**Chapter Thirteen**

It was almost disappointing not to wake up having Blake stare at me creepily.

*Almost.*

Getting up, I looked around to see her on her bed, reading. Pyrrha was in the shower, and Yang was passed out on her bed, sheets twisted around her legs, as usual.

Thankfully, after *whatever* the hell I’d done, my throat had mostly healed by the time I’d joined the others for dinner, and focusing on the food, all that had been left afterwards was a slight raspiness to my words. An explanation of ‘Practicing my breath. Overdid it.’ had been enough to get nods of understanding from the others, as Semblance Training apparently involved a lot of finding your limits by overextending.

Then came studying, as I insisted we did our homework that night instead of putting it off, then bed, and then the new day arrived.

Wednesdays were a bit odd. We had a class in the morning, as normal, but from 12:30 onwards there was a six-hour block just labelled ‘Class Activities’, and a room number, and searching the school’s systems didn’t tell me what that was, other than we didn’t have it today. At least, searching the publicly available systems only told me that, and I wasn’t dumb enough to try to hack into the secured areas.

As such, fed, washed, watered, and in armor, carrying our weapons, we reported to a hall that looked not too dissimilar from my workshop at Home, only several times bigger. Instead of a lecture hall, there were work-tables, each with two chairs each.

The teams paired off, though Pyrrha approached Blake, to my surprise, leaving Yang and I sitting together. Team RRWN also split up oddly, Weiss grabbing Ren’s arm, much to Nora’s displeasure, until the Albino said something that sounded like ‘High Yield’ to Ms. Valkyrie, who ran over, picked up Ruby, and bodily carried her leader over to their workstation.

Shaking my head, I looked around the room, no teacher in sight, but there was a door in the back of the hall. Sure enough, a few minutes before class started, it opened, and an enormous woman stepped out.

Six and a half feet tall, *easily*, the woman’s status as a cow Faunus was instantly identifiable from the two curving horns parting her dark brown hair. She looked around at the gathered students, her gaze stopping when she looked at me. I smiled, and her stare sharpened, almost glaring, before she seemed to wrench her gaze to Yang, glanced back to me, and continued on.

Class started and everyone was there, *especially* team CRDL who rushed in at the last moment, all of us watching the woman who was obviously our teacher.

Said woman shot another annoyed glance my way, and I wondered if I had something on my face, before she stared forward and announced. “I’m Professor Amakuni, and I’m here to teach you all how to take care of your weapons, to improve them, and how to make your own. Some of you already know how to do that. Some of you think you know how. Some of you at least know that you don’t. Your weapon is your life, in the field, and without it you’re easy pickings for the Grimm, Bandits, and whatever else you come across. Yeah, you in the red,” the woman said, nodding to one of our classmates, a muscular guy with spiky red hair the color of his outfit.

“I’ve heard about manly huntsmen who took down their opponents with nothing but their fists and their fighting spirit!” the teen argued.

Our teacher gave a very bull-like snort. “If by fighting spirit, you mean their Semblance, then yeah, they exist. Some can get by, like Goodwitch does, without ever having to use a weapon. But not all of us are so lucky as to have one like that. Whoever you heard about could probably do better with real equipment, but are content to let their pride get in the way of their duty.”

The woman looked around at all of us, “What makes us better than animals, better than the Grimm? We use *tools*. Weapons, armor, and the like. That’s the only thing that’s let us survive, and will let *you* survive. That’s what makes us dangerous, but those tools can be dangerous too. That’s why, *none* of you will be so much as *breathing* on the equipment here until you’ve proven you know what you’re doing.”

Her declaration was met by angry looks, mutters, and I could hear Ruby’s quiet *“nooooooooooo.”* However, beside me Yang nodded, and, while I thought I understood why, I shot her a questioning look.

“You work with this stuff before, Jauney?” she asked, and I shook my head. “Even with Aura, it’s pretty nasty. You’re not gonna lose a finger the first time you touch a cutter, but if ya keep doing it?” she shook her head, grimacing, “Had someone in my class almost lose their hand. Dumbass kept relying on Aura, and didn’t realize when he didn’t have enough to stop it. You’ll prolly be fine,” she added, with a smile. “But not everyone’s as. . . *endowed* as you are, Light-Knight.”

I blinked, having worked in shops before, before I’d come here, and I’d never thought of how Aura could affect things. It’d been drilled into us to be *extremely* careful, as a single mistake could mean injury, or even the loss of body parts, but with the defenses Aura gave there was a margin of error. That, ironically, could possibly produce even *more* injuries as that kind of nigh-paranoid care wouldn’t be required, so mistakes would be made and it would be no big deal, right up until it was.

Professor Amakuni waited for the complaints to die down before continuing. “You all have an hour and a half to study, and familiarize yourself with the machinery. During that time, I’ll be looking at your gear, understood?”

There was a general murmur of assent.

“*Am I understood?*” she repeated.

“Yes Ma’am!” the class replied.

We got to work, looking over the safety manuals, and how the equipment worked. Yang, much to her surprise, found that she already knew most of it, while I had only the *barest* of ideas. A table saw was a table saw, even if it was made with Dust and mechashift, but for every device I recognized, there were two I didn’t. She was taken back a bit as I turned to her and asked her to help me, but rallied, with a “Don’t worry Jaune, I won’t leave you. . . *Yang-ing.*”

Not able to repress my snort of laughter at the *terrible* pun she started going over the manuals and I could practically feel Science Talent kicking in, letting me learn what all this was *far* faster than I likely should. My partner, after a few more bad puns, actually got into the rhythm of explaining, and we started to tear through the manuals. Any questions on *how* something worked, like the Sonic Magnetizer, were met with shrugs, but how to *use* it, and what *not* to do, prompted pleasantly complete explanations.

Part of me knew I’d likely be getting a better education from Ruby, but this was rather fun as well.

“Okay, let’s see what you’re using, Long” a voice called from in front of us, causing us both to jump. Professor Amakuni was standing there, and was staring directly at Yang.

“Oh, sure,” the blonde said, stripping off one of her bracelets and offering it to the woman.

The Faunus took it, turning it over in her hands, hitting an internal switch and causing it to expand outward into its gauntlet form. “Good use of mechashift,” she said, “This the only type of ammo it uses?”

“No, I also have Fire Dust rounds,” Yang told her, pulling a strand of shells from a belt pouch and handing it to the older woman, who turned them over, nodded, and handed them back. “I was thinking of extending the gauntlet a bit. For arm armor. Not a lot, just to the elbow, but enough to bounce a blade off of.”

The professor considered it. “You’d need to double up on the capacity of this part,” she observed, tapping a seemingly random section of the weapon, but Yang nodded in understanding. “And it’d throw off the balance for a bit. Are you sure you can handle the weight?”

“Totally,” my teammate nodded, smiling. “I’m second-strongest on my squad, ‘cept for Lizard Lad, but that’s like saying you’re second to a Goliath!”

“*Lizard Lad?*” I asked, amused.

However, Professor Amakuni *wasn’t.* Her eyes snapped over to me, her look hostile. “*I’m not talking to you,*” she commanded, and I blinked, taken aback.

“Um, sorry?” I replied.

The look intensified, and her nostrils flared for a moment, before she looked back to Yang, closing up the weapon, and put it down firmly on the table. “Good work,” she told my teammate, before practically stomping away.

“The hell?” Yang asked, looking to me in confusion. “You screw her sister or something, Arcs?” I didn’t respond, scouring Jaune’s memories. Unsurprisingly, he was a virgin, but that had more to do with overbearing sisters than anything else. “Wait, you *did?*” my teammate gasped, misinterpreting my silence. “But you said-”

“*I didn’t,*” I hissed quietly. “I’ve *never-*I don’t know why *that* happened.” Did she not like Faunus? I mean, she *was* a Faunus, but that didn’t preclude that. No, she was talking to Blake just fine. Did she not like men? I looked around, but none of the other guys looked like they’d been blindsided like I’d been. Watching her, as she talked with Blake and Pyrrha, her expression and demeanor was the same as it’d been with Yang. Gruff, but pleasant.

Then she glanced my way, and her expression darkened for a moment, before she turned away.

Pushing what just happened to the side, I turned to my teammate. “Whatever, doesn’t matter. Now, how the hell do I use a gravity borer without risking flensing my hand every time I need to make an adjustment?”

<DR>

The professor didn’t come back, having us start the test without ever looking at my weapon. With Yang’s crash-course, combined with my Talent, I passed it, even if not with flying colors. I wondered if my new body helped any, most adult Dragons being smarter than any but the most intellectual of humans, at least according to Dungeons and Dragons. I’d say using tabletop roleplaying games as a barometer of reality was dumb, *but I was in a tv show.*

However there was also a practical, which required us to come up and do something under her watchful eye, one at a time, alphabetically.

That is, alphabetically, *except for me*.

“That’s not cool,” Yang muttered, starting to raise her hand, only for me to grab it and keep it down. “But,” she objected.

I shook my head, “Not worth it.” It hadn’t been the first time I’d dealt with a hostile teacher. Hell, *Glynda* came to mind, but at least I’d *said* something to her first, and knew why she might be annoyed at me, even if it wasn’t fair. I wasn’t even angry, as I hadn’t *done* anything to be judged poorly for her. This was all her, I just wish I knew what it was about me that was setting her off. Putting me at the end of the list to make me sweat was, honestly, not the worst thing I’d had a teacher do to me. Not on the first day, mind you, but the teachers here were all a little *off*. I mentally reviewed, fully expecting her to give me a task still within the parameters, but a little more difficult than what she’d given the others. It didn’t matter, I’d do it, and I’d keep on going.

The class was coming to an end, and, from the looks Blake and Pyrrha were sending me, as well as the others, it was becoming increasingly clear that I was being ignored. Finishing with the last student, Amakuni said, “Good, that’s everyone. Bronzewing, Lark, Jules, Celes, go over the manuals and you can try again next week. Everyone else, we’ll start work. That’s all, go get lunch.”

“Professor?” Pyrrha asked, Glancing over at me. “You skipped Jaune.”

“No, I didn’t,” The cow Faunus shot back. “*Leave*.”

The rest of the class, either oblivious and hungry, or twigging that something was up, quickly beat feet. Weiss started to follow, only for Nora to grab her by the back of her shirt and keep her from going anywhere.

I stared at my professor, shocked, not having expected something so. . . *blatant.* But, then again, getting rid of witnesses before something bad happened was SOP for people like this. *Fine,* I thought as I stood up, *if that’s how you want to play it,* ***fine.***I called to the others, “Guys, let’s go. I’m obviously not wanted.”

The teacher crossed her arms and snorted in a way that practically screamed ‘yeah, run’, but I shut it out. The others looked like they were going to say something, but, Ruby looking between me and the other Faunus, obviously confused, they stayed quiet. I paused, almost out the door, looking at the professor, and looked to the professor. For a moment I didn’t just see her, I saw *others*.

Professors who’d outright stated I should change majors because I, as a man, shouldn’t be teaching. Administrators who then accused me of lying. Bosses who’d not bothered to tell me what I was supposed to do, then tried to use my not doing what I didn’t know I needed to do to get me fired. Teachers who’d gone after me to the point that the *administration* had gotten involved, but then only pulled me from the class. Professionals who’d seen me and decided that their *job* was secondary to *hurting me*, for reasons they never stated, leaving me unable to even prevent it from happening again. And it *always* happened again.

I felt a spark of anger flare up, a single prismatic spark dancing on my breath as I said, without even thinking, my words soft but carrying, “I’d apologize for whatever you think I’ve done, but I haven’t had time to *do* anything, so I’ll just say I’m sorry that you can’t be bothered to be professional and *do you job.*” It almost came out as a hiss, and, from her position leaning against her desk, I could see her eyes widen, then narrow with anger, crossed arms bulging with tensed muscles.

*That was dumb* I thought as I turned away, not knowing *why* I’d said it, ready in case she tried to attack me, listening for the telltale movement, either a pounding of feet or a shifting of clothing. I’d dealt with people like that before, I’d been battered about by those in power, unable to do anything, I knew that I was just giving her a way to justify her antipathy, that everyone would say I needed to take it rather than make it worse, but I knew from experience that rolling over didn’t help either.

Nothing *ever* helped. Nothing *ever* got better. Nothing *ever* worked the way it was supposed to.

I walked out of the room, in the dead silence, slipping out my scroll, as the others followed. I repressed my first instinct, to open a portal and just *leave*, instead quickly composing a message, asking Glynda to remove me from the class, due to personal conflicts with the staff, naming my fellow teammates as witnesses. I outlined that it was specifically due to Amakuni refusing to let me to take the qualification exam that was the issue, which she’d had literally everyone else take.

Phrasing it that way, it became an academic issue, and not yet another ephemeral ‘this person doesn’t like me’, where essays there were once A’s suddenly came back C’s and D’s for no reason. Where my name was just mysteriously missing from mass e-mails that it was my fault I never received. Where it was my paper that got ‘lost’, to the point that I took photos of every assignment in case I needed to re-write them, sometimes twice, once three times. Where it was dozens upon dozens of ‘subjective’ issues and ‘mistakes’ that were *always* excused, *always* seen as one-offs instead of patterns no matter how blatantly they were lined up. No, *this* was an objective problem, and one I could *directly* point to.

Maybe that’d work, maybe *this* time the people who saw it would say something instead of denying everything to avoid getting in trouble. Would choose to speak the truth instead of hide behind ‘ignorance’, lest they get caught in the crosshairs of someone abusing their power.

Or maybe it’d be like college all over again. Where *proof* didn’t matter. Where everything everyone *else* did was excused. Where everything *I* did was taken in the worst possible light. Where I was *alone. Always* ***alone.***

Best years of your life my *ass.*

“Are. . . are you okay?” Ruby asked, sounding concerned. I looked down at her, and she hesitated, “Just. . um,” she motioned towards her face.

I reached up, wondering if I had some grease, only for my hand to come away a little wet. And I was tearing up.

Fucking *lovely.*

Focusing on the tightness in my chest that I thought was just my fire, I pushed it back down, and out, and took a deep breath. “I’m fine,” I said. “Not the first time I’ve dealt with someone taking umbrage at my existence.”

“But, she’s a Faunus,” Blake objected, and I glanced back over to her, as the others were trailing behind me as I walked. . . I didn’t know where.

“Why would. . .” I trailed off, wondering why that’d matter. I could see where she was going, though. Ms. Belladonna, ex-White Fang member that she was, still saw everything through the Faunus/Human conflict lens. She assumed my previous problems were racist in nature, which, ironically, at *least* once they had been, but not because of my *scales*.

In fact, thinking on it, I stiffened as I realized that, while Jaune had had his share of problems, he’d *never* had to deal with this. That it was, apparently, truly just something about *me* that caused this bullshit that even came with me when I switched bodies. Because of *course* it was.

*Glynda’s* problems I got. She knew I cheated to get in, and probably didn’t like that, though she’d never admit it. Then I made her feel dumb. Then I made her look bad because she was being lax in watching the fight that I was pretty sure she’d arranged to make me look bad for making her feel dumb. And if I’d *been* Jaune, or who I was on my transcripts, I would’ve gotten my ass kicked. Hell, if I’d been the me that’d finished the initiation, without the experience of running the Gauntlet with my team, I might’ve lost.

And then I hadn’t, and proven her wrong *again*, and there was a certain kind of personality type that didn’t handle being proven wrong very well. It was a *terrible* personality type for teachers, but Glynda’s strength seemed more administrative and janitorial than pedagogical.

But the *cow*? All I’d done was *show up.*

I’d been bluffing a bit with Goodwitch, about expecting Beacon to be different, but it turned out I wasn’t bluffing as much as I’d thought. Pissing off Goodwitch? To be honest I kind of expected it. I wasn’t a shrinking violet by nature, and especially wasn’t now, nor did I have whatever conditioned response she seemed to provoke in the other students. But part of me *had* been expecting Beacon to be different.

This was a *death world* for fucks sake! You didn’t have *time* for this petty bullshit! Except, apparently, *half the show* was petty bullshit. The Schnee plotline I’d heard about. The White Fang, which once the Faunus had got their *continent*, pulled a ‘if you give a mouse a cookie’ instead of showing that they were *actually* just as good, if not better, than the other nations. And now, *apparently*, the kind of stupid school bullshit that’d been missing in the show, which had led me to have certain expectations.

And I’d been wrong. *Again.*

“I’m. . . *fine,*” I told an expectant Ruby, realizing I’d lapsed into silence again. “I thought I’d gotten used to it, actually,” I laughed, which just made me feel worse instead of better, and by her expression, didn’t help her either. I checked my scroll, making sure what our schedule was what I thought. The extended afternoon block was for field trips or special events, but this first week it was free, and we didn’t have anything for the rest of the day.

“I. . . “ trailed off, trying to figure out what to do. Whatever it was going to be, I didn’t want them to see me like this. I’d tried to be open with vulnerabilities to those I *thought* friends when I was younger. Avoiding ‘toxic masculinity’ and all that.

*That’d been a mistake.*

There really was nothing like someone you supported, someone you’d been there for, calling you weak, and pathetic, and *worse* when you opened up to them, the better for them to strike deeply. And these girls, for all that I thought I thought I knew them, knew who they were, I was realizing that I didn’t. More than that I didn’t. . . *trust* them. To have my back in a fight? Certainly. To not say the wrong thing? To not lash out if I pushed their buttons accidentally and believe that I didn’t mean to hurt them? To not use *this* against me?

Blake had already shown me the answer to *that* question.

“I’ll see you at dinner,” I told her, and the rest, turning on my heel and striding to the large window left ajar, likely to let in the spring breeze. It took barely a second to open it up fully, not breaking stride, before I leapt out, wings extending, and, with a few powerful flaps, I streaked away, whatever Ruby said lost in the wind.