

Ruby found it difficult to focus over the next couple of days.

Soldiers marched in uniform lines, their steps kicking up dust. Spines straight, heads forward facing and rifles shouldered, they moved as one, their white uniforms gleaming in the harsh sun. Transport ships were being loaded, pilots and crew rushing around to ensure everything was in order while officers barked commands at their men.

Without context, it looked like they were about to go to war. That was the point.

The Atlas military were conducting training drills.

A rough plan had been formulated to combat the coming tide of Grimm, and so the soldiers were put to work in running simulations. There was a narrow canyon that separated the more verdant rain forests of mid-Sanus and the beginning of the sandy desert. It would funnel them into a bottleneck, and it was here that it was decided they would strike.

The surrounding region was difficult to navigate, even for Grimm. While airborne beasts would have no issue, cutting them off in the canyon would be a devastating blow to their numbers. Not only would it allow them to cause great damage to their number, it would also scatter the host and force them to traverse the mountainous peaks, slowing them significantly.

It was a good plan.

But to ensure that it worked, everyone needed to be put through their paces.

Other than the canyon, there was one other way through the treacherous region. The railway that ran from Vale to Vacuo passed underneath those mountains through a series of tunnels, so they would also need to be collapsed. Otherwise it would be a direct path for the Grimm to follow.

That would be the job of Ruby and her team.

Though mostly it fell on Blake. This was an area where her former association with the White Fang came in handy. Some of the operations she'd engaged in against the Schnee Dust Company in the past had involved tactical strikes using explosives.

It wasn't her first time bringing down a tunnel.

"Ruby?"

Think of the devil, and she shall appear. Ruby smirked to herself.

"Yeah?"

Blake peered at her, observant. She was carrying a sack filled with equipment that jostled as she switched it from one shoulder to the other.

"Did something good happen?"

Ruby frowned. "What do you mean?"

Blake shrugged. "You just seem... happier."

"Do I?"

Her teammate nodded. "Lighter, almost. You've been like this for a couple of days now. I thought something good must have happened."

Ruby felt her cheeks redden, and very carefully looked away.

She thought of an excuse quickly. "Uh – I guess I was just happy that Jaune's party went so well."

Blake hummed. "It was a nice night. I think we all needed something like that."

Ruby laughed awkwardly. "Yeah, totally."

Her fingers fiddled together, trying to keep her mind off the events of that night, and the next morning. But it was hard. It was all she'd been thinking about ever since, to the point where Ruby was beginning to think she was a little obsessed.

Maybe if sex didn't feel so good, she wouldn't think about it all the time.

Ruby busied herself with her work. She was meant to be planning out their approach to the tunnels, and how they would operate when they landed. Blake was handling the firepower, putting together a series of devices that would bring down the tunnels and ensure complete blockage. Three tunnels, three devices each for a total of nine bombs. But Ruby was handling everything else. The logistic side of leadership.

But now that Blake had unintentionally reminded her of it, Ruby couldn't focus on the old maps set out in front of her. All she could see in her mind was Jaune's body, and feel the phantom pleasure he'd gifted her body. His long, hard, manly cock spearing into her, filling her up, threatening to make her pregnant.

Ruby felt foolish. She'd *completely* forgotten about the possibility, and if it hadn't been for Weiss reminding her... after they'd left Jaune's room, they'd found the closest drugstore for the morning after pill.

She swallowed.

It wasn't that she'd mind having a baby with Jaune, it was just... now wasn't the right time, and this thing that had developed was brand new, and they should really talk about stuff like that before they decided to start a family.

A family. Her as the mom, and Jaune as the dad, and Weiss... as another mom?

It wouldn't be like her own family where Raven and Summer had been with her dad at different times. They'd be with him, *together*, and...

...they'd be together, as well.

Right?

They hadn't talked about that either. They'd kissed and touched one another, and they'd spoken about loving Jaune, but when it came down to the two of them and how they felt, they'd yet to speak on it.

She liked Weiss.

She was pretty, and smart, and her best friend, and just as she wanted to kiss Jaune, she wanted to kiss Weiss too. Just as she wanted to have sex with Jaune, she – and her ears burned now, to think it – she wanted to have sex with Weiss, as well.

Her eyes closed briefly, attempting to focus. It did little good.

She was so horny, and it was all their fault!

They needed to talk. All of them. Properly.

But Ruby needed to talk to someone else, as well.

Oscar.

He'd bared his heart to her, and she still hadn't responded properly. Ruby had done her best to ignore it, to push it back, but that wasn't fair. Now that she'd taken that step with Jaune, and with Weiss... she owed it to him to be up front, and tell him.

She hated that it would hurt him, but Ruby would much rather tell him that she wasn't interested in him in that way than him find out she was... what? Dating Jaune? Dating Weiss? Dating them both? That was something else they needed to address. Whatever it was, it didn't matter.

He needed to know that she didn't return his feelings, and that she was sorry.

She pulled out her scroll. Finding his contact information, she sent him a message before she could overthink it. To meet her that evening just outside Shade. Before she could put her scroll away, he responded in the affirmative.

She sighed.

That was one thing set in motion.

Now she just needed to speak with Weiss, and Jaune, and... read these damn maps.

The next hour was spent memorizing the landscape, and taking note of possible high spots she could use as vantage points. Ruby wasn't sure how accurate these maps were, considering they were over thirty years old, but barring any significant shift due to landslides or earthquake, the cliffs should be as marked.

The beginning of the first tunnel and the end of the third were over seven miles apart. The longest tunnel was two miles, and each one was spaced by breaks several hundred meters long. There were several spots they could be airlifted out if needed, and the airship could keep watch on them between tunnels, and provide transport should they require to move faster.

Ruby wrote down her notes and cross checked everything about a half dozen times before she was satisfied.

“Have you finished your work?” she asked, glancing Blake’s way. The cat faunus had been silent for some time, tinkering with her devices. They were spread out on the table, wires connecting a control unit to three tubes that were empty right now, but would eventually contain Dust.

“Not yet,” Blake looked up. “I’m going to need more parts. It’ll be best to use timers. We shouldn’t rely on a stable signal, all the way out there, and especially with the explosives being underground.”

Ruby nodded. “Right.”

“And then we’ll just need Dust to finish them off,” Blake laughed wryly. “I thought my days doing this sort of work was over.”

Ruby grinned. “At least you’re putting it to good use.”

If they really wanted, they could use heavy munitions from one of the military airships to collapse the tunnels, but they were trying to conserve as much of their heavy firepower as possible. They needed to be efficient with what they had, because once it was gone, it wasn’t like they could get any more. Vacuo had a stockpile of its own, but it was dated, and limited. They were doing their best to produce more, but it was slow going.

Vacuo just didn’t have that type of infrastructure.

So this way was the best way.

Cutting off the Grimm coming from Vale was only one of the battles to come. Even if they did stop them, Vacuo was teeming with enough Grimm to swarm the city at any moment. The fact that Salem hadn't already been testing their defences was strange, and cause for concern.

Why was she being so... patient?

Most of their forces would be staying behind. Along with Team RWBY, it would only be four transports filled with twenty soldiers each, and Winter Schnee accompanying them. The idea was to hit the Grimm hard and fast, take as many of them out as possible with what limited munitions they carried, and then Winter would bring the canyon down around them using the powers of the Winter Maiden.

Best case scenario, she buried them all under tons of dirt and stone, or flooded the area and drowned them all. She'd been training her abilities but this was going to be a massive test of what she could accomplish.

The rest of the Atlas military would remain on standby. Just in case Salem decided to attack while they were gone, as some sort of feint.

"Ruby..."

"Yeah?"

Blake hesitated, her ears flattening against her head.

“...I was wondering if... that is, uh – has Yang spoken to you about... her mother? I mean since she got here.”

Ruby blinked.

“Uh – no, not really,” she admitted. “Why?”

Blake stared at the table, thinking.

“I think she’s a bit thrown off by... seeing her with your dad,” Blake rubbed her neck. “I’ve tried to speak to her about it, but she keeps brushing me off. I’m a little worried...”

“I guess it is a little weird seeing them together again,” Ruby sighed. “Not together-together, just... well, maybe it is that. I’m not sure.”

“How do you feel about it?”

She shrugged. “I dunno. I mean, I never really knew her, she was gone before I was born, but... I’ve always known of her, you know? I always knew he had another wife before my mom, so... it strangely feels normal. I can’t really explain it.”

“So you aren’t... hurt by it?”

“Not really,” Ruby smiled awkwardly. “But Yang probably doesn’t feel the same way. It’s different for her.”

Blake nodded, sagging. "I just wish I knew what to say. She's not acting any different but I can tell she feels a little down about it."

"I'm actually surprised they haven't gotten into a fight," Ruby mused. "Yang really has learned a lot of self control, huh?"

Blake laughed weakly. "You can say that."

Ruby smirked. "Or maybe she is channeling those feelings somewhere else."

Blake flushed. "Ruby!"

She snickered. "Sorry, I couldn't help it," she then nodded, making a decision. "I can talk to her, if you want. I mean, we probably should anyway... as sisters, you know?"

"Would you?" Blake sounded grateful. "Thank you, Ruby."

"Sure," she chirped.

She found Yang working out at the gym after she returned the maps to the school archives. Her sister was in the middle of a bench press and so she watched silently, not wanting to interrupt until she was done. She was lifting some serious weight, the bar bending dramatically as her sister grunted with each rep, sweat beaded on her brow.

When she finally racked the weight, Ruby announced her presence.

“Yang.”

She must have been really out of it because she jumped, startled, head whipping around in surprise.

“Ruby! Don’t do that!”

She couldn’t help it. She was a little sister, after all.

“What’s up?”

Yang huffed, annoyed. Reaching for her bottle of water, she downed what was left.

“What does it look like?”

Ruby snickered. “You looked pretty focused. Thinking about something?”

She wasn’t being very subtle, and Yang responded by shooting her a glare.

“What are you doing?” she demanded.

“I wanted to talk.”

“So talk,” Yang said, waving her hand.

“About dad... and Raven.”

Yang froze.

“If you want to talk about it, that is,” Ruby continued, pretending like she didn’t notice the conflict in Yang’s eyes. “Since they sorta just showed up out of the blue and everything.”

Yang looked away, silent.

“...It must be pretty weird for you.”

Her sister sighed, her shoulders sagging.

“What are you talking about? It must be weirder for you,” Yang muttered.

Ruby sat down on the bench next to her.

"I don't know why, but it just feels normal," Ruby shrugged, and Yang shot her an incredulous look. "Okay, maybe not *normal* – but I've always known about her, so it doesn't feel like she's stealing mom's spot or anything. Technically, mom stole her spot."

"...she shouldn't have run off, then, should she?" Yang asked sourly.

"No," Ruby agreed. "Though if she hadn't, I wouldn't be here. So that's good, right?"

Yang stared at her, and then a small twitch of the lips showed she'd gotten through to her a little.

"When you put it that way... you're saying I could have been without an annoying little brat sister? Damn. I missed out."

Ruby scowled and nudged her with her elbow, hard. "Shut up."

Yang laughed, her eyes fond. "But seriously... I guess that is the silver lining. You're the best thing that ever happened to me."

Ruby's cheeks grew hot. "Oh my god, stop. Right now."

“What’s wrong? I’m saying I love you, you dork.”

“Yeah, well... I love you too, idiot,” Ruby smiled shyly, kicking her feet.

They sat in silence for a moment, the pair of them smiling to themselves.

Then Yang sighed again, her metal hand clenching and unclenching, as if she were testing its function. Ruby watched as her artificial fingers curled and released, straightening.

“I just don’t like how they turned up together like it’s the most natural thing in the world, you know?” Yang scoffed. “Like she hadn’t abandoned him – abandoned us – for over fifteen years, and now they’re acting like nothing has changed between them. What the hell is up with that?”

Love could be strange. The thought came to Ruby suddenly, and she thought of her own situation. Her, Jaune and Weiss – it went against the conventional, accepted norms, but they didn’t care. At least, they hadn’t cared enough to stop what happened, and she hoped they didn’t care for what came next.

Ruby was all in, and she had a feeling Weiss was too. Jaune was the mystery, and it scared her a little, but she had faith.

She supposed it was a little like that with her dad.

“She hurt him, and he’s acting like...” Yang started off heated before she trailed off, almost in defeat. “I just don’t get it, Ruby.”

"Have you spoken to him about it?"

She shook her head.

"No. We had dinner with him but we just talked about what had been happening, you know? Since we left Patch... I don't even know where to start, and... well," it was here that her cheeks turned red, a rare embarrassed expression dominating her face. "Things were a little awkward."

Ruby tried not to smile, and failed. "Because they saw you and Blake?"

Yang grit her teeth. "Yes, thank you, Ruby."

"That does sound horrible," Ruby imagined the same scenario, but she was with Jaune and Weiss, and they were engaged in sex... urgh. Yeah, she'd want to die.

"It was the *worst*," Yang stressed, covering her face. "And not only did my mom see us, Professor Goodwitch was there... ahhh! I don't want to think about it!"

"Raven actually asked me about you and Blake," Ruby revealed.

Yang lowered her hands. "What? Really? When?"

"She found me in the kitchens with Weiss, when we were baking Jaune's cake. She wanted to know how long you two had been together," Ruby saw the shock on her face. "And she wanted to know if Blake treated you well."

Yang gaped.

“What the *fuck*?” Yang asked heatedly. “Why is she asking that? As if she cares!”

Ruby shrugged. “Maybe she does... in her own weird way.”

“She really knows how to show it!”

“I asked her why she cared, and she asked me if it was so strange for a mother to ask after her daughter,” Ruby pulled a face. “I might have said something mean to her after. It annoyed me a little bit.”

“You’ve always been like that.”

Ruby frowned. “Like what?”

“All innocent and cute, until something rubs you the wrong way. You can be pretty brutal sometimes and you don’t even know it.”

“I don’t mean to be...”

Yang laughed lightly. "It's usually when someone upsets one of us. It's because you care. It isn't a bad thing. Raven deserved it."

Ruby fiddled with her fingers. "She also said some other stuff. About Jaune."

Yang tilted her head in question. "What about Jaune?"

"She said he has dangerous eyes..." Ruby had thought about Raven's words a lot. "That he had sad eyes."

"Anyone would have sad eyes after what he went through," Yang tried to hide it, but Ruby saw that she was upset. "He was there, all alone... whenever I think about it, it hurts. I just... it just really hurts," she placed a hand on Ruby's shoulder, giving it a squeeze. "But you've been helping him."

"I've been trying."

"It's working, I think," Yang smiled softly. "He seemed like his old self at the party. Not completely, of course, I don't think that is possible, but... he seemed looser, happier... and you did that."

"Weiss helped."

"I know," Yang shot her a questioning glance. "What is going on between you three?"

“Uh, what do you mean?” now it was Ruby’s turn to feel a little embarrassed.

“Don’t think I haven’t noticed. You guys have been hanging out a lot, and you even fall asleep all over him. That was really cute, by the way.”

“I just... I mean...” Ruby thought about it, and decided to come clean. “I like him.”

Yang blinked.

“You like him?”

“I love him,” Ruby amended. “I... I’m in love with Jaune.”

Yang’s mouth fell open slightly, and then she smiled. It was a proud smile, radiant and filled with teeth.

“Oh my god, Ruby – are you serious? I mean, I sorta gathered that you might have feelings but...” Yang shook her head. “This is your first love, right? Oh, it’s so cute!”

“Yang, stop,” Ruby pleaded.

“Sorry, sorry – I’m just so excited, my little sister is growing up so fast!”

“You’re making it worse!”

Payback for Ruby laughing at Yang and Blake being ‘walked in’ on.

“I also... like Weiss too.”

Yang was completely floored.

Ruby squirmed, her boots knocking together. “Ehe – heh?”

“You like – when did this happen?” Yang exploded, standing up. “But you just said – wow, Ruby, you’re actually pretty hardcore, huh?”

“Yaaang,” Ruby pouted. “Don’t make it sound weird.”

“I mean, it is a little weird,” Yang snickered as Ruby elbowed her leg. “I’m just teasing, calm down. I just wasn’t expecting to hear you say that... that must be tough.”

“Not really... Weiss likes Jaune too, and... I think she likes me.”

“...What the hell have you three been getting up to?” Yang asked incredulously. “Are you three in some kinky threeway?”

“Yang, stop! Right this instant!”

Yang plopped back down on the bench.

“Wow. I don’t know what to say. I’m speechless.”

“I know it’s different, but... I really like them, Yang.”

Yang softened, throwing an arm around her. Ruby leaned against her, taking comfort.

“So are you three dating or something?”

Ruby shrugged. “We haven’t really talked about it properly.”

“Well, if you guys are happy then I’m all for it,” Yang said warmly. “Life is too short, you know? And you’d be hard pressed to find two people better than Weiss and Jaune.”

Ruby smiled to herself, feeling very affectionate towards her sister. “Thanks, Yang.”

“I want to be there when you tell dad.”

They spent the rest of the day together, hanging out like the old days. It had been awhile since Ruby had spent time with Yang alone, so it was nice. Just two sisters, teasing and bickering and speaking their minds without worry. Sharing secrets, and reassuring one another when they voiced their fears.

She'd missed this.

Blake and Weiss found them in one of the common areas.

"Finished your bombs?" Ruby asked.

Blake nodded. "They're ready."

"Where have you been all day?" Yang asked, directing it at Weiss.

"More Dust lessons," Weiss sat down heavily, and removing her shoes, she began massaging her feet. "I really didn't have anything to do today, so I thought I'd give lectures."

Her voice did sound a little husky.

"Have you seen Jaune?" Ruby asked quietly.

"I have. He just got back from a mission," Weiss stretched her legs out, toes pointed before she relaxed them, and placed them on the floor. "He escorted some Shade students out into the

desert. Some Grimm had been sighted, a small group – so the Professors wanted their first years to get some practice. He was supervising.”

“Look at you two,” Yang teased. “Maybe there will be a teaching position in your futures.”

Weiss gained a thoughtful expression. “I wouldn’t mind. I believe Jaune would also make a fine teacher.”

Evening was approaching, which meant dinner – and her meeting with Oscar. Ruby checked the time, and saw that it was less than twenty minutes away.

She swallowed.

“Ruby?” Weiss asked. “What’s wrong?”

She waved them off. “It’s fine, I just... have something I need to do.”

“It doesn’t look fine,” Blake said bluntly. “You look like you’re going to be sick.”

Ruby laughed weakly. “Really, it’s fine. It’s just something I’ve been putting off, that’s all.”

When it was time, Ruby made her way to the meeting spot. He was already waiting for her, and he looked as nervous as Ruby felt. He hadn’t noticed her yet, and she took the time to watch him.

Right now, he looked his age. None of Ozpin's ageless grace or poise shone through. This was Oscar, as he should be. An awkward, young farm hand who was awaiting an answer to a confession he'd made to the girl he liked.

She took a deep breath, and approached.

He turned when he heard the scuff of her boots against the stone path, and perked up.

"Ruby," he greeted.

"Oscar," she said, and then silence fell.

She saw the apprehension plainly written on his face. Cautiously optimistic, but already bracing himself.

Ruby steadied herself.

There was no chickening out now.

"I'm sorry about taking so long to give you an answer," she said softly.

"It's fine. I know I sprung it on you out of nowhere, it wasn't very considerate of me," he laughed awkwardly. "But... I had to say it."

She understood.

"Right," she breathed in deeply, held it – and then let it rush out, carrying her words, "Oscar, thank you for being honest with me, but I only see you as a friend."

There was no anger, or even hurt. All she saw was acceptance.

He sighed, eyes closing. "...I had a feeling you'd say that."

"I'm really sorry," Ruby lowered her head.

His eyes opened, and he nodded. "It's okay, Ruby."

It wasn't, but... he was taking it a lot better than she thought he might.

"You have someone else that you like, don't you?"

Ruby felt her mouth go dry, and so she nodded.

“They’re lucky,” he said. “You’re an amazing girl, Ruby.”

“Thank you...”

Oscar sighed heavily then, turning away. “So... I guess I’ll see you around?”

“Yeah,” she said quietly. “We’re still friends. Got it?”

He laughed. “Got it.”

He didn’t say bye, and she didn’t call out. Ruby watched as he walked away, and just like that, it had been dealt with. It made her feel horrible, but also... unburdened.

She really should have said something earlier.

He wasn’t showing it, but Ruby knew it must have hurt. No one liked being rejected.