

The next morning, Yang acted as if their kiss had been nothing more than a figment of his overly horny imagination. She was her usual boisterous self, seeing them off on the ferry with an enthusiastic wave alongside Ruby and Tai, Jaune watching her mane of blonde hair fade into the distance.

He may have even believed it if Blake hadn't been there to reassure him that it really happened.

The fact that he'd kissed another girl – one not on their team this time – didn't seem to bother her, either. Quite the opposite. Before they parted, she admitted to him that she'd actually found it really enjoyable, and she'd been so turned on by it, she had to finish him off. It wasn't that Jaune thought she'd be mad, per se. She'd sucked him off while it was happening, and if she'd been angry about it, she never would have done that, but she showed no signs of jealousy or envy or anything like that.

There hadn't been an ounce of hesitation when she told him that it was fine, and Nora would also agree, and maybe Weiss would be a little upset that someone else had beaten her to the punch, but she'd also get over it when it was her turn. So she said. Jaune thought she was being a little optimistic.

Jaune really didn't know what was happening.

It felt surreal. Nora and Blake had been unbelievable enough, but then Weiss... and now Yang? If Tai was to be believed, Ruby might also think of him as something more than a friend, so where did that leave him?

Was he in a movie or something? It just didn't sound real.

Every single one of them were top tier, the sort of girl you might go your whole life without encountering. Somehow, Jaune had encountered six of them – and it was possible that five of the six might *like-like* him, as Nora would put it.

If any of his sisters found out about this...

Well, at first, they'd be *pissed*. From the outside, it would look like he was a two-timing piece of shit. Three-timing? Four? Whatever the number, it made him look dodgy as hell. But if they found out it wasn't the case?

He'd never live it down. The teasing would be generational.

Jaune knew he needed to speak to Yang about this, but as the days meandered on by, he just didn't know how to bring it up. They messaged each other every day now, she was no longer ignoring his texts, but she was acting as if nothing had changed, and so... Jaune went with the flow.

He was good at doing that.

But at some point, he needed to tell her about Nora and Blake. About their relationship, and everything that went with it.

As for Blake – well, he'd discovered that she was quite needy, and wanted more of his attention. Attention he was willing to grant. Since returning to Vale, they'd met up a few times to hang out and engage in more carnal activities, to sate her growing lust.

Their first time together had really popped the cork on the bottle that was her libido, and there was no putting it back in.

While Yang was no longer ignoring his messages, Penny had gone completely silent other than a simple message explaining that she was okay, but she was going to be busy until the start of the semester.

It wasn't exactly the most reassuring message but Jaune could only take it at face value. He had no idea where she was staying, and had no way of finding out.

And so the holidays quickly began trending towards a conclusion. Vale was covered in snow most days now, and when he wasn't working or 'entertaining' Blake, he was at the gym. He threw himself into his training, sparring with any and all Huntsman that wished to give a fresh faced trainee like him the time of day – and then, the day of his departure to Atlas had arrived.

"Jaune!"

A familiar voice called out to him, and he paused as he was about to cross the street. A pair of long, brown bunny ears dashed towards him, visible over the crowd.

"Velvet," he exclaimed as she rushed up to him, almost slipping on the slick sidewalk. Jaune reached out quickly and caught her by the waist, stopping her momentum cold. "Woah, careful!"

She flushed as she straightened up, her eyes bright.

"T-Thanks," she hastily adjusted her outfit, a cute beige petticoat and a checkered red and black skirt along with a pair of thick thermal stockings to protect her legs from the cold, and some fashionable heeled boots giving her an extra inch. She looked like she had stepped off the cover of a fashion magazine, winter edition. Coco's influence was strong. "How are you? I just happened to see you through the crowd and wanted to say hi!"

“Things are good, I can’t complain,” he said, smiling at her enthusiasm. “Did you just get back to Vale?”

She shook her head quickly. “No, I’ve been back for a few days. I stayed with my dad for a little longer than expected, but I’ve just been relaxing since I got back. I’m not really a fan of the cold,” she admitted. “But it’s warmer than Atlas.”

So he’d been told.

Being from the north, Jaune was used to cold winters but Solitas was something else. Pack warm or not at all, Weiss had told him when they’d spoken yesterday, and so that’s exactly what he did.

She spotted the large bag he had slung over his shoulder.

“Are you going somewhere?” she asked, curious.

“I’m actually flying out to Atlas today,” he said.

He wasn’t sure but he thought her expression fell.

“O-Oh?”

“Yeah, Weiss invited me out.”

Understanding crossed her features. “Oh! That’s nice of her!”

“I’ve never been before, so I guess I’m a little nervous,” he chuckled. “Vale is still pretty alien to me at times, so I’m sure Atlas will be even worse.”

“The city is really pretty – but the people can be a bit... you know,” she grimaced. “Especially towards...”

“Yeah,” Jaune sighed. “I had heard.”

Like Mistral, Atlas held certain views on faunus that were very dated.

There was a beat of awkward silence.

“Are you heading to the airship terminal now?”

He nodded. “That’s right. Blake, Yang and Ruby are meeting me there. Want to come?”

She gave a little hop, clapping her hands. “I’d love to!”

It wasn't far from where they were. Jaune could have taken a taxi but he'd wanted to walk through the city and admire it before going away, and it had given him some time to get his head straight. He wasn't just nervous about going to a new kingdom.

The whole reason for this trip was because Weiss needed someone in her corner. He knew that the situation he was heading into was far from ideal, and a big part of that was because of her father. A man he would be meeting, as well as the rest of her family.

He was not going to embarrass her.

Jaune was not just her friend, but also her team leader. She'd admitted to him that her father didn't want her to become a Huntress, and had made her prove herself before allowing it, testing her, and could at any moment revoke his decision to allow her to pursue this career path. Jaune would never forgive himself if his actions reflected poorly on her, and her life was altered because of it.

He would be on his best behavior. He'd charm the pants off them!

If that was possible. If Weiss were to be believed, it would be anything but.

His Ma and Pa had raised him right, though. He wouldn't let Weiss down.

Velvet chatted about all the things she'd gotten up to over the holidays, the time she spent with her father, and even showed him a bunch of photos on the camera she liked to carry around. From what he recalled, her mom was here in Vale and when she got to pictures of her, he recognized some of the local hotspots.

"You two look a lot alike," he commented.

While Velvet's face had a softer, rounder edge to it, she got her long, chocolate brown hair from her mother, as well as the long brown rabbit ears.

It didn't take them long to arrive at the terminal but before they stepped inside, a sudden hush overcame the crowd around them. People were pointing at the sky, and as one, they both looked up, facing the north.

Jaune blinked, his mouth falling open slightly. "Woah..."

Amity Colosseum was the venue of the Vytal Festival fighting tournament, and Jaune had seen it on television before. A massive flying stadium, it moved from kingdom to kingdom every four years and hosted fans from around the world, those who came to see the future generations do battle to crown themselves Vystal Festival Champions.

And here it was, in all its glory, escorted by a fleet of battleships from the Atlesian military numbering in the dozens, casting long shadows over the city of Vale.

It was a miraculous feat of engineering, a technological marvel. All four kingdoms had contributed to its construction in the pursuit of a grand stage to showcase the world's warriors, and Jaune felt nothing but awe as it continued its slow journey through the sky. Shaped like an inverted cone, a truly massive Dust crystal protruded from the bottom, tapered to a point. Jaune had never seen a Dust crystal so large and completely intact, and it was no doubt what powered the entire structure and gave it the ability to fly, even when it must have weighed tens of thousands of tons.

People around them began taking pictures on their scrolls, and Velvet even snapped a shot on her camera.

In a few months, they would be both standing on that grand stage, fighting in front of not just tens of thousands of fans in the stadium, but the millions of people tuning in around the world.

Something about its arrival felt off, though.

“Does Atlas usually send so many ships with it?” he asked quietly, drawing Velvet’s attention.

She frowned. “I don’t know. It does seem a little excessive...”

Along with the dozen or so battleships, there were many more smaller aircraft; small, maneuverable fighter ships and even transport Bullheads.

Jaune couldn’t help but feel like this was a projection of power... but who was it aimed at? Vale? Weren’t Atlas and Vale allies? It didn’t make sense unless there was something going on behind the scenes that they weren’t telling the people.

The awe faded, and Jaune was left with a feeling of trepidation.

When they found his friends, they were all staring up through the glass ceiling at Amity and the armada that accompanied it.

“Hey,” he said, startling them.

“Jaune!” Ruby exclaimed, tearing her eyes off the spectacle and tackling him with a hug.
“Excited for your trip?”

"You could say that."

Yang smiled at him, giving nothing away. There wasn't a hint of awkwardness, the blonde stepping forward to give him a hug. Jaune wrapped his arms around her, returning the embrace, and maybe it lingered longer than was typically appropriate but nothing more.

"Velvet!" Ruby gasped. "Hi! What are you doing here?"

Velvet beamed. "Hey Ruby. I just ran into Jaune in the street. I thought I'd come see him off as well."

As the two girls chatted, Blake moved in, wrapping him in a firm hug that he returned with equal vigor.

"Ready to meet the family?" she asked quietly, a whisper in his ear.

"Ready as I'll ever be," he replied just as quietly.

She hesitated. "Have you and Yang spoken about...?"

He shook his head shortly. "No, not yet. She's acting like nothing happened. She's just her normal self."

“Do you want me to speak to her?”

Jaune thought about it for a moment.

“No, I should be the one to tell her.”

Going with the flow was all well and good, but this is something that needed to be hashed out. The sooner the better.

Releasing Blake, he took a step back and faced Yang.

“Hey, Yang, do you have a minute?”

She nodded. “Yeah, sure, what’s up?”

They moved away from the group for a little privacy. As much privacy as you could achieve in a packed airship terminal, anyway.

There was really no point in beating around the bush.

“About that kiss...”

Her cheeks were instantly aflame, Yang's face turning red.

"O-Oh?" she tried to play it off, but there was no way she could hide how her skin *glowed*.

"I just thought you should know... I'm in a relationship with someone."

Her eyes widened, and he saw her expression morph between shock and devastation, and then lastly, acceptance.

"Oh," she muttered, tinged with a hint of bitterness. "Oh, I – shit, Jaune, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to put you in that position."

He could tell that she was hurt, and yet she was apologizing. Yang really was an amazing girl.

"It's fine, you didn't know," he told her.

She shook her head. "I should have known. You're a great guy, Jaune. The best. I – since the beginning of the year, I've thought so. You were so good with Ruby and had a good head on your shoulders, and – well, I have eyes, you're handsome as hell so even before all of – you know, what happened – I sorta had a thing for you, but then you went and did all that, and..." she sighed. "I-I'm not used to feeling like this, it's usually the other way around. I know I'm putting a lot on you for saying it but I'm really into you, but I understand that you don't see me the same way."

"I didn't say that."

She blinked, startled.

“What?”

“I’m with Nora,” he confessed.

“Nora?”

“Yeah – and Blake.”

Her mouth dropped open.

“What?”

Her face was twisted in confusion.

“It’s complicated,” he paused. “Really complicated – and I know it’s really unusual, and sometimes I don’t understand how this happened or if it’s even real but... I think you’re amazing, Yang. The best,” he parroted her words. “You’ve had to deal with so much in your life but you’ve never let it hold you down. Yes, you make mistakes. Yes, sometimes it gets to you. But you’re only human. You’ve got a wonderful outlook on life and you helped your dad when he was at his lowest, watching over Ruby and being there for her, even when you were hurting yourself. I admire you a lot, I have for a while now – and I only admire you more, the longer I know you.”

Her face was turning red again.

Reaching out, he grabbed her hands and cradled them.

"I like you, Yang. A lot. But like I said, it's complicated..." he chuckled weakly. "I'm in a relationship with Nora and Blake, and they seem to think that Weiss likes me too... I don't know what I'm doing. I'm not used to all of this."

"Jaune..."

"Just know that it isn't that I don't feel the same way," he said emphatically. "I think you're great. Strong and beautiful. But... well, you know now that it isn't so simple."

"...Yeah, no kidding," she muttered, dazed.

"I'm not sure where we go from here," he admitted.

"Yeah, me either... Jaune, are you saying that you... like me?"

She sounded confused but also hopeful.

He nodded.

"Yeah, Yang. I like you. I like you a lot."

“And what does that mean... for us?”

“I honestly don’t know. I’m sorry that this is coming at such an awkward time, with me flying off to Atlas and everything...”

“It’s not your fault, I’m the one that kissed you, remember?”

He did. He thought about it often.

“But if you want to talk to someone, Blake is here,” he said, glancing at his teammate. She was in conversation with Velvet and Ruby. “You know, if you want to. I know it could be a little awkward, but...”

Yang nodded. “I – yeah, this is... kinda messed up, huh?” She then laughed, and Jaune felt that maybe this wasn’t going to be a complete disaster after all. “Maybe I will talk to her. I just – wow, Jaune, I didn’t know you were such a player.”

“Please, no.”

“I mean, *damn* – like, I knew you were a fine catch but I didn’t realize that you’d been reeled in a couple times already,” she joked. “Get it? Catch – reeled in, like a fish? Huh? Huh?”

He couldn’t help it. He laughed.

Her eyes lit up, a megawatt smile following.

But then she became serious, her eyes filled with emotion – fondness, affection. “Jaune, I like you a lot and no matter what happens here, I don’t think that is going to change. You feel me? So... maybe, I don’t know... if you’d think of me sometimes, I’d really appreciate it.”

“I think about you all the time,” he told her. “Trust me, Yang. You aren’t a girl that is easy to ignore.”

She nodded happily. “Oh, and – uh, for the road...”

Her eyes darted around quickly, making sure their friends were preoccupied before leaning in quickly and pecking him on the cheek. Jaune felt his skin bloom with heat, and tingle where her soft, moist lips had kissed him. It was nothing like the kiss they’d already shared. This could easily be a simple gesture of friendship.

And yet it made his heart skip a beat all the same.

Yang looked down shyly, playing with the ends of her hair. “Uh, so yeah, heheh – um, cool. I – I’ll talk to Blake about... *you know*, stuff, and maybe...”

Jaune nodded. “Er – yeah, stuff. I think that would be good.”

Calls for check-in for his flight came over the loud speaker, and so Jaune hurried over to make sure everything was in order, and to hand over his luggage. He was given a physical boarding pass, and an electronic one on his scroll.

After that, it was time to say goodbye.

“Take loads of photos, okay?” Ruby demanded, hands on hips. “And tell Weiss I said hi, and she better bring me those parts she promised me.”

Wait, Weiss had promised to bring her parts?

“I hope they’re legal,” he teased.

“Of course they are,” she puffed out her cheeks before smirking, “Well, maybe?”

He wouldn’t put it past Ruby to try get her hands on some dodgy specs for a weapon.

They hugged again, much longer this time – and then in front of everyone, she kissed him on the cheek, much like Yang had done. Everyone stared in shock, and Ruby’s face turned crimson as she dashed away without a word, rose petals hitting him in the face.

...That had been unexpected.

Yang gaped at him for several long moments before shaking her head, and approaching him.

"I guess I didn't have to hide it..." she muttered, and they embraced firmly. "My little sister isn't competition, is she?"

"I don't know what that was about."

It was looking like Taiyang might be two for two.

"She's never done anything remotely like that before," Yang said quietly as they parted, meeting his eyes. "I think she just gave you her first kiss."

"W-Well, it wasn't on the lips."

"To her, it might as well have been," Yang still seemed thrown off. "Have a good trip. I'm... going to go find my sister."

"Yeah, you do that. Um – stay safe, Yang."

She wandered off in a daze, leaving Velvet and Blake.

"I wanted to hang out with you a little before school started back up again," Velvet confessed, pouting. "But I guess that won't happen now."

"I'll be back in Vale a few days before the semester starts," he said. "If you still want to, that is."

She smiled, nodding, her ears swaying dangerously. "Sure! Coco will be back by then, as well. Maybe we could all meet up."

She hesitated but hugged him, just as the others did, and then Blake took her place as she stepped away to give them some time alone.

"What was that with Ruby?" she whispered as they hugged.

"I don't know," he replied, imprinting the feel of her lovely body against him and her warmth, drawing it in.

"I saw Yang kiss you as well," she admitted, tightening her hold.

"I told her about us," he revealed. "About you, me and Nora."

"And what did she think about that?"

They gently parted. "Shocked, mostly. A little hurt at first, but then I explained things, she seemed... hopeful."

"Did she now?"

"I also told her that she could talk to you, if she wanted. I hope that wasn't too forward of me."

Blake shook her head. "No, that's fine. I think that is a good idea."

"Blake, I'm not trying to – you know," he struggled to find the right words. "*Expand* this thing we have, but..."

"Expand?" she asked with humor, giggling. "That's one way to put it."

"Blake..."

"I know, I know – sorry," she apologized, placing a hand on his arm. "I know this is serious. I – well, Nora... you know what she feels about all this."

"Is it really okay, though?" he asked, worried. "I know you two have said things about Weiss in the past, but now Yang? This isn't normal."

"What's so good about normal?"

He opened his mouth and then closed it again.

“Why do we have to be normal?” she pressed. “I *really* like you, Jaune. So does Nora – and I know Weiss feels the same. And maybe it won’t always be smooth sailing. A girl can get jealous easily, and Weiss is struggling with this. But... what I feel for you, I just know I would regret it if I let go of it, for any reason. I can’t speak for the others, but... and you better not judge me for this...”

“I would never judge you, Blake.”

She smiled softly. “No, you wouldn’t – but, well – I guess I enjoy watching you with others.”

Jaune blinked.

“You do?”

“I mean, I haven’t seen you with others yet... but the thought of it excites me,” she admitted shyly. “When Yang kissed you, even though I couldn’t see it, it turned me on so much – and when I’m with you, sometimes I think about you being with Nora or Weiss, and it drives me wild.”

“Oh – uh, I never knew.”

“Nora might feel the same way. But that doesn’t mean everyone feels things like that,” Blake shrugged. “But just know that I’m on your side, okay? We both are.”

He knew that already but it was good to hear it.

“Have you heard from your clone at all?”

She shook her head. “No, not a peep. I’m starting to get a little worried, but...”

“Let me know if something changes, okay? You can call me anytime.”

“Okay. I will,” and then she hugged him again, squeezing him hard enough to bruise before reluctantly pulling away. “Oh, and don’t forget this.”

Hopping up on her tippy toes, she kissed him. Not on the cheek but on the lips, framing his face with her hands and lingering, not deepening the kiss, but just staying connected to him for several long moments.

She then pulled away, flushed. Jaune’s eyes found Velvet, and she was staring at them both in shock.

“Well – uh, I better be going.”

Blake nodded quickly, glowing. She seemed very pleased with herself.

“Good luck.”

“Thanks.”

Weiss had put him in first class. That meant his ticket gave him access to pre-flight benefits like the cocktail lounge and while he wasn't going to drink, it gave him a quiet place to sit down and think. There were only a few other passengers here, businessmen and the wealthy, minding their own business, nursing drinks as they watched the news report on the large holo-screen above the bar.

Jaune found a couch and sat down heavily, sighing as he leaned back, his head hanging back over the backrest. His thoughts immediately went to Yang, and Ruby.

She'd have found her sister by now, and Jaune couldn't help but wonder what they were talking about. Yang had confessed, and in return, he had confessed back, hadn't he? Told her that he liked her even though he was already dating two other girls. And then Ruby had pecked him on the cheek in a daring display, especially for her.

It *could* just be an act of affection between friends. He'd thought so when Yang did, while knowing that it wasn't in that case. But Ruby wasn't the type of girl who just pecked her friends on the cheek, was she? As free as she was with her hugs, this felt different. Yang thought so.

How did that make her feel?

How did that make *Jaune* feel?

Flattered. Ruby was an amazing girl and he loved being friends with her. Confused – because why was he suddenly so popular with girls? And not just any girls, but these magnificent Huntresses-in-training.

Jaune sighed.

Was he just the luckiest guy in the world?

He'd now been branded by three girls. Like before, Yang's symbol was no more than some raised skin in a vague outline, much as Blake's had been before they'd taken their relationship to the next level. His semblance had imprinted it upon him, as if declaring her intent. He wondered sometimes if his semblance *knew* who was best suited, who held true feelings for him – or would it just do it for anyone?

Was it his own feelings that made it possible? Or was it a combined effort?

He liked to think it could tell what was true and what wasn't. That if he were to kiss a random girl, it would leave no trace on his skin. The fact that Nora, and Blake, and now Yang were etched onto his body in some manner meant that their feelings were pure, and his were the same.

It helped. Because he didn't want to hurt any of them. When such powerful emotions were involved, it was always easy for things to turn sour.

His mind then went to Weiss.

Nora and Blake had been beyond accepting. They'd been encouraging. His conversation with Yang implied an interest on her end, that even though he was already in a relationship, the strange nature of it did not seem to bother her. That she may be open to something.

Weiss had not been so open to it.

Resistant.

He couldn't blame her.

Guys dreamed of having these sorts of problems, but it held its own difficulties.

Jaune just hoped he didn't mess this all up.