

It was too late to start looking into things so they made plans to meet up the following day. Jaune stayed with her until she boarded the ferry back to Patch, and waved her off until the boat was but a speck in the distance. The sky was beginning to darken rapidly, and a cold drizzle started, so after grabbing something easy for dinner, he returned to his hotel room.

He knew that Huntsmen were capable in a way that civilians sometimes struggled to comprehend. The difference between someone with aura and someone without was vast, and not even firearms could bridge the distance. The fact that they could just walk into the office of one of the most dangerous men in the city, after which Yang had already caused trouble with said man by destroying his club, and simply walk back out was a clear indicator. While Melanie and Miltia were trained and had aura, and he suspected that Junior did as well, the strength of their organization was reduced to just them against someone like Yang, or Jaune, or any worthwhile Huntsman.

But they weren't invincible. While it was improbable for a regular person – even a criminal – to get the better of a Huntsman, it wasn't impossible. Unlike Grimm, people were thinking creatures, and if there was one thing that could overcome martial might, it was intelligence.

He couldn't help but worry. These were bad people. Bad in a different way to the White Fang, but equally as dangerous. And if Junior had people with aura on the payroll, these other criminal factions were sure to be the same.

They needed to be careful.

Jaune was just relieved that at the very least, Yang wouldn't be doing this alone. He would have her back – and if he needed help, Blake was only a quick call away. She was close at hand, should things turn south and they required back up.

He just really hoped it didn't come to that.

After eating dinner and showering, Jaune went to bed. He slept like a log, and when he woke up bright and fresh in the early hours of the morning, he already had several messages on his scroll.

Most of them were from Yang. She was awake early, and it was clear that she was excited to begin their search. The early morning ferry was set to depart, and her messages were accompanied by a few pictures of her waiting on deck, posing for selfies with increasingly stupid expressions on her face.

Jaune snorted, shaking his head.

Even now, she was as calm as could be. He wondered if it was just a front, or if Yang really was unfazed by what they were going to do. Seeing as she hadn't had any issue with throwing down at Junior's in the past, it was likely that she just had no fear.

He admired her confidence, while also feeling a touch of concern. Confidence could soon become recklessness.

But Yang wasn't the only one that had messaged him. He'd received one from Ruby, asking what was going on. She'd sent it late last night, and Jaune hesitated, unsure what to say. While he didn't want to keep it a secret from her, it wasn't entirely his place to say. Yang had mentioned that she didn't want Ruby involved, and if he told her what it was that Yang was up to, there was a good chance that Ruby would force the issue.

He replied after a moment of thought, making sure to keep silent on any specifics but letting her know that he'd be helping Yang out on an errand, and not to worry about it. He hoped that was enough to placate her.

The last message was from Penny. When he saw the time she'd sent it, he blinked.

What was a girl like Penny doing awake at two in the morning?

It was a simple question, nothing out of the ordinary other than the time. She was asking if he was busy today, and that she would like to meet up. Jaune hated to disappoint her but messaged her back quickly, letting her know that he wasn't available.

He'd barely sent the text when he got a reply. She couldn't still be awake, could she? But it was clearly from her. That was a little odd.

The message didn't say anything in words. All she'd typed out was an emoji.

*Penny Polendina: :(*

Now he felt horrible.

He sat there thinking of what to say for much longer than he should have, before finally promising her to meet up with her on the weekend. They could spend both days together to make up for it.

Her reply was instant.

*Penny Polendina: :)*

He wasn't sure why she was only communicating in emoji. Maybe she'd just discovered the function. Penny was odd like that. She was very knowledgeable about certain things but completely ignorant about others. He couldn't say it wasn't endearing, though.

Jaune got ready for the day, going through his morning rituals. He donned his armor, suiting up in his full combat attire as if he were about to go out into the Emerald Forest and tangle with some Grimm.

It was a statement as much as it was practical. There would be no mistaking that he was a Huntsman, if the sword on his hip should somehow fail to warn them.

Jaune met Yang at the ferry terminal, grinning as she pranced towards him.

"You're awfully chipper this morning," he commented.

She'd had the same idea as him, dressed in her combat attire with Ember Celica ready on her wrists, if she should ever need them.

"Why wouldn't I be?" she smirked, hand on hip. "We're about to rough up a bunch of bastards, of course I'm happy."

"Maybe it won't come to that," he said, though he knew it likely would. Yang wasn't going to pay for the information, she was going to force it out of them with threats; both vocal, and physical.

"Come on, don't act like it doesn't get your blood humming," she swung her hip against him, giving him a firm nudge. "We make a good team, remember? And they won't have anyone like that White Fang bastard, this'll be a cake walk."

“I guess I’m a worry wart,” he admitted. “Just try not to go overboard.”

“Fiiiine, fine, I’ll be good. But if any of these jerks step out of line, you know what’ll happen, don’tcha?”

Yeah. He knew.

Apparently Yang had already put a call through to the information broker who worked for the Vassari family on the ride over, so they were expected. Jaune wasn’t sure how she’d managed to convince the man to meet them on such short notice, but the meeting was secured. That was all that really mattered in the end.

They were to meet him in an office down by the waterfront. When they arrived by taxi, Jaune saw that it was owned by a logistics firm. No doubt under the control of the Vassari family, and used as a legitimate front for their less legitimate dealings.

Dockworkers were already hard at work, unloading vessels that had arrived in the early morning darkness. One of the wharves was blocked off, and construction crews were setting up for a long day. That was where the failed Dust heist had occurred, and even from a distance, Jaune could see the damage to the concrete supports, and the surrounding infrastructure. The massive ship-to-shore cranes in that section were also out of commission, the steel beams dented, unsafe for use.

The White Fang had caused quite a bit of havoc.

Yang took the lead, drawing looks from any man that saw her. Jaune couldn’t blame them for staring, she was eye-catching with her lush blonde hair and womanly physique, her hips

swaying as she ascended the stairs. Jaune followed her up, and they were met at the top by two men in silver-gray suits, their hair slicked back, both wearing expensive sunglasses.

“We’re here to see Argento,” Yang said, voice calm. “We were told to meet him here.”

They looked Yang over before their eyes swung to Jaune and the clear armor he was wearing, and the sword on his belt. Their jaws tightened.

“Is there a problem?” Yang asked, eyebrow arched.

“The Huntsman stays here,” one of them said, voice gravely. A smoker, perhaps.

Jaune was about to speak up when Yang agreed, shooting him a look.

“I’ll just be inside, stay by the door,” she commanded as if he was her underling.

Oh, so this was how they were going to play it.

He wasn’t keen on letting her out of his sight but played along, nodding his head, remaining silent.

“Satisfied?” Yang asked cattily. “Now – Argento?”

“This way,” the other man gestured, opening the door. Yang stepped through, the man following her in before the door clicked shut.

Jaune was left with the man with the smoker’s voice.

It was a little awkward so Jaune tried to make conversation.

“How long have you been working for Argento?” he asked after thinking for a moment.

The man stared at him, eyes hidden by his sunglasses, and remained silent. Jaune waited, but there was no answer forthcoming.

“Nice weather we’ve been having,” he tried again before frowning. “Wait, no – it’s been raining a lot. Uh – do you watch football?”

Silence.

Just as well, Jaune didn’t watch football. If he’d said yes, then he had nothing to follow up with. The guys at work had been pestering him to join them for one of the home games but he’d been busy.

The next time they asked, he would try and make time.

“So – do you stand here all day standing guard or are things more interesting than that?”

He might as well have been speaking to a wall.

“Right,” he said, moving next to the door, standing opposite the man, a hand resting on the pommel of his sword. “Quiet it is.”

They must have been standing there for around ten minutes, watching the waterfront slowly come alive, until there was the unmistakable sound of a scuffle coming from within. The guard moved instantly, reaching into his coat as he turned, only to grunt as Jaune buried his fist in the man’s stomach.

“Sorry,” he said before kneeing him in the face, shattering his glasses and knocking him out cold.

When he kicked in the door, the frame splintered, and he was met with carnage. Three men were unconscious on the floor. One was the man who had escorted Yang inside, and the other two were additional support. Yang was standing atop the desk, and dangling from her hand could only be Argento, the broker.

His face was flushed red as he attempted to pry Yang’s hand off his throat, legs kicking out, his previously slicked back hair ruffled. He was dressed in a much nicer suit than his goons, his fingers adorned with rings.

He quickly changed from red to purple.

“Yang, you might want to put him down before he passes out,” Jaune said dryly, shaking his head.

She turned to look over at him, and shot him a smile before dropping Argento unceremoniously. The man crumbled on his desk, rolling off the side and hitting the floor with a gasping wheeze. Then he started coughing, inhaling desperately as his hand darted inside his jacket.

Jaune stepped forward and unsheathed his sword, resting the edge by his neck. Argento froze, eyes widening as he caught sight of Jaune and his very sharp sword.

“Don’t do that,” he said calmly. “We don’t want this to be more complicated than it has to be.”

His hand left his jacket, and he continued to gasp for breath as Yang hopped down off the desk.

“What happened?” Jaune asked.

Yang scoffed. “He wasn’t taking me very seriously, so I had to show him why he should be.”

“And these other guys?”

Yang shrugged. “I think the plan was to ambush me.”

“They knew I was outside, right?”

“I don’t think they’re very smart,” Yang said. “And aren’t used to people that fight back.”

Bending down, she grabbed Argento by the jacket and hauled him up, throwing him against the desk. It rattled as paper slid off the side, a picture frame toppling over with a crack. Yang threw up his jacket and grabbed the concealed handgun, pulling it out and tossing it aside like it was trash.

“Now then, are you *sure* you don’t know this woman?” Yang pulled out her scroll and flashed him the screen. “Think *real* carefully this time before you answer.”

“D-Do you know who you’re messing with?” he managed to get out, voice distorted by the fact that Yang had just choked him half to death.

“Yeah, I do,” Yang said uncaringly. “I contacted you, remember? I know exactly who you are. I don’t care. All I care about is if you know who this woman is and where I can find her.”

Jaune could see the insult forming on his tongue, but he instantly swallowed it when Yang held up a hand and her gauntlet mecha-shifted into being, covering her knuckles in yellow colored Dust steel.

“I told you to think carefully,” she chided. “Now – talk.”

He didn’t know much. While he claimed to not know her name, he admitted that the Vassari had done business with her in the distant past. It was only the once, and it had almost been fifteen years since, but Yang’s mother wasn’t the type of person one easily forgot.

She left a lasting impression, regardless of name.

“S-She wanted a weapons supplier, and wanted to know if we had any contacts in Mistral that we could link her up with,” the man spilled through gritted teeth. “But we don’t really deal with Mistral. We told her to go speak with Spider, they’re the big dogs over there, but she wasn’t interested. I don’t know if she ever got what she wanted, we never saw her again, I swear.”

It wasn’t much – but it was something.

According to him, Yang’s mom wanted weapons – illegal weapons, untraceable weapons. The question was why?

You didn’t go to all this trouble for something small.

They left Argento to clean up the mess Yang made of his men. She remained silent as they left the docks and started wandering up town, Jaune waiting for her to say something. It wasn’t until they were forced to stop at a set of lights that she did.

“She’s in Mistral.”

“Maybe,” Jaune said. “This was fifteen years ago, remember? She might have gone there, but that doesn’t mean she still is.”

Yang nodded reluctantly. “I know, but... it’s the only lead we have.”

“Mistral is far away,” Jaune pointed out as the lights switched, and the pedestrian crossing was free to use. They crossed the street. “We can’t exactly just skip right on over.”

Yang frowned. "No, but..."

"But?"

"She was looking for a supplier out of Mistral, but didn't want to deal with Spider for some reason," she bit her lip, worrying it lightly. "So she had to go to someone else. Could be anyone, but who in Vale would know about what happens in Mistral? A gang that used to be stationed there."

Jaune saw where she was going. "The Black Lotus."

Yang had mentioned that Spider had driven them out of the city a long time ago. But that didn't mean they still didn't have connections there, and may have been Raven's next port of call.

"If anyone could give her what she wanted, it's them."

"But why did she want weapons in the first place?" Jaune asked. "I know you said she was involved in criminal activity, but this isn't minor stuff. I don't know much about all of this, but if she only wanted a few weapons, she could easily get something like that, right? This sounds like she wanted more than just a few."

"Uncle Qrow always refused to talk about her whenever I asked," Yang said, annoyed. "I only know about the criminal stuff because I overheard him talking with my dad once. It wasn't just her, either. He made it sound like he was also involved, but when I tried to press him, he wouldn't talk about it. It never sounded that serious, but..."

Maybe it was.

Maybe it was a whole lot worse than she'd ever thought.

"So – the Black Lotus," Jaune refocused. "Have you contacted them yet?"

"Not yet. I'll call them now, see if I can get us a meetup."

A sudden overly dramatic gasp drew his attention but before he could turn, he heard a very familiar voice with a very familiar greeting.

"Friend Jaune~! Sal-u-tations~!"

A mass of ginger hair appeared in front of him, and looking down, happy green eyes blinked up at him.

"Er..."

Yang leapt back in fright at Penny's sudden appearance, face filled with confusion.

"What a coincidence~!" Penny chirped, only to immediately hiccup. "I cannot believe we've bumped into each other!"

*Hiccup.*

“Jaune?” Yang asked, unsure. “Who is this?”

“Yang, this is Penny. Penny Polendina,” Jaune introduced after a moment, still thrown by her unexpected appearance. “Penny, this is Yang Xiao Long. She’s a friend of mine from Beacon.”

Penny’s gaze swung around to face Yang, and Yang took a further step back at the intensity in her eyes.

“A pleasure to meet you, Friend-of-Jaune,” Penny offered a hand by way of greeting, and after a moment of hesitation, Yang took it. Lilac eyes widened, no doubt feeling how firm her grip was. “It is always nice to meet a fellow Huntress-in-training!”

Yang looked totally lost but managed to salvage some of her composure, an awkward grin stretching her lips. “Heh – nice to meet you. You’re training to be a Huntress?”

Penny nodded quickly. “I am! I am a student of Atlas Academy, and I’m combat ready!”

“She’ll be competing in the Vytal Festival,” Jaune revealed. “She arrived early with her team to acclimatize to the conditions.”

Penny looked a little nervous, giving a robotic laugh.

“Y-You remembered, Friend Jaune.”

“Of course.”

Yang’s shock was beginning to fade, and her natural charisma was taking charge. “Oho? So we’ll be competitors. Are you any good?”

“I am the top student in my year, and my parameters are unmatched!” Penny boasted proudly, hands on hips as she puffed out her modest chest. “I believe I’ll be more than a match for anything the other schools throw at me.”

“Really now?” Jaune saw the competitive fire ignite within her, Yang’s grin becoming a smirk. “I like your style. I hope you can back it up, I’d love to throw down with you some time.”

Penny looked delighted. “Does this mean we’re friends?”

“Heh – I suppose it does.”

Penny bounced up and down, beaming. “A new friend! That makes four! I only have ninety-six more to go!”

That was a strange thing to say.

“What do you mean?” Jaune asked, not able to help himself. “Why ninety-six?”

Penny was suddenly overcome with excitement, leaning into his personal space. "I've given myself the task of making one hundred friends!"

A hundred friends.

That was a lot, wasn't it?

Yang shot him an amused glance.

"And you've made four so far?"

Penny nodded quickly. "That's right! Jaune was my third friend – but my first boyfriend!"

"Ah – Penny, that means something else," he tried to correct her as Yang snorted.

"I didn't know you were taken, Jaune. Should you be hanging out with me?" Yang teased.

The thing was, he actually was taken. Just not by Penny!

"Yang is my fourth friend," Penny nodded proudly, ignoring his protests. "Ciel Soleil was my second friend, and is a member of my team."

Well, he supposed that made sense. But weren't teams made up of four people? Was Penny not friends with one of them? Jaune couldn't see how that could be possible, she was the sweetest girl around not called Ruby Rose. It was impossible to dislike her.

"Who was your first friend?" Yang asked.

"Specialist Winter Schnee."

They stared at her.

Wait a minute. She knew Weiss' sister?

She'd never mentioned it before.

"Oh, uh – we know Winter's sister," Jaune said quickly. "Weiss is actually on my team."

Penny's mouth formed an O.

"Winter is very fond of Weiss, she speaks about her all the time," Penny revealed.

"How do you know Winter?"

Her eyes widened dramatically. “Oh, uh – well, I’ve often encountered her at Atlas Academy.”

“Oh.”

You learn something new every day.

That was quite the coincidence, though.

Yang’s expression suddenly became cheeky, and Jaune had a bad feeling.

“Say, Penny,” Yang sidled up to her and threw an arm around her shoulders. “Winter wouldn’t have happened to share some childhood stories about Weiss, did she?”

Oh no.

Before he could intervene, Penny perked up. “She very much did, Yang!”

“And would you be willing to share them?”

“I don’t know if this is a good idea,” Jaune tried to block her but it was hopeless.

“What would you like to know?”

Yeah, this was *not good* – but a part of Jaune, deep down, wanted to hear about Weiss as a young girl. He knew her family life wasn't great, but she'd only ever mentioned Winter with warmth, so maybe...

"Winter mentioned that when Weiss was twelve, she once caught her practising kisses in the mirror," Penny revealed without care, following it up with, "I thought that was a good strategy, and tried it out myself! I'm not sure if I got any better at it, though..."

Yang and Jaune's eyes met, and he saw in slow-motion how her face crumpled, her lip quivering as her eyes crinkled, a startled laugh escaping her.

"She what?" Yang asked in disbelief. "And *you* – Penny!"

"I continue to practise whenever I have time, but I think I've gone as far as I am able without a partner," Penny continued. "I'm unsure if Weiss has moved onto partner practice, Winter hasn't mentioned."

She said it with such a straight face, voice completely earnest that Jaune couldn't stand it. He had to look away or he'd start laughing.

"Penny, you shouldn't self-report like that," Yang chided, her voice tinged with laughter. "Oh man, can you imagine little Weiss puckering her lips in the mirror. That's too funny. What else have you got for us?"

Apparently Weiss slept with stuffed animals until she was eight, and then she was 'too old' for such childish things, but Winter knew that she kept them hidden under her bed and pulled them

out when she went to sleep and no one could see. Her favorite was a shark she'd dubbed Mr. Tooth.

"Her favorite animal is also sharks," Penny added. "Winter once took Weiss to an aquarium but she started crying when the sharks wouldn't come over to the glass to say hello."

At least this story was less embarrassing and more cute, but when Penny started talking about training bra's, Jaune stepped in.

"Okay, okay, I think that's enough," Jaune placed a hand on Penny's mouth, her lips brushing across his palm as she continued to speak.

"Mmrrrg mmn mmmrrr!"

Yang snickered. "Come on, don't you want to know about all her deep, darkest secrets?"

"You know if you reveal any of this, she'll kill you, right?"

"Yaaaah, I know – but it'll be fun to see her expression right before she does it," Yang became serious. "But yeah, thanks for the info, Penny. Maybe I'll buy her a stuffed shark for her birthday."

Jaune jumped as something wet and soft licked his palm, and he pulled his hand away in surprise.

“Penny!” he exclaimed.

She beamed at him. “Yes, Friend Jaune?”

He hesitated. Was he mistaken?

“N-Nothing. Just... maybe keep Weiss’ secrets to yourself from now on. I’m sure Winter told you those things in confidence. We shouldn’t have asked.”

She nodded. “If you think it best, then that is what I’ll do.”

Their day had taken a more light hearted turn. Their investigation was put on hold.