

I don't own One Piece - way too Shounen or Ranma 1/2 - way too based on comedy through pain.

Yeah, I know, not my best work...

This has been betaed by Hiryo and myself, which again probably means that there are mistakes scattered throughout. If you spot any, mention them specifically in your review or a PM as Riniko22 mentioned in his for the last chapter. The mistakes you mentioned have been corrected LOL!

Oh, and to the two guests (or maybe one who somehow left two reviews on the same point) who commented on me being a dumbass for keeping the curse: opinions are like assholes: everyone has one, that doesn't mean yours is worth sharing especially if you're rude about it. However, there was another actual reviewer who mentioned the curse in a more polite manner. To that i will say that going into this world I had a choice of what to keep from the Ranma-verse. I decided to keep the curse rather than the name, since I had gone that route in Wild Wolf. I could also see Urd doing that to Ranma in a heartbeat given the names he called her.

Chapter 2: Of Marines, Bounty Hunters, Pirates and Thieves

Dancing around a ballroom on a pleasure cruise for the rich and famous despite not being either of those things was an orange-haired young woman with the emphasis on the 'woman' part. Even at 17, Nami, for that was the young woman's name, was used to getting glares from other women older and richer than her. Because they knew that she had a face and even a body all their money cannot buy. Receiving looks like that were some of her little joys Nami allowed herself while going about her business.

Today was another such day and Nami smirked internally as she left the dance floor ignoring with near-regal disdain the glares at her from some of the other ladies. *That's right eat your heart out ladies I make this cheap dress look better than any of your thousand beli outfits!*

What Nami was making look good at the moment was a simple blue dress which came down from her shoulders leaving only a slight hint of her bust visible before going down to her ankles. It looked like a princess outfit but she hadn't worn it because it flattered her figure. No, Nami had worn it because it flared out below the waist, which allowed her to keep the tools of her trade and her collapsible staff on her, the last of which she wore at all times. Nami would rather go swimming with piranha, literally, than go anywhere without her staff.

Moving out of the ballroom, Nami moved through the ship as if heading back towards her room, though if any of the other passengers had asked the sailors which room that was or vice versa, none of them would've been able to answer. Nami was a stowaway. After all, why pay to board a ship when you're just going to rob everyone on it anyway?

A few moments later Nami exited the captain's quarters. She had a small pouch over one shoulder now and an *irritable* scowl on her face. The captain hadn't actually had much in his private safe which meant the partygoers became her main target. *Darn, pickpocketing all of them is going to take forever!*

Dropping the small pouch off in a room she knew to be empty, Nami then re-joined the party still going on in the ship's ballroom. She did not go back onto the dance floor however, instead simply mingling with the crowd, smiling politely when addressed, but otherwise simply part of the decor. Despite several women glaring at her, Nami made an effort to blend into the background, and succeeded to a degree that should've been impossible given her looks and in particular her orange hair, but she did.

Mostly what she was concentrating on was counting up the loot here and she wasn't impressed really. *Good grief, rich really does sometimes equal stupid.* A lot of the jewelry she was seeing were fake, oh the gold was real enough but the jewels were either well-made glass or inferior stones polished up to look far better than their actual worth. *The amount could still make a decent haul all together, but how to get it all away?*

She took a glass of red wine from a waiter, sniffing it appreciatively before moving over to the side of the ballroom towards where she saw the captain holding forth to the richest looking people in view. If there was anything more valuable than

what the partygoers had on their persons aboard, he would be the one to know about it. She hadn't seen any sign of a hidden safe but you never knew.

Nami stopped however when she passed a window, spotting something in the distance, a small ship coming towards them. It was a very small ship, a small two-person sloop, though it looked to be decently rigged.

What had grabbed Nami's attention however was the shock of a red hair she could see out there. Nami knew her own hair sometimes turned heads, and she had lost count about them amount of times she was called a ginger, but in comparison to the woman out there, there was no contest as to who the real redhead was.

Her attention came back to her own surroundings as she heard the captain laughed loudly, obviously quite deep into his cups. "Pirates? We've never had a problem with pirates! This ship has never, and will never have any problem with pirates. We stay well away from any known pirate waters, and we have a direct line to the nearest Marine base or ship at all times. Only the most idiotic pirate would try to..."

So she wouldn't be obviously eavesdropping Nami moved away slightly. She looked out another window for a second only to sweatdrop, looking back at the captain then back out. Coming out from behind an outcropping of rocks sticking out of the ocean was tackiest, pinkest ship she had ever even imagined flying a personalized pirate flag. *I don't know what's worse, the proof that fate might just have a sense of humor, or that ship's design, ugh! On the other hand, from chaos, comes opportunity...*

OOOOOOO

Hearing the sound of cannon fire in the distance Luffy looked around from his argument, currently **her** argument, with Makino. Luffy had many talents, but navigating was not one of them. He/she could do it on an island easily enough, but not out on the ocean. He simply couldn't keep all the stars and everything else in his head, so Makino had been the one doing the navigating so far as they entered the tried to find the waters where their first target was supposed to hang out. The argument had been because Luffy had thought they had passed the area, whereas Makino knew they hadn't.

Now hearing the cannon fire Makino stuck her tongue out at Luffy, who pouted rather adorably at her. "No one likes a sore winner Makino."

Makino laughed, pushing the shorter girl in the shoulder as she took in her companion's form once more. Luffy was very short in her female form, only around five foot three if that, something that, though she didn't know it, was holdover from his life as Ranma which Urd had 'thoughtfully' tagged on when she played her prank. As was the shock of red hair, which currently was spooling down to her shoulders in loose curls, something Makino had done to it after they had decided it would be a good idea for Luffy to use his female form for his bounty hunting activities. That way they could use his bounty hunting later on as a way to rustle up cash if needed.

Surprisingly Luffy's curves from his last life hadn't carried over entirely. His hips were slightly thinner, and she had definitely more of a tomboy image overall, with B cup breasts rather than the C pushing D cup that Ranma's female form had grown in his/her last life. Luffy's female form was a little wider in the shoulders too, though she was the same height, something that irritated Luffy no end when he thought of it.

Currently Luffy was wearing short cut-off jeans that barely came down to mid-thigh, a T-shirt and a wide belt. The T-shirt had the words 'Thunderstruck' on it, and a pair of shades completed the ensemble. His straw hat was currently perched on Makino's head for safe keeping to further separate Luffy from 'Ranko', the name Luffy wanted to use in his/her bounty hunter persona.

It was a memorable look, but Makino had devised it so that everything would take away attention from Luffy's actual face. 'What did the bounty hunter look like Marine? Well she was short and perky. Can you describe her face? She had red hair and glasses.' Indeed, Makino's skill with clothing and alternate identities had surprised Luffy.

Pulling out a spyglass Luffy held up to one eye, pushing her shades up lightly to do it. "Good God that ship is, wow. Someone is really overcompensating in the whole girlish image department. I mean, do girls really like pink that much?"

"Judging from her wanted picture, I imagine that Alvida has a lot of problems with her personal image," Makino replied dryly, looking down at the picture for a moment then taking the spyglass from Luffy. "So what's the plan?"

"Plan?" Luffy asked blankly then kicked up into the air using Geppo grinning down at Makino. "I don't need a plan!"

Makino laughed, then turned and began to take in the sails, moving closer towards the other two ships which were now tied together as Luffy raced ahead of her, bouncing over thin air as easily as if he was walking on land. She would never get used to how at home in the air Luffy looked, but it certainly gave him an advantage in a fight. *Not*, she reflected for a moment smiling somewhat evilly, *that this is going to be much of a battle.*

Luffy soon arrived at the ship, hopping in midair above the two vessels, he watched as the crew of the pirate vessel moved their ill-gotten gains off of the yacht and onto their own ship, apparently having finished robbing the guests. Directly in the center of all this activity was a giant fat woman, at least 10 feet tall or so, she stood taller than every man in sight, not just in girth either. She had a massive iron mace over one shoulder, and she seemed to be berating a small pink-haired boy with large, thick glasses that just screamed nerd to Luffy's senses.

Deciding he'd seen enough and realizing none of the morons below him had yet noticed his presence, Luffy cleared his throat, then spoke. "Hey, you the whale they call Alvida?"

For a moment the activity continued before screeching to a halt as all eyes turned towards where the odd voice had come from, every face in sight showing pure terror. They saw a short red-haired woman, staring down at them with an almost bored expression on her face, as if what she had just said was the equivalent of asking what the weather was like. If the pirates were given to introspection, the fact that she was, you know, **hopping in midair**, should've given them a clue that this young woman was not normal. But pirates, especially low-grade ones, were not known for their intelligence.

Instead they all screamed and ran away as Alvida roared. "What did you call me!?" Swinging her club off her shoulder she whirled into a blow designed to connect with the redhead.

But the redhead reached out with one hand, grabbing the iron club by its shaft, not even moving from the impact of the blow on her arm. "I asked if you were the whale called Alvida, but I guess yer face and the iron club is enough to identify you anyway."

Turning Luffy flung one of her leg out quickly, a Rankyaku flying through the air to impact a group of pirates who had just been about to fire on her. Others began to do the same, and Luffy let go of the iron club before dodging this way and that in midair, contorting her body in a way that made one or two of the pirates actually grin evilly and mutter to themselves about what they were going to do with her once they brought her down.

That was counting their eggs before they hatched because even after several minutes of firing not a single bullet had hit Luffy. "Are you done yet?" she asked dully, then began to fling more Rankyakus down, smashing into groups of pirates, hurling them aside as if they had been struck by Alvida's club but not cutting into their bodies. Luffy had perfected the ability to use a less deadly version of that assault several months ago. Once a space was cleared, she landed lightly, looking up at Alvida from behind her sunglasses. "So, how exactly did a whale learn to walk anyway?"

"Why you..." Alvida growled, unaffected by what had happened to her crew, far more interested in Luffy's continued insults. "Coby! Who is the fairest woman on the seas?"

"...You don't read the newspaper much do ya?" Luffy said shaking her head. "There's talk about this empress of the oceans Boa Hancock, and I know there's a captain in the Marines named Hina something or other. She's damn sexy from the picture I've seen of her. Both of them are stronger and a hell of a lot prettier than you, you fat slab of..."

At that point Alvida lost her temper once again, bringing her club down in an attempt to smash Luffy. But Luffy used Shave and began to dance around insulting Alvida, using her really more to destroy the rest of her crew than anything else. Despite their best attempts to get out of the way Luffy continually led her right to the few remaining groups of pirates hiding here and there on the deck or over on the yacht

Yet despite this destruction Alvida was still on his insults to her 'beauty' and shouted again at the short boy. "Coby! Tell this bitch who the fairest is, or you'll be swapping spit with Moby Dick before the day is out!"

Coby had hidden himself the moment the battle began, hiding underneath a pile of ropes with only his head sticking out. At Alvida's first question he had begun to

answer by rote, before shuddering to a halt as he continued to watch this short slip of a girl toy with Alvida, even Coby could tell that. For some reason simply watching it gave Coby courage that he didn't know he had. "You are.... you are a fat slab of blubber Alvida, just like she says! And when I become a Marine, I, I'll capture you!"

Alvida turned in rage, and suddenly 'ooofed' when Luffy stopped dodging and went on the attack. A single blow to the side of her body sent Alvida careening across the deck, smashing into and through the last of her pirate crew before slamming into aft deck, out like a light from the pain. And probably, Luffy thought as she looked down at her fist, with a few cracked ribs. She hadn't used Armament of course.

In fact Luffy intended to not use Armament against anyone in East Blue except maybe someone with a Devil Fruit. Otherwise it would simply be overkill, and he really didn't want to advertise he could use it in either of his bodies. The only people who knew about that and his Chaozhou haki were Shanks and his brothers and Luffy wanted to keep it that way for as long as possible.

But for someone like Alvida, even a regular punch was devastating. Once making certain the giant woman wasn't moving, Luffy looked over at Coby cocking her head thoughtfully. "You really don't look like you belong here kid, there a story behind that or what? Or were you part of part of the yacht's crew?"

"What the hell!?" shouted a female voice, coming from ahead of Luffy, where an entrance to the interior of the ship could be seen among the rubble of Alvida's rampage. A Orange Town headed young woman, looking a little older than Luffy herself stuck her head out, staring at the carnage. She wore what looked like the normal pirates garb, a loose shirt and pantaloons with a sash around the middle. "What, just what is..."

Luffy looked at her, then back at the crew all around them. "If you were part of this crew, how the hell did Alvida think that anyone was telling the truth when she asked them about that fairest of them all crap?"

The Orange Town-haired woman laughed rather shakily, still staring around her as she began to drag a large amount of treasure out behind her. Luffy smirked, moving over to help, only to get her hand smacked away possessively. "I'm not part of the crew! I hate pirates, I was just trying to rob them!" The girl glared at Luffy then put

both of her arms around the small bag of loot protectively. "It's mine! You can't have it!"

"Don't want it," Luffy said with a laugh. "I'll just take Alvida and find the nearest marine base or ship. She's got a bounty on her, and that'll do me fine."

The girl subsided, looking at the redhead thoughtfully, gesturing around them at the wreckage of the deck. "So you're a bounty hunter? Is this your doing then? How did you do it?"

"Easily," Luffy said dryly. "And yes I'm a bounty hunter, well for now anyway."

The girl still was looking at her thoughtfully then around at all the damage. "I don't suppose you need a navigator do you?"

"Actually yeah I do." Luffy nodded, moving over to start tying up the crew gesturing at Coby, who had fallen silent at the Orange Town-haired girl's appearance, to join him. "Makino and I are okay using the sails, but the further we get away from our starting point, the less she's able to navigate us. Don't suppose you know where the nearest Marine base is from here? And what's your name anyway?"

"Nami, and I am the best navigator you will ever meet!" The girl said smirking and holding out her hand. "For a mere 60 percent of the cut, I'll get you to wherever you want."

"I don't think so," Luffy laughed, reaching over to push her shoulder playfully before turning back to tying up the pirate she was currently working on and the other girl grinned. None of them were conscious, and Nami wondered again what the heck she had missed while digging through Alvida's treasure room.

At the same time the crew of the yacht began to make itself known, coming out from the inside of the ship where they had been forced to remain with the passengers. They all moved quickly to help shooting glances at Luffy and the other two, some of them even thanked Ranko as they did. But when they spotted Nami they became a little too suspicious for her liking.

Luffy noticed this and smirked. "How about five percent of Alvida's bounty, and I don't mention what you have in that sack over there to the Marines?"

"That's blackmail!" Nami gasped, a hand coming up to her chest as if she was about to have a heart attack, but she smirked at the other girl and nodded her head. "In that case, I should get going." She looked around as more of the sailors came out, then over the side of the ship out over the ocean towards a ship in the distance, shading her eyes. "There is a Marine ship already closing in on us, I guess the captain was telling the truth about them having a hotline to the nearest Marine ship. And I'd rather not answer any awkward questions."

"Excuse me..." said a timid voice, and both girls turned to the short pink-haired boy, who was looking a little worried now.

At the same time the Marine ship began to fire on them. Evidently they couldn't make out what was actually going on, and had simply assumed that destroying Alvida's pirate ship was more important than saving the possible hostages. *A typical Marine response* Luffy thought disgustedly. *My grandpa would kick their asses for that.* "Yeah, what do ya want?"

"D, do you mind if I come with you? I wasn't part of Alvida's crew honest, it was just a mistake, I want to be a Marine, but it might..."

"Alright, alright whatever..." Luffy said as the explosions of water came closer to them while the Marine ship began to get its range. "Makino should've pulled our ship up on the other side of this pink piece of crap, take your stuff and get on it Nami, and you too I guess nerd boy."

"Coby," the boy said, tremulously but with feeling. "I've had enough of getting called names for a while."

Nami simply nodded, turning away rapidly grabbing up her sack of loot. Luffy nodded too, then turned and leaped up onto the air as easily as walking up a set of stairs, before reaching down and heaving Alvida's unconscious form into the air with her. Without another word she turned and hopped away towards the approaching ship, leaving Coby staring after her. "Wh, what is she?"

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The Marines gaped at the flying object coming towards him before several of them began to run around wildly shouting instructions. "Raise the cannons! Raise the cannons, incoming!"

"Don't!" Luffy shouted, holding up Alvida's body in front of them. "The pirates've already been beaten!"

Slowly as Luffy circled the ship the activity aboard it began to die down, or at least became less militant. Most of the crew were now staring at her, this short tom-boy, who frankly looked more like she should be running around climbing trees, hopping around in midair hauling the far larger Alvida around like she weighed nothing at all.

"Are you a bounty hunter then?" The captain asked, pushing through the crowd. He was slightly larger than the rest of his crew and wider across the shoulders well, with a big prominent nose which looked as if he was getting over a cold and a mustache that looked almost alive as he glared up at Luffy.

"Yep," Luffy said chirpily, bouncing in place even more than she had to in order to stay in the air, which caused her chest to do interesting things, which in turn caused the Marines mind's to begin to melt. The number of women in the Marines was something like less than .5% if that, and Marines were almost as bad as pirates for staring.

After letting her bouncing do its work, she went on. "My names Ranko, and me and my partner, who's back there on our ship, we decided to take up bounty hunting. Alvida was the first one our list. Don't suppose you have the money for her right now would ya?"

"I can write you out a promissory note payable by any World Government bank." The Marine captain said, trying hard not to stare at Luffy's chest as it continued to bounce by concentrating on something far more important. "But how did you learn one of the Rokushiki?"

"Oh?" 'Ranko' said with a laugh, hopping down out of the air now to land lightly on the deck, Alvida's unconscious form slamming into the deck beside her. "You know about the Rokushiki? I had a friend who taught it me, well he didn't really teach me, he simply used them in front of me and I learned from that."

The captain stroked his mustache for a moment, frowning heavily his mind now able to focus on something other than the perky redhead. "Those techniques are not supposed to be used by anyone not associated with the World Government or the Marines. I don't think it's an actual law, but..."

'Ranko' shrugged, using the lie he/she had come up with for moments like this. "I might join the Marines myself eventually, though honestly I'm not certain it would be for me you know? I'm not exactly big on following rules. Still, I'll make that decision when I get to the Grand Line one way or the other."

The captain frowned then looked over at Alvida then over at the two ships still joined together in the distance. "Is her crew over there?"

"Yep, the sailors from the yacht're tying them up now. I knocked them all out during my fight with this fatso. I don't think her crew had time to do anything to the passengers, which means they should be safe now that you lot've stopped shooting at both ships."

Still pulling at his mustache the captain nodded slowly, ignoring 'Ranko's' rather biting criticism of his crew's action. "I won't make an issue of it then." He smiled at the short girl. "You do good work, and I'm certain if you do eventually join the Marines you'll be offered officer rank quickly. As an officer you have a lot more leeway with those rules you so disparage. Now, let me go write out that promissory note."

By the time 'Ranko' was finished with the Marines, Nami and Makino had moved the small, unnamed ship out of sight around the rock that the pirate vessel had previously used to hide itself. Nami wanted to be out of sight entirely as the Marine vessel continued on its way towards the two anchored ships. After all, she had stolen (or should that be re-stolen?) a lot of the treasure the pirates had just taken in this raid.

She and Coby both started when the redhead came out of the sky landing lightly on the ship whereupon she put her arms around herself and shuddered. "Unclean, unclean, **unclean!**"

Makino laughed shaking her head. "Does that mean I'll be doing all of our trading with Marines from now on?" Nami laughed too understanding where the girl was coming from while Coby merely blushed as Luffy moved towards the center cabin.

"God yes! Whoever thought the idea of putting 100 plus men on a ship without any women around was a good idea needs to be shot! Marines might not do much beyond looking but even that..." Luffy shuddered a little then began to put her hair up into a ponytail.

Coby hesitantly asked, "Um, I, I'm sorry to ask miss, but um, I didn't catch your name."

Cocking her head Luffy looked at the pink-haired boy then Nami thoughtfully. She then looked over to Makino, who shrugged, a small smile on her face. After a moment Luffy shrugged, then grinned brightly. "I'm Monkey D. Luffy, the man who will be the Pirate King! Damn I've always wanted to say that, feels good!"

Coby gaped at her while Nami stiffened looking between Luffy and Makino in confusion and rising anger. Despite this it was Coby who first replied, shooting to his feet fast enough to rock the small boat shouting. "Wha-what kind of nonsense are you spouting!? Do you even know what that means!?"

"It isn't nonsense, and I know exactly what it means." Luffy said, her grin still in place.

"B-but to become Pirate King you'd have to enter the pirates graveyard the Grand Line, an-and find One Piece!"

"Yep, that's sort of one of prerequisites to becoming Pirate King." Luffy's grin, which was already a little too wide to be normal, widened further somehow. "I'm looking forward to the challenge honestly."

"Impossible! Impossible, impossible! EOUCH!" Coby cut off with a cry as Luffy smacked him upside the head.

Luffy glared at him now, her grin gone. "Who are you to tell me what's impossible?" With a sigh she moved to squat in front of Coby, capturing the pink-haired boy's eyes with her own. "I know it's going to be tough. I know I'll face a lot of challenges along the way. I know I may die. And that's alright. That's my dream, and if I do die before I reach it, then that's fine by me."

Coby's eyes widened at the amount of belief in Luffy's voice.

But Luffy's attention was taken by someone nearby scoffing then trying to smash her head in with a staff. Luffy's hand flashed up catching the staff's end and she cocked her head at Nami. "Where the heck did you keep, oh, it's collapsible, clever."

"Thank you, wait no that's not the point!" Nami glared at the redheaded girl angrily. "You told me you were a bounty hunter! I'd never have gotten onboard this ship if you said you were a pirate from the start! I bet you even kidnapped poor Makino-san, or, or blackmailed her or something to make her join you!"

Makino had made an impression on Nami while Luffy was off dealing with the marines. She reminded Nami strongly of her older sister in some ways and her adopted mother Bellemere in others. She just couldn't see the green-haired woman willingly becoming a pirate.

"Well I'm a bounty hunter right now. After all, we need some money before heading to the Grand Line. And um, blackmailing? Makino's got more blackmail material on me than vice versa." Luffy laughed, her fist still clenched around the end of Nami's staff despite her best efforts to break Luffy's grip.

"Pictures of you from when you were young and got into trouble are not blackmail Luffy, they are simply memorabilia. Unless you're counting the pictures I have of that time Ace and Sabo dared you to dress up and act like a lady to see if you could help trick Sabo's ex-family. In which case, yes, that's blackmail material." Makino replied dryly, before looking at Nami and Coby. "He's telling the truth you know, his dream really is to be the Pirate King, and he really would be fine, or at least not sad if he died if he did so while trying to achieve it."

"And Nami-chan, I joined him because of my own reasons. There's a certain man I want to hunt down in the New World..." She trailed off, her face darkening noticeably as she began to chuckle evilly under her breath.

Nami and Coby recoiled and Luffy took the chance to pull Nami's staff out of her hands. "Yeah, she gets kind of scary when she's talking about he-who-shall-not-be-named." Moving over to a small heater she lit it and put a kettle on top before looking over at Nami. "So you have a problem with pirates, beyond the whole making a living by stealing from them thing?"

"Pirates are the scum of the sea of course I have a problem with them! They murder, steal, rape and ruin lives wherever they go!" Nami said, answering the question yet not giving any details, feeling vulnerable now without her staff and suddenly remembering that this slip of a girl had smashed an entire pirate crew and their reasonably well-known captain less than an hour ago with little apparent effort.

Luffy noticed this of course, but didn't comment. "Not all pirates are scum like that, but you're right, too many of them are. Those are the bastards who go to sea merely to become bandits, with their small ambitions of getting rich or taking what they want from other people. Those kind of pirates will never amount to anything because they don't have the conviction to drive them to better things. Do you have a dream?"

Nami blinked, thrown off by the sudden question. For some reason she nearly answered honestly before remembering that the girl in front of her was a pirate and stopping herself in time. But even so her face gave it away, and Luffy smiled at her. "A dream you'd give your life to achieve? That is what the Jolly Roger means to me and to the pirates who taught me what it really means to sail the seas under that flag. When you raise a jolly roger and declare yourself a pirate, you need to have a dream, and the conviction to take on the whole world to reach it! If you don't you're no better than bandits, scum of the sea and I'll crush any such I find!"

At the sheer force of Luffy's words Nami reared back slightly and Luffy smiled at her gently, giving the girl her staff back. "I won't try to pry or change your mind, but I don't really like it when people use bold labels like that, like all marines are good and all pirates are bad."

Coby had been staring at her in shock while Luffy spoke but now he spoke up hurriedly. "But marines **are** all good! They protect civilians from pirates, they uphold the laws and..."

"And they follow the World Government's orders good or bad and sometimes downright evil." Luffy cut him off harshly, her face darkening. "Worse, they allow slavery and uphold the rule of the Tenryubito, who are the most corrupt and vile examples of humanity that have ever existed."

Both Nami and Coby flinched back at that, but Makino, who had come out of her own anger, rested a slim hand on Luffy's shoulders. Luffy subsided but shook his head at Coby and Nami. "You can't just label any one group good or evil like that, that's all I'm going to say. Part of why I want to be Pirate King is to clean up the pirate name, or maybe to try and make the distinction between **real** pirates and scum of the sea, and to follow my own moral code. If I became a marine I couldn't, not if it didn't jive with my orders from the World Government or the marine's own HQ and their idea of 'Absolute Justice', another freaking label if ever there was one."

Nami frowned, but shook her head. "You're still a pirate, and that's enough for me. I'll navigate us to the nearest marine base but that's it, we'll go our separate ways there. If you're lucky, I won't oust you as a pirate when we get there, are we clear?"

"That's fine, though I'd still be open to making a deal with you as long we're operating as bounty hunters." Luffy said with a shrug. "I intend to hit up all of the bounties I can in a month before really raising my flag."

For a moment Nami was actually tempted but then shook her head. "No, you're still a pirate, and besides, Alvida was probably a lot weaker than she looked, you'll just get yourself killed somewhere."

She was surprised when Luffy and Makino both burst into laughter, shaking their heads at that but it was Makino who answered. "Heheheh, trust us Nami-chan, there's no chance of that happening."

"heh, yep. East Blue's known as the weakest of the five seas. The only pirates around here are small change or cowards who have given up after attempting the Grand Line." Luffy said, reaching down and touching the teapot, smiling as she felt it was hot enough before pulling off her shirt and tossing it aside.

"You do know there's a boy here right?" Nami said shaking her head at the girl's sudden bout of exhibitionism even as she took a moment to look at the shorter girl's body, nodding approvingly at what she saw even if the girl was a pirate. The girl didn't have her curves and given how short Luffy was she probably never would, but if there was an ounce of excess fat on that body Nami couldn't see it. There were a few scars including one major one on her side and Nami wondered about the history behind them, but had to approve of the general aura of toughness the girl gave off.

For his part Coby had blushed tomato red trying to tear his virgin eyes away but being unable to. His face went from red to white in an instant however when Luffy poured the water over her head, initiating the change. *I know I've made my female form a plus here, but that doesn't mean I'm not gonna smack Urd if I see her again.* Luffy thought to himself, snickering slightly even as she did, taking in Coby's reaction.

"Wh, what the hell!?" Nami shrieked, before putting her hand out to poke Luffy's now very flat, toned chest, blushing slightly but not overmuch. The boy suddenly standing in front of her was very good looking but it took more than a pretty face and a nice body to turn her head, not even counting the shock of watching the petite redhead change into a far taller boy.

If he had eaten the fruit that Shanks had found and showed him that one time Luffy would have been a short young man, barely taller than Nami herself with scant muscle tone and thin shoulders if little actual fat. But this would have been because of the Gum Gum fruit and a slight case of malnutrition, not because he lacked muscles or was genetically predisposed to be short. **This** Luffy stood 6' with decently wide shoulders, almost as wide as his older brother Ace's, with visible muscles though not quite to Ace's extent. He looked like an Olympic swimmer crossed with a martial artist, which was basically accurate, though the amount of strength in Luffy's frame was of course deceptive.

"You explain Makino, I need to change out of these pants, gah, forgot how tight they are in my normal body!" Luffy turned away, reaching down even as he did to try and relieve some of the pain.

By the time Luffy was back, Makino had finished her explanation and Nami was looking at Luffy in shock. Coby on the other hand had dunked his head over the side and seemed to be trying to drown himself. Luffy laughed evilly at that sight patting the pink-haired boy on his back. "Heh, that'll teach ya not ta start having thoughts like that about girls ya just met kid."

Nami turned to him, frowning thoughtfully, wondering where the straw hat Luffy was wearing now had come from and why he was wearing it since it didn't look to go with the long pigtail he was sporting now. "So, you're going to use your female

form to do the bounty hunting, and this form to do the pirating? Have to say that makes sense but it doesn't change anything. I'm still leaving you at the next port."

"That's your choice Nami, I'm not going to make you stay with us. I wish you would, you seem quick on your feet and your navigating skills would make you a great fit with us. But again, I'm not going to make you stay with us."

Nami nodded, though still looked a little leery of Luffy. Luffy's general attitude was so open and friendly it threatened to throw her off but she'd had too many bad experiences with pirates to trust Luffy after so short a time. The fact she actually wanted to and wanted to see him as a friend despite that was worrying and actually helped keep her from letting her guard down further.

"Just remember, that the offer's open." Luffy went on. "And whatever problem you have with pirates, or maybe are still having, I'd be willing to help you out whatever it is."

"A-ano," Coby interrupted, pushing himself out of the water, his attempt to drown himself having failed miserably. "Lu-Luffy-san, are you sure you want to go to the nearest Marine base? Only, I overheard some of the pirates say that the pirate hunter Roronoa Zoro, a veritable demon of a man has been seen there, and the captain of that base is supposed to be very tough too. If you're outed as a pirate..."

"We have different definitions of tough Coby. As for Roronoa Zoro, I've heard about him too. Heh, if he's as tough as the rumors say, I might just recruit him for my crew..." Luffy said, then laughed at Coby's expression while to one side Makino was watching a now silent Nami closely, frowning in thought.

OOOOOOO

Morgantown was a small coastal town built around a Marine base, which had been the reason for the town to exist in the first place, or so Nami said. Luffy was more interested in two things, one that Roronoa Zoro was here, and two, he'd be able to exchange his promissory note for actual cash.

It had taken them about a day's sailing to reach the port, during which time Luffy had gotten to know both Coby and Nami better. Nami was a nice girl, very, very bright and an independent, worldly sort, who seemed to get a kick out of Luffy, his

curse and some of his jokes. In the brief moments she forgot he was a wannabe pirate anyway. Every time Nami remembered that, she would clamp up again.

Luffy liked her, her prickly, independent attitude appealed to him and she had a wicked sense of humor whenever she allowed it out. But it was obvious she had a major problem with pirates, despite, in his opinion, having the right temperament to make a fantastic pirate herself, above and beyond her disdain for anyone else's right to own property. It was clear she had something driving her, not just the need for money but something else, something underlying her sense of pride in her navigation skills, maybe even a dream like his own.

The fact Makino liked her too was a major plus. She was a really good judge of character so that counted for a lot.

Now, as Makino and Luffy began to furl the sail, Luffy looked over at Nami. "Damn, not only did you guide us straight here and predict that squall last night, but you were spot on with your prediction on how long it would take us to get here. That's pretty amazing Nami."

"Heh, well of course I was spot on, didn't I tell you, I'm the best darn navigator you'll ever meet." Nami said proudly, once again letting her guard down around Luffy and Makino.

"Just the kind of skill the navigator for the next Pirate King would need..." Luffy said leadingly, winking at her.

Nami actually blushed a bit at the wink for some reason, but shook it off quickly, shaking her head angrily at the way Luffy was so damn friendly and able to get under her skin like that. *Remember he's a pirate girl, they're all the same whatever his talk about dreams and conviction it all comes down to not caring about other people, using them and taking what he wants.* "No way! I told you I'd get you here, and that's my part of our bargain done."

She looked over at Makino, her hands busy as she did grabbing up the large sack of jewels and gold she'd taken from Alvida's ship, worth a little over four million beli she estimated. "Maybe we'll meet again if you realize that guy you're after isn't worth it Makino-san, or if you just want to ditch this fool."

"Oy, I resemble that remark." Luffy cut in, shaking his head. But Nami didn't reply, simply turning and jumping up onto the wharf, walking away without looking back.

Luffy looked after her frowning until Makino touched his shoulder, pushing him forward to help Coby tie the ship to the wharf. "She was fun, but everyone has their own reasons for doing and believing things. Don't pry."

"Wasn't about to," Luffy said with a shrug. "Just wondering what happened to her is all. Wondering doesn't cost me anything and doesn't hurt her either. But for now, we have our own stuff to take care of."

Makino nodded, and hopped up onto the deck easily, before they both turned to Coby. "Well we're here kid, you still sure about joining up with the Marines?"

The two of them had talked about this a few times, with Luffy pointing out how much the marines were merely government dogs in his words, testing the boy's convictions. But instead of disheartening the boy, Luffy was pleased that his arguments had simply made Coby more determined to join up and to make a difference.

The short boy nodded resolutely even though he was looking around strangely. "Yes! You convinced me, the marines might have issues, but they are still generally speaking a force for justice and law. Besides if I want to change things, I can do it better from the inside."

Luffy shrugged, and gestured him further down the wharf. "In that case, I can at least set you on the right path besides dropping you off here. Remind me to write you out a note, I have an... acquaintance in the marines who could help you."

Makino giggled behind her hand for a moment, looking between Coby and Luffy. "Are you thinking about an offering to a certain someone?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Luffy said quickly, turning away leading the way down the wharf as Makino's giggles turned into full-blown laughter.

"Um, are you sure about this?" Coby asked as he caught up to Luffy.

"Sure about what shorty?" Luffy asked, exchanging a coin with an apple seller, tossing one to Makino and keeping one for himself after holding it out to Coby, who shook his head quickly.

"About recruiting that demonic bounty hunter."

"Rumors can be just another type of label kiddo, and I've already said I don't like those. I like a lot of what I've heard about Zoro..."

"AGHHH!" At the name Zoro every individual within hearing suddenly bolted away hiding themselves behind carts or in doorways.

"What the heck?" Luffy muttered looking around and sell for a moment as Makino did the same quizzically.

"You see!?" Coby said as the people began to move out of their hiding places, looking a little sheepish at their reaction. "The demon must've gone wild in the town for the people to get that big a reaction. I bet that's why Axe Hand Morgan had to lock him up."

"At the words 'Axe Hand Morgan; the people who'd just been crawling out of their hiding places ran back into them with even louder screams.

Luffy cocked his eyebrow at Coby. "Doesn't seem as if this Morgan fellow's popular. Well whatever, I told you I was going to make my own judgments, nothing you say is going to change that shorty."

"I don't know why a marine would get that kind of reaction, though I've heard rumors that Morgan is rather... regimented. Besides that, why do you keep on calling me kiddo or shorty, we're the same age Luffy-san." Coby muttered, shaking his head as he followed Luffy and Makino towards the Marine base on the other side of town from the wharf. It loomed about 10 stories tall, its presence dominating the town and the small island with ease. Having the word 'Marine' painted on it was a bit much in Luffy's opinion, but no one had ever said Marines were subtle. *Certainly not if Ji-Kure's touted as a hero among them for certain.*

"Because you're short," Luffy said aloud, laughing. "Besides kid, despite your brief tenure as cabin boy and all around boot licker for Alvida, you don't actually have a lot of world experience. Hence, kiddo."

With that Luffy turned away, cocking his head to one side as a little girl came out of a bit of scrub brush along the side of the Marine base's outer wall carrying a ladder. She caught his eye, and put a finger to her lips and Luffy did the winking at her. She smiled at him but turned away quickly, putting the ladder against the wall and climbing it, a small handkerchief tied up around something in one hand.

Behind him Coby and Makino noticed the girl too, and Coby raced forward. "Wait, don't!"

But he was too late. The girl had already pulled herself over the wall and dropped down on the other side. Luffy chuckled, jumping up easily and holding onto the side of the wall just so his eyes could peer over it, dangling there by his forearms. "I wonder what she's up to?"

"She can't just go in there, that's trespassing! She'll get in trouble!" Coby said, racing up the ladder and stopping himself just as Luffy had, looking over the wall. He blushed hotly when Makino moved up beside him, pressing him between her body and the wall to look over his head.

But what he saw in the courtyard below drove that sensation out of his head. Tied up to a target block was a human body. Or at first Coby thought it was a body, but then he saw the man raise his head to stare at the girl. He was wearing a green bandanna that cut covered almost its entire head, but even from here Coby could see the eyes, the eyes of the demon he thought, and when the man opened his mouth it seems to prove him right.

"What the hell ya want kid?" the man asked, his voice rough from disuse. "You want to die? Get out of here."

"Er, Zoro-nii, I made you some rice balls, I know the marines don't feed you so..." She looked down momentarily, toe digging into the dirt. "This is the first time I've made rice balls so-"

Makino giggled. "Oh, how cute."

"C-cute, she's trying to help a criminal, she, she might be killed!" Coby muttered in reply.

While the two of them had been speaking, Luffy had been looking at the man tied up, and the glare he was giving the girl then all around. Before he could say anything however Zoro spoke again. "Get out of here girl, I told you I'm not hungry!"

The girl began to tear up, "But, but you..."

"I said get out of here!" Zoro growled.

Before this little drama could go further, Luffy caught sight of someone coming out of the base. "Er Makino, is purple in this season or something?"

Both Makino and Coby looked, and Makino gagged in revulsion. Coming out of the base was a lanky young man with blonde hair done in a bowl cut and a purple suit. "Ugh, I don't think any suit could make that boy look good Luffy, but purple is definitely not his color."

Coby however breathed a sigh of relief seeing the young man and the two marines following him. "Good, the marines will protect that little girl. Hopefully she won't get in too much trouble."

"Protect her, from a man tied up like that?" Luffy asked dryly, shaking his head before falling silent as the newcomers approached the scene.

"Tch, that's about what anyone should expect of scum like you Roronoa Zoro, picking on little kids." The blond teen said, his voice high pitched and arrogant.

"Any particular reasons the captain's bastard son has decided to grace us with his presence?" Zoro growled, his hooded eyes locking on the purple clad teen like turrets.

"Bastard am I? Hah, my father's Captain Morgan Zoro, you should watch your tongue." The blond tsked, then turned reaching down to grab the onigiri the girl had made without even bothering to ask. "Heh, I have to confiscate nay food given to the prisoner, can't let him get ideas."

Biting into the rice ball despite the girl trying to stop him the blonde immediately made a face, spitting the bit out to one side before hurling down the rest of the onigiri into the dirt and stamping on it. "What the heck, sugar, blech, don't you know you put salt in onigiri!?"

"Wait, stop don't waste it like that you big meanie!" The girl tried to stop him only to be kicked away and the blonde continued to stamp her rice balls into the ground.

Makino and Coby both scowled at this, and Luffy's fingers twitched, his lips thinning into a dangerous scowl.

Finished with her rice ball the blonde reached out grabbing the little girl's face. "First sugar instead of salt and now tears? Stupid brat you shouldn't even be here, can't you read?" The blonde pointed to a sign stuck in the ground nearby facing marine compound's outer gate. 'Anyone caught aiding the prisoner will be charged with aiding him in his crime.' My dad's the big boss around here, and what he says goes! You wouldn't want to get in trouble with Axe Hand Morgan would you?"

Letting the girl go he shook his head. "If my old man had caught you might've have gotten the death penalty, but because I'm such a nice guy I'll let you go with a warning this time." With that he turned to one of the nearby marines. "You toss her over the fence."

"Wh, b, but sir, she's a little girl!" the marine replied, standing back quickly.

"Ehhh, are you actually questioning my orders, you do know who my dad is right, your captain!" The blonde douchebag grabbed him by the lapel of his shirt, nearly spitting into his face as he roared, or more accurately whined at him. "Do it soldier, or I'll report you, and you know what my father does to anyone who disobeys orders!"

The Marine backed away, hastily saluting. "Y-yessir, Helmeppo sir!" Reaching forward he grabbed up the little girl, whispering something the onlookers couldn't hear before turning and hurling her over the outer wall.

Luffy turned with the quickness of a snake leaping up and into the air. Catching the girl he somersaulted with her to land easily on his feet without even a bump.

Looking down at the crying girl, he shook his head. "Here now, don't cry okay, you're a tough girl, right?"

The girl threw her arms around Luffy's neck, hiding the fact she was still sniffling slightly, but began to subside quickly. Makino hurried up to him, smiling at the little girl. "Good catch Luffy."

"I don't know," Luffy said smiling down at the little girl and winking at her before looking back at Makino. "She's a little small, and we've already met our quota for short people. I might have to toss her back."

The girl laughed wetly through her tears, and Luffy set her on the ground, gesturing to Makino. "Why don't you go with the pretty nee-san here back home little one, though I want to talk to you later okay?" The girl nodded, and took the older girl's hand, moving off quickly.

With that Luffy rejoined Coby at the wall with enough time to hear the weird blonde talk about some kind of deal Zoro had made with him. Then they watched as he walked off back into the building. Once the coast was clear Luffy leaped over the wall, making his way over to the tied up Zoro. "If anyone had talked to me like that they'd be eating their meals through a straw for the rest of their lives. Heh, I don't know if you're dumb or just trusting to have made a deal like that. Sure as hell strong though to go a month without food or water out here in the sun."

Zoro frowned, staring at the odd youth who stood there without a care in the world, looking as if he was just out for a stroll. But Zoro was a swordsman so he could see the training the boy had gone through in how he stood and his body type. "This is nothing, a mere challenge. If I couldn't face this, I wouldn't have the willpower necessary to fulfil my dream."

Cocking his head Luffy stared at Zoro, smirking. "Heh, I like that attitude, and those eyes of yours, the determination in them, you're not just saying that." His smirk widened into a grin. "Roronoa Zoro, I want you to join my pirate crew."

"No." Zoro replied bluntly. "I have no desire to become a criminal, get out of here punk."

"Oh, so you're a law abiding citizen are you?" Luffy laughed.

"No, but neither do I go out of my way to break the law, steal, cheat or murder."

"I feel like I'll be saying this a lot, but that isn't what real pirates are. Pirates, real pirates have dreams they want to fulfill, or simply are people unwilling to stay in the mold society has for them. Real pirates just want to be free, and their dreams aren't for trinkets or blood or anything like that, but for bigger things." Luffy sighed, shaking his head. "Well, whatever, I'm going to be here for a while anyway, so you still have time to change your mind."

"Wait!" Zoro called out as Luffy made to turn away. "That onigiri. Can you pick it up for me?"

"Er, it's mostly a dirt ball now man, that Helmeyp guy really did a number on it." Luffy said, not commenting on the swordsman apparently being willing to take this little bit of aid despite his deal with Helmeppo.

"Baka, like I care, just give it to me, I'll eat it." Luffy did so, and watched, a smirk on his face until Zoro was finished. Swallowing with a visible effort Zoro looked away, muttering, "'It was delicious,' tell her that."

Luffy chuckled and turned away without another word. Back in town, Luffy and Coby found Makino at the local bar, which was apparently owned by the little girl's family. Her name, it turned out, was Rika, and she definitely had a small case of hero worship when it came to Zoro for some reason.

Her face lit up when Luffy told her Zoro had eaten the onigiri she'd made which made Makino and her mother, who seemed to get along, smile. "Really, he liked it!?"

"Yep, he even said it was delicious." Luffy replied.

"I, I just don't understand this." Coby muttered, not looking at Luffy who was smirking at him. "I mean, isn't Zoro supposed to be a demon in human form? All the rumors about him say he's a brutal killer, a monster who frightens everyone he meets."

"NO!" Rika screamed, as her mother shook her head sadly from behind the bar.

"What've I said about labels like that Coby? And ya should never believe rumors like that, they always get distorted the further away from the person they are." Luffy reached out, ruffling Rika's hair soothingly. "Now, why don't you tell us what happened between Zoro and baka blonde."

Rika and her mother both burst into giggles at Luffy's nickname for Helmeppo while Makino simply shook her head. After a moment however Rika looked up at Luffy, shaking her head. "Nisan never did anything wrong! That, that baka blonde had a wild dog which he always let round town to frighten people. It came in here and started scaring everyone then attacked me when I tried to stop it, but Zoro-nii sliced it up! Then baka blonde threatened to have me and mommy executed for it, but Zoro made a deal with him to save us."

Rika's mother cut in here. "Helmeppo is Captain Morgan's son and everyone's too afraid of Morgan to do anything about their tyranny. He orders everyone around marina and civilian like were his subordinates, and if we don't obey him we're flogged at best! I've lost neighbors because they refused to pay his increased taxes."

She came around the bar to put an arm around her daughter who looked as if she was about to cry. "A, and now nii-san's starving every day out there in the sun, and Helmeppo punches and kicks him, he even orders the marines to do it when he gets tired. I hate both of them, father and son."

Luffy nodded, looking over at Coby who looked as if his entire world view had just been crushed and tossed into the trash. He was somewhat sad for the boy, but if he wanted to join the marines, Luffy felt Coby would need to realize what they were like, warts and all. Yes, the marines could be a fantastic force for good, but it all depended on the marine in question. *If his ambition is strong enough to survive this, he'll be a better man for realizing it now, but if he can't, then that's all it was.*

Just then the door slammed open then and the purple-wearing blonde buffoon himself walked in sneering at all and sundry as his two bodyguards followed him. "Damn, I'm hungry, hey woman we'll be eating here for free and bring out the booze, the good stuff!

As Rika's mother hurried to obey and Luffy cocked his head thoughtfully to one side his fingers beginning to twitch, Helmeppo turned to Rika, his sneer becoming

even larger as he looked between her and her mother. "Oh, and since I'm bored, I've decided to execute Zoro tomorrow. Look forward to it!" With that he laughed loudly, throwing his head back as if he had just told the funniest

Right, that's about enough. Luffy stalked forward, his hat over his eyes, and suddenly giving off a very different vibe than his normal happy-go-lucky feeling. The few other people in the restaurant moved out of his way without even seeming to realize it, and the two marines behind Helmeppo tensed. Coby did too at first, but then his face firmed and he simply watched as Luffy moved. Rika's mother, who had looked horrified, made to say something but Makino put her hand on the older woman's shoulder, shaking her head.

Before the two Marines escorting him could move, Luffy was in front of Helmeppo. The blonde had just a moment to realize someone was in front of him before Luffy's fist smashed into his face with enough force to send the blonde head over heels backwards through the door behind him, shattering it and taking his two marine guards with him into a heap outside on the road.

"Well, time to take out the trash." Luffy mused, his words and tone not matching his angry expression as he moved out after his victim.

The two marines were both unconscious having slammed into both the door and the road, but their bodies had cushioned Helmeppo somewhat. His face was a mass of bruises, his nose splattered across it, but he was still able to talk, or at least squeal, his pain and his nose muffling his words further. "Whosh, whosh the hell're ya, I'sh Captain Morgan's son, you'sh'll be 'xecuted for shis!"

Luffy looked down at him contemplatively holding up a fist, but Coby grabbed him around the arm, trying to keep him from doing so and Luffy scowled letting his fist fall. "That'd be a waste of a good punch." He reached down, chopping at the necks of the two marines making certain they would stay down, before grabbing Helmeppo. "Makino, why don't ya head over to the bank? I'm going to go free Zoro and get him to join our crew."

Moments later Luffy walked off dragged the idiot son behind him, ignoring Coby's protests and even Makino shaking her head at him. She didn't try to stop him

though, and indeed held Coby back when he made to follow Luffy, urging him to tie up the two marines.

Once he reached the marine base Luffy stared down at the blubbering blonde then wound up his arm before hurling him up to land on the top of the large building. Even from here he heard the crash as the blonde's body slammed into the roof, though it was followed quickly by shouting.

Ignoring that Luffy hopped up, kicking off the air and moving towards where Zoro was still tied up. Still tied to the target block, Zoro turned from looking up at the top of the marine base wondering what had happened to stare at Luffy hopping in midair, his eyes widening in shock as his mouth dropped open. "How the hell are you doing that?"

Luffy laughed, shaking his head grimly, momentarily derailed. "It's just a technique, anyone can learn it and its' fellows if they put in the effort. If this surprises you, you really are a frog at the bottom of a well."

"What do you mean by that?" Zoro growled, getting over his surprise and becoming angry at the insult.

"The real world is a lot stronger than anything around here."

Zoro laughed now, losing some of his anger as he smirked fiercely at Luffy. "It doesn't matter. I have a dream, if I die on the way to achieving that dream, so be it."

"I really do like those eyes of yours Zoro." Luffy said, before shaking his head. "Unfortunately for your pride, Helmeppo was just boasting about how he was going to have you killed this afternoon because he, and I quote was 'getting bored'."

"What!?" Zoro shouted angrily. "We had a deal!"

"I don't think he cares. You challenged him and his daddy-given authority, so he's going to have you killed." As Zoro began to strain at his ropes Luffy smirked. "So I want to make a deal with you Zoro. If I get you out, you join my pirate crew."

Zoro stared up at him and they locked gazes, intensity against intensity before Zoro laughed loudly. "You really are a pirate! Very well I'll join your crew! But know

this: my dream is more important to me than my life! If you get in the way of my dream I will not hesitate to cut you down!"

"And what's your dream?" Luffy asked, not taking umbrage at the threat.

"To be the greatest swordsman in the world!"

"Hah, That's a great dream, one worthy of the first mate of the future pirate king."

Zoro stared at him then laughed again just as loudly as he had a second ago. "Dreamers together then!"

Luffy nodded with a smile. "Together we're going to change this world whether it wants to be changed or not. Now, where's your sword?"

"No idea, they're somewhere in the base. That blonde moron took them from me when I surrendered."

"Dammit, now I'm sorry I threw him like I did." Luffy muttered, scratching under his straw hat for a moment. "Well whatever, I suppose there are worse ways of starting my pirate career then smashing a Marine base. I'll be right back." With that Luffy walked off towards the entrance to the marine base, whistling under his breath.

Roronoa looked after him then began to chuckle. As he watched Luffy once again leaped into the air scaling up the sky next to the Marine base as if he was simply walking up a staircase. "What the hell kind of pirate have I joined up with?"

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"I'sh don' know, I'sh don' know, shhe last thing I'sh 'emember wassh getting; punched in the resheteraunt in town!" Helmeppo blubbered then shrieked in terror as his father lifted up his hand to smash Helmeppo again, hopefully with the back of the axe though seeing the expression on Captain Morgan's face the onlookers weren't willing to make any bets on that.

Morgan was a massive man, as tall as Alvida had been with a weight lifter's build and an axe where one hand should be along with a lower jaw made of an iron

hinge. Morgan's look, his axe, his cruelty and his rank were enough to keep the marines in line.

He had taken a hands-off approach to his son before, not really caring what the brat did so long as he was out from underfoot, something all the Marines thought was part of the reason why Helmeppo acted like such a brat. But Morgan hadn't cared so long as whatever happened to his son couldn't be construed as an attack on his authority. Even now it wasn't his son's treatment that had enraged Morgan, it was the fact that upon falling out of the sky, Helmeppo had smashed Morgan's large stone statue the marines had been in the putting up on top of the marine base.

Hurling his son aside Morgan turned to the marines all around him. "Get a troop together and head to that tavern, find whoever punched my son! They must've been the same one to throw him up here!"

"That's right," said cheerfully voice, and then Morgan turned only to eat a dull Rankyaku to the chest, hurling him backwards into the marines behind him. To Luffy's surprise however he didn't seem to be that injured, shrugging the blow off as if it had simply been a normal punch.

The confusion of his sudden appearance still allowed Luffy to land next to Helmeppo, whereupon he grabbed him up by the neck. "You, come with me."

Luffy ducked under a slash from the man with the axe embedded in his hand, rolling forward into the stairwell still carrying the Helmeppo behind him. "I'll be back to deal with you later," Luffy said over his shoulder, leaping down the stairwell to land lightly on the next level and race off.

Luffy didn't want to take out the entire marine base if he could help it a lot of marines were good people, if far too quick to simply follow orders from higher up rather than do their own thinking. He also wanted to see how good Roronoa really was. He'd heard a lot of rumors, but as Luffy had told Coby, he wanted to make his own impression of the man, not just his personality but his skill.

"Now," he said holding up the blonde son. "Where do you keep Roronoa's sword?"

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Roronoa was still staring at the Marine base wondering what the hell Luffy was, and where the heck you could learn a technique which would let you walk on air. Luffy had said that it was a technique which meant Zoro could possibly learn it, and maybe others if that wasn't the only one in Luffy's bag of tricks. Indeed, Roronoa was thinking that maybe joining up with Luffy might be a good idea, not just because it would get him, but also for how learning from him could help him achieve his ambition.

He looks down however when a pink head appeared over the wall and began to run towards him. "What are you doing kid?" Roronoa asked.

"Getting you out of here!" Coby said almost angrily. "I might not like Luffy's methods, but he's right, this isn't the kind of Marine I want to be! Going back on your word, tying up a person who was just defending a little girl, ignoring the law and justice! I refuse to stand by and let Morgan and his son drag the marine name into the ground. If I did, how could I ever believe in the justice the marines are supposed to believe in, how could I become a marine myself if I let this pass!?"

"So he was telling the truth," Roronoa muttered, even as he smirked at the other boy's attitude. "That blond idiot was really going to have me killed regardless of our deal?"

"Yes! He said he was getting tired of waiting for you to die on your own." Coby said bitterly.

"Then hurry up get me loose, that bastard's got a date with my fist coming!"

Unfortunately, Coby's pink hair had betrayed him, catching the eye of captain Morgan, who was still on the roof of the marine base exhorting his men into the fortress to chase Luffy down. Snarling he gathered some of his men, charging down the stairs and out into the courtyard, pausing only to let them grab up several dozen rifles.

Standing with his men lining up into a firing squad aiming towards the prisoner and the boy helping him Morgan bellowed out his fury. "One after another, all of you questioning my authority, acting against me! I am a Marine captain, my authority, my rank is everything! You a mere civilian try to go against me!? The punishment for disobeying me is death! I'd hoped to wait to gather the townsfolk for your execution

Roronoa, but you and your little helper can die together right now! Marines, prepare to fire."

"Is this where I am going to die?" Roronoa said to himself, even as Coby frantically tried to untie one of his arms. Roronoa could tell he wouldn't make it though. "Is this where I'm going to die, is this all my dream was worth?" *Kuina...*

"Fire!"

The muskets fired, but before they hit their target Luffy landed between Coby, Roronoa and the firing troops, his arms outstretched shouting "Tekkai!" His hands moved then flickering out of sight to most eyes, smacking away the musket balls going wide of his body even as the rest of them hit him square on. But the Tekkai technique did its work, the bullets bouncing off as if they had hit, yes, iron.

Even Luffy's fingers were covered with the technique, protecting them from the slight bruising he'd get from deflecting the bullets. The musket balls went into the air or down into the ground as his hands continued flickering in and out of sight smacking them one after another.

As the smoke cleared, the marines saw what happened, and stared in shock as did Morgan. Roronoa too stared shaking his head. Then he began to laugh, ripping the ropes that Coby had been loosening out from around one arm now that Coby had loosened them enough to give Zoro some leverage before pulling out his other arm in turn. Cracking his neck explosively Zoro stretched for the first time in weeks. "Freedom feels good! So, is that another technique of yours?"

Luffy looked over his shoulder smirking at the slightly older boy. "Yep, Tekkai. Another technique I'll be teaching my crew, you interested?"

"I don't know," Roronoa said with a grin as he stared past Luffy at the shocked and fearful Marines. Even Morgan seemed stunned. His lips still curled into a almost vicious grin, he turned his attention back to Luffy and asked seriously, "You have my swords?"

"Baka blonde fell asleep before I could ask him which was yours so I just grabbed all the swords he had in his room." So saying Luffy held a trio of swords over his shoulder. One of them was clearly not like the others, and Luffy determined to ask

Roronoa later about that one. He didn't know much about swords, but having dealt with Kuno for so long along with a few other swordsmen both as Ranma and as Luffy he knew **quality** when he saw it. Luffy had even learned some actual sword techniques along the way.

"All of them are mine, I use Santoryu."

Luffy turned to face him fully, staring as Zoro pulled off the ropes around his feet. "Three swords? How the heck do you, you know what, never mind. With my life, I'm sure not in a position to throw stones at the strangeness of others."

By this point Morgan had roused himself from his shock and put some spine in his troops. Half of them pulled out swords and charged as the others fell back to reload their muskets. Seeing this behind Luffy's shoulder, Zora reached out quickly, snatching all three of the swords out of their scabbards before racing past Luffy towards the approaching marines faster than most could see. A growl of "Tatsumaki!" left his clenched teeth, and a very small tornado appeared, slamming through and throwing the Marines this way and that. None of them were injured much, but they were surely out of the fight for now.

Seeing this, Luffy smirked. "Nice job Zoro."

Pulling the katana in his mouth Zoro smirked at him. "You're welcome Captain. But about that one?" He asked, jerking his head towards Morgan and the marines who hadn't charged with their fellows.

"I've got this." Luffy said, a pure Ranma-style Smirk™ on his face as he pushed his straw hat up with one finger, moving to stand in front of Morgan.

Morgan glowered down at him, hurling his captain's cloak to one side before bringing his axe down in a fast slash towards Luffy's head. "Don't get a bit head just because you have some tricks under your sleeve brat! Anyone who stands against my authority will die!"

Luffy laughed even as the ax came down. Reaching up he grabbed the axe by its edge, catching it between his fingers. Try as he might Morgan couldn't wrench his axe free from the younger man's grip. In another lifetime Luffy/Ranma might have

toyed with his opponent by dodging around, getting a feel for his skill before dispatching him. But not in this life. "Authority? I'm the man who will be the Pirate King, I don't care about your authority! You marines are supposed to stand for justice, but you don't know the meaning of the word! You trample on people's freedom like Zoro or Rika and the others here, on Coby's dream! Scum like you are the ones I love to crush the most!"

With that Luffy twisted his wrist. There was a sound of screaming metal as the axe head shattered, and Morgan fell back in shock. Even as he did so that he tried to punch out, only for Luffy to counter with his own punch, the two fists impacting between them.

"GAAHH!" Morgan fell to his knees screaming in pain as his fingers and all the bones in his hand crushed under the force that blow. "Wh, why you!" Morgan belatedly trying to get to his feet only to see another punch coming in, crashing into his metal jaw shattering it just like his axe and laying Morgan out unconscious.

Luffy lifted up his bloody fist, some of Morgan's bones actually having ruptured his skin under the impact. Ignoring the blood he stared at the Marines all around them. "Anyone else?"

Their response surprised him. The marines all started shouting, cheering the Morgan had been beaten. Apparently even his own troops hadn't liked Axe Hand Morgan, they just hadn't been willing to go against him. Luffy didn't like their attitude really, but he had other things on his mind. "Hey Coby, you still want to be a marine?"

Called out like this in a crowd of marines, Coby nodded his head quickly. "Yes!"

"Good!" Luffy said nodding his head, glad the kid's dream had survived running into the Morgans. Seeing a sergeant and figuring he was the ranking Marine here he moved through the crowd, putting an arm over the older man's shoulders. "Hey, I got a favor to ask you. I want to use your den-den mushi..."

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Nami groaned aloud, thumping her closed fist into the wall above the secret safe in Axe Hand Morgan's office. She had expected to find a map to the Grand Line

here, but the only thing inside the safe was a small note saying it had already been taken, along with a very distinct symbol.

"Buggy the Clown," she muttered, shaking her head. "That's a bigger name than I want to tangle with but if it gets me the map to the Grand Line, one step closer to getting the money I need..."

Staring off into the distance Nami paused for a moment then shook her head resolutely pushing herself to her feet before glancing out the window and sweatdropping at what she saw there. Outside Luffy stood over the body of Captain Morgan as the Marines, for some reason, began to cheer, shooting their muskets or throwing their caps up into the air. "Um...huh..."

OOOOOOO

"That was a great meal!" Roronoa shouted, leaning back in his chair, downing half a tankard of ale before slamming it down next to the remains of his fifth plate of food. Strangely enough he had drunk about two dozen tankards of ale along with his meal. "Not having eaten for so long, I really put it away didn't I?"

"I would say so." Luffy drawled, smirking at the other young man, who smirked back at him. Luffy's own plate had been piled high originally, but he wasn't nearly as starved as Zoro. Still, one thing hadn't changed from his old life to this one: Luffy/Ranma still enjoyed a good meal.

"I ate some too," Coby muttered, holding up his empty plate sheepishly. "Though I honestly don't think I did anything helpful here."

"You tried and that's the important thing." Luffy said nodding his head at the younger boy before turning to Rika's mom, smiling politely at her. "I can't thank you enough for feeding us miss, are you sure you don't want money?"

"Not at all!" the woman replied cheerfully, looking up from her conversation with Makino to her daughter then Luffy and Zoro. "You really saved this town you know, it's the least we can do."

"You're so strong Nii-san!" Rika said, grinning at him.

Beside Luffy Zoro chuckled quietly. "Some pirate," he muttered, reaching over to smack Luffy on the shoulder. "So Captain, where's the rest of this crew I'm joining?"

"You're looking at it," Luffy gestured towards Makino and himself. As Zoro gaped at him he said "We're rather early into the recruitment phase just now."

Zoro laughed again shaking his head. "Alright, then tell me more about these techniques of yours. How long does it take to learn them, and can any of them be used with swords?"

"Two of them are applicable to sword combat, though you'll have to learn the others first just to build up your arm and leg muscles. We'll talk about them more once we get a real ship. I have a set of weights that you'll be needing to use, but for the most part it's just repetition..."

Luffy paused speaking when the door to the restaurant opened admitting several marines with the sergeant at their head. "Good day. I am sorry to interrupt, you saved both us and this town from Morgan's tyranny, and I truly wish we didn't have to do this, but regulations are clear: we cannot allow you to stay here any longer. We won't tell HQ anything about you, but you can't stay here any longer."

The other people in the restaurant, which was packed with well-wishers, shouted in fury at the marines who they had seen as part of the problem for far too long. But Luffy shook his head, gesturing Makino and Zoro to follow him. "That's fine we were about to leave anyway, I don't want to be here shortly."

"Wait, Luffy you didn't..." Makino said, staring at the younger boy, then paling as he nodded. She quickly grabbed up a pack of foodstuffs Rika's mother had prepared and made for the door. "Right, yes moving on is a very good idea!"

"I don't know what you're worried about Makino, you'd just bat those eye-lashes of yours and get out of trouble like you always do." Luffy said with a laugh causing Zoro to shake his head. Obviously there was more to this conversation than what he was hearing.

For his part Coby looked torn, not wanting to act like he was friends with pirates in front the other marines, thinking he had gotten away with helping Zoro earlier without anyone realizing he was with Luffy, but also wanting to say goodbye to his

sort-of friend. After all, Luffy had not only freed him from Alvida, but had encouraged his dream even while forcing Coby to realize the marines might not be perfect.

His hesitation didn't save him from being noticed this time however. Just as Luffy and the others reached the door the sergeant pointed at Coby. "Wait, isn't this boy with you?"

Luffy stopped, looking over his shoulder with a grin. "Nope, I forced him to navigate us here after coming on his dingy out at sea. He'd lost his sails but apparently was coming here to join the marines anyway. He was just saying that he still wants to be a marine too, even after seeing Morgan in action, can you believe that? Or that a little weakling like him could ever amount to anything?"

"You shut up!" Coby shouted, jumping to his feet and pointing at Luffy. "I'm going to be a marine, a marine who fights for True Justice, and when I become a marine admiral I'm going to catch you Luffy!"

Staring between them, the sergeant didn't look convinced, but at Luffy's sudden wink his way he nodded. He had, after all, overheard the call Luffy had sent out over the den den mushi. "Very well, we'll see what we can do with him."

With that he stood aside and he and the other marines all saluted as Luffy, Makino and Zoro walked past them. "Once again, thank you pirate scum!"

Luffy and his crew of two laughed at that, leaving quickly as Coby watched them go with decided mixed feelings.

Two hours later Coby had been fitted out with a uniform and had been put to work helping to clean up the roof of the marine base, shoveling parts of Axe Hand Morgan's statue over the side to a prepared area. As such he was one of the first to see a marine galleon sail over the horizon. Turning he shouted down into the interior of the base. "Sirs, there's a marine galleon incoming, it has a large dog's head on the prow!"

About an hour later Coby joined the rest of the marines in the base lining up for inspection as an admiral, a man standing taller than Morgan, trooped into the base. For some reason he stopped right in front of Coby, staring at him thoughtfully. "So you're the boy my brat of a grandson says I should train huh? Well, we'll see. If you can

survive my lessons you might just make up for my brat of a grandson becoming a pirate."

OOOOOOO

At the same time Coby met the man who would make his life a living hell in the name of training for the next several years, Makino was once again trying to navigate their ship towards their target using what she had already known and the directions she had gotten in town. She was aiming for a town called Orange Town, which had a small scale shipyard. She and Luffy had called them before they left Fuchsia in order to purchase a larger vessel, a caravel which could house six or seven people comfortably.

Neither of them were very fussy about a ship at this point, but they needed one that could at least survive for a while at sea, which their little sloop couldn't. Luffy knew that they'd have to get a permanent ship eventually, and had talked with his brothers about it before they had set out to sea. He'd even brought it up once with his grandfather, and knew precisely where he was going to get one once they were in the Grand Line. Until then though, he'd buy or even steal ships as they went.

"So where are we going exactly?" Zoro asked, the only one who didn't know yet. He wasn't able to make heads or tails of the directions that Makino was muttering to herself underneath her breath between ordering Luffy around as if she was the captain while he worked the sails. *But then again*, Zoro thought to himself amused, *she seems to be the cook too, so I suppose that makes her just as important as the captain anyway.*

"Orange Town, Makino and I ordered a ship from them. Hopefully they'll have a World Government bank there, so we can change the promissory note I got for this pirate I turned over to some marines a bit ago. But if not, they'll surely know where we can find one." At Zoro's confused look, Luffy explained how he had captured Alvida and turned her over to the marines.

Makino nodded, looking immensely irritated. "I can't believe that Morgan was able to get away with shutting down the World Government bank like that, and then to empty all of their money into the Marine base's own vault to pay for some stupid statue!? Someone should've caught that somewhere shouldn't they?"

"You'd think so, but the World Government is so corrupt who'd notice a little more way out here?" Luffy said with a shrug. "Frankly, Morgan's probably closer to their ideal of Marines than Ji-Kure."

"Your grandfather? Why do you call him Ji-kure?"

"His training methods." Makino and Luffy replied in unison.

"Trust me," Makino went on, laughing. "I've seen the aftermath of some of his training ideas, and to say they're insane would be to put it lightly. Tossing Luffy into a den of hungry tigers, hurling him off balloons in midair, tying him up and covering his eyes and ears before forcing him to find his way back through a jungle..." she said counting off on her fingers.

"Tying one arm behind my back and forcing me to fight one of my brothers, don't forget those. Though I'll say those **were** sort of fun." Luffy mused. "The others... not so much."

Zoro frowned thinking they were having him on, but when he realized they weren't he shook his head. "That's kind of crazy, but I agree that having to learn how to solely use one hand or the other would make good training. The rest I agree with you Luffy, 'not so much'. But what's his name? And is that why the Marines let you access their base's den den mushi?"

"Yep," Luffy said with a laugh. "As for his name, his name's Monkey D. Garp. Ever heard of him?"

Zoro gaped at him, then began to laugh shaking his head. "The moment I think I know exactly how crazy this crew is, you just add more to it!"

Makino laughed in turn and, deciding the moment was just too perfect she reached over the side of the boat to splash Luffy before he could move. The now wet redhead glared at her and Makino turned back to Zoro with a smirk. "We have only begun to break your mind."

Zoro eyes widened as he gaped at the redhead sitting where Luffy had just been before slowly reaching out a finger towards his chest. "Those cannot be, what just..."

"Hands off." Luffy said grabbing Zoro's hand in a vice-like grip. *What the hell man, why is that everyone's first response when they see my curse. Nabiki, Ukyo, Shampoo, Ace, Sabo, now Zoro! Geez.*

"It's a curse, something happened to me when I was a baby, something involving someone else's Devil Fruit power. Yes Devil Fruits are real, I've seen one in action. Now whenever I get splashed I change genders. My mind doesn't change yes it is a full body change but I'm not attracted to guys, never have been, never will. And if you try to touch me again I will kick your balls up through your mouth."

"Duly noted," Zoro replied with a shudder leaning back quickly. He frowned thoughtfully after a moment, narrowing his eyes as he stared at the redhead. "But doesn't that get in the way of your dream?"

"Are you one of those men who don't think that women can fight?" Makino asked archly, one hand reaching towards a handgun Zoro suddenly realized had been hanging from her skirt's belt all along.

Zoro looked away. "No, not really... My sword master, he was, and he had trained his daughter to think it, but she was... she was strong, a lot stronger than me..." He looked away, and the two could tell there was a story there.

As Makino began to heat some water for Luffy to change back, the redhead looked at Zoro thoughtfully. "So, your dream of being the greatest swordsman isn't just for yourself is it, you're carrying someone else's dream alongside it?"

Zoro whipped his head around to stare at the redhead, then nodded slowly.

"That should add all the more weight to those swords. That white one in particular, I'm not a swordsman, but I know quality when I see it." Luffy went on, jerking her head toward the katana in question.

"Yeah," Zoro said, tapping the white hilt. "This was hers, and yeah, I do carry more than my own dream with me."

"Then we begin training tomorrow." Luffy said firmly smirking evilly at him.

But as she had partially expected Zoro came out of his somber mood matching him with his own smirk, his eyes glinting eagerly. "I'll take anything you can dish out."

He would later regret those words.

That 'later' came the next day, as Luffy was working on the sails Makino oversaw Zoro's training, over 20,000 squats with the weights that Luffy had supplied. "We're starting with the largest weights Luffy was using before we left Fuchsia, so you don't have to do as many squats as he had to do in the beginning. I honestly don't know how many he had to do in the beginning to get his legs strong enough to use the Geppo maneuver for the first time, he could already do that when he met me. Luffy?" Makino asked looking over at the younger boy.

Luffy shrugged. "No idea. A lot I'd say, I remember I started the morning and finished after lunch most days, so at least five hours straight through. The amount of time I spend in the hospital after exercising like that was only about half of that I think."

"Oh that's so reassuring!" Zoro muttered, but he continued the exercises, grunting between words. "You, huff, want to, huff, teach me, huff, Geppo first. I get, huff, why if, huff, we're going to be, huff, fighting on the ocean, huff, but what's next after this?"

"We'll apply the same training to your arms, so you can launch wind attacks with your swords. You already can do small scale stuff like that tornado attack of yours I noticed, but you can do a lot more damage with more strength and more control of where the wind pressure goes."

Luffy finished rigging up the sails to Makino satisfaction and moved over to the swords lying next to Zoro tapping one of them, though not the white blade, with a finger. "You mind?"

Zoro shook his head, still continuing his squats. Luffy pulled out the blade, looking at it thoughtfully. "Definitely not as good as the white blade, though I will say that isn't exactly a surprise given that one's quality. Still..."

With that he turned quickly, whipping up the sword in a quick draw technique flashing it forward across the waves. A white line of force extended from his swing slicing into the ocean, dissipating slowly. "That," Luffy said gesturing to the attack, "could have cut through wood, or even low-grade iron. I'd have to try harder to cut steel."

"Cut steel," Zoro mused, then grinned, his eyes lighting up eagerly. "Sounds like a target for me I suppose."

"True, but remember strength without skill is simply barbarism."

Zoro nodded seriously looking at his new Captain. He could tell that there were some other things that Luffy knew, he wasn't entirely unused to the technique of showing just enough to motivate someone rather than too much and discouraging them. "Have you been to the Grand Line?" he asked bluntly. "Where would you rate yourself?"

"The Rokushiki are a Marine only school of combat for the most part." Luffy said obliquely. "I know some other skills, but they're a good starting point. As to where I'd rate myself?" Luffy frowned thoughtfully, scratching at his chin. "I'd say I'm at least at a Commodore's level in Marine terms? Maybe a little higher? Not certain, though I know that no one in East Blue is going to match me."

"Arrogance comes before a fall," Zoro muttered still doing his squats. "How are you so sure about that?"

Makino giggled quietly. "Before we left, Garp and I were still talking over the den den mushi. Garp isn't very happy about some things going on here in East Blue and he knew that whatever he thought Luffy was going to become a pirate. But that didn't mean that Luffy was going to change his nature~~." She teased.

"All right so I've got a bit of a protecting people thing, sue me!" Luffy said with a shrug. He looked over at Zoro seriously. "I'll smash any pirate who goes around preying on normal people I meet and there are more than a few like that here in East Blue."

"So Garp informed Makino who was here, sneaky old man, thinking you'd clean them up for him." Zoro said with a bloodthirsty smirk of his own. "That mean the Marines won't bother us for a while? So long as were cleaning up other pirates anyway?"

"Ji-Kure doesn't actually have that much influence here, he's not assigned to East blue after all he just sails through sometimes. But, with my other form, we can at least get some bounties."

"Fine by me, more money equals more booze." Zoro said bluntly.

"Freaking alcoholic." Luffy retorted with a chuckle.

"Don't knock it till you try it." Zoro shot back.

"Please no!" Makino broke in quickly. "The one time I've seen Luffy get drunk is something I won't forget no matter how hard I try."

"Wait, what?" Luffy asked, turning to her. "What happened when I was drunk? When did I get drunk?"

"You're better off not knowing." Makino said shuddering as she remembered that night. "Let's just say that you, Ace and Sabo had a bit too much destructive-type fun and let it go at that."

"Oh, now you've got me interested." Zoro said grinning even as he continued his squats.

The three of them continued their voyage for two days getting to know one another as they did with Zoro fitting in remarkably well with the two of them. At first he was worried that he was going to be a third wheel, but after only a bare few hours at sea he realized that he wasn't getting that vibe from Luffy and Makino. It was definitely more of a brother/sister relationship. Occasionally it was an older brother/younger sister or younger brother/older sister, it varied wildly. But it was definitely that close a familial sort of relationship.

He had also thought at first that Makino wasn't a fighter until she took down two gulls on the wing, with her pistol, then reached into her purse, a small little thing which looked as if it was supposed to be for cosmetics or something, and thrust her entire hand into it. When he saw that he gaped, and Luffy grinned at him. "Another little trick I know and can teach, though it will take a long time to work up to."

It was a learning experience for Roronoa Zoro, but he was eager to get better pushing himself constantly. After all, if Luffy was so much better than him and wasn't a swordsman, then what did that say about his target Hawkeyes Mihawk?

By the end of two days Zoro had impressed Luffy immensely by how much progress he made, though he had paid for it. His legs were so stiff that Zoro had trouble moving normally, and there were bags under his eyes from lack of sleep. But he could take a few steps into the air after only two days which Luffy knew from experience was frankly incredible and a show of how strong Zoro had already been.

Halfway through their third day Makino frowned thoughtfully from where she was sitting at the prow of the sloop looking ahead of them with a spyglass.

"Hmm...there are three people in the water over there and um... they have clown hair and noses..." Shaking her head as if to clear it she looked back, nodded to herself and then looked over at Luffy questioningly. "Buggy, you think?"

"I've heard that name," Zoro said, cutting off his training and moving over to join Luffy at the oars. "A Grand Line pirate who came to East Blue for some reason."

"Garp was under the impression he just wanted to get away from the competition, though there's some secret there," Makino replied, still staring through her spy glass toward the men in the water. "Something about Buggy that Garp knew and didn't want to share with me, I could tell in his voice he knew something about Buggy that amused him."

"That's kind of weird, but on the other hand if Ji-Kure even knew Buggy's name that means he might be a challenge." Luffy said while he and Zoro moved to the oars, pushing the ship towards the three beleaguered waders.

"Your cockiness pisses me off." Zoro said bluntly. "If I didn't know it was warranted I'd be even more pissed by it."

"I am what I am," Luffy said with a grin.

A few minutes later the three waders spotted them and began to shout for help. Luffy raised a hand in reply and the small sloop continued on under oar power, since there was no wind at present. They had in fact been becalmed late last night and

hadn't seen any wind since. But under Zoro and Luffy's muscle power the sloop was quickly within reach of the three men in the water.

As Zoro and Luffy backed oars the three men pulled themselves over the side of the sloop. Then they immediately pulled out cutlasses brandishing them angrily, one of them grabbing Makino around the waist and pulling her towards him, his cutlass swinging around her face and neck threateningly. "This ship is now property of the Buggy Pirates!"

Zoro, Luffy and Makino exchanged glances, but to Zoro's surprise it was Makino who moved first. Since she had been the one grabbed by the first one over the side of the boat, it made sense of course but despite her marksmanship Zoro really hadn't thought her much of a fighter. Until right now that is.

Makino's hand chopped down, smashing into the wrist of the man threatening her, deadening his grip as she flung herself around, an elbow slamming into his sternum hurling him back over the side of the boat. At the same time her hands flashed to the sides, grabbing and snapping both of the other men's cutlasses, her fingers turning black for a bare moment.

Seeing that Zoro looked over at Luffy cocking an eyebrow in question. "I'm not the first one you've trained then? What was that black stuff on her fingers?"

"I trained Makino some, but Ji-Kure did too once he figured out she might go out to sea to hunt down he-who-will-not-be-named. Ji-kure seemed to find the entire damn thing hilarious." Luffy shrugged. "As for the black covering Makino's fingers, that's what I'll teach you after you master what you want from the Rokushiki. And yes, it can be used on swords too."

"One of these days we're going to sit down and drink and exchange stories, 'cause that one about Makino hunting someone sounds really damn interesting," Zoro muttered, looking at the two now unarmed pirates who had scrambled away from the scary green haired woman. "All right you two if you don't want to get a beating get over here and start rowing."

Luffy nodded and moved aside as the two now terrified pirates took their places, before reaching over the side and pulling out their bedraggled fellow and tossing him to join them. "What happened to the three of you anyway, and if you're part of Buggy's crew, where is he?"

At first the trio remained silent but then Zoro went to work on them and they quickly became much more talkative. "The captain's taken over Orange Town for now. We had a major storm about a week ago so we needed to raid a dockyard for supplies." Supplied the first, his words somewhat muffled by how swollen his face was after Zoro's beating.

"Lost half of our cannons overboard, and our rigging too," The second replied, though his face wasn't as bad as his fellow.

"The three of us were sent out on our little raid of our own, and we were coming back when he ran into this orange-haired girl, she was a real witch!" the third said, his eyes cutting toward Makino and away.

"Oh?" Luffy smirked, squatting in front of the speaker. "Tell me more about this girl with orange hair and what she did to you."

About an hour later they came within sight of Orange Town's island, though they had to rely on the rowers the entire way, no hint of wind having been seen. Luffy reflected that was probably a good thing seeing as their sloop would've been far more visible with her sails up.

At his orders their ship did not enter the main dock, where the pirates had said Buggy's ships was docked, instead running aground elsewhere on the small island. While Makino and Zoro went to work tying up their prisoners, Luffy went ahead to scout out the town.

He entered the town quietly, moving through the deserted streets and frowning slightly. *So, I guess the normal inhabitants've hightailed it out of here, I certainly would have Buggy and his merry band of morons came down. Honestly, who in their right mind would dress up his entire crew as clowns? That's almost as bad as dressing your troops like cross-dressers.*

Shaking his head from that errant memory from when he was a baby Luffy rounded one street into another, stopping as he heard "Stop the bitch!" "Don't let her get away!" "Buggy will have our hides if we let her get away with the map!"

Moving in the direction of the three voices Luffy almost bumped into Nami coming around another corner. She stopped blinking at him then grinned mischievously before leaping upwards. Grabbing a balcony sticking out over the road the Orange Town-haired girl flipped herself up and over the banister of the balcony to land on it before leaping further up onto the rooftop.

"Impressive." Luffy said looking up at her just as her pursuers came around the corner tear.

Nami winked at him, before shouting "Boss, I'll leave this to you now!" With that she ducked out of sight.

Behind her Luffy chuckled shaking his head as he turned to the trio of pursuers, who just like the last three were dressed like clowns. And they also were quick to brandish their weapons, two clubs and a cutlass in this case. "Damn it where'd that bitch go!?"

"Never mind we've got her boss right here, that'll do for now."

"This is not your lucky day," Luffy said with a shrug before moving forward. One of them tried to smack him with a club, but Luffy grabbed the club with one hand thrusting out hard with a punch to the face that sent that one rolling backwards ass over heels. A kick caught a second in the side, and Luffy whirled away from a sword thrust to lash out with a second kick catching that one in the chin, spinning him around to join his fellow on the road, unconscious.

Shaking his head Luffy turned to look up to where the girl had disappeared. "You can come out now Nami."

Nami did, looking down and whistling appreciatively. "You know, I knew you were good from that display against Alvida and her crew, and the whole walking on air thing, but even so..."

"Why thank you fair maiden for those faint words of praise!" Luffy said sarcastically, doffing his straw hat to her. When he pulled up from his bow however he was glaring up at her. "Are you following me, or is this just coincidence?"

"Just coincidence," Nami said scowling angrily. "I told you I would never join your crew."

"And yet you aren't exactly against using me are you?" Luffy asked archly, jumping up to join her on the balcony crossing one leg over the other as he sat there almost as at ease on that small balcony as Nami was on the roof.

The girl frowned looking away. "I knew you could handle it," she said rather lamely.

Luffy looked at her for some time, but eventually sighed, deciding to let it go for now. "Well whatever, can you tell me what's going on around here?"

Nami nodded, filling him in on what she had learned. The villagers had retreated from the town the moment Buggy's pirate flag had appeared over the horizon, which was just as well. "You should see the damage done to the other side of town, Buggy fired some kind of special cannonball and leveled that entire half of it including the mayor's house. Since then, which apparently happened at least four, five days ago Buggy and his crew have been partying between looting the shipyard to the ground."

Luffy frowned thoughtfully. "How many men does he have?"

"A little over 75 I think, but only a few of them look anything more than common riffraff dressed up in clown outfits." Nami shook her head. "Honestly, who would dress up their crew to look like rejects from a circus?"

"I know right, I was thinking the same thing earlier." Luffy laughed. "Although, it does sort of fit his picture you know." Luffy frowned again then shrugged. "Oh well, we were heading here to buy a ship anyway, and if we can get another bounty I'm all for that too."

"You're insane!" Nami scoffed. "Buggy is a Grand Line pirate, you really think you can take him on?"

"Yes," Luffy said simply. "I know I can." He smirked at her slightly. "My last offers still on the table you know. Join my crew and you can get a share of the bounty when I turn him in."

Nami stared at him, hearing the conviction in his voice, and frowned for a moment before shaking her head. "All right, I'll help you out just this **one** time for a measly 50 percent."

"25 percent of the bounty, and you get to keep Buggy's treasure minus the stuff he's taken from Orange Town," Luffy said firmly. "These people have had enough shit drop on them and keeping that stuff would make us as bad as Buggy."

At first Nami scowled at the idea of leaving any beli behind, but she had to concede that Luffy had a point. Luffy nodded and went on. "And when it's all over you navigate us to our next port of call and go with Makino to the nearest island with a World Government bank while we see about our ship."

"Deal." If push came to shove, Nami felt she could overcome Makino and take the boat and leave. She'd hate to do it, Makino was a nice woman, if really misguided but it was definitely doable.

"Deal," Luffy said in turn, holding out a hand which she slapped rather than shook, something that made him roll his eyes. But then he smirked at her wagging a finger in Nami's face. "And just so we're on the same page, the loot from Buggy will stay here until you're back safe and sound." Which of the two would be safe and sound was left unsaid.

Nami pouted smacking his finger away irritated that he had read her so well.

"And maybe," Luffy went on seriously. "Once we get to know one another you'll tell me what you need all that money for. For now though, you know anywhere around here that we can get some food? We ran out of food last night, and I am starving."

After a moment spent staring at Luffy and wondering how he was able to read her so easily, Nami nodded. "Follow me, there are a few houses that still have food in them. And while we're going, you can tell me about your plan to beat Buggy. I've got one, in case you don't by the way."

"Plan?" Luffy asked blankly. "I beat up the captain, and my first mate Zoro beats up everyone else. Why would I need a plan?"

Nami stopped dead staring at him. "You got the pirate Hunter the demon Zoro to join you!?" When Luffy nodded she shook her head. "That's really bizarre."

"Not really," Luffy smirked. "People with dreams like ours who wish to challenge the world, we have to stick together ya know."

Again Luffy looked at her, and at the determined look in his eyes Nami looked away quickly. She had a dream like that once. Before her maps got her in trouble, before... She pushed those memories away, shivering slightly. "Your plan still sucks."

Luffy was still looking at her as they walked, only stopping when he heard a bark from directly in front of them. Turning he saw a little dog, around a foot tall with long ears and a wide mouth with really soft looking fur sitting in front of a shop they were passing by growling at them.

"What's up pop?" Luffy asked, going down to his knees and reaching forward to scratch the dog behind his ears. The dog made to bite him, but Luffy pulled his hand back quickly, smacking it on the nose lightly. At the same time he noticed how unkempt the dog was, he even had a few injuries here and there that hadn't been treated. "None of that dog, just because you're a scrapper doesn't mean I will let you bite me."

Nami went to one knee beside him, reaching out to pet the dog, who for some reason didn't try to bite her like he had Luffy. "Poor thing, did your owners abandon you?"

"Hey, get away from him you punks!" Turning Nami and Luffy saw elderly man with glasses and an odd poufy sort of hairstyle Luffy hadn't seen before. Over a Hawaiian shirt which gave Ranma/Luffy a serious case of the flashbacks he wore what looked like very old leather armor.

I thought all the townspeople fled when Buggy arrived. "No worries old man, we were just petting the little guy." Luffy adroitly moved his hand once again as the little dog tried to bite him. At the same time Nami began to do what she could for the dog's injuries. "Who're you?"

"I'm Mayor Boodle, this is my town! And the dog is ChouChou." Boodle moved forward into the shop behind the dog, coming back with a small plate and a packet of dog food, which he poured out for the dog. "I come back every day to feed him. Where are you two from, you're not part of Buggy's crew, not dressed like that."

"Normally you mean?" Luffy laughed, shaking his head. "A friend and I had called here to put in an order for a caravel, but when we arrived we saw Clown face's ship in dock. Why didn't you just take ChouChou with you all when you evacuated?"

Boodle sighed. "ChouChou's owner owned this store. For ten years the two of them lived here. The store is filled with precious memories for the two. My friend passed away several months back, but ChouChou still follows his orders to guard the store even now."

The old man gestured to the injuries Nami was trying to treat. "A few of the pirates have tried to ransack this store like the rest of the town, a few of them even have pets so it makes sense. But ChouChou always tries to fight them and he's actually done a decent job of it."

Luffy smiled and petted the dog, once more, scratching him behind the ears. "You're a good boy, protecting your treasure like that!"

For the first time since learning Luffy planned to be a pirate Nami smiled naturally at him with no ulterior motives or even a hint of anger. *Luffy can act really sweet when he wants to.* She shook that thought off as Luffy stood up, letting the dog to his meal. "Come on, I think you promised me a meal."

"Come on then," Boodle cut in before Nami could reply. "The house next door to the shop should still have some food. Though if you're here for a ship boy, I'm sorry to say you'll be waiting for a while. Buggy's crew tore apart most of the ships in our dockyard, and those they didn't they used for target practice."

"Great, another reason to beat the clown into the ground." Luffy groaned but followed Boodle along with Nami, who was feeling somewhat hungry herself.

The two of them listened to Boodle talk about the citizens evacuation and the damages the pirates had already done, working himself into a fury at them. He said more than once he wanted to challenge Buggy and kick him out of the town himself,

but both teens knew that would be suicide. Luffy tried to calm him down, but didn't have much luck, mostly because he had no experience at all in trying to do so.

Nami had a bit more luck especially when she began to use her body to turn the man's attention to other things. Indeed by the end of the meal she had almost gotten him back to normal.

But then they heard a loud crash outside, and ChouChou's growling, followed quickly by a pain filled whimper. Before either of the others could even push themselves to their feet Luffy had bounded away from the table and out the window, smashing the glass in passing to land outside right in front of the pet store.

In front of him was a massive lion with green fur and a purple mane of all things. Behind Luffy the door to the pet store had been smashed open, and Luffy spotted ChouChou pushing himself out of the rubble of the door, still snarling as he tried to face down the far larger and more dangerous animal.

With the massive and oddly colored lion grabbing his attention Luffy missed the oddly dressed man standing next to it, wringing his hand out and wincing. It looked like he was wearing a hat made of fur which went under his chin and rose into ears over his head, while covering his shoulders with the same fur. His stomach below that was bare, and he wore blue pantaloons.

"Fucking mutt ya shouldn't have bit me! Finish him off... wait who the hell are you" The guy with the fur asked taking his eyes off the still growling dog as Luffy landed in front of him.. "Hey, you could be that bitch's boss, the boys mentioned you and how you beat them up. Well I'm Mohji the Beast Tamer of the Buggy Pirates and I think you'll find my lion and I think we'll be too much for you to handle! Get him Richie!"

Luffy still didn't notice him, trying his damndest to stop himself from running away in terror at the sight of the lion. *God damn it, why the fuck am I still afraid of cats! I've never been attacked by them in this body, there's no fucking physical reason to be afraid of them, but I still suffer from the Neko-ken madness!*

The lion roared and swiped his paw forward at Luffy, who though he saw it coming wasn't able to get out of the way in time. It was all he could do to brace his body. "T-Tekkai!"

The lion's paw slammed into him, hurling Luffy backwards since despite his technique Luffy hadn't quite set himself to take the blow well enough. He flew backwards past ChouChou into the interior of the shop. On the other hand, Richie's paw broke in several places, the lion having no reason to pull his blow and not anticipating the impact of trying to smash through steel.

As the lion screamed, rolling about in agony while Luffy pushed himself out of the shop, swearing under his breath so much even Shanks would have blushed. "Freaking goddess, damned Neko-ken, gonna...grah!"

Seeing the lion down and no longer a factor Luffy breathed a sigh of relief pointing at the moron in the fur cap. "Alright, my plan to cripple your lion worked perfectly, now you're next!"

Overlooking the action from a nearby balcony Nami laughed. "Plan my ass that was pure luck!"

"No comments from the peanut gallery!" Luffy shouted back, resolutely not meeting her eyes for a moment.

"You, you bastard! I'll never forgive you for hurting Richie!" Mohji shouted, pulling out a cutlass from his waist and charging forward.

Now you I can deal with! Luffy thought gleefully, charging forward. He ducked under the cutlass and punched upward into Mohji's chin. "This'll teach you not to mess with other people's treasure!" Except that in his eagerness to get over his fearful response to Richie, Luffy forgot to pull his punch as he normally would.

All that could be said was his blow didn't splatter Mohji's head across the landscape, though Mohji probably would never realize his good fortune as the blow sent him flying up and over the town. The sight of Mohji flying into the air as if he had just been fired out of a cannon was enough to make Nami and Boodle, who had raced through the house to come out onto the road, gape in astonishment.

With the human dealt with Luffy reluctantly turned to the lion, only to see it limping down the road away from them, "Oh phew, um I mean, damn, it got away." With that he turned around moving back into the rubble of the shop, bringing out ChouChou

Nami shook her head slowly as she moved to help him, already bringing out her few medical supplies. The beating of the lion and the idiot with the weird hair didn't mean much to her, though she did wonder why Luffy had used that odd body strengthening move rather than simply dodge the blow and punch the lion as he had its owner. His strength was incredible, but she had seen strong people before.

No, what shocked Nami was that Luffy hadn't hesitated in jumping into the fight to protect ChouChou and his 'treasure'. It wasn't anything anyone else would have recognized as such, but it was obvious the dog really did think the store was as valuable as Nami thought her money was. *Why can't more pirates be dreamers like him rather than bastards like...*

Once more Nami cut that thought off, moving to stand next to Luffy trying to make light of her thoughts and the odd impact Luffy's action had on her. "Nice job, but what was with freezing like that in front of Richie?"

"Don't want to talk about it." Luffy muttered.

Behind them Booble began growling, working himself up once more. "I can't stand this! This, this is the second time in my life I've seen my village destroyed by pirates. Forty years ago my family had to abandon this village when pirates attacked it then. What right do these blasted pirates have to come and destroy our lives, our hopes and dreams for the future?!"

"Pirates, these bastards aren't real pirates." Luffy growled, looking up from his work on ChouChou. "They are cowards and weaklings, scum who can only make themselves feel strong by preying on the weak, mere brigands of the sea with no dreams to call their own or any idea of what **real** strength is."

Nami shook her head sadly. "Luffy I know you don't like it, but that's what most pirates are."

"I know that's what you think, and there might be a lot of crews out there like that, but that doesn't mean they deserve the name pirate." Luffy stood up after placing ChouChou down on the ground right in front of the ruined entrance to the pet store. The dog actually licked his hand as he pulled away, but Luffy didn't notice. His eyes were shadowed by the brim of his straw hat and he cracked his knuckles meaningfully. "But if they are going around calling themselves pirate, then as future Pirate King I

should be one to punish them. I'm going to make this Buggy character eat his own fat red nose then I'm going to turn him in to the marines."

"Oh, going to get into a fight without me captain, I'm hurt." Luffy, Nami and Boodle all turned at the sound of the unexpected voice, to see Zoro leaning against the side of a building at the far end of the street. "If you're going to pick a fight let me join."

"Zoro, why in the world are you trying to look so cool?" asked Makino, and the three watchers saw her grab Zoro's ear, tugging hard.

"OW! Why you, let go woman, it's not my fault you got lost!" Zoro groused trying to pull away only to find Makino's grip was a lot stronger than she looked. Which really shouldn't have surprised him, but it did.

"I did not get lost, **you** did." Makino said still coldly as she moved forward dragging Zoro behind her towards Luffy Nami and the elderly man with him whose size and general disposition reminded her rather strongly of mayor Woopslap. "You got lost the moment you got out of sight of the boat without waiting for me Zoro!"

She turned to Luffy, shaking her head angrily. "I was putting the finishing touches on tying up those three pirates, when Zoro decided I didn't need him anymore and walked off with the stated intention of 'finding Luffy or booze whichever comes first' only to somehow lose his way in the small bit of land between where we beached our ship and Orange Town. I found him actually up on that little hill over there trying to figure out where the town was!"

Luffy blinked, then looked at Zoro, who looked angry, still trying to break Makino's grip on his ear without actually trying to hurt her which Luffy knew from experience wasn't exactly easy. *Oh my God, he's another Ryoga!* Luffy kept that thought off his face however, simply smirking at the other boy. "Well now that you've finally arrived, and remind me to get you a compass at some point Zoro, let's go have some fun. There are a crew of pirates who's collective ass needs kicking."

"Fun!?" the mayor spluttered, while Zoro simply grinned evilly, putting his hand on his swords.

Nami and Makino sighed exchanging a glance which said it all really. *Men!*

"I'm coming with you damn it, I'm tired of letting these scumbags have the run of my town! I..." the mayor trailed off staring at the three katana at Zoro's side. "Are, are you Pirate Hunter Zoro?"

"I still don't understand how I got that name. It's not like I went out of my way to fight pirates, they went out of their way to fight me." Zoro muttered shaking his head. "And I only ever turned them in when I had to pay for food."

Luffy shrugged ignorance as well, but then looked at the mayor. "I don't think you should come with us old man, no offense but you don't look like you could fight one pirate let alone a crew of them. I realize this town is your treasure and you want to fight with for it, but I don't know if we'll be able to protect you once we're fighting."

The mayor tore his eyes off the three swords to look at Luffy's expression, then slowly nodded. *The Pirate Hunter calls this man captain, and I saw his strength against the lion and the man with the weird hair, so...* "I'll put my trust in you," he said formally. "And if you still want a ship after this, we'll build it for you for free!"

"Deal." Luffy nodded, while Makino looked ecstatic before reaching into her pouch and pulling out her handgun.

Nami was the only one of the others that noticed this and she gaped at the girl who winked at her before cocking her pistol meaningfully. "Shall we go?"

The three of them moved off, with Nami quickly following. "Just so you know I'm not going to be fighting, the moment you guys get their attention, I'll sneak in under their noses and steal all their treasure before they know what's happening."

"That's all well and good for now, but after this I'm going to have to train you up if you're going to stay with us. Running and hiding really isn't my thing." Luffy replied.

"I told you I wasn't going to join your crew." Nami said sharply then subsided as Zoro glared at her. "We're only working together to beat Buggy."

"Even if you could get more money joining us for now, say just until we get to the Grand Line?" Makino asked slyly.

Nami seems to pause a moment at that, but shook her head quickly.

"**Maybe** I'll join you on that basis after this is over. But you're still a pirate, or at least you want to be a pirate, though I still think you should stay as a bounty hunter team. If you do, then I'll join you full time..." she wheedled, leaning sideways, pressing her cleavage against Luffy's arm.

Luffy blushed, moving away to grab up a small bucket someone had left out which was full of water at present. Despite the time he'd spent as Ranma or even in this life around Makino, he still wasn't used to being flirted with like that. "N-none of that, I've told you I'm going to be the Pirate King, how can I do that if I'm not a pirate?"

"Meh, can't blame a girl for trying. But in that case, my answer to joining you crew is still no." Nami laughed, suddenly feeling a lot better about this for some reason. She watched as Luffy dumped the water over her head, one eyebrow raised.

As Luffy walked off into a nearby alleyway to change his, now her, clothing, Makino answered Nami's unasked question. "In case we want to turn Buggy over, this way even Buggy and his pirates won't be able to connect Luffy the pirate with 'Ranko' the bounty hunter."

A moment later, the quartet had gotten within range of hearing the party going on top of the town's bar. The town bar had been the largest of the few three story buildings in Orange Town, overlooking the small docks and the ships there with the roof set up like an observation deck. Now it was the only three story tall building, Buggy having destroyed the others. Buggy had set up there with most of his crew along with a cannon set to face the ocean most of the time. Occasionally over the past few days he had used it to smash houses in the town to pieces while his crew looted the town slowly.

Of course since Mohji and Ritchie haven't returned yet, Buggy was in a bad mood, and most of the crew was keeping out of his way. One of them however was near the edge of the tavern's roof where he spotted the four of them coming. "Hey boss! Isn't that the thief?"

Buggy and several of his crew rushed over to glare over the side, and the first thing that Buggy noticed was the straw hat on the redhead's head. "That kind of hat reminds me of someone I'd sooner forget." Buggy muttered while Luffy cursed, having

forgotten to remove his hat. But then the clown's eyes latched on to Nami and he screamed angrily. "So you came back you dirty thief! Don't expect that to make your death any easier! Men, show these swabs what happens when they face Buggy's pirate crew!"

Behind him his crew began to gather their weapons and charged forward, leaping over the side of the building or down into the tavern making their way to the door like normal people.

As they did, Luffy looked over at Zoro. "You want them all, or can I at least say hello first?"

"You're the captain, captain." Zoro said, tying his bandana in place before pulling out his katana and placing the white hilted one into his mouth, speaking through his clenched teeth. "Most of them look like small fry anyway."

"Good," Luffy said, then whirled quickly, her leg lashing out. "Rankyaku!"

The blast of wind from his leg slammed into the tavern's first floor carving through it and out the other side since Luffy hadn't blunted that's one nearly as much as he usually did. The pirate's caught still inside the tavern screamed as many of them fell into the rubble caused by his attack, while others were blown off their feet.

The remainder pushed out of the rubble or over the side of the roof, only to be intercepted by Zoro. "My turn!"

Zoro matched them blade to blade, dodging the few musket balls fired at him as he did, whirling away and around, slashing many of them down before they could even touch him. Then he was forced to defend himself from a straight, single-edged katana thrusting towards his face. "So," he drawled, "there's at least some of you who can actually fight."

"Judging by your three blades you must be Roronoa Zoro, but don't let your reputation go to your head! I'm so angry right now words fail me!" the man on the other side of that katana muttered, balancing easily on a small wheel. He had dark green hair almost like Makino's covering half his face, while the other half was swept back, kept in place by some wooden hairpins, a long coat open at the front and an

equally long blue and white scarf. "To think you brats would dare to challenge the Buggy pirates and do us such damage to boot. It has to be paid for."

"Heh, let's see who pays the bill in the end clown!" Zoro grunted, pushing the other man back and bringing the sword in his mouth around in a cut which the other man had to block while he used the swords in his hands to attack a few more pirates.

Buggy had been among those buried, but he pushed himself out of the rubble quickly, or rather pulled himself back together. Not that any of his attackers noticed that from their point on the street below, or the fact his thoughts were going a mile a minute. *That, that was one of the Rokushiki, Rankyaku! Where'd a punk like that learn one of the World government's combat techniques?! Damn it, I'm going to have to take this seriously from the start!*

His ability to think clearly stopped abruptly however when he heard a voice shout, "Buggy get your big red nose out here so I can break it!"

All movement in the battle below shuddered to a halt at that as everyone in Buggy's crew stared at the straw hat wearing girl in horror. None of them noticed that the other two women that had been with the foursome had disappeared or that some other men had fallen to musket balls impacting their legs or arms. "You moron!" they all shouted as one. "You never mention the nose!"

"That's all I can take!" Buggy shouted. "Flashily die! Bara Bara Cannon!" With that he raised one hand, pointing it toward Luffy suddenly holding a knife in that hand. The hand shot forward as if shot out of a cannon, the arm behind it actually coming apart into segments as it did, each segment shooting the one in front of it out faster towards the target.

Even as she gaped in surprise Luffy was able to dodge aside, watching the pieces of the arm that Buggy had somehow separated and hurled at her like weapons. *So that's the secret Ji-Kure knew about Buggy, he's a Devil Fruit user.* Experimentally Luffy lashed out at one of the parts, trying to smash it sideways, only to see it simply float back into the air and move back towards the body.

A Rankyaku sent towards his body made Buggy divide himself to avoid it, laughing aloud. "You flashy moron, cutting attacks can't work on me!"

Luffy blinked at her opponent actually saying that aloud, but shook her head quickly, realizing this might be a challenge. *And he's got full control of those body parts of his while in the air. Some kind of telekinesis maybe? Whatever it's obviously part of the devil fruit itself so I'm not going to question the mechanics of it.*

Then Luffy was forced to dodge backwards as one of the hands that had flown past him before twisted around, the hand shooting off from the wrist to add even more speed to its assault. *And no limit to how much he can divide himself? This is going to be a challenge good!"*

With that Luffy charged forward, her fist and feet flashing knocking aside the attacking parts, shattering the knives in Buggy's hand' forcing him to recall and rearm them from the knives he kept on his main body. *It would be easy if I used Busoshoku, or even had a good grasp of Kenbunshoku, but I'm not the best at that, and I promised myself I wouldn't use Armament unless I desperately had to. No rookie could know that ability and even Ji-Kure doesn't know I can use it.*

To one side of the fight between captains, Zoro continued to battle the rest of Buggy's crew and more importantly Cabaji. The long-haired unicycle was giving him issues, dancing in and out of the rest of the fight trying to attack Zoro from his blind spot, and also had some other tricks as well, as evinced when he took a draft from a small clay urn before opening his mouth, shouting "Breath of Death!"

The clay container had oil in it and Cabaji had a device under his tongue he could use to create small sparks and did so now. From his mouth flames shot out towards Zoro.

But as Cabaji attacked his unicycle shattered under him hit by a musket ball and Cabaji's attack went above Zoro's head as he fell backwards. "Damn it! Some of you fall back through the rubble, circle around and find that damn sniper!"

A millisecond later was forced to block a sword cut aimed toward his shoulder, and concentrated on Zoro once more.

Nearby it hiding in plain sight in an alleyway Makino scoffed. "I'm not a sniper, I'm good, but I'm not that good. But I suppose that Zoro can handle this lot now. I'd best check on Nami-chan right now."

Doing so she ran into the men that the first mate had ordered to come around and attack her from the side, overcoming them as easily as she had the three on their sloop earlier that day. Sneaking down the short distance to the docks and onto Buggy's galleon she pulled herself onto the deck as Nami appeared at the top of the stairs leading into the hold, a large bag of treasure over one shoulder. She hadn't had much trouble, most of Buggy's crew being with him up on the roof of the tavern, though she had knocked out the one guard left to watch Buggy's treasure.

"My word," Makino said from behind Nami, startling the younger girl. "They weren't kidding when they said the ship took a pounding in a storm. Where's the main mast, and look at all that damage to the sails and the deck itself."

"Yet for all that, the crew and this ship are still dangerous." Nami said, getting her breath back. "After all, how else would they have gathered all this treasure?" She pulled her large sack over her shoulder, opening it slightly to show Makino before closing it protectively. "Your captain said that I can keep all the treasure that isn't from Orange Town itself, so it's all mine!"

"You just contradicted yourself Nami-chan." Makino said gently. "Unless you can tell me you've already identified all the treasure Buggy stole from the town?"

Nami pouted at the older woman, before pulling out a smaller bag and putting it to one side. "That's better. I suggest we stay here for a bit however, the fight over there is reaching its climax I think.

Back in the main fight Zoro shouted, "Enough!" once again blocking a sword thrust from Cabaji, absentmindedly sending two other Pirates down to the ground with flat of his other katana "Always trying to attack me from behind, using that fire-breathing trick of yours, have you no honor as a swordsman?!"

"Swordsman?" Cabaji scoffed, backing up slightly, sneering. "Why would I have something so useless as that, I'm a pirate not a swordsman!"

Zoro growled angrily, slowly crouching down as he stared at the pirates in front of him, having moved so that all the remaining crewmen were in front of him now. "I wanted to test this out on a worthy opponent, but you just pissed me off! Onigiri!" He shouted, rushing forward faster than their eyes track his blades slashing out just as fast before coming to a halt on the other edge of the crowd.

For a moment nothing happened, then blood fountained out as dozens of wounds appeared on Cabaji and the other pirates. "Im-impossible, the Buggy pirates, defeated like thi..." Cabaji moaned, before slumping to the ground along with his crew-mates, blood gushing from the slash across his chest as his katana shattered in his hand, hit by another blow.

"That's for your stupid tricks." Zoro scoffed, spitting to one side.

"Caba-chan!" Buggy shouted, turning quickly and shooting his free hand toward Zoro, only for Luffy to intercept the attack, punching the fist down into the ground before stomping hard on it, causing Buggy to cry out in pain.

Grinding her foot down on Buggy's hand Luffy looked at Zoro with a grin. "Did you just name that attack after those rice balls Rika made you?"

Zoro flushed angrily, smacking a bit of debris towards him with one of his now sheathed katana. "S-shut up! It's demon slash, Oni-giri, two words, not onigiri!"

"That is so cute!" Luffy laughed, before ducking as Buggy's feet flew through the space her head had previously occupied, the ends of Buggy's boot now containing a dagger which had popped out from the toe. Even his foot however could separate, and the toes did so now, shooting back towards Luffy.

"Tekkai!" Luffy said, knowing she couldn't dodge in time. The knife shattered against her side, and she smirked evilly up at where Buggy seemed to hover in the air. Or at least seeming to, since Luffy noticed one of the clown's feet was still on the ground below him, and the other was actually walking back slowly for some reason. "You didn't think Rankyaku was the only one of the Rokushiki I knew did you?"

"Damn it, how the flashy hell did someone in East Blue learn about the Rokushiki!" Buggy shouted.

"I don't have any reason to tell you that." Luffy laughed. "I told I'd be busting your big red nose and that's what I'm going to do, Buffoon."

"You flashy damned brat!" Buggy growled angrily attacking again. "I don't know what irritates me more, you or that damn hat!"

Luffy cocked her head thoughtfully even as she dodged Buggy's attacks. "What the heck about my hat bothers you?"

"It reminds me too much of the man I will always hate, that bastard Shanks!"

"Huh, you know the Yonkou Shanks?"

{Cue and end canon flashback}

"So Shanks saved your life? That's awesome I guess, though I still don't get why that'd irritate you. Unless you see it as yet another sign he's surpassed you in every way imaginable. I mean, he's a freaking Yonkou while here you are hiding away in East Blue! That's pretty pathetic." Luffy said bluntly.

With an almost audible snap Buggy lost what little bit of his self-control remained. "Flashily die you bitch!" He shouted "Bara Bara Festival!"

With that his entire body came apart, rocketing towards Luffy. His hands and feet still held knives, while the rest of him simply charged forward as fast as so many fists.

Luffy however backed away slightly, glancing behind her and out past toward the ocean. Suddenly smiling she leaped into the air using Geppo, and began to smack the parts away lightly, keeping her real strength in check for now. Doing so she shattered the trio of knives in each of Buggy's hands, but what Luffy was mainly doing was watching how long it took Buggy to regain control of the parts of his body Luffy hit.

"Just because you can use Geppo doesn't mean you can beat the flashy me!" Buggy shouted, sending his hands forward again loaded with knives as his feet below followed up.

"Oh come on Red Nose, this is all in fun right? Or no, I suppose attacking civilians too scared to fight back is about your speed ain't it Buffoon!" Luffy taunted.

"Murder, death, flashy kill you!" Buggy shouted, trying to close again with his hands, only to watch Luffy duck aside. The bitch didn't want to use the iron body technique apparently. *Maybe she can only use it a few times before tiring himself out?* It was possible; Buggy had seen that happen a few times in the Grand Line.

It never occurred to Buggy that he was following the bounty hunter towards the ocean, or that she seemed to be retreating very methodically.

From their hiding place on Buggy's ship Makino and Nami watched as the two captains fought their way through the air over the docks. "I wonder what Luffy is planning," Makino mused. It's not like her to run away."

"Maybe he, er she, just can't get a handle on Buggy's strange power." Nami replied. She'd frozen when she had first seen what was going on and Buggy's odd power, but thanks to Makino smacking her upside the head had recovered her equilibrium quickly. "To think Devil fruits are real."

"Oh..." Makino exclaimed, smacking a fist into her palm. "**That's** what she's doing."

However, Buggy had noticed them and suddenly stopped attacking Luffy. "You flashy thieves! No one steals my treasure from me and lives to tell of it!"

Nami popped out of her hiding place shouting angrily. "Hey, this treasure is mine now red nose!"

Luffy laughed, but Buggy once again lost his temper. Shooting his upper body through the air towards her, he grabbed onto the stack of loot that Nami quickly raised to try and slam him aside.

But behind him on the wharf Luffy saw his feet and legs were still in position on the ground, proving that Buggy's levitation was very limited. Staring at the legs that were moving towards Buggy's main body, Luffy wound her leg up and kicked upwards right into Buggy's balls. "Not how I wanted to do this but whatever."

Buggy screamed in pain as Luffy's blow landed his legs shooting into the air following a low curve into the ocean with a splash. Suddenly Buggy couldn't feel anything from his waist down. He sagged against the large bag Nami was still holding, looking over his shoulder woozily as the feeling of being dipped into water hit him. "What, what..."

"One of the weaknesses of any Devil Fruit user is water." Luffy said with a shrug. "I wondered what'd happen if I dumped some of your body parts into it. Looks like you're actually able to function better than most."

Before Buggy could respond to this backhanded compliment Luffy was in his face, crossing the intervening distance faster than Buggy could track. *Fast! Where the hell was that speed before!*

That was as far as his thoughts before a sound like nothing he'd ever heard before rang out as Luffy shouted, "Amiguriken Assault!" Her hands flashed out, smashing into Buggy's body as he tried to disassemble, smacking the body parts into the ocean alongside his ship to join his lower body.

Soon only Buggy's head remained, and now he was **really** feeling the effect of the ocean water on his body. His eyes began to roll in his head as he fell into unconsciousness. The last thing he heard was the thief's voice. "You know, since I had to play bait at the end there I think I should get a larger cut of his bounty, don't you?"

End chapter

I know I could have gone into detail about the fights in this chapter, but frankly none of them were worth the effort save Buggy's and I feel like I did enough there to show how Ranma/Luffy fights differently than canon Luffy beyond his not having the Rubber Fruit.

From here on out I will start changing canon a LOT, but even here you can see the changes Ranma/Luffy is making in terms of his interacting with other characters not just how he deals with his enemies: he doesn't have quite the same sense of honor, nor quite Luffy's way of motivating/befriending people. He also doesn't have the same kind of restraint Luffy has as a Shounen protagonist towards the whole not killing thing.

The next chapter is going to be more about character interaction than this one, let Ranma/Luffy get to know Nami, show her what sort of person he is, and let her get to know the other three while also getting some training in. Also for those worrying

that Makino is just along for the ride, don't worry, she will have her time to shine, it's just right now there's no need for her to step up for any of the fights.