-up his shirt). Even Professor Goodwitch was enjoying the party; the teacher was (ironically) dressed in a stereotypical witch costume that looked like it was made of leaves and seemed to be lecturing some kind of space alien. The troublemaker was covered in blue makeup with her hair dyed a darker shade; she had (fake?) horns, shoes that were designed to look like hooves, a tail,

and wore very revealing "armor." It was only by focusing on the beret and sunglasses that Weiss recognized Coco Adel of Team CFVY as the culprit.

They were all different, yet they all fit in. They all belonged.

"I don't."

"What?" Blake asked, looking at her.

Weiss looked away. She hadn't meant to say that out-loud. "What I mean is . . . I don't know what to do. This isn't like the parties I'm used to."

Blake was silent for a moment. "Me neither."

Weiss turned back around and looked at her. Weiss had always hated being called "princess," yet here was Blake (once her biggest critic in the school) dressed like a queen, and it fit her perfectly. Yet, her teammate seemed to be serious. "Really?" she asked.

Blake nodded. "We don't celebrate Haunting Night back home. We have our own festival for the dead, but we don't dress up."

"Then, why are you here?" Weiss' voice came out in a whisper.

"I told you earlier. It's . . . nice to pretend to be someone else for a night. Ruby agrees."

"Really?"

The Cat Faunus smiled. "Why not ask her yourself," she said before raising her hand and waving it at the yellow-coat wearing team leader.

Ruby saw them and ran over their way. "Weiss! Blake! Are you having fun?" she asked, all smiles.

"I am," Blake affirmed. "Weiss, however, has a question for you."

The heiress shot her black-haired teammate a glare before trying to put up a neutral façade for her partner. "Yes, well. I was wondering, wondering . . . why you liked this holiday so much." She cursed herself for her horribly worded inquiry. "What I mean is, why do you like dressing up so much? You're not normally so eager to spend time in large crowds."

Ruby may have blushed; it was difficult to tell now, between the lighting and the large glasses hiding much of her face. "Well. It's fun to pretend. Besides, I think it's like weapons. What people dress as, it's an expression of who we are inside."

"It's a disguise," Weiss pointed out. She'd paid enough attention to know that the origin of the costumes was based in wearing disguises to hide from spirits on the night they were out and about more often than usual.

"Yeah, but what you chose to dress up as shows what you like or what you want to be," Ruby argued. "Take my costume. Jubilee's a lot of what I want to be: fun and supportive, but she's



also so confident and fearless, and I, I kind of wish I was more like that."

"You're already fearless, Ruby," Blake pointed out. "You charged against a deathstinger on your own during Initiation."

Ruby ducked her head. "Yeah, but that's fighting. I'm good at fighting. I'm not so good at, you know, the social stuff."

"You also kept trying to be my friend when I had done nothing but yell at you," Weiss reminded her. "That was . . . fairly brave."

She was treated to a 50,000 kilowatt smile. "Really?"

The heiress rolled her eyes. "Don't get a swelled head about it."

"HEY!" The trio looked up to see Yang coming over to them. Weiss tried to keep her eyes on the blonde's face now that she was getting the frontal view of Yang's costume. Thankfully, Yang's face *was* worth looking at. "What are you three doing over here? You hear that music? It's dance time!" She grabbed her sister and Weiss' hands and dragged them over into the middle of the dancefloor. She gave Blake a look, and her partner decided to follow her teammates.

Weiss grumbled about the "brute's" actions and how she didn't know how to dance like the rest of the partiers, but she was smiling the rest of the night.

## Chapter End Notes

"The Saga of X-23" is obviously inspired by both X-23/Wolverine of Marvel and The Saga of Darren Shan (and am I the only one kind of disappointed Jubilee's no longer a vampire? Given how little she resembled the stereotype of vampires in modern fiction, I think it was an interesting role for her to play). The implications I was aiming for is that Remnant's vampire mythology matches the Darren Shan reimagining of vampires. I've always wondered what Folklore and urban fantasy have to be like on a world with Faunus. Some things (Giants, Little People, and Tolkien-esque Elves) are easy; other mythic creatures are more challenging because you have to imagine what would separate them from Faunus. I always liked the imagination Shan put into his vampires, and I think the warrior culture they have would appeal to hunter society. Though I modified the lore by implying that the Remnant mythos incorporates aspects of the Vampaneze who were a splinter group in the Saga, but that wouldn't make sense if vampires were to be considered "monsters."

The "King of the Crowns" series is obviously a pastiche of Lord of the Rings. "Nerwen" is one of Galadriel's names. It means "Man-might," which makes it appropriate for a warrior woman (like a Huntress).

The Belonging Kind come from Hugo Gernsback's short story of the same name. You can find a pretty good examination of it by the Extra Credits folks on YouTube. I always thought they were an interesting idea for a monster adapted to life in urban centers (even though they're mostly only monstrous in an existential sort of way; i.e. they embody the horror of conformity at the cost of identity), so I made them a part of the mythology of Remnant.

Yang's costume is based on the Flash from the "Tangent Comics" setting. I feel like the heroes there are weird enough to feel "super" on Remnant. Penny is inspired by the nurses in the Silent Hill Franchise. Sun and Neptune are . . . just a couple of pirates (I was as lazy as Weiss accuses Sun of being). Glynda's "traditional" witch costume is inspired by me wanting to make the Remnant's cliché's different than Earth's. Coco is a Draenai from Wow because I like the Draenai. What can I say, I like the idea of these blue aliens dressed in skimpy armor who look like demons but are (according to the wiki) apparently devoutly religious.

The "101" bit is part of my own headcannon and is something that will hopefully be explored later.

# Oumsmas

## Chapter Notes

### Happy Pride Month!

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

Blake felt . . . Nervous? No. She'd felt nervous before, and this didn't qualify. She'd felt nervous before enacting an op for the White Fang and again when she'd entered Beacon. No, she wasn't nervous. She was just a little stressed was all. Perfectly normal during this time of year.

It was a couple of weeks before Oumsmas. Blake herself didn't belong to any denomination of the religion, but most people in Vale were. Including a pair of sisters she knew very well. Ruby and Yang had been counting down the days until the holiday happened—or until Winter Break began, which started in a few days. Blake had only two days left to buy presents, and every single shop, store, and outlet was crowded beyond belief. More than once, she was tempted to give up on the whole thing.

But she didn't. Yang and Ruby—and Weiss, too for that matter even if she didn't seem to be an Oumist either—had accepted her when she'd accidentally revealed herself as a Faunus and a former White Fang agent. In fact, they were more forgiving of her than she herself was. They were her friends. Really, truly her friends.

Thus, she was walking up and down Vale searching for . . . something. She didn't know what, but it needed to be something meaningful. As it turned out, she didn't know her new friends that well. They'd lived together for months now, but it seemed like Blake didn't really know them as well as she thought she did. Oh, she knew the important things; she knew how brave and loyal they all were. She knew some of their dreams and their secret pains. But, there were other things, little things, that friends should know about each other, that she didn't. Things like, "what do you do for fun?" She knew a few of the books and comics they read (well, Yang and Ruby read in the case of the comics). She'd heard them discuss movies they'd enjoyed and music, and the sisters had pulled them all into video and tabletop games. That all felt too superficial. She knew where they were from, but she didn't really know anything about Patch—or, she was willing to admit, Atlas. She didn't know much about Oumsmas traditions beyond the commercial fluff; she might insult the sisters by accident. She might do the same to Weiss, since the Cat Faunus had never really inquired much about the heiress' own belief system, assuming she had one. During the Great War, Mantle's attempt to control people's emotions had resulted in them cracking down on art, religion, and storytelling. She'd heard that most Atlesians today remained atheist and disinterested in their ancestral heritage, but that might just be another stereotype that didn't fit reality, like the idea that the Schnee's lived pampered, easy lives while abusing Faunus for spite. Whatever was true about her father, Weiss deserved to be treated as her own person and nothing less. The

heiress had already proven many of Blake's preconceptions wrong, so the Faunus had decided that going forward she wouldn't allow any more of them to color her perceptions.

It was a good perspective to have, but it also made the job even harder. As Blake made her way through the streets, she came across *Tukson's*, a small book store. It was run by another felid Faunus, a gruff but polite man the shop was named for. Unlike Blake, he didn't pretend to be Human, though he didn't exactly advertise his Faunus status either (though as his Faunus traits were retractable claws, hiding actually came very easy to him). Still, if he'd never said anything in support of her choice, he'd never said anything against it either, so she'd always felt safe and comfortable within his business' walls.

Blake ducked in through the doors. The shop was done up in Oumsmas decorations which had surprised her for a moment. Then she realized that it was probably a good business practice. More importantly, she recalled Tukson mentioning once that was a Vale native; she was still accustomed to thinking of Menagerie as the baseline of Faunus culture, as many people both Human and Faunus did. Anyone who'd ever set foot on the continent, however, could tell at a casual glance that the so-called "homeland" of the Faunus people was heavily steeped in East Mistrali ideas and customs. And religion. Blake remembered her friend Ilia from the White Fang, who was from Mantle and how many times her friend gave her odd looks for some of her comments and activities.

Soft but cheerful holiday music played on the speakers as Blake made her way through the aisles. She wasn't really shopping, but walking through the rows helped calm her mind. As she walked past the various tomes (finding herself in the graphic novel section), she thought about what she knew about her teammates' tastes.

*Camp Camp?* Dumb name, but she'd seen Ruby reading that a time or two and laughing at it. Along with *X-Ray and Vav* and *Bobo's Strange Shenanigans* (She smiled remembering the look on Weiss' face the first time she'd seen her partner reading that one and—not knowing that in the kingdom of Mistral, they traditionally read right to left—had asked Ruby why she was reading the comic backwards). Yang, as her Haunting Night costume had implied, was a bigger fan of Tangent Comics, though Blake had seen the sisters swap graphic novels occassionally. It was actually kind of sweet how close they were.

Weiss, predictably, had turned down any offers to share in the grounds that they were “too juvenile.” That had been months ago; Weiss was better now, but no new offers had been made.

Deciding she didn't know enough to about graphic novels to choose one herself, she left that section and headed to another. There were young adult titles, like the Perry Baker books, but Weiss might not want any, and Ruby and Yang already had plenty of those. Maybe something more mature? Ruby had once asked to borrow her copy *The Man with Two Souls*.

She'd also asked about a couple of Blake's *other* books, ones she was fairly certain Yang wouldn't want her sharing with the younger girl. Idly, she wondered if Yang herself might be interested in *Ninjas of Love*.

"Need some help?"

Blake almost jumped at the voice. Looking up she saw Tukson had come around from behind his desk, though he was still a good six or seven feet away. He smiled gently. "Sorry about that. You just looked a little lost. Looking for a present for Oumsmas?"

Blake blushed. "Yes, actually. Three presents. For my teammates."

"A Huntress?" the older Faunus asked. "Well, I can see you're close to them, if you're shopping for presents."

Blake nodded. "They're . . . They've been very accepting of me, and supportive too when I needed them. I wanted to repay that somehow."

Tukson nodded. "I hear you. Do you know what they like?"

Blake groaned. "Just enough to know what they already have."

"Hmmm. Do they enjoy board games and the like?"

"Two of them do," Blake said, recalling the last time they'd played *Remnant: The Game*.

"The other one might when she doesn't get curbstomped."

Tukson chuckled. "I've been there. Maybe you just need a different ruleset." He walked over to another aisle. "I think what you're looking for is over here."

Intrigued (and slightly desperate), Blake made her way over to the section in question. "Oh," she said when she looked at the titles in question.

The male Faunus picked out a specific title. "It makes for a pretty good shared gift."

Blake couldn't stop her eyebrows from rising at the book in question. It was certainly different than what she'd had in mind when she came in—in as much as she'd had *anything* in mind—but it would probably appeal to Ruby and Yang. Weiss might even be willing to try it once; the heiress had proven willing to try Ruby's board games after all. Maybe she really did just need a game with rules and gameplay that didn't blindside her at every turn.

"Thank you," she said. "I'll take it."

"Glad to help," the older Faunus said. "Would you like it gift-wrapped?"

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"Are you sure you can't join us over Break?" Ruby asked.

"Quite certain," Weiss sighed. "Father expects me to attend several social events on behalf of the SDC."

"Sounds boring," Yang commented.

"Yes, well. It's necessary. If we don't make a good impression, business could suffer, and my father will take his lost profits out on the employees."

"I hope you're paying attention as your father teaches you how not to run the Company," Blake opined. Once, she had resented Weiss her privilege and status as the heiress to the wealthiest business on Remnant--and the one with the worst history of abuse towards her people. Now, she had hope for the future. It was a little distasteful to look at Weiss in that way--as an asset rather than a friend--but it was inescapable.

Still, it seemed that her friend shared her views. "I can assure you I've taken copious notes," the white-haired young woman replied.

"Well, if you're not coming back with us, you may as well open your presents now!" their young leader announced. Racing around the room, Ruby pulled a package wrapped in white paper with red roses on it from . . . somewhere. It was impossible to tell with all the rose petals falling everywhere.

Weiss blinked. "What?"

"We want to watch you open your presents in front of us," Yang said, holding up her own gift in one hand, wrapped in yellow paper with a big purple ribbon (cute, her own hair and eye colors). In the other, she held her scroll, obviously intent on taking pictures.

"But I don't celebrate Oumsmas," Weiss protested.

"So what?" Ruby asked. "We do, and you're our friend. And our teammate. And you're my partner." She pushed her gift into Weiss' face, all but demanding the heiress accept it.

"You know I haven't bought anything for any of you, right?" the heiress asked.

"Psht!" Yang said. "You can pay us back by taking us all out to dinner tonight."

"Yang!" Ruby protested. "You don't need to do anything, Weiss! We WANT to give you these gifts." She turned to glare at her sister as she finished the statement.

"No. She's right," Weiss insisted. "I need to repay you for your kindness. Paying for dinner seems appropriate."

The two continued to squabble for a minute over what Weiss was or wasn't obligated to do. Yang broke it up saying, "Rubes, let her pay for one meal; it's not like she can't afford it." The blonde sounded more tired than anything else. Maybe that was why Ruby gave up and agreed to let Weiss buy them some expensive dinner she probably didn't care for anyway. Weiss looked relieved.

Blake was rather amused, but she saw Yang was shaking her head. The Cat Faunus caught her eye; her partner replied by shrugging, resigned. Blake nodded. Weiss was the type of person who couldn't accept gifts without feeling she was indebted to someone. No doubt another result of Jacques Schnee's wonderful parenting skills. They'd make an attempt to train her out of that later, but it wasn't something they could do in one night.

Sufficiently pacified by the promise that she could pay her friends back, Weiss finally accepted Ruby's gift and began to peel the tape off the package, unwrapping it without

wrapping the paper. Ruby was on the edge of her seat the whole time, while Yang laughed at how the heiress felt the need to even unwrap her presents primly. Weiss ordered the "uncouth barbarian" to shut up.

"This is . . . ?" Weiss asked when she'd finished unwrapping her gift. It was a large book with a picture of circus tents on the cover, along with a young woman in black clothes, another young woman with a distinct yellow raincoat, a short burly man dressed in orange and black, and a tall man in a trench coat. Emblazoned on the top was *The Saga of X-23, By Sharron Dan*. At the bottom of the book was the other half of the label, *Part I: "The Carnival of Mutants."*

"The first three books in *The Saga of X-23!*" Ruby said excitedly. "I figured you might be interested because of the way you kept looking at my costume on Haunting Night."

Blake hid her snort. It was obvious to anyone--except perhaps their naïve young leader and her currently photo-happy big sister--what the real reason was for Weiss' attention was that night. It surprised her that Yang didn't say anything to that, but maybe she just hadn't cottoned onto the fact that her baby sister was so attractive. The gods knew it had been difficult to Blake to hide her appraisal of the younger woman's form-hugging attire.

The flustered (and flushed) heiress stammered her thanks. "Um . . . Thank you, Ruby. That was . . . very kind of you . . . I'll get started reading these over break."

"Really?" Ruby asked, her eyes shining with hope. "Oh, thank Oum! I was so worried I'd guessed wrong. I wanted to get you something nice, but I didn't know what to do, and you can buy anything you want, and so I was wracking my brain, and--"

Weiss put her hand on Ruby's mouth. "I am very grateful, Ruby. Thank you."

Ruby blushed as red as her namesakes behind Weiss' hand. When her partner brought it down, the team leader's eyes fell. "Sorry. I just, I'm glad you like it. You're welcome, Weiss. Merry Oumsmas."

"Merry Oumsmas, Ruby," Weiss replied. The words sounded odd coming out of her mouth; probably because it was the first time she'd ever said them, but Ruby smiled brightly at them.

"My turn!" Yang exclaimed, walking up and shoving her own gift in Weiss' hands. Ruby took her book back to let Weiss focus on her new gift. The heiress opened it with the same, precise movements she had with Ruby's, though the bow gave her some trouble. She eventually slid it off and revealed . . .

"A med kit?" Weiss asked, looking it over as though expecting some kind of trick.

"I know, I know. You can buy your own right?" Yang said. "But tell me this, Princess: have you ever treated your own or anyone else's wounds before?"

Weiss had been scowling at Yang's nickname for her and opened her mouth to berate her. She stopped short however when she heard Yang's question. "No," she admitted.

"I thought so," Yang said. Walking over to the closet, she dug around in it a few minutes and pulled out two identical-looking kits. "Ruby and I learned this stuff from our Dad and Uncle Qrow. I know we'll study long-term survival at some point, but having a good emergency kit is a good starting point, and it may come in handy later, trust me." Her sister nodded in agreement with Yang's assessment, and Weiss looked back down at her new gift with wide eyes. "Thank you," she said.

Yang shrugged. "No problem. Merry Oumsmas. Now, let's go get that dinner."

"Wait," Blake said. Setting her bag down, she reached inside and pulled out a parcel of her own. "Let's open mine first."

"Aw, Blake, you got the Ice Queen an Oumsmas present, too?" Yang crooned. Weiss seemed to flabbergasted to comment on the nickname.

"Actually, it's for all of us," Blake said, looking down. Why was this so embarrassing? She'd given gifts before! "I didn't know what to get each of you, so I got something we could all share."

"A Team RWBY present," Ruby whispered as she looked at the appropriately decorated gift. It was wrapped in metallic gold paper with diagonal black stripes, and it had been tied with a large ribbon that had red and white stripes running down its length. It had cost a bit more than plain wrapping, but Blake couldn't deny how right the present looked. Judging by the photo Yang snapped of it, her partner agreed.

"So, who should open it?" Weiss asked.

"We need to open it together," Ruby insisted.

"How do we do that?" Yang asked. "Each grab a corner?"

"That might work," Ruby replied.

"Why not?" Blake asked. "It won't hurt it."

"Oh, very well," Weiss huffed.

The four teammates each took hold of a corner and yanked. *Riiiiiiip!* Yang and Ruby each ripped away a piece of wrapping paper, whilst Weiss and Blake were still holding the package by the slivers of paper their fingers had managed to slightly peel back.

"Well, that was unimpressive," Weiss noted.

"Ah, Weiss, no need to go off on a tear," Yang jibed, causing Blake to shudder. She loved her teammates; she really did, but each of them had the ability to get on her nerves. With Yang, it was the puns. The worst part was, if she complained, Yang would try to win her over with more of the awful non-jokes.

"Fine then. Ruby, you open it," Weiss said, shoving the gift towards their team leader.



"Are you sure?" Ruby asked.

"Of course. You'll probably enjoy it the most anyway," the heiress said.

"And you are the team leader," Blake noted. "It's appropriate for you to open the team present."

"Huh, that's a pretty good idea," Yang admitted. "Go ahead, Rubes. Open it."

"All right," the youngest member of the team agreed. She took the gift from Weiss and Blake and ripped the paper off in two seconds--literally, thanks to her Semblance.

"Another book?"

"*Platemail?*" Weiss asked, examining the title. It had a picture of two people in knightly armor clashing swords and had the subtitle, "Strategies for Dark Ages Figurines."

Ruby turned it over. "It's a game book," she announced.

Blake blushed. "The owner of the bookshop suggested it was a good game for a group of friends."

Yang wrapped her arm around her partner's shoulders. "Aw, I can't wait to play when we get back together." Blake felt a rush of warmth that she put down to Yang's fiery Aura.

Ruby eagerly flipped through the book, so Blake took that as a sign that she enjoyed it as well (and if the Cat Faunus felt warmer while watching her, she didn't notice). Weiss retained her stoicism, and for a moment, Blake was worried that she'd failed, but then the heiress gave her small smile--the one that she hid behind when she didn't want people to know how happy she really was--and said, "Well, I guess it's worth a shot."

"That's the spirit, Weiss-y!" Yang announced, grabbing the heiress in her other arm. "Maybe Blake's finally found a game you can win!"

Weiss squawked in annoyance, but before she could get wound up, Ruby dropped the book and jumped into the group hug causing them all to fall over onto the floor. Yang laughed, Weiss complained, and Ruby apologized without letting go. Blake said nothing, but she couldn't stop smiling.

She still didn't know much about Oumsmas, but she did know that this was what holidays were all about.

## Chapter End Notes

Well, that was fun. I even got to introduce some of the ideas I have for Blake and Weiss' cultural backgrounds. I'm a little sorry I didn't get to explore Oumsmas more. Maybe

next year.

"Bobo's Strange Shenanigans" is "Jojo's Bizarre Adventure." Hypothetically, it probably remained focussed on the magical martial arts storylines, since Stands feel less special in a world with Semblances. Unless the conceit is that Semblances manifest as spectral entities, which would be pretty cool, actually.

"Tangent Comics" is DC but again with the weirdest incarnation of their characters as the mainstream canon. I have other ideas for stuff that would show up in comics. Hopefully I'll get an excuse to discuss that later.

"Perry Baker" is of course "Harry Potter." I ran through a mess of names until I found one that felt right.

As stated The Saga of X-23 is a weird hybrid-parody-thing of Marvel's X-23 and The Saga of Darren Shan. Obviously, the "Carnival of Mutants" is a reference to "Cirque du Freak." Looking back, I was kind of annoyed the series focused so much on the vampires (even though I loved them) instead of exploring the bizarre world suggested in the first novel (And remember, The Demonata series isn't canon to the Saga). In case anyone cares, the 12-book (seriously) Saga of Darren Shan was at one point re-released as four anthologies that each contained one of the four trilogies that made up the broader narrative ("Vampire Blood," Vampire Rites," "Vampire Wars," and "Vampire Destiny."). I guess that means I'll have to come up with three more titles eventually. I want to complain, but I can't seem to make myself stop smiling at the idea.

"Platemail: Strategies for Dark Ages Figurines" is a reference to "Chainmail: Rules for Medieval Miniatures," one of Gary Gygax's earlier games and the more-or-less direct forerunner to Dungeons & Dragons. Chainmail, however, was a miniatures game, similar to Remnant: The Game, so it felt more appropriate to do a spoof of. At the very least, it wouldn't be as different from what they've already done as a real RPG.

# Hearts' Day

## Chapter Notes

This chapter was somewhat inspired by the fic "Last Minute Shopping" by dennisud on Fanfiction.net. It's fun.

Desert Bus begins tomorrow! If you want to help out some sick kids or watch a bunch of "grown" people make fools of themselves for days on end, check it out!

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

Yang was grinning as she wove in and out of downtown Vale's streets. She loved the feeling of speed, of being able to pull off complex, unbelievable turns; Bumblebee was surprisingly good at maneuvering for such a large bike—at least when Yang was the one behind the handlebars.

She pulled a hard turn and came to an abrupt stop in front of a flower shop. Walking in, she began looking over the florist's products. Thankfully, since she was arriving just as the store opened it hadn't been raided by other last-minute shoppers yet. She knew she should have planned out what to get her family, friends, and teammates, and in some instances she had. Yellow roses for Teams JNPR and CVFY to honor their friendship. Some people might say it was a little early to be giving Hearts' Day gifts to the other freshman team—and they'd definitely say that about CVFY—but Yang had always been the type to go all in when it came to relationships. She smiled, thinking of Ruby. Her little Sister was was no different; for all that Rubes was shy, she held back even less of her feelings than Yang did. Her partnership with the Ice Queen was proof of that. Yang sighed.

She was so proud of the leader Ruby was becoming. Her baby sister was strong and brave and smart enough to lead her big Sis and a couple of strangers to victory against a giant Nevermore. That was pretty badass. But Ruby hadn't lost any of her kindness either; she really did just want everyone to be safe and happy. When Blake has accidentally outed herself as Faunus, Ruby had been the only one trying to defend both her and Weiss and trying to keep the team together. Yang had more or less the opposite. First she'd come down on Weiss for being a loud-mouthed racist, but she hadn't exactly come running to Blake's defense when her partner admitted that she was a terrorist.

Yang had failed teammates. So in addition to telling the two how much they meant to her, this was a chance to apologize for her previous shortcomings and show that he's meant to be better. Once she figured out how to do that.

Yang toyed with getting white roses for Weiss and black roses for Blake—fitting their color schemes, but that felt boring. White and dark chocolate, maybe?

“Need help?”

Yang jumped. A man was smiling at her right next to her. He was brown-haired, a little pale, and was smiling shyly. He was a little older than Yang herself.

She laughed. “Dang! How’d you do that?”

The man shuffled a little. “Sorry. I’ve been told I’m too quiet.”

”You remind me of my partner!” Yang laughed. She considered asking if he was a Cat Faunus, but suddenly realized how bad that sounded. She could be taught.

He eyed her. “Oh, are you in Beacon?” he asked.

Yang grinned and nodded. “Yeah. I’m looking for a Hearts’ Day’s gift for my teammates. How bout you?”

The man smiled. “I’m looking for a gift for my teammates, too.”

Yang eyes him. He didn’t look like a huntsman.

The man smiled. “My spouses,” he explained. “My wives and my husband.” He stuck his hand out to her. “My name is Shinji,” he offered.

”Mine’s Yang,” the blonde replied. She shook his hand, smiling at the fact that neither of them looked even slightly Mistrali, despite their names. “Y’know, I’m pretty sure Vale still hasn’t legalized group marriages yet.”

”They haven’t,” the man sighed. “But there are legal loopholes that let you get spousal privileges if you’re a veteran.”

The blonde nodded. By the time it finally wrapped up, the Great War had left many people in complicated situations. Psychological damage, physical damage, orphaned civilians. Plus the inevitable economic issues that came when a nation had to switch from a war economy to a peaceful one. As a result of this, the Vale council had been forced to pass a number of laws in a short time frame to try to deal with everything at once. For example, former comrades could file to have familial privileges for legal and medical emergencies. A side effect of this, was that it was now (sort of) possible for poly couples (was it still a couple if it was more than two people? She’d have to ask Blake) to marry and have that marriage somewhat recognized.

The most enthusiastic adopters of this practice were hunters. One of the quirks that was quickly discovered in the new profession was the habit of teammates falling for each other. Sometimes, though, it went even further, and the entire team decided they wanted to be more than friends and siblings-in-arms; Yang was pretty sure her own family was proof enough of that given how quick Taiyang seemed to have shackled up with Summer after Raven’s disappearance. It wasn’t something that happened all the time, but it was far from unheard of. Every hunter knew a team or knew a team that knew a team that did it. Get a random

dozen teams together and odds were that at least one of them saw their teammates as more than just friends.

"I didn't take you for a huntsman," she admitted. He seemed kind of scrawny, and she didn't feel an active aura emitting from him.

Shinji laughed. "I'm not, but not too far off."

"Military?" Yang asked, eyeing him.

He nodded. "I was. We were all in the same lance, and after we got out we decided to make it legal. Or as close as we could."

"Wow, that isn't far off," Yang declared. Lances were similar hunter teams. Elite, four-person units who worked and fought in tandem. There was only one type of soldier who used that unit, however. "So you were a mechwarrior, huh? What'd you drive?"

"A Wasp," he said, naming one of the smaller and more humanoid-looking piloted mechs. He spoke of his battle vehicle with the same kind of reverence and affection a huntsman might use to talk about his well-used weapon. "I called her Eva. She wasn't much but she saw me through a lot of messes. We were a scouting unit, used to find some of the bigger concentrations of Grimm." That explained why he was in a small, lightly armed mech. It wasn't uncommon. Since the world had been at peace for so many years, the military was mostly used to support and supplement hunter teams in fighting Grimm or to fight some of the more giant examples of the monsters. Hunters couldn't be everywhere, after all; the level training required to make the grade meant that there just weren't enough real huntstmen and huntresses to tackle every job. So, the armed forces picked up the slack.

"That's cool. Maybe we should swap stories," Yang offered. "If I could ever figure out what to get my teammates!"

"I know what you mean. I warn you; it never gets any easier. I've been married for seven years, and I still struggle with this every Hearts' Day, and that's ignoring my friends and my foster mother."

"Well you have more experience than me. All I've ever done is give people yellow roses, and that doesn't seem very good anymore."

"Welcome to life as a grown-up," Shinji replied. "You'll find your feelings are so much more complicated than they used to be, but it's worth it. I promise. So, what do you want to say to them?"

"I don't know!" Yang groaned. She shook her head, thinking hard. Ruby was easy, but for Blake and Weiss . . . "Forgiveness."

Shinji nodded. "All right. Could you be more specific. Are you asking 'Forgive me,' 'I forgive you,' or 'Forgive yourself?'"

Yang smiled weakly. "All of the above?"

"I've been there," he said, sighing. He was quiet for a moment. "If there's one thing I learned about relationships—especially when you're sharing your life with your comrades—is that it takes a team effort. When you have problems, it'll almost never be just one person's fault or one person's job to fix it. You'll all mess up, and you've all got to work together to fix things." He smiled at her. "I'd say it gets worse when you're in a relationship, but honestly it got easier when we could make love."

"I'm pretty sure that's not how that works," Yang said.

"It's not an end-all, fix-all," he admitted. "But it's better than yelling at each other.

Sometimes you need to tire yourself out before you can have a real discussion instead of a shouting contest, and sometimes you just need to remind the other person how much they mean to you."

Yang thought about that. She thought about the time she'd nearly gotten herself and Ruby killed walking into the woods on her own. After Uncle Qrow had saved them and dragged them back home, she had expected her father to be furious with them.

The first thing he did was wrap them both in his arms and cry, telling them how much he loved them and how sorry he was for how he'd failed them after Summer's death. He'd punished her the next day, doubling her chores and not letting her out of his sight for a week, but it was OK. She knew her father still loved her.

"Yeah, I know what you mean she said. "So, what'd the rest of your Lance drive around in?" she asked. Not the smoothest transition ever, but she needed something.

Shinji smiled, and the conversation continued.

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Two days later, Yang stood in her dorm room with her teammates.

"Happy Hearts' Day!" Ruby cried, more exuberant than normal. She had a very large gift to share everyone: a giant fruit bouquet with chocolate-covered strawberries. She also gave each of her teammates two roses—white for Weiss, black for Blake, and yellow for Yang.

"Ruby . . . How much did this cost?" Weiss asked.

Ruby squirmed a little. "Not much. I got a lot of money from my Uncle Qrow last Oumsmas."

"How much?" Yang asked. "I know you spent some of it on parts for Crescent Rose."

Ruby scowled. "I used my stipend from the school for that, and I used some of the free parts."

Weiss frowned further. "Ruby, you shouldn't waste so much money . . ."

"I didn't!" Ruby insisted. She blurred forward, taking Weiss' hands in hers. "I didn't waste it. You guys are my team! You're my best friends, and I wanted to do something for you all!"

"Dolt," Weiss said, but it wasn't angry. In fact, the heiress was blushing, and she didn't remove her hands from Ruby's. "But, I suppose I should thank you. It, it is a nice sentiment."

"It is," Blake said. She came up beside the two and placed her hand on their team leader's shoulder. "Thank you, Ruby."

The redhead blushed. "You're welcome," she said, looking down.

"Well, I guess it's my turn," Yang said. She had carried a cooler into the room. Lifting the lid, she brought out a bouquet made of red roses with tulips and sunflowers. "Happy Hearts' Day, Sis," she said, offering the flowers to her baby sister.

"Thank you, Yang!" Ruby cried, zooming over and wrapping her sister in a tight hug. Yang returned it with one arm (the other holding the flowers). They broke apart, and Yang handed the bouquet to Ruby, who happily took it and placed it on her desk. Yang smiled at her sister's appreciation for her gift, but that was the easy part. Turning her attention back to her friends, she smiled again, to hide her nerves. When did she get so anxious about talking to people—that was supposed to be Ruby's problem, not hers. She reached into the cooler and pulled out the flowers she'd acquired for her other teammates.

"Happy Hearts' Day," Yang said, weaker than normal, despite her best effort to play it cool. She held out the two bouquets. They were filled with yellow roses along with lilies and tulips. Lilies stood for devotion and humility; tulips symbolized peace, forgiveness, and a new beginning. Shinji and the flower shop owner had found what might have been the perfect bouquets. Judging by the way her friends' faces lit up when they saw the flowers, she knew they were.

## Chapter End Notes

Hearts' Day is obviously a Valentine's Day reference, but with influence from "Friends Day" from *The Flash*. I like the idea of a holiday dedicated to all relationships.

I guess my love of the *Battletech* setting is on full display here. The funny thing is, I've ever played a single game (electronic or tabletop) or read a novel in the setting, but I've spent a lot of time on [Sarna.net](http://Sarna.net) and I love the *Tex Talks Battletech* videos. I actually intended for hunter teams to be inspired by lances, but then *Fairy Tales of Remnant* came out, including the story of "The Hunter's Children," so I had to change that.

I did some actual research for this. It took me forever to find the right flowers for Yang to use (part of why it took so long for this chapter to come out).

# Carnival

## Chapter Notes

How's this for timing: I'm publishing this just minutes before my clock flicks over to Fat Tuesday/Mardi Gras, which is Carnival in Italy? Welcome to the Easter season.

Happy International Fanworks Day! At least where I am. Enjoy!

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

"Seriously, Atlesians have their own holiday for dressing up?" Yang asked.

The four teammates were once again in their dorm room, chilling out on a Friday afternoon. Or, at least, three of them had been until Weiss burst in and announced that they had a week to buy costumes to attend a party in Vale that was celebrating Atlas' biggest holiday.

The heiress frowned. "Carnival is not just an excuse to dress up. It's an important part of our culture. And it's not an Atlesian holiday; it's a Mantle tradition, with roots stretching back centuries. In the olden days, there were fairs and festivals to celebrate the arrival of spring; after the War, these festivals were revived as a single celebration of our heritage. A refutation of the former government's attempt to sterilize our culture and lobotomize our past."

"So where do the costumes come in?" Ruby asked. "I know on Haunting Night it was originally about disguising ourselves so spirits wouldn't recognize us and maybe we could scare them, so why do Mantle people dress up?"

Weiss preened. The crimson-cloaked reaper smiled. Weiss was always happy to explain things, and Ruby was happy to listen to her. She suspected Blake and Yang were too; they just didn't want to admit it out-loud. Her partner explained, "Carnival costumes can be traced back to the Masque performances put on in the courts of Mantle in the days of the monarchy and aristocracy. These performances took place in the courts themselves where they had little room for acting and no stages to pre-arrange special effects, which would have been hard to do anyway given how tight security was at such functions. So, the performers relied on singing, dancing, music, and elaborate costumes. Their stories were rooted in mythology and folklore and so made use of symbolism and stock characters like The Magician, The Sun and The Moon, various members of court, and the like."

"So, these masked performances were all the same, and they were all 2-dimensional?" Yang asked. She grinned when Weiss scowled at her. It was proof-positive, as far as Ruby was concerned that Yang thought Weiss was just as adorable when she was angry as she did. Of course, Yang was a glutton who didn't believe in too much of a good thing, so she decided to poke the Ursa some more. "Didn't the folks in Mantle have any imagination?"



Before Weiss could screech, Blake looked up from her book and joined in the conversation. "Most of them were interchangeable, but several playwrights and composers are recognized as creative and talented, experimenting with the lyrics and costume design. While the originals aren't really performed anymore, once opera took off, many composers--both within and outside of Mantle--began adapting Masques."

"Really?" Yang asked, surprise evident in her voice.

Now mollified, Weiss nodded. "Right. They kept the outline of the stories, experimenting with theme, character, and plot mechanics."

"So, they were writing fanfiction?" Ruby asked.

"NO!" Weiss yelled. Her cheeks were flushed and she stamped her foot. Ruby didn't think she'd ever admit it, but Weiss was ridiculously adorable when she was angry. It was an unspoken secret she, her sister, and Blake all shared; it was why all three of them tended to get on the heiress' nerves so much.

Still, there came a moment when she had to defuse the situation before Mt. Weiss erupted. "So, who's organized this party?" she asked.

Weiss calmed down. "A collection of Atlesian students, including myself. We received Professor Goodwitch's permission; she volunteered to act as our teacher-sponsor."

"Wait, you're in on this?" Yang asked.

"She suggested it," Blake said.

"How did you know that?" Weiss asked.

Blake shrugged. "Weiss, I used to be a professional saboteur for an international terrorist organization. How are you surprised?"

"But, that isn't you anymore," Ruby protested.

The Cat Faunus looked up from her book. She turned to Ruby, her eyes wide in surprise. ". . . No, I'm not, but some things you never forget."

"A girl has to have her secrets, Ruby," Yang explained. She walked over to Blake's bed and planted herself next to her partner. Wrapping Blake in a hug, she continued. "It's makes them so adorable!"

Blake snorted. "By that logic, you too are the least adorable people alive."

"Blake! How could you!" Ruby cried.

"Don't blame me; blame your sister."

"Ouch! Did anyone get the license on that bus I was just thrown under?"

Weiss huffed. "I am living with children."

Ruby giggled. Weiss was so adorable.

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Ruby smiled. She was a little disappointed that the costumes didn't have the same individuality as the Haunting Night one did, it was always fun to dress up. She loved her "Death" costume: The black cape was heavier than her cloak, but it felt right wrapped around her shoulders. It slightly obscured the buttoned-up shirt with white shoulders and the black poofy shorts and white stockings she wore. She was also wearing black shoes with silver buckles on them along with a tall, wide-brimmed hat with a larger buckle on the front, and her face was covered by a bird-like mask. Weiss said it used to be worn by plague doctors. Ruby resolved to ask about that later. She was sad she couldn't ring Crescent Rose with her, but Weiss had insisted it wasn't safe. That felt a little hypocritical when Weiss was wearing Myrtenaster as a part of her costume.

Speaking of her partner, the heiress was dressed as a Magician. Instead of a robe made of leaves or snowflakes or anything like what Ruby expected from a wizard or the like, Weiss wore a red costume, holding a cup in one hand, and a golden scepter/wand in the other. As said, Myrtenaster was sheathed at her side, and she had a small glyph floating above her head. "Myrtenaster doesn't take up much space," Weiss argued.

"But Weiss . . ." Ruby whined.

"We're already here, and we can't call a weapons locker into a crowded room."

Well, they probably could, but Ruby didn't want to risk it. This party was pretty fun. The speakers weren't playing any kind of pop music, instead doing some up-beat orchestral music. Despite the limited choices in costume, there was still plenty of variety, though Ruby did see a bunch more Deaths and Magicians. *Great minds think alike, I guess*, she thought. Of course, no one had costumes that were quite as good as the ones Weiss had bought them.

She caught sight of the rest of their team. Blake was in the semi-tight black leathers of the Knave of Spades; it suited her so well, it probably shouldn't have qualified as a costume. Her Faunus teammate wore a hood (that hopefully let her leave her ears open underneath it) and had changed her eye makeup from purple to black circles around the eyes, which combined with the hood's shadows to make her harder to recognize if Ruby didn't know it was her. The only light color on her costume was in the white spades on her wrists, boots, hips, and the small of her back. Weiss said these represented knives.

By contrast, Yang's Knight costume was probably more defense-focused than her big sister had ever been in her life. The costume was metal plates mounted on a leather or canvas outfit, guarding the majority of her body but leaving the joints unprotected but free to move. The metal looked silvery, but with black spades on the pauldrons and the shield she carried. Yang had forgone the traditional helmet with a T-visor, since it couldn't fit with her hair. The blonde was walking around with a spear. She'd had an argument with Weiss about the home-made weapon; Weiss insisted the Knight was only supposed to have a shield, but Yang had countered that if the Magician got a sword, so should she. Weiss had eventually caved and agreed to let it go so long as Yang promised to resist making phallic jokes (the smile her

sister was wearing suggested that she was either keeping them all in her head, or else she'd found a loophole). Also, Yang had to make the weapon herself, hence why it was a spear instead of a sword; Yang was not talented enough with paper mâché to make a sword.

It was beautiful. Unlike Haunting night, Weiss was happily wandering the crowd and mingling with everyone with a smile (and occasionally a blush, which was also incredibly cute). Her partner's guard was finally down; if Ruby had known this was all it'd took, she'd have thrown a Carnival party herself. Not that she'd known Carnival was a thing before tonight. Or that she even knew much of anything about it now. But, hey, at least her partner was happy to explain what all the costumes were. Jaune was the Knight of Diamonds, which looked like he'd just painted his normal armor. Pyrrha's long gown could mean a number of costumes, but the headpiece she wore and the scroll she carried suggested she was the High Priestess. By contrast, Ren carried the staff of the Hierophant; it was odd, since usually couples would share those costumes. Nora wore a flower crown and a stole that Weiss insisted was a lion's mane; she was dressed as Strength. Penny wore simple gown paired with a thin crown.

"This is a Princess costume," her odd but sweet girl explained.

"That's awesome," Ruby said, admiring the black costume with a red belt decorated with black designs. "Princess of Clubs, right?" She hoped it was. Otherwise, the costume designer was a dirty cheater.

"It is," Penny said, confirming Ruby's continued faith in the world. "Do you like it?" she asked.

"You look very elegant, Penny," Weiss confirmed, because she was actually a sweetie herself. As much as she tried to hide it.

Professor Goodwitch was on-hand in a long gown decorated with all four suit symbols and large crown that also had all four designs on it. "She's the Empress," Weiss explained. "Though, she's supposed to have a staff."

"She does," Ruby argued. "Sort of." Good witch carried her riding crop and used it in conjunction with her telekinesis on any couples who were getting too cuddly with each other. Even though they were off-campus, she still had a responsibility to "be a kill-joy" as Yang would put it. Ruby was just as happy, personally.

It was when Ruby caught sight of Team CFVY that things got weird. They had decided to go with a theme; they were all dressed as Court characters, and they were all in the suit of hearts. *What's the rules for four in a row?* Ruby wondered, trying to remember the rules of card games. That wasn't the weird thing though; they weren't the only team to use a theme, though there weren't many others. No, what confused Ruby was their individual choices in costumes. Fox was dressed as a prince, wearing a small crown similar to Penny's with an embroidered belt. He was wearing a shirt with poofy sleeves and pants instead of a gown, and his was red, but she could see similarities. Yatsurhashi looked just as right in a Knight costume as Yang did, and the shield looked appropriate on his arm. Those two sort of made sense. The Knight was perfect for Yatsurhashi, and Fox would happily probably spend the

entire night giving people dumb orders and acting insulted when they were followed. It was the other two that threw the red reaper for a loop.

Velvet was dressed as The Queen of Hearts, in a long, flowing gown and a medium-sized golden crown decorated with hearts on her brow. Her ears protruded above the circlet, and Ruby couldn't decide if they highlighted the crown or if it highlighted them. Either way, she looked like a queen. Moreover, she moved like one. The usually shy and shrinking Velvet was walking through the room like she owned it, her eyes lidded as though she was looking down on everyone.

In one hand the brunette Faunus held a scepter, while the other was extended at the elbow. Coco was escorting her. Or she was escorted by her; it was hard to tell. The upperclassman team leader wasn't dressed as an Empress or Priestess or (and this was a blessing) Lover like Ruby would have expected, but as the Page of Hearts. The most fashionable woman in Beacon was dressed in a plain, loose-fitting shirt and plain pants and over-sized hat of the Page. It was strange to see her in such plain clothes. Not that she wasn't still drawing stares, though. Between the loose, wide-collared shirt, the tight pants, and her boots (which were her usual boots rather than the ones that came with the costume), Coco was attracting attention. She didn't wear her sunglasses, though, and the proud woman was . . . blushing under the attention. While Velvet strode with her head high, the picture of confidence.

Had the two of them switched bodies? Ruby couldn't remember the last time she'd seen the older team leader look anything less than self-assured. In fact, when Fox spoke to her, she bowed and then scurried off to the concessions table to fetch him some (probably spiked) punch. *Is it even safe for her to bow in that costume?* the incarnation of Death wondered. *That shirt is really loose. I mean, Fox is blind, so he won't see anything, but what about everyone else?*

"Foreplay," Blake muttered.

"What?" Both partners jumped. Blake had snuck up on them without making a sound. She looked annoyed.

"What did you say?" Weiss asked.

"You're wondering what's up with Team CFVY. We're watching their foreplay, that's what's up." Blake grumbled.

Ruby blushed, though it was hidden by her mask. How did wearing those clothes count as-- Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope. She didn't want to know.

Her partner, unfortunately, did. "What are you saying?" Weiss hissed, her face now bright red.

"Weiss!" Ruby squeaked.

Blake rolled her eyes. "They're flirting in front of everyone." Her voice dropped to a grumble, and she added, "Lucky jerks."

"Wha--all of them?" Weiss looked like she was about to faint or explode. Or both.

Ruby, however, wasn't able to appreciate it as much this time; she was distracted. Team CFVY had formed a relationship together. People she knew were trying to turn their team into a family. OK, maybe all teams were supposed to be families, but in a siblings way. Coco, Fox, Velvet, and Yatsunashi were trying to make a romantic relationship work. Just like her own parents had.

Maybe she should talk to them . . .

## Chapter End Notes

Obviously, costumes are based more on Tarot cards than traditional Mardi Gras/Carnival costumes. I also used cards from both the Walter-Rite and the Alistair Crowley decks, in case anyone is confused by the prince and princess costumes.

Ruby's suit and hat is meant to look like a stereotypical Pilgrim's (say what you will about how tyrannical and hypocritical they were, they knew how to dress). Weiss' costume inspired by the Magician card from the tarot, but combining elements I always thought were superfluous (the Glyph combines the infinity symbol with the Pentacle, and it bugs me that the character holds a scepter but has a separate wand on top of that!). Blake and Yang's knight costumes would be inspired by Din Djarin's Mandalorian armor. Penny gets the Suit of Clubs because that suit and/or its tarot equivalent (Wands) is associated with creativity which seems right for a Pinocchio-esque being.

Blake and Weiss' discussion of Mantle's theater tradition is based on Shakespeare's. As my best friend likes to point out, what most people forget about Shakespeare was that most if not all of his plays were adaptations of pre-existing literature and folk tales; he was the most successful FANFICTION AUTHOR in history.

Yang didn't get to do much, but at least I got to drop hints about my headcannon for CVFY. Yeah, Team RWBY isn't the only team trying to become a complete set. They're not even one of two.

# Eve of the Dead

## Chapter Notes

Finally! I meant to have this done so much earlier. But I had Finals stuff to do, and then flying home, and then Writer's Block and general distractions, but I finally got it. I should be able to get more out more regularly. Happy Pride Month!

Before anyone says anything, I have seen the RWBY/Justice League crossover mini-series. I think it's pretty cool (especially as they're trying to fit the DC characters into the world of Remnant as opposed to just having characters jump from one universe to the other). No, this doesn't mean I'm retconning the Tangent/DC thing from earlier. Those versions of the characters are so different from the RWBY-fied ones that I don't see anything conflicting between the two apart from the names (and lest ye forget, pre-Crisis Barry Allen took his Flash name from a Golden Age comic featuring Jay Garrick).

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

Haunting Night was coming up again. Which meant Ruby's birthday was coming up again. Which meant Blake had to run around looking for a present for her friend and leader while also trying to find a new costume to rent and seeing it preparations for her own ritual. Not for the first time the Faunus found herself wishing her clones had a bit more range and substance so she could be in multiple places at once.

Last year hadn't been so bad. It had been busy, but the Eve of the Dead had come after Haunting Night that year so it had been a little more manageable. This year it came 2 days before Haunting Night.

*I worked harder in the White Fang*, she told herself, ignoring the stab of guilt and shame that always came with such memories. *When did I get so lazy?*

Then again, in the Fang she always knew what she was doing. She had a task, and she worked to complete it. Even when she had multiple things to worry about, she still had goals she knew she was working towards. She didn't have to run around comparing clothes and books and tools and things, not thinking which would please her . . . friends the most.

Blake tried to keep how tired she was to herself. It shouldn't have surprised her that her teammates found out regardless.

Blake woke up early Saturday morning. At least, she planned to. She hadn't planned to wake up to the feeling of sunlight warming her cheek. She frowned, even as she instinctively snuggled deeper into the wonderful warmth and comfort of her bed. *I need to get up, she told herself.* Frowning more, she forced herself into a sitting position.

She opened her eyes and saw her teammates were up too. Ruby and Weiss were sitting on the heiress' bed reading (Blake smiled to see Weiss' eyes were glued to her copy of *The Carnival of Mutants*). Yang was sitting at her desk by the door. "Good morning, Blake-y," the blonde said.

Blake stiffened. She was getting very familiar with her partner's moods. Yang smiled a lot, but she had different kinds of smiles. The one she had right now was the one Yang had mentally dubbed "Yang's Trouble-Making Smile." Also known as "Yang's WATCH YOUR ASS Smile." *She's standing by the door, maybe I can get out through the window . . .*

The blonde got up and started walking towards her. "You slept in late, Kitty Cat," she said. "Which makes sense, you know, since you've been looking so tired lately."

Blake swallowed and started to seriously consider jumping now out of the window.

Yang continued. "In fact, I haven't seen you this tired since you were hunting for the White Fang on your own." Yang was leaning over her now. "You wouldn't happen to be doing that again, would you?"

Blake shook her head. "No. No I haven't. I learned my lesson: no more going behind your backs to chase bad guys."

"So, what have you been doing?" Weiss asked. "Because you have been going behind our backs to do something."

Blake swallowed. "It's nothing," she said.

"Blake," Ruby whined. "It's not nothing. It matters to you, and you matter to us. So this matters to us. So let us help you. Please."

The Cat Faunus sighed. Saying no to Yang was always hard, but saying no to Ruby when she was in full heart-on-her-sleeve mode nearly impossible. "I've just been busy with shopping."

"Shopping? Weiss asked. That's it?"

"It's been a lot. Getting a costume and looking for a present for Ruby . . ."

"Blake," Ruby said. "I don't want you running yourself to death looking for a gift for me." She looked genuinely hurt at the idea, and Blake's tired mind tried to come up with something to placate her.

Yang however was less concerned and more suspicious. "Blake, Weiss and I are in the same situation, but we're not nearly this run-down. And after Ruby, you enjoy running around more than the rest of us. What's up?"

Blake considered how she could explain it to them, when Weiss spoke up. "Is this about the Eve of the Dead?"

Blake blinked. "How did you know that?"

Weiss stiffened. “Up until last year, I was very ignorant of Faunus culture. I’ve been trying to correct that.”

Blake smiled at that, so did the sisters. They all felt so proud of their formerly racist teammate. Oh, Weiss wasn’t perfect; it would take more than a year or so to undo a lifetime of indoctrination, but it meant so much that Weiss was trying.

It was also, she thought, nice to see the heiress’ stubbornness and perfectionist drive turned towards something constructive.

“What’s the Eve of the Dead?” Ruby asked.

”It’s a holiday celebrated on Menagerie,” Blake explained. “It’s similar to Haunting Night, a night when the barrier between the worlds of the living and the dead are believed to be thinnest and the dead can interact with the living. The difference is that for us, this isn’t a terrifying thing; it’s a chance for us to speak with our lost loved ones again.”

”Sounds pretty cool,” Yang said, sounding wistful.

*She’s probably thinking about getting the chance to speak with Summer again,* Blake thought.

But, with her typical way, Yang shook off the mood and returned to the business at hand.

“Why didn’t we hear about this last year?”

”The Eve of the Dead is based on the Mistrali lunar calendar,” Blake explained. “So, the date it falls on varies from year to year, sometimes by a lot. Last year it was after Haunting Night, so I had a few extra days to work it out.”

”But why didn’t you mention it?” Ruby asked. “This is important to you, isn’t it? Why didn’t you say anything?”

“It’s not that big a deal,” Blake deflected. “I think Mistral has a similar festival, but it’s not exactly the same. If you’re not a Faunus, not from Menagerie, then it wouldn’t mean anything to you.”

“So, tell us,” Ruby said. “Let us help you. This time of year is supposed to be a happy one, not sad or stressful.”

“I’ve never heard of that,” Weiss said.

“Well, it’s my birthday, so of course it’s supposed to be happy,” Ruby said, affecting her best high and mighty attitude. It was adorable.

“Sounds like sound logic to me,” Yang said, grinning.

Blake was confused for a moment, then her brain caught up with her ears and she groaned at the bad pun. *Did that even count as a pun, or was it just bad word play?*

“So,” Ruby said, speaking in earnest, “how can we help you celebrate?”



Blake sighed, knowing she was beaten. "If you could help me pick out a costume and a present for Ruby—that I can afford on my own," she added the last bit staring hard at Weiss and Yang. She was paying for the gift herself; she might not be able to pick out a present for Ruby, but it would still be a gift from her.

"And the . . . Evening . . . Thing?" Ruby asked.

"Eve of the Dead," Weiss corrected.

Blake smiled. "Don't worry about that. I can handle that myself."

"I have a question though," Yang said. "How were you planning to do this when you were first came to Beacon? You know, when you were, ah . . . ?"

"When I was still hiding the fact that I was a Faunus?" Blake asked. "I didn't know. I was planning to muddle through it."

"I guess it's a good thing you came out when you did," Ruby remarked. Then she thought about her phrasing. "Uh, I mean, not 'came out.' I meant, uh . . ."

Yang burst out laughing. Weiss sighed and shook her head, though was fighting a smile. Blake smiled openly as she felt herself falling in love all over again.

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The next night, Blake made her journey to Beacon's on-campus chapel. The octagonal room was a mixture of elegance and simplicity. It had a high-vaulted ceiling, rows of pews, a podium on a raised platform, a few small tables or altars against the walls, and stained glass windows, but nothing more. While it mostly mimicked an Oumist Church, there were no religious symbols or icons belonging to any faith. Even the stained glass was arranged in abstract patterns rather than forming symbols or scenes or the images of saints. Certain times had been set aside for services, but it looked like the chaplains assembled and disassembled their ritual requirements each time rather than leaving the chapel set for a specific faith.

It was a place open to all, and it lived up to that goal. Blake had come in here last year a time or two for her rituals, though unlike an Oumist, her religion didn't have regular church services. It did make use of scented candles, though, and right now, it was all Blake could do not to gag at the mix of smells emanating from the room. A Human might not notice it, but to her sensitive nose, there was no escaping the cloying smell.

Much like last year, a handful of Faunus students occupied the various tables; there weren't enough for everyone, so folks shared and tried not get in each others' way or disturb each others' offerings. They also spoke in low voices, filling the entire room with a droning murmur.

Blake looked around and saw an one that still had a lot of open space on it. To her pleasant surprise, she saw a familiar pair of rabbit ears in front of it.

The Cat Faunus made her way over to the wall. "Velvet," she said, politely as the Rabbit Faunus set up her small shrine.

"Oh, Blake," Velvet said, looking up. "Good evening."

Blake opened her bag. She took out a collection of candles of various colors. White for those lost to age, red for those lost in violence, green for those taken by sickness, and black for the Grimm. She had a lot of red candles. She lit them all, one by one. Then she set up her representatives. First was a small statue of a smoke jaguar. She smiled at it. Everyone assumed her ears were from a house cat. If anyone ever looked closely at them in good light . . . Normally, she would have set up framed photographs or painting or the like of family, but Blake hadn't taken any when she'd left home, and she was not an artist. Instead, she placed drawings of her family's emblems, drawn as well as she could, at the bases of the candles. It was a small, pitiful representation of her family, and it reminded her how much she still needed to do to make things right.

Lastly, she took out three small cups, the size of shot glasses, and a thermos. She opened it, and steam came out. She poured the fresh tea into the cups, placing them in front of the statuette and the drawings. She also withdrew a plate which she placed in front of all three and a plastic container. On the plate she placed a small offering of dried fish, crackers, and cherries. Blake's mother had told her that her grandmother loved cherries (not unlike Ruby's love for strawberries).

The Cat Faunus bowed her head. "Ancestors," she said. "I wish you well. I hope I've made you proud this past year. My friends and I captured a very dangerous criminal, though we weren't able to stop him from doing a lot of damage. My team placed second in the Vytal Festival; I think this year we might be able to win." Blake took a deep breath. "My teammates are wonderful people. They've been the best friends I ever could have hoped to have. We had some rough patches, but they've accepted me, even when I didn't accept myself. I've, I've been very blessed to know them."

The Cat Faunus spoke more, assuring her lost family members that she was doing her best to honor them and make up for her past mistakes. She'd made so many; she sometimes wondered if she'd ever be able to make up for everything, but her teammates told her she could. Sometimes, Blake wondered if "teammates" was really the best word for what they all were, or if the four of them were becoming something more. But, her ancestors likely weren't interested in her love life (especially with non-Faunus), so she kept such concerns to herself.

She finished her prayers and stood up. In the morning, she would return and disassemble her make-shift shrine.

Velvet was waiting for her at the door. "Would you like to get some coffee?" she asked.

Blake paused for a moment. "Sure."

The two walked to the school's café. The cafeteria had long since closed, but the small make-shift coffee shop/pub would be open for a few more hours. There were human and faunus students milling around in the tables. In the back, four friends were playing pool. Blake and Velvet ordered their coffees. Velvet ordered a plate of cookies to go with it. She offered to share, but Blake turned her down.

The two sat at a table. The started talking about classes.

"I've always been impressed Oobleck knows so much about Faunus-related history," Velvet admitted. "I'm honestly a little embarrassed about how little I know."

"Maybe you should drink more coffee," Blake commented. "You could study faster and for longer."

The Rabbit Faunus laughed out loud. "Oh my gosh. I can't believe how much coffee he drinks. Even Coco doesn't drink that much, and she loves coffee. How does he not have constant caffeine-induced headaches?"

"I guess he doesn't stop drinking long enough for a headache to set in," Blake remarked. She frowned. "Velvet . . . how did your team react when you told them you were coming her tonight?"

Velvet cocked her head to the side. "They've always been supportive of it. Yastuhashi asked me if he should come with me. It was sweet, but I thought it might make the others nervous."

Blake smirked. "Seeing a giant human looming behind them all can do that."

Velvet giggled. "I know. I was scared when I first met him, before I realized what a big softie he is. Why are you asking? Did your team not take it well?"

"No," Blake shook her head. "They were supportive too. I guess I wanted advice from another Faunus with human teammates." *And who was more than teammates with them*, she thought but wasn't yet ready to say aloud. "I was wondering if I should have brought them with me, to introduce my ancestors to them."

"I'm probably not the best person to ask about that," Velvet acknowledged. She nibbled a cookie. "I'm an atheist. Or an agnostic. I kind of go back and forth."

That took Blake aback. "Then, why were you in the chapel tonight?" she asked.

"It's more about a cultural heritage for me," the Rabbit Faunus explained. "I don't believe my ancestors are really there, but I do want to honor them. To remember their achievements and sacrifices and try to live up to their memories."

Blake nodded. "I understand. I'm trying to do the same." Speaking of things she was also trying to do, she swallowed and tried to force them out.

"Blake, are you all right?" Velvet asked. "You look . . . pained."

"How . . . How did you know?" *There*, Blake thought, *I said it*.

"Well, you're frowning," Velvet started.

"No. How did you know . . . how did you realize that you and they . . . ?"

Velvet blushed. "Why don't you have a cookie?" she asked, pushing the plate towards her. Blake took one of the remaining cookies and began nibbling on it while Velvet thought over her answer.

"So, can I presume you're asking because . . ."

"I might be having similar thoughts," the Cat Faunus admitted.

To her surprise, Velvet chuckled. "Oh my dear, dear Blake." Her voice was richer than usual. More sensual. She stared at Blake with hooded eyes. "I don't think you're having thoughts at all like mine~"

Blake shivered. Her senses were sharp enough that she had always had a good idea of what went on in the CFVY folks' intimate lives, but it was one thing to think about it. It was a very, very different one to be on the receiving end.

Velvet broke out laughing. "I'm sorry!" she said. "I just, I couldn't resist!"

"What happened to the quiet, non-confrontational huntress I met just after initiation?" she asked, still trying to reconcile that young woman with the commanding voice she'd heard make a giant, a desert-raised tribesman, and . . . *Coco Adel* beg for mercy.

She blushed bright red. "I don't often meet anyone else who knows the truth. I'm not actually comfortable admitting it, but you know and it's . . . liberating to be able to admit to my orientation. "

"I thought it was a lifestyle or something."

"Not to us," Velvet said. "Some of us, anyway." She shrugged. "Anyway, regardless of what we get up to behind closed doors, can I presume you're talking about wanting to do it with all your teammates?"

Blake flushed. "It's not a great idea, I know. We're from 3 different countries, have 3 different backgrounds, three different religions, and I'm the only Faunus."

"Better than 4 different countries, 4 different backgrounds, and maybe 4 different religions," Velvet countered. "We're both the only Faunus on our teams."

"Maybe 4 different religions?" Blake asked.

"Fox might be agnostic too," Velvet said. "Though he tends more towards Vacuoan spiritualism. He doesn't talk about it much. Yatsunashi is a Mistrali polytheist, and Coco is an Oumist."

"Sounds like a headache during the holidays," Blake commented.

"You have no idea!" Velvet laughed. Sobering, she said, "Blake, Let me be honest with you. Our relationship is difficult. It's complex. We don't always understand each other, and we sometimes hurt each other without meaning to. We get on each other's nerves."

Blake blinked. "So . . ."

"Why do we do it?" Velvet asked. "How do we do it? We do it because it's worth it, because they're worth it," she said, smiling. "We talk. We compromise where we can. We try to be patient with each other. We try and we try, and we remember to forgive each other.

Sometimes it can take awhile—Coco can carry a grudge," she chuckled a little, apparently full of affection for her troublesome lover. "But we all value each other and our relationship to stay angry or anything."

She finished her coffee. "That's my advice, Blake," she said. "Always remember that you're a team, as huntresses and as a relationship—if it ever gets that far. Either that means more to you than anything or it doesn't." She shrugged. "If it doesn't, then it won't work out."

Blake nodded. That made sense, in a way. Her relationship with Adam hadn't been more important than her moral compass, but she had faith in her new team. She knew what kind of people Ruby, Weiss, and Yang were. That their morals were, for the most part, complimentary to hers, and where they weren't, they could find common ground. As a huntress team, she knew their relationship was solid. But could they take it to the next level? Could they become more than teammates?

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Two days later, it was Haunting Night 102. Team RWBY was once again there. This time Weiss had a proper costume; she was dressed as the Winter Maiden from the old stories.

Taking cues from Team CFVY's Carnival costumes, all of Team RWBY was decked out in matching costumes; Ruby was the Spring Maiden, Yang the Summer, Blake was dressed in the reds and yellows and oranges of the Fall Maiden. The brightly colored dress, with the design of autumn leaves and the light and billowy the fabric felt very . . . not her. It didn't help that she could remember Professor Goodwitch wearing a costume very, very similar to this last year.

But, she was enjoying it. She was happy to join her team in this ridiculous spectacle.

Nearby, she saw Team CFVY had also taken up themed costumes (she wondered if Ruby and Coco had been trading ideas). The older team had gone for a retro-look, like they'd stepped out of the Post-War world of Deco, Pulp, and Noir. Velvet was dressed like a flapper, Coco wore an elegant glamorous dress suitable for a femme fatale, Yatsushashi looked a little silly in his Bellhop's uniform, and Fox made for an impressive gangster or PI complete with trench coat and fedora.

Velvet looked a little uncomfortable to be wearing such an insubstantial dress, but Coco put her arm around her waist. In response, the Faunus smiled and snuggled into her.

It was, Blake thought, extremely sweet. If only she was brave enough to approach her own teammates that way.

Her keen ears—mostly useless with the music and the sounds of so many people—heard the sounds of heels approaching her just before Weiss spoke. "Blake?" She asked. "Can we talk?"

Blake nodded. It saved her from having to form words. Where the collection of autumn leaves looked completely out of place on her, Weiss' icy gown looked perfectly natural on her. Rather than the laurel made of flowers or leaves Blake and the sisters wore, Weiss wore an icicle crown. Normally, Weiss hated everyone's habit of calling her an "Ice Queen," but at this moment she had taken to the role perfectly.

The two found a quiet place in the back. "What is it?" Blake asked.

Weiss sighed. "I've been thinking lately."

"You're always thinking," Blake noted.

"Heavens know the rest of you don't often enough." The barb wasn't harsh; if anything it felt . . . Tired.

"Weiss," Blake asked. "Are you all right?"

Weiss didn't answer right away. She looked out on the dance floor. Team JNPR was also using a theme—superheroes. Jaune was dressed in some badly crafted bright red armor with spikes coming out of the shoulders, a large fin or bat wing on its head, and the chest plate and shield. Pyrrha was dressed in a green gown and a darker green cloak with gold patterns on it along with a mask and she held a shepherd's crook that had a Mistrali lantern hooked to the end. By contrast, Nora was wearing a lime-green body suit with matching makeup on her face and orange and black armor on her arms and shoulders. Poor Ren looked as out-of-place as Blake felt in his gray-and-black suit with blue cape, yet he was smiling. Maybe, she thought, he was enjoying being a part of a team too.

"I've been thinking about . . . religion," she said at last. "You, Ruby, and Yang all have your beliefs."

"We do," Blake agreed, waiting for her to continue.

"Religion was not very important to my father," the heiress said.

Blake snorted in response. No one would ever accuse Jacque Schnee of being worried about being judged for his actions. Besides which, "I can't see him acknowledging any higher power than himself."

Weiss smiled. "Neither can I. Anyway, I wasn't raised with much in the way of spirituality, though of course, I couldn't study history or literature without developing an understanding of Atlasian traditions."

She went on. "In those traditions, we don't have an afterlife, not like Oumists or I suppose you do. In the Cantrion—that's the name of the traditional Atlasian religion—the reward for a good life is to lie peacefully in your grave. The punishment for a flawed life is to wander as a restless ghost and to be vulnerable to the works of necromancers." She paused. "Go ahead, laugh."

"Weiss, I'd never laugh at anyone else's beliefs, especially not my teammates, as long as they're not hurting anyone." Her own religion held that at least one night a year, the spirits of the dead could interact with the living. Once you accepted that, necromancy felt like a perfectly logical assumption.

"Thank you," Weiss said. " But, what I mean is . . . Between my father's materialism and my own cultural heritage, I wasn't really raised with the idea that, that the dead were paying much attention to us."

"And now?" Blake asked.

Weiss looked back out at the dancers. "Now, I wonder if they do. And it scares me."

"You're worried about disappointing your ancestors?"

"Yes. But, I also can't help but think about everyone else my father has hurt. Everyone who's . . . died."

Weiss whispered the last bit and shrank deeper into herself. Blake was glad for that because she needed a minute to recover. She remembered her friend Ilia, who had lost her parents to an SDC Dust mining accident. And the gods only knew how many more people had lost loved ones in that incident or others.

"Weiss," the Cat Faunus said at last. "That isn't your fault. It's your father's, and if you're so concerned about what other people think of you . . . be a better person than him. It doesn't matter if they're living or dead; that's all anyone can want from you. Do that and we'll be proud of you, whatever else you do."

Blake realized she'd made a mistake. She'd said "we."

Weiss smiled softly. "Thank you," she said. She looked back out on the dance floor. "There's our partners, making fools of themselves." Indeed, Yang and Ruby were dancing together, or at least flailing around together. "Shall we try to rescue them from themselves?"

Blake smiled back. "Sounds fun."

## Chapter End Notes

Surprise! Everyone (me included) generally tends to think that Coco would be the top and Velvet the sub in a relationship, but I thought it would be fun to reverse that. I don't know a lot about BDSM, but I do know that what you are in the bedroom isn't a sign of being "strong" or "weak" outside.

I hope to eventually do some lemons featuring the teams. Let's just say CFVY's is gonna be very, very kinky.

Shoutout to WhatOtherPlanet for the name "Cantrion." I've asked their permission to use the Atlasian religion they detailed in their story "Panoply" which is really good. Check it out. I'm also planning to rip-off/borrow another idea from that story involving Weiss. I've asked for permission and haven't heard back, so I'm taking that as approval. Maybe not my best idea, but it's kind of canon now, and I am trying to mitigate any damage by reminding all readers where it's coming from.

That bit about the afterlife however was not in "Panoply." I stole it from MTG and the Plane of Innistrad.



# Flower Festival

## Chapter Notes

Spoiler right now, The Flower Festival is not based on any real holiday. It was vaguely inspired by the Indian Festival of Colors, but it's mostly my own creation.

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

Weiss hid her smile as she watched Ruby plaster her face against the bullhead's window, looking down on the city of Mistral as they approached. Ruby was an amazing leader and had proved time and again that she deserved to skip two years, but somehow the simplest things still had the power to reduce her to childish glee and enthusiasm.

"Wow, it's so cool," the redhead whispered.

Weiss shook her head, trying to look disdainful.

"Don't let it fool you," Velvet warned. The Faunus' voice surprisingly negative. "There's a dark side to it."

Everyone in the bullhead sobered. Team RWBY was sharing space with Teams JNPR and CFVY. Teams SSSN and FNKI would meet them in Mistral. Weiss still wasn't sure she could believe how many friends she had; once, she'd been the girl desired by everyone and loved by no one. Now, she had more people in her life than she knew what to do with.

Blake addressed the other Faunus in the room. "When I was in the Fang, I heard a lot of unpleasant stories out of Mistral. Not as bad as some of the things that happened in Atlas . . ."

Weiss frowned at that. What Blake really meant was "in the Schnee Dust Company;" she was just too kind to say it.

Blake continued, "But pretty bad."

Velvet nestled against Yatsushashi, who put one of his large arms around her; on her other side, Coco took her hand. "Mistral isn't the best place to be a Faunus," she agreed.

"It isn't the best place to be different in any way," Yatsushashi agreed, rubbing her arm. "If you're too tall or too short, too fat or too thin, too . . . Anything, you find yourself ostracized at best. Actively oppressed at worst."

"There's also the criminal element," Ren added. "Given that we'll be landing in the middle of the Flower Festival, everyone will need to be especially vigilant. If anyone bumps into you, presume they're a pickpocket. If someone tries to sell you anything, presume it's either

stolen or a knockoff. Stay in the group; don't go wandering off anywhere and especially not on your own."

Nora, surprisingly serious, nodded in agreement.

"I thought that was a stereotype," Jaune said. "I mean, I know you guys said it was rough—" Jaune clammed up.

Ren shrugged. "Some people live up to stereotypes."

"There are plenty of good people in Mistral," Yatsunashi said. "Unfortunately, you often can't tell them apart from the bad ones until it's too late."

The mood in the cabin dropped like an anchor. The group brooding and worrying silently. Thankfully, Ruby—bless her and her curiosity—decided to ask the question her teammates hadn't thought to. "So, what's this Flower Festival?"

Velvet perked up. "It's a celebration of the end of the War," the Rabbit-eared woman explained. "The flowers represent peace, harmony, prosperity, and benevolence."

"Reminds me of Hearts' Day," Yang commented.

"I know, right?" Nora said. This started a passionate argument between various people arguing over how much the Flower Festival did or didn't have in common with Hearts' Day. Weiss groaned and pulled out her book, burying her nose in it in an attempt to drown out the noise by immersing herself in YA literature. *I should probably see about getting the next trilogy the next time I'm in Vale*, Weiss thought.

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The friends landed at Haven Academy. Headmaster Lionheart made a long speech about the unity of the Academies and the Kingdoms. Weiss couldn't help but compare his style to Ozpin's, and the Lion-tailed man came up short. Ozpin's speeches tended to be short and to the point, blunt even. Her first day, the day before initiation, she had been surprised and disappointed by this, but she'd come to appreciate these styles compared to the to the speeches she was used to hearing in Atlas. Her father and his colleagues and rivals were fond of long, flowery speeches designed to confuse, mislead, and manipulate.

It made her think of the character Whitman from *The King of the Crowns*, whose greatest power wasn't his Wizardry but his subtle and confusing manner of speech. Weiss paused at that. *Why am I thinking about that?* She might have been reading too much. *Now that's a thought I never expected to have.*

The assembly ended, and the teams dispersed to put their things away. However, that was interrupted when Team CFVY started banging on their door.

"What's up?" Ruby asked.

"We've got a reservation," Coco said. "We're taking all you underclassmen to the best spot in Mistral. Then we're gonna show you what the Flower Festival is all about. Now, move."

Outside, Team JNPR was with them. Team SSSN had apparently already run off on their own.

Half an hour later, the three teams were sitting in a seafood restaurant built on the bank of the river. It had a large, open-air deck designed to accommodate customers who wanted to enjoy the view, but the teams were all seated inside. They could still see the water and the boats and the dockside hustle and bustle outside the large windows.

"Sitting outside means dealing with the heat, bugs, and the smell of fish," Coco explained. "Unless you're a native of a first-time tourist inside's the place to be."

Her teammates nodded in agreement with her. "Plenty of natives prefer the inside," Yatsu added.

Weiss was fairly certain most of her friends (Blake in particular) would have enjoyed the outside experience anyway, but she was personally grateful for the older team's consideration.

"The view's just as good where I'm sitting," Fox said, making a show of sweeping his blind eyes around the group.

"The food is worth it, anyway," Velvet assured them.

The wait-staff came and provided them all with glasses of water along with a four large, chilled decanters to refill whenever they needed. To Weiss' surprise but delight the table was also supplied with kettles of hot tea along with cream and sugar syrup. Ren and Jaune immediately slapped Nora's wrist when she reached for it, while Weiss and Yang did likewise with Ruby. Pyrrha—bless her—pushed the metal-capped containers of liquid sweetness out of their reach.

"Can we get you anything else?" the oldest-looking waiter asked.

Before the group could answer, one of the younger waiters yelped in pain. The others turned and saw the man's hand being crushed in Yang's.

"This jerk tried to pick my pocket," the blonde said. Smiling none to friendly, she asked, "Or were you just trying to feel me up, sweetie?"

Her question was accompanied by a tightening of her grip, causing the man to whimper. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It won't happen again. Just let me go. Please."

"Please let the boy go, ma'am," the eldest said. "I promise he will be reprimanded for his behavior. Obviously, he won't be serving you—or anyone else—this afternoon. Hopefully, a week's suspension will teach him better manners."

*Or it'll teach him to be a better thief,* Weiss thought. Back in Atlas or Vale that worst of behavior would have terminated the man's employment and possibly earned a call to the police.

Beside her, Jaune actually voiced her thoughts. "Doesn't that seem a little light for attempted theft?"

"It's Mistral," Ren said. "Nora," he reprimanded, slapping his partner's hand again as she reached for more syrup.

The redhead glared but didn't say anything.

Blake took up the thread. "The gap between rich and poor isn't as bad here as some places."

Again, Weiss cringed at thoughts of her home.

"But it's still pretty bad. Did you see how greasy his hair was? He probably hasn't had a shower in days, at least. Desperation is the cause of more crime than abject greed."

"Dang. No I wish I had let him off," Yang lamented.

Blake smiled and patted her partner's thigh. "Crime is still crime, and you have a right to defend yourself.

"Besides," Fox added. "Maybe he really was just trying to grope you."

Blake snorted. "Yes, because that's so much better."

The waiters—minus the youngster—returned. Instead of bread, they had brought steaming plates of calamari with a variety of sauces to the table.

"What kind of restaurant gives you fresh squid?" Jaune asked.

"A Mistrali seafood place," Pyrrha said, gleefully helping herself to a sizable plateful.

"It helps that this is the height of mating season," Yatsushashi said, filling his own plate. "And we're right on the Azure River."

"This is freshwater squid?" Weiss asked. Mentally she chastised herself. Of course, freshwater squid would be more available in Mistrali restaurants; it was their native kingdom. Still, it was amazing to see a luxury (in the other kingdoms) heaped on the table to be taken or left as the guests saw fit.

"The sweet sauce and the hot sauce are pretty good," Fox said, mixing three sauces on his plate. "But watch out for the really hot sauce. If you're not used to it, it can be a lot."

"Thanks," Jaune said, sitting right next to him. "Wait. Which one's which?"

Fox "looked" at the two bottles before him. "Huh. You know, I can't remember." He picked one up and handed it to Jaune. "I think this is the sweet stuff. It should be OK."

"Thanks," Jaune said, taking the bottle like it was a bomb.

"Fox!" Velvet cried, whacking his arm.

Her blind teammate rolled his eyes. "Fine. Here's the real stuff."

The blonde took the bottle and tried a drop on his finger, happy to discover the other man was telling the truth—this time. The wait staff returned again, and the group delivered their orders. After which, they settled into munching on the calamari.

"So," Jaune asked. "What goes on during this Festival, anyway?"

"You have three Mistralians on your team," Blake pointed out. "And you never asked them?"

Jaune blushed. "I never really thought about it. Nora decorated our room with flowers last year, and Ren mentioned it, but neither of them talked about it much. And Pyrrha didn't seem to care."

"In my defense, Argus is more akin to a colony of Atlas," Pyrrha said. "Though we tend to think of ourselves as an independent settlement, much like Menagerie."

"The Festival is a little hard to celebrate outside of Mistral," Velvet said. "It's mostly a cultural thing. Lots of vendors selling food, street performers, and theatrical productions."

"Don't forget the prostitutes, pick-pockets, and con artists," Fox pointed out.

"Well, yes there are those too," Velvet admitted.

"There are also fireworks," Yatsushashi added.

"Yeah, we should be able to get a good view of those tonight," Coco agreed.

Weiss internally cringed. Fireworks. She looked beside her and confirmed what she already knew: Ruby's eyes were sparkling.

She would deny until her dying day—she promised herself—that she derived any amusement at that sight.

Out loud she asked, "Do you know anything about these plays? Maybe, should our schedules allow it, we can attend one."

Yang snorted. Weiss ignored her. Just because the blonde was content to be a barbarian didn't mean the rest of their team had to be.

Coco fished out her scroll. "Let's see. In addition to the folks performing in the streets, there are some traditional Kabuki and Noh plays. Plus a couple more standard-to-Vale things."

"Including a Voss Bender Revival of all things," Blake noted. Weiss turned and saw her Faunus teammate examine her own scroll with a slight frown on her face.

"Who Bender?" Jaune asked.

"Voss Bender was an Argusian opera writer," Pyrrha explained. Of course she knew who he was. "He was one of the most famous and controversial artists in Argus' history."

"Controversial?" Weiss asked. "What's there to debate? He was a great composer and playwright."

"He was also an insufferable and melodramatic blowhard," Blake commented.

"That seems a little harsh," Jaune noted. Loathe as she was to admit it, Weiss agreed with him. Blake was using a tone she normally reserved for the most corrupt and despicable individuals. *Individuals like Father.*

"It's not," the Faunus insisted. "Bender used his celebrity status to essentially outlaw any theatrical or musical works that didn't fit his own overly-dramatic sensibilities or whose politics he disliked."

A light bulb went off in Weiss' head. "Like people who wanted to criticize the treatment of Faunus?" the heiress offered.

Blake nodded. "He wasn't fond of social criticism in general. Wealth disparity. Gender-based discrimination. Nationalities. If there was a problem with Argus, he didn't want to see it discussed or depicted on-stage."

"Wow, he sounds great," Yang drolled.

"In fairness," Velvet said. "He didn't put down Faunus composers. He just didn't let them talk about how unfairly they were treated by their Human neighbors."

"So, I guess he wasn't all bad," Ruby offered.

Weiss shook her head, though it warmed her heart, the way Ruby was always trying to see the good in everyone. No matter how undeserving they were. *People like me*, she thought remembering the start of their friendship.

"There have definitely been worse people—in both politics and the arts," Blake admitted.

"Well, you can judge for yourselves," Pyrrha said. The others turned to her. "Team JNPR was already planning to visit my family in Argus for New Years. You could all come as well."

"In the meantime, let's find something to do that doesn't involve an egomaniac who was way too fond of bass drums and cymbals," Coco said, chomping on a piece of calamari.

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Weiss had to admit, this was a pleasant distraction. While she wanted to get back to training for the Vytal Festival, she had enjoyed the day. After lunch, the group had gone to explore the streets. They'd caught sight of jugglers and street acrobats and musicians. They watched magicians perform conjuring tricks and animal charmers with birds and snakes (Weiss' favorite was the pair cloud cobras that seemed to dance together). They did their best to avoid being swindled by people hocking over-priced candy. Though at the end of the day, they did buy tea and boxes of snacks called "dim sum" to serve as a light supper; no one was hungry enough for a large meal after "lunch."

As Fox had warned them, they also had to deal with far too many people trying to sell them goods and services of a distinctly illicit nature.

"How can these people be so, so brazen?" Weiss demanded after practically chasing away male and female pair who'd been propositioning Yang. *They were lucky I didn't use Myrtenaster.*

"I'd guess they were drunk, but I couldn't smell alcohol before you scared them off," Yang said, red-eyed. She probably would have started throwing punches if Weiss hadn't exploded first; the couple hadn't exactly made it clear whether or not they were prostitutes or if they thought Yang was.

"It's Mistral," Blake growled. "It's basically legal here."

"Really?" Ruby asked, her voice going high, as it often did when sex was even vaguely mentioned.

"It's true," Velvet agreed. "Prostitution, drugs, and gambling are all officially illegal, but the laws are almost never enforced. Except when it's convenient."

"What do you mean 'convenient?'" Ruby asked. "When wouldn't it be convenient to arrest drug dealers?"

"Watch the news after a recent council election in Mistral," Weiss explained. "Especially after a new administration forms. You'll notice that a lot of bureaucrats and military personnel from the old government are losing their jobs and being arrested for corruption. Then, the same thing happens again when the next group takes power."

"Seriously?" Yang asked.

"Now you know why Argus likes to have as little as possible to do with the rest of Mistral," Pyrrha said.

"I guess Uncle Qrow wasn't exaggerating," Ruby sighed. "How can anyone live here?"

"It's not all bad," Yatsunashi said. "There are some neighborhoods that are better than others. The truth is, most of Mistralians—at least most of the ones I knew growing up—are friendly enough."

"Aside from cheating at cards, right?" Coco asked.

"Well," Yatsu said, shrugging. "It's only cheating if you catch it."

"It's worse when you're an outsider," Velvet commented. "Mistralians are very clannish. Before the kingdom united, it was just a bunch of warring clans and tribes, and people still consider those old allegiances before anything else, though it's more about geography than anything these days; most of the neighborhoods are divided by clans. Watch a person with their neighbors and with strangers, and you can see two completely different people."

"Everyone's been pretty nice so far," Jaune noted.

"We're in the business district," Yatsu noted. "People are welcoming here because their success and well-being depend on it. It's also the place where people from different areas are most likely to interact. Go to the residential areas, and things aren't so pleasant."

"So, I guess we won't be meeting your family, huh?" Ruby asked.

"You might run into them on campus," the giant admitted. "But don't expect them to be particularly warm."

"Hiyoko was friendly enough," Velvet said. "After she got to know us."

"She's a baby," Coco noted. "Give her time."

"I thought we got over that sort of thing after the War," Ruby complained. "Why do people want to be jerks to each other?"

"They're still too used to it," Blake explained without missing a beat.

Ruby groaned. It seemed so innocent, an odd Follow up to Blake's casual cynicism. When their team was first formed, Weiss had thought they were doomed because they were all so different. Now, it felt like this was the way things were meant to be.

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The group was settled on the rooftop of Haven Academy, eating their dim sum and drinking their tea. Weiss was again using her scroll to check for local activities they could enjoy together.

"The Haven Drama Club is putting on a production called *The Four Corners of the House of Mistral*. Supposedly it's about the domestic life of the last Emperor of Mistral and his family."

"That'll definitely be . . . Interesting," Velvet said.

"What makes you say that?" Blake asked, looking up from her copy of *Ninjas of Love IV: Blossoming of the Kunoichi*. While it had been odd at first, the other three members of Team RWBY were happy that their friend no longer felt the need to keep her tastes secret. "The fact that the name is a reference to the Four Corners of the House of Troubles or that Leonardo III publicly kept three mistresses?"

"He what?" Jaune asked.

"Mistral is an unusual place," Pyrrha explained. "Officially, polygamy isn't legal. However, prior to the end of the aristocracy, it was common practice for nobles and royals to have official, recognized mistresses."

"You've got to be kidding me," Yang said, deadpan.

"Nope," Nora said. "That was a thing."

"The last emperor actually did have three official mistresses," Pyrrha added. "Plus his wife."



“Really?” Ruby asked. Surprisingly, she sounded more incredulous than embarrassed.

”Sounds like he was one horny bastard,” Yang noted.

”More like supremely insecure about his masculinity,” Coco countered.

“Anyway,” Velvet said, continuing the academic discussion. “After the War, when the nobility was abolished. The tradition lived on in the upper class.”

”Truthfully, it’s almost more scandalous not to take a Mistress,” Yatsunashi admitted.

”Really?” Ruby asked. “Why not just make it legal to marry more than one person then?”

”Because that would make everyone in the relationship equal,” Coco said. “This way, the official spouse has more prestige and more rights. At least being an official mistress—or whatever you call the male equivalent—has some legal protections. That’s better than you can say for Vale or Atlas.”

“Vale is pretty hypocritical about it too,” Fox said. “Everyone knows soldiers and veterans use the Post-War acts to get their relationships recognized. No one talks about it, but no one’s that blind.” He smiled. “Take my word for it.”

”What about Vacuo or Menagerie?” Yang asked.

”Some tribes allow for multiple partners,” Fox said. “It varies. Like everything.”

”What about Shade Academy?” Jaune asked. “Aren’t they basically the government in Vacuo?”

”Only in the area around it,” the scarred upperclassman admitted. “Anything more than a day’s travel is more or less left to their own devices.”

”What do you do when a family comes from one of the tribes that do allow polygamy?” Weiss asked, genuinely curious.

Fox shrugged. “Pretend to be idiots and ignore the obvious. You know, standard politician behavior.”

That got a round of laughs. Despite the comments, Weiss was intrigued to see the production. Blake might want to accompany her. *I’ll never convince Yang and Ruby to come with us*, she thought. To her surprise, she wasn’t annoyed at her teammates’ lack of culture. If anything, her thoughts of the sisters were . . . Fon—

“Look!” Ruby cried. “It’s starting!”

Weiss blinked. Her mental mindscape was shattered just in time to watch the first firework explode. It was a bright, cheerful red that made her think of Ruby. It hadn’t faded when another pair of fireworks went on—yellow and purple.

More pyrotechnics went off. Ruby coo-ed at the sights. Yang cheered. Even Blake was looking up and watching the display. For a time, the rest of the world disappeared. Even their friends faded into the background. For a brief time, the entire world was made up of Weiss, her team, and lights in the sky.

## Chapter End Notes

“Whitman” is the Remnant version of Saruman. His name is both a reference to white and to Walt Whitman the poet. Also, it sounds like “Wit-Man,” and Saruman’s name means “Man of Craft.”

That bit about the Emperor of Mistral publicly keeping 3 mistresses to prove his virility is a reference to Napoleon III. He had A LOT of mistresses. I’ve heard that he had a bit of an inferiority complex due to who his uncle was (in fairness, his uncle was freaking Napoleon. Do YOU think you wouldn’t have issues trying to measure up to him?).

The Four Corners of the House of troubles is stolen from Elder Scrolls, because I’m too lazy to create an actual pantheon for Mistral (also I like the Daedra).

And here we have a bunch of references to my favorite book: “City of Saints and Madmen.” I was tempted to also introduce Maximilian Sharp, but maybe later.

The bits about Menageriean and Mistralian relationships are sort of stolen from “The Name of Our Game” here on Ao3—It’s a great (albeit very angsty) pollination + Glynda fic—and “Draconian Remnant” on QQ which is a pretty fun badass Jaune story. Recommend both.

Remember, Remnant is a magical place. Snake charming isn’t animal abuse, because you can actually train snakes to dance. In the real world, Indian snake charming is abusive and often involves mutilating the snake. Don’t support it.

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