

I ain't Japanese, nor can I draw.

So... I tried to give Tomon as much time as I could. I very much didn't need him to give me a full editing job, but I wanted his opinion on flow and a few questions. Unfortunately, he didn't get it back to me in time. In fact, I am, technically, kind of late posting this and the Magic chapter. Still, I hope you all forgive me.

This was the Ranma-only poll winner for October. I had some trouble getting back into the world, which I think made some of these scenes go a bit longer than they should, but otherwise, I think I'm happy with it. This has been edited by Hiryo but not Tomon, as mentioned above, and has also been Grammarlied for the most part.

Enjoy!

Chapter 49: Pink-Haired Menace, Big Boned Annoyance

Three days after arriving back on Amazon Lily, Luffy and a portion of his crew prepared to leave Amazon Lily once more along with the two newcomers, albeit only one technically. At one point, Luffy had idly thought to bring the entire crew along for this trip to Fishman Island, but that plan had been set aside quickly.

First, Zoro refused, saying, "Rayleigh just helped Franky make me these new weights and I want to get the most out of them! Also, Hancock and me are going to concentrate on Busoshoku while you and the old man are away."

Hancock had chuckled at the time, shaking her head and leaning back into Luffy's shoulder as they all ate lunch on the terrace together. Luffy had basically been lavishing attention on Hancock day and night every chance they could get, and she was far more sanguine about his leaving again than she had been when he and Vivi had headed to Alabasta. "What he means is that he'll spend more than half the day weight training, and then I will beat on him with my own Busoshoku to build up his endurance. For myself, I am not saying just for the joy of beating on our little Lost Boy here, but also because I need to push my own crew's training. Several of them have allowed their training to fall by the wayside while working on other projects, and I refuse to allow that to continue."

In actuality, that wasn't the whole reason Hancock was also thinking about the future. The future in terms of Amazon Lily and herself, when, in a year or whenever, Luffy decided his crew was ready for the New World. Because at this point, Hancock was having several second thoughts about staying with her own crew and thus near Amazon Lily. She knew that had been the plan, and really, there was no room on a single ship for two captains, but even so, the idea of being separated from Luffy and even Vivi and Robin for so long was a future she did not like the look of.

Chuckling at how much sheer amusement Hancock got out of pointing out Zoro's lack of a sense of direction, Luffy had shrugged his shoulders at the time. "And ya don't object to us taking Sandersonia?"

Nami wasn't joining them for this jaunt either, which would have left the crew without a navigator, bar Rayleigh, who could probably do the job, but Sandersonia had actually volunteered to come along as well that morning. Instead, Nami, after she, Luffy and Shakky had sat down and worked out a preliminary physical exercise regimen for the orangette, was learning a few new combat-specific skills from the former Kuja Empress. Luffy had put Zoro in charge of making sure that Nami stuck to the training schedule he had made, while Shakky was teaching her something she called 'silent movement'.

When Shakky demonstrated it, the technique put Luffy in mind of his Umi-Sen-Ken, but without the use of inverted ki. Shakky made a movement of a hand or an eye to draw the attention of those around her to a specific point, and then simply faded into the background. It only worked for a minute at best, but in combat, it was remarkably effective and would be even more so given some of the illusion-style trickery that Nami had created in the past.

Well, against anyone without Kenbunshoku. Which, in turn, was the third area Nami was working on currently. Luffy wanted Nami to awaken her Kenbunshoku before the plan to send her to Weatheria, the sky island specializing in weather technology, was finalized. He thought that Vivi was ahead of her in that area due to her natural skill with reading her opponents and insane agility, but hoped Nami's training would help her catch up.

"Not at all. Sandersonia will use the opportunity of this trip to pick up some supplies for the island on my orders, both from the archipelago and from Fishman Island. We have a credit with a shop on Fishman Island for clothing and materials, and it's high time we saw a return in that investment," Hancock said, shaking her head and not mentioning the supplies from Shabondy. "She will also represent me and the Kujas as a whole when you speak to the Mer-King. I will not lower myself to treat with any male beyond yourself and Rayleigh as equals, but Sandersonia can act in my stead there and will do a far better job of it than Marigold. Although," Hancock smirked, "from what I have learned of the King's appearance, the two of them would actually be of a more similar size."

Of the rest of the crew, Chopper was also going to be staying behind, which Luffy actually wasn't as happy about. He had wanted to spend some time with his ship's doctor to create a more invested training schedule as he had been able to for Nami over the past few days.

Unfortunately, Chopper had found several plants and other ingredients on Amazon Lily when Luffy was away and was busy studying them, so Chopper didn't want to leave with them just yet. Plus, his training was going decently well already. Chopper, Marigold and Brook had gotten into the habit of sparring every morning. Marigold's defensive style and use of her overall size made for good training for both Straw Hats, as it forced Brook to lean heavily into his

own mobility, and served as an example for Chopper. In fact, Chopper told Luffy the morning he was due to leave that Chopper felt he was close to creating a fifth form for himself. An advanced version of one of his original Rumble Ball-assisted three, without the need for his specialized drugs.

Because of this, and despite wanting to put his stamp on such training, Luffy decided to let it go for now. He could always concentrate on Chopper training when he returned, as well as Nami's if she had seemingly hit a wall in her new training regimen by the time the Fishman Island expedition returned.

Similar to what she was doing with Nami, Shakky was also working with Laki. This was made difficult at the moment since, like Franky had previously, Laki was still spending time helping the locals to design the cannons that would be used to defend Amazon Lily in the future. Although unlike Nami's training, Laki's ran in an almost purely mechanical manner right now.

While most of the time, his friends and crew only saw Luffy as an exercise and training freak, he was also a tactical and combat savant. When looking at his crew as a whole, it was obvious to him that, despite her position as gunner, Laki both needed an upgrade to her personal combat style just like Nami, and that the two of them would be best when it came to indirect combat styles. The use of dials could control territory in various strange and hard-to-deal-with ways would make any fight against them a nightmare, even for those who knew about dials in the first place. Luffy could remember quite well how Enel's four priests had made small killing grounds, and that had only been using their own separate dial-based styles.

That had caused a real argument, one Luffy reflected on now as Sandersonia, Robin, Vivi, and Rayleigh boarded the Everlasting Resolve. Laki really didn't want to give up fighting with her rifle and with a few dials to assist her movement, saying that had been the whole point of her combat style in the first place. It took Luffy forever to point out that that really wasn't the case, and that continuing to simply use a simple rifle as her main weapon was stupid. Luffy fully understood that part of her dream was to prove she could be as tough as any man, as good a marksman and so forth, but there was being true to your dream, and then there was missing the forest for the trees.

Yes, he had used those words. Yes, they had been meant to harken back to Enel's priests. It had worked, Laki's mutter of "But I like guns" notwithstanding, anyway.

Still, Laki did have one major point they needed to address. "We need more dials if you're looking for me to become some kind of area control expert," Laki had grumbled before brightening. "Then again, we're already making plans to try to get Nami up to Weatheria. When we're able to, it will definitely be time for two birds with one stone."

The crew's other gunner, Makino, had also not come along. In her case, though, it was simply because her training was going great and Luffy hadn't even bothered asking if she

wanted to. She had succeeded in imbuing some of her bullets with the unstable haki attacks the Kuja could imbue into their arrows and had begun to practice using them consecutively with her Gun Fu. She had even beaten Franky in a spar by springing it on him from point-blank range.

Shaking his head, Luffy returned to the here and now as Rayleigh joined them on the bridge. "Thanks again for coming along to do the bubble coating for us, Rayleigh. I know we've got more than enough money to pay someone else to do it, but after everything that happened with Whitebeard's War, even with how weak they are right now, the Marines probably wouldn't be able to ignore my crew and me if we spend too much time in the Archipelago."

"I think you would be remarkably surprised at how willing the Marines would be to try to make trouble for you, regardless of the show of force you put on, or rather, directly because of it." Rayleigh chuckled. "But this trip also serves a purpose for me as well. I want to check in with some of my friends out there."

"And by that you mean what, exactly?" Vivi asked, smiling politely at the older man. "I almost get the impression that you are speaking about a spy network of some kind when you say the word friends, Rayleigh-san."

"You would be correct in that, dear princess. Few of them would actually call themselves spies or informants, but between a real espionage network and simply a large group of friends who pass on information in ways that can't be tracked... well, what is the difference there, exactly?" Rayleigh chuckled.

That caused Luffy to smile. For some reason, the idea that this old pirate, who the World Government would probably have, before Whitebeard's War forced them to reevaluate their priorities, given a left arm and a leg to hang, had a wide network of acquaintances and others still willing to pass on information, tickled his funny bone. "Let me guess, pirates, bandits, information brokers? Heck, I've never been too clear about how many of Roger's old pirate crew actually survived."

"Oh, there're a few of us around; any more than that would be telling, wouldn't it?" Rayleigh answered laconically, before smirking a little. "And it's not actually just old pirates and others. I've made friends with royalty, not just Princess Vivi here, but a few kings in the New World and even a few ex-marines."

Both Luffy and Vivi stared at him in shock, and Rayleigh's smile widened a little as he pointed at Luffy. "One of them is a name you might actually know, considering who your grandfather is and the fact that the man was part of his crew for some time. Bogard."

"No shit?!" Luffy exclaimed, his eye going wide as old memories resurfaced. "Thin guy, goes around wearing a fedora, likes to wear an officer's cloak over a suit, damn good swordsman? Likes to carry around a bag of sour sweets to fake out anyone wanting to call him out on a tobacco addiction? Is that who you mean?"

“Yes indeed, although I hadn’t heard the sour sweets thing,” Rayleigh guffawed. “Bogard and I had a bit of a rivalry going on at the same time that Garp and Roger had theirs, but it was never personal between us. Frankly, we bonded more than we fought simply over how crazy our captains were. And then, well...”

Rayleigh sobered a bit, shaking his head. “At some point nearly a decade ago, Bogard was promoted off of Garp’s crew. He then ran face-first into the seedier side of the marines. After that, he chose to retire as soon as he could get away with doing so.” Rayleigh chuckled. “If Zoro were here, he might like to know that Bogard had been the greatest swordsman among the marines, but prior to his retirement, he lost a duel with Gion.”

He sighed, faintly. “That and, as I said, Sengoku badly underestimated how he would react when he discovered some of the more duplicitous, self-serving things the Marines have been up to. He did his duty, he followed orders and then when Bogard hit sixty-five, decided to retire. As far as the Marines are aware, the man did just that, returning to his home island and settling down. Hah! He even got married despite his advancing years to some sweet young thing.” Rayleigh coughed. “Although I would prefer you not to mention that to Shaky? She still gets annoyed at times when she remembers that she and I haven’t actually had a wedding or anything.”

“Fufufu, that very much sounds like a ‘you’ problem, Rayleigh-san,” Robin answered, smiling in a seemingly friendly manner but yet with something to her smile that caused Luffy and Rayleigh to flinch. “While our circumstances forestall any such thing for me, Hancock, Vivi and Luffy, surely at this point in your lives, there is no reason for you and Shaky to not be tied together in such a manner? Unless, that is, you still have some horrible idea that you are able to, *ahem* play the field, so to speak? Despite not having any ‘play’ to speak of, and Shaky being very much a woman who would geld you for doing so?”

While Rayleigh grimaced at Robin’s words, Luffy attempted to ignore her scary attitude, whistling faintly. “Damn... I was still living aboard Garp’s ship when Bogard was promoted out of his crew. I learned a lot of curse words that day, and not just from my old man, either. Still, it doesn’t surprise me that anyone who was in Gramp’s sphere of influence for so long would object to some of the stuff the Marines have to do.”

Personally, as he had an entire other world’s history to fall back on, Luffy never really held it against the rank-and-file marines when they were ordered to do the World Government’s dirty work to keep its power and only a bit of resentment when it came to things like the whole allowing slaves thing. They were just following orders. It was why he’d had nightmares about what he’d done in Whitebeard’s War for a time.

“While fascinating, that actually brings up an interesting point. You’re helping us out tremendously now, Rayleigh, and as long as we keep training on Kuja Lilly and elsewhere, we will have access to you and through your information network. But perhaps we should think about creating a means with which to communicate in the future?” Robin mused, having

remained quiet up to this point, directing a long line of hands to carry her and Vivi's trunks down into the ship. Considering that meant going down a ladder from the bridge, that was a bit more concentration-intensive than it would have been otherwise.

"I've been thinking about that since Luffy's trip to Alabasta, and it's going to become more and more important. Now, I have a contact among the Revolutionary Army, so if I have Luffy's permission to name-drop, I might be able to get us a pair of their White Den Den Mushi. Those things piggyback on other Mushi networks, and their signals can go completely undetected. Don't ask me anything about how they're bred, though," Rayleigh snorted. "That's one secret no Revolutionary who actually knows about those things will ever give up. Say what you will about the man, but your father's always been able to instill an insane level of loyalty in his followers."

Luffy scowled a little. While he could get behind some of the ideals that the RA espoused, he didn't like the idea of all-out war like they were pushing for, and, well, he had a lot of personal issues with his old man, and not just because he had foisted Luffy off on Garp. Too often when he looked at things with the RA, well, it seemed as if they sometimes leaned too far toward the idea of the end justifying the means when it came to fighting the WeeGee and keeping their secrets.

Still, Luffy wasn't going to let that get in the way of a good idea. "It's not a bad idea. If ya can't talk to my old man, talk to Sabo, he'll jump at it. As for the tattooed skank, he might love the idea of trying to get an alliance out of me and Hancock. Although getting a pair of White Den Den Mushi to you is gonna be another thing."

"Leave that to me. Well, me and Franky," Rayleigh said with a snicker. "I've already thought of a way to do that, and if things line up well, I might have those Den Den Mushi by the time you return from Fishman Island."

Shaking his head at that, Luffy moved over to the speaking tubes, calling down into it as Sandersonia moved to the wheel. "Franky, Sanji, you two ready to go?"

Franky was the first one to answer from the engine room. He'd come aboard earlier that day to install a pair of batteries for the engine. That was a work in progress, as Luffy had told him how the batteries on the Swallow had basically been worn out by Luffy's lightning powers, but such batteries were one way to allow the ship to keep using the lightning-based engine rather than rely on steam power, while Luffy was away doing other things. Franky would also be making more changes to the internal area of this ship on this trip, both inside the engine room and the bridge, to allow Luffy to stay on the bridge to empower the engines rather than be in the engine room, and a few other changes to various rooms aboard the ship, requests from other crewmembers and so forth. He was also coming along to meet with Tom, his teacher's brother, who lived on Fishman Island.

“Captain, batteries are fully installed and ready to go,” Franky reported. “I had to change the starboard bulkhead of the engine room to make room for the batteries, like I told you I would, but the energy siphon and gathering points are still the same. I even installed that chair like you wanted.”

“Great work, Franky. Sanji?”

Sanji’s time over the past few days had not changed overmuch since the revelations about why the Kujas were avoiding him had come out. Even with some of the older Kujas, those who had given birth before, tried to inform their younger fellows about the reality of the birds and the bees, none of them wanted anything to do with Sanji or any of the other men in Luffy’s crew. Indeed, only the awe and veneration that Hancock held in the eyes of her people had kept her from being questioned about her and Luffy’s relationship.

Yet, his lack of attention from the local ladies had finally spurred Sanji to do the one thing he hated most in the world, right up there with being nice to Zoro. He had finally been forced to join the free-for-all spars on Rusukaina and fight Hancock seriously. He’d gotten his ass kicked, but had at least gone all out on her, which in turn meant Luffy had allowed him to join them on this trip to Fishman Island and hopefully greener pastures for the flirty cook.

Thus, it was no surprise to Luffy that his cook sounded almost raveningly eager to leave. “We’re fully stocked up here in the larder, Captain, with everything stowed properly,” Sanji reported, his words mockingly formal as he followed Franky’s serious tone. The shipwright took everything to do with launching ships or leaving port seriously, while Sanji would probably prefer to bite through metal than treat Luffy’s position with respect normally. “We won’t even need to go shopping in the archipelago, although I would like to do so for spices if at all possible.”

“It will be interesting to see what the prices of spices and so forth are. Small-scale luxury goods like that are always a good denominator of how overall trade is doing,” Vivi murmured. She was along as a diplomatic officer, and Luffy smiled at her, causing her to smile back even as she leaned sideways into Robin’s side. “I think that sounds like an excellent idea, Sanji-san.”

“Thank you, most gracious princess! Your company on this journey, along with Sandersonia’s and Robin-chwan’s, will make any day a perfect one, even if it is storming and thundering out!” came Sanji’s reply, and Luffy rolled his eyes.

“In that case, Robin, untie the mooring lines. Eve, raise the anchor,” Luffy ordered. After a moment, Robin nodded to indicate that the ropes tying the *Everlasting Resolve* to the docks had been removed. Eve, on the other hand, didn’t reply, and Luffy frowned a little before Robin, once more using your Devil Fruit powers, reported, “The anchor is up. Perhaps Eve just doesn’t want to appear while Rayleigh is around? Even if he knows about her, he isn’t crew.”

“Yeah, but she’d normally at least, you know, whispered in my ear or something.” Luffy was currently by the bridge’s portside bulkhead, so something like that should have been easy for the klabautermann. “Ya think she’s still salty about us using the Swallow?”

Robin blinked at that, then shook her head. Neither she nor Luffy nor even Vivi noticed that several small objects around the room has started to shake and quiver as the chairs or tables underneath them rocked, and even the wheel under Sandersonia’s hand had begun to twitch. “Surely not. It’s been days since you returned after all.”

Rayleigh chuckled, but said nothing. Even the Oro Jackson hadn’t ever developed a klabautermann, so he had no idea about Eve’s personality. It didn’t take a genius to assume that such a spirit could be very petty indeed, though. Now, he was looking forward to seeing how the little spirit would make its displeasure at its captain’s betrayal known. *It will make for good theater at least, even if Eve will go out of... its... hers?... way to not appear before me personally.*

The engine revved beneath them, causing a throbbing noise to fill the bridge for a second before it settled down into a pleasant hum as the propellers began to move. Shortly, the Everlasting Resolve was moving off and away from the docks.

Luffy looked out one of the bridge’s windows, waving his hand towards Chopper and Brook, the only two who had been able to see them off. Hancock had wanted to, but, well, Luffy had gone above and beyond on her the night before, and she was still either asleep or loudly complaining about how his endurance was so much higher than her own.

They had been joined, oddly enough, by Perona, who seemed to be talking to Brook about something even as all three of them waved at the ship.

Robin and Vivi moved to stand by the windows, waving back for a moment before Robin stepped back and moved towards the hatch, heading elsewhere in this ship. Vivi stayed for a moment, looking back at Perona’s slowly dwindling form thoughtfully. “I wonder how that is going to go. Her and Zoro’s relationship, I mean. I know they said they would break it off when we all were ready to head to the New World, but saying such and ending a relationship without acrimony are two different things.”

“Oh, beauteous flower of the desert, could I please ask you not to speak of such things in my presence?” Sanji asked, coming up from the galley directly below the bridge. “It pains me on a soul-deep level to know that Zoro has been able to keep a relationship with a woman and yet I have not. Truly, the world is a strange and at times horrible place.”

Vivi giggled at that, while Rayleigh clicked his fingers, pointing at Luffy. “By the way, at some point on this trip, you and I are going to sit and talk about this ki business of yours, and what it has to do with the soul. I had wanted to listen to your and Brook’s discussion on that point a few days back, but Shaky demanded my help on that training course she was setting up for your navigator.”

"Mmm... ki doesn't really mean the soul so much as a reflection of that, as built on the life force of an individual, but yeah, that could be interesting. Don't think we'll all just be lounging about while we sail, though. We'll be training just as much on board ship as we were back on Amazon Lily. There might not be enough space on deck for a full spar, but at least half of us can take to the air," Luffy warned. "That includes you, old man."

"In that case, let us split the topic into several different conversations and begin now." As Amazon Lily started to fade behind them, Rayleigh and Luffy sat down facing one another, and Sandersonia set course for the archipelago. "One thing I have noticed with interest is that you call your life energy ki, a rather simple name, but one that has interesting connotations when we consider haki. Tell me, are you able to use your ki attacks while covered in Busoshoku? Have you tried to imbue a ki attack with Busoshoku or Haoshoku or vice versa?"

The following conversation was indeed quite fascinating, drawing in Sanji and Sandersonia alike. Vivi excused herself, having had numerous discussions about haki and ki with Luffy before while aboard the Swallow. She also had certain... plans... that she wished to talk to Robin about for the trio's first night without Luffy's need to concentrate on Hancock to consider.

Meanwhile, the discussion shifted to battle auras, the connection between that and life energy, and how Sanji had seemingly created his own in the form of Diable Jambe.

"In fact, Sanji, you might well become the first one among the crew to create your own ki attacks. I'm not saying you will. Ace and Sabo both received some of the same training as I did," *because I trained them*, Luffy mentally added, "and neither of them was able to use any kind of ki attack either. Although their ability to recover from wounds is well above the norm."

"Actually, people who use Busoshoku oftentimes do seem to have an ability to heal from things that they otherwise should not be able to, above and beyond their simple durability," Rayleigh murmured. "I know the wound on my face should have resulted in a far worse scar, for example, although I've never heard of any of them regrowing fingers or limbs as you say ki could allow you to. Further, I've never heard of anyone directly controlling such a healing ability..."

Rayleigh trailed off, his thoughts and mind far away for a moment. "I've never heard of any with Busoshoku being able to heal or correct physical ailments. If that was altogether possible, the world would be a very different place." *Simply because my old captain might well be alive still. The greatest pirate that had ever lived, the strongest fighter the world has ever seen, was brought down by a disease of the bones and blood that even the finest doctors couldn't solve*, Rayleigh thought sadly, an old pain going through him.

After a second, he shook it off, pointing to Sandersonia. "I wonder what the ability to manipulate your own life energy would do for a Zoan like yourself, my dear. You already have incredible regeneration abilities. Could a skill like this be able to make you effectively simply heal from any wound almost instantaneously?"

The conversation meandered from there, and all of them had a fun time. Robin, Franky and Vivi rejoined them for their first dinner out on the ship before retreating, with the conversation continuing. Luffy came away from it with only a few things he wanted to look into with his Busoshoku and ki, but Sanji and Sandersonia both got a lot out of it.

In particular, the pair would get a lot out of using meditation to get in touch with their ki, something that Luffy hadn't really been pushing his crew to do before this, since he knew that building up ki to the point it was usable was a long-term thing.

But now that they were going to be spending a lot of time simply training, it seemed like a good idea for Sanji to follow up on that. Luffy had been very much telling the truth when he thought that Sanji would be the first one to create a ki attack.

Better, I think that there might be something to this whole Busoshoku plus ki attack thing. I kind of shifted away from using ki attacks when I got my Devil Fruit, but if I take the concept of Emission Style Busoshoku, which Rayleigh has been talking to me, Zoro and Hancock about, to its conclusion, then there's no way to say that I can't imbue a ki attack with my Busoshoku. Or at least my Haoshoku. Similarly, I might be able to do the same to my lightning. Give it a little extra hit, you know? I don't quite see the purpose of that one, but it's still a fascinating idea. Especially when I might be stuck in my female form and not have access to my Devil Fruit powers. I definitely do not want to come to rely too much on my Devil Fruit powers for long-range, really deadly attacks.

However, all thoughts about ki, haki and training went out of Luffy's mind as soon as he opened the door to the captain's quarters. Naturally, he knew that Robin and Vivi would be sharing those quarters with him, along with Hancock when she was aboard, but that logical conclusion was a far cry from actually seeing Robin and Vivi, currently making out on the bed. *And what the hell are they wearing?!*

Lime start:

Robin was the one currently sitting on a corner of the bed, her legs spread to either side of Vivi as the shorter woman (despite her age, Vivi certainly checked all the boxes to be called a woman rather than a girl) pressed into her. From his vantage point by the door, Luffy couldn't see much of what his older lover was wearing, save that it included a set of stockings that rose high up her thighs. White fishnet stockings to be precise, which stood out starkly against her tanned skin. Her tan had even deepened in color on Amazon Lily. The contrast was incredibly erotic to Luffy's eyes, to say nothing of how those legs were spread out around Vivi at present.

For her part, Vivi was wearing, well, it looked like she had smuggled a maid's outfit aboard the Swallow back in Alabasta. It certainly was no French maid outfit. Indeed, Luffy would have said the normal purple outfit, which was just a purple short-sleeved dress with white frills around the neck and sleeves, was designed to be asexual. Which, considering it must have been worn by Terracotta when she was younger, was undoubtedly a good thing.

However, on Vivi and her toned, fit body, the normal purple dress had been shortened significantly from this angle and made to hug her curves in a way the original hadn't. Added to the maid outfit was a black choker around her neck, under which Luffy could see Robin had worked one finger, which she had probably used to pull Vivi into the kiss the two were currently sharing.

Nearby, a book lay forgotten on the bed, while in the reading nook above, Luffy saw several bits of clothing dangling off the side and thus into his line of sight.

"Guh..." he merely grunted, shaking his head from side to side, as he stepped inside, closing the hatch behind him. "I, heh, uh, I see you two are having fun."

Hearing his voice, Vivi started, and Robin's hands on her shoulders twitched, but Robin did not allow the younger woman to pull back from the ferocious tongue-dueling kiss the pair was sharing. When she did finally allow Vivi to take a step back, Robin leaned around her to give Luffy a look. "Well, I had to do something with my time while you were showering attention on Hancock these past few days, so Vivi and I planned out a bit of a play for us tonight."

She frowned pensively, even as her eyes twinkled. "I have to admit to some jealousy on that score."

Luffy flinched a little at that, taking that mock complaint seriously. "Yeah, I'm sorry about that, Robin, Vivi. I should've been spending as much time as I could with you too, to make up for all the time I spent with Vivi on the trip to Alabasta. But with this trip and Hancock needing to stay behind, I thought that spending most of my time with her just made sense. Er, you agreed with that too."

"Oh, I did, and I do not regret spending time with Hancock before you returned or even all four of us together, as I am still exceptionally attracted to her as well as our little princess maid here." Robin giggled as she gently twirled the blushing Vivi around to face Luffy, showing that some further liberties than Ranma had seen from the back had been taken with her outfit. After all, the normal Alabastan maid outfits didn't allow for her breasts to be bare, nor was there a small patch down below to allow anyone easy access to her bare womanhood. "Your alternate female form woke me up to the joys of a woman's touch, and Hancock is an **amazing** woman that I both deeply respect and admire. It is simply that we will need to better allocate our time going forward so that we can all be satisfied and have our Luffy time, and she is not as giving a lover as she will need to be."

Robin then stood up, gently pushing Vivi ahead of her, the still silent girl blushing rosily as Luffy took her body in, her heart pounding in her chest. Of course, this wasn't even the second, not even the fifth time that Luffy had seen her, but somehow Vivi didn't think seeing the desire and love in Luffy's eyes or even in Robin's eyes before this would ever get old. Better, this was one of her particular fantasies they were following at present, just like that night on Alabasta when Luffy had snuck into her room.

The fact that Robin had a similar idea had made it even better, and the two of them had conspired to make this night one to remember, something that Robin followed up on now. "Speaking of being satisfied, I believe as mistress of the house, that myself and our little maid here should see to your desires first, darling~."

Hearing that, Luffy's mouth scrunched up. While he had been alright with hearing that term over the Den Den Mushi, in person, the term 'darling' reminded him too much of Shampoo for a moment. Yet he fought through the revulsion of that memory, simply watching as the pair of women moved towards him.

This might have been because Vivi had moved forward enough to allow Robin to stand up, and she had moved to the side of the shorter girl, thus allowing Luffy to see what else his darker-skinned lover was wearing. Robin wore a white corset, one of the things that women in the olden days of Europe wore underneath their dresses, which completely covered her stomach and sides, squeezing. The top of the corset only came up to the bottom of her breasts and seemed to be made of some kind of hard leather, which acted like a pair of cupping hands to present Robin's larger breasts as if they were on a platter to Luffy's eyes.

She had done something to her nipples, or perhaps Vivi had previously, because they, just like Vivi's smaller, pinker ones, were very much standing at attention, so much so that they were almost demanding to be sucked and nibbled on further. Unlike Vivi, she also had panties on. They were white to match the rest of her outfit, but sheer, barely hiding her womanhood from his gaze. On Robin's arms, she had also put on leather bracers. Overall, she looked like a cross between a Victorian-era woman ready for a night of debauchery with her lover mixed with a BDSM mistress vibe, although she lacked any of the props for such beyond her clothing.

Which, frankly, Luffy was happy about. "Um... wow... You two look amazing. I mean, ya always do, you've got that fashion down pat, but this is... amazing. Although I'm glad you didn't take the whole mistress thing too far, Robin. I'm okay with, er, a bit of rear-smacking or biting, but I'd draw the lines at using any, um, objects like paddles or anything else."

"Oh, I knew that after our talks and previous nights together. I also can't take all the credit for this outfit. My discussions with Vivi have expanded my desire to roleplay over the past few days, even if I was the one to put these outfits together." Robin giggled and then exchanged a glance with Vivi, sultry smiles on their faces as they saw the impact their wardrobes had on Luffy.

Quite literally, as was very obvious given the tent showing in his pants at present. *This is going to be good!* Robin exulted, feeling her lower lips starting to become slick with arousal. *I am so grateful that Vivi has such an adventurous frame of mind, as well as being so pliable in bedroom matters.*

Vivi's thoughts dovetailed with Robin's, albeit moving in a slightly different direction. *Hehehe, I knew Luffy would like this. That night we had in Alabasta might've been more*

spontaneous than this, but I know we both enjoyed it. Hmm... I wonder if I can convince Hancock-sama to dress up, although there are very few parts I think she could actually act out in comparison to Robin and me. Perhaps Robin could be the slave woman next time, an unwilling rather than willing slave to Hancock's mistress? Or perhaps the primitive queen and the daring explorer? If we find any ruins at any point, I wager that would get Robin's juices going something fierce.

The pair of women set such thoughts aside for now as they continued towards the still stunned-looking Luffy. That made Robin's smile widen slightly, always amused and thoroughly enjoying every time she could make Luffy act like a stunned horse with her body. The number of times they made love couldn't exactly be counted on one hand by this point, but every time Robin showed off her body to Luffy, it was always the same: that look of awe, veneration almost, mixed with raw desire and other softer emotions all rolled into one. *Is it any wonder that I love this man?*

Luffy didn't move as the two women moved towards him, sensing he was also supposed to act a part. "I do indeed think that you both should be putting more effort into... please me?" he hesitated over the words, but judging by the twinkle in Robin's eyes and cherubic smile that replaced Vivi's more sultry ones, it worked well enough.

"Mmm... you are quite right, my love. Let me be the first to welcome you home, husband," Robin whispered, reaching forward.

Luffy didn't fight it when Robin reached out and gently pulled on his chin to drag him into a kiss. Instead, he deepened it. One arm gently wound around Robin, pulling her to his left side and chest. His hand fell to Robin's rear, whereupon a thought went through Luffy's mind, *of course it's a T-back, why wouldn't it be*, as he felt no cloth under his hand as it gripped one of her buttocks, squeezing.

Nor did he argue as Vivi as her hands fiddled with the button on his pants, whispering, "Let me help you out of your clothing master~," her voice low with an almost mockingly subservient tone, although Luffy could still detect a good deal of arousal there.

The look in her eyes, however, was full of desire, and as Luffy glanced her way, he let his other hand come up to gently stroke Vivi's cheek, causing her to sigh and lean into his touch even as her hands continued to work on pulling out his belt, unbuttoning his vest. "Yes, my dear, that would be a good idea, while I tend to your mistress."

With that, Luffy turned his attention back to Robin, his lips seeking hers. The pair continued to make out for a time, with Luffy doing everything he could to pull a series of moans out of Robin with just his lips, while Robin started to conjure up hands all over Luffy and Vivi. Nor were Luffy's hands idle; one hand continuing squeezing Robin's ass, shifting from one rear cheek to the other, before dipping down below to slowly slide between her legs, and then back again, causing Robin to twitch and moan as he found her soaking womanhood, while his other

hand had moved to play with one of Vivi's breasts even as she continued to work on removing his clothing.

For her part, Vivi's self-appointed task was going quite slowly, as she wasn't all that good at blocking out Luffy's ministrations while concentrating on something else. She slowed further when one of Robin's hands caught one of hers, forcing it to remain on Luffy's chest, feeling his muscles, the mix of smooth skin over muscles, along with the scars there. Those scars weren't as bad as the ones on his arms, where the Lichtenberg scars from his fight with Enel remained, but they still showed the harsher side of a lifetime spent training in The Art.

Not that any of his girlfriends cared. Indeed, Vivi had once lavished attention on each of his cars, kissing them one after another, before finding herself hoisted into the air and eaten out by Luffy at the time.

At the moment, Luffy was debating on doing just that maneuver to Robin, when they were interrupted.

End Lime

Eve shifted up and out of the floor, reminding them of her presence for the first time, with a shout of, "And of course! The first time you're back aboard me, you spend it with all this stupid fleshy stuff rather than actually sailing your ship!"

This had the equivalent of a bucket of water on a normal person's libido in the case of Vivi, who hopped away from the other two, quickly covering herself and staring at Eve in shock. Luffy could have told Vivi that, for all the fact that she had the smallest chest of his three lovers, one arm was not going to cut it, but the look in Eve's expression drew his attention, while Robin simply took a few steps backwards, staring at the spirit in some consternation. Also a decent amount of anger, despite Eve being a valued crewmate. *Being interrupted like this had best not become a habit!*

In an attempt to stave off that anger, Luffy quickly spoke up. "We're not actually sailing, I mean, I know that's the term that everyone uses, but perhaps steaming would be a more accurate way of putting it?" *Gah, why the hell did I say that?!*

This joke served to make Robin pause what she had been about to say, but as Luffy had feared, his lame joke seemed only to add more fuel to the fire in Eve's case. "The term doesn't matter! You go off with Vivi out on an adventure of your own, sailing not just the Calm Belt, which would've been bad enough, but a portion of the Grand Line, in that small, dinky ship that Franky made! When you are **my** Captain! When you're supposed to be sailing **me!**"

For a moment, the furious glare from the young-looking spirit had Luffy snorting internally. *Good grief, this reminds me of seeing some of those online videos Mom liked at one point, where they test whether or not a dog can smell another dog on their owner.*

Eve's next words and the furious poke at his chest a second later made Luffy think that thought comparison was even more accurate than he had first thought. "You're the captain! You're **my** Captain. It's not like, well, it's not like you're my owner or my master or er, what are they called, my dad, but you are still the most important crewmember, the one who I'm tied to the most! You can't just go on other ships and captain them too, even if you're only doing it with a few of the crew. That's not how this works. It freaking hurt knowing you were out there on another ship!"

"While I am sorry our leaving in such a manner hurt you, Eve, I think you are not looking at this in the right way. To start with, I would not even call the Swallow a ship," Vivi said diplomatically. Getting over her own irritation and embarrassment, faster than either of the other two, she moved to rest one hand lightly on Eve's shoulder. She was astonished, as always, that Eve could simply create a body like this out of nothing solid enough to not only interact with the rest of her physical form but also be interacted with by the crew in general. "I would call it more of an away boat than anything else, given its size and how few people could stay aboard it for any amount of time. Certainly, there's no way that ship could ever create a spirit like you, is there? Wouldn't you have seen signs of it when we returned?"

That calmed Eve down a little, but she was still glaring up at Luffy angrily, and Vivi went on. "Also, if we had known that seeing your crew travel on other ships was something that actually hurt klabautermann we would never have done it in the first place. Luffy and I would have come up with another way to get to Alabasta."

"I... didn't know that either," Eve confessed, calming down further, looking a little lost for a moment. "In a way we're in, well, reallllly rare territory here, and we klabautermann are spirits. We don't exactly meet one another often enough to, er, have any real idea of things like this. Normally, by the time a klabautermann has formed, the physical ship's already dying, so seeing our crew leave on another ship is normally a good thing. But this really wasn't."

Eve shook her head, turning to poke Luffy in the chest again, her finger giving distinctly wooden stick vibes to Luffy for a second. "I don't mind being left in dock for days on end or not having many of the crew around to interact with. I'm a ship's spirit; that kind of thing is normal for us. Seeing the two of you going off on another ship like that, that was just wrong, painful and wrong. It, it felt like I was being left behind despite being perfectly in shape to keep sailing. Don't do it again!"

Now feeling a little guilty they hadn't even asked Eve what she might think about his and Vivi taking another ship to Alabasta, Luffy caught her poking hand again, shaking his head. "I promise we won't leave you behind again, Eve, although I will warn you that at least Nami and Laki might be heading up to Sky Island territory again with Rayleigh and Shakky. The plans for that are still in the works, but it's doubtful that a ship like ours, one that is going to be world-famous soon if it isn't already, would be usable there. They'll need to pass through former Whitebeard territory without drawing attention."

Eve scowled a bit, but eventually nodded reluctant agreement, and Luffy continued. "I promise that we will use you to head into North Blue, though."

That caused Eve to blink. "I thought we were going to Shabondy Archipelago?"

"That's what we're doing now, darling," Robin said, and Luffy reflected that using the term darling for Eve did not give him the small case heebie-jeebies it had when Robin had used it on him a moment before. "But in the future, Rayleigh's plans for Franky's training include a portion of our crew heading into North Blue to a few islands he's learned of that might have a higher than average technological and industrial level."

"Yeah, the crew at that point will probably be me, Franky, Zoro and Perona, with Rayleigh as our navigator, rather than Nami or Sandersonia if the plan for Nami heading up to Weatheria starts to come together fast enough. That'll be the first time most of us are going to be in North Blue, and that kind of adventure, of course, we're going to take the ship that Franky made to travel the entire world, you know?" Luffy added.

"... It feels like you're bribing me, and I'm kind of okay with it, but I am serious. No more taking week-long trips on other ships, Luffy or any of you," Eve growled. "I am not dealing with the feeling of pain, jealousy and... well, fraying, I guess, is the best I can put it, again."

While the three lovers exchanged confused and worried glances, wondering what that phrase meant in terms of a klabautermann, Eve grinned suddenly. "I interrupted you now more to get your attention than to prank you, but you do **not** want to make me angry at any of you. You have no idea what a spirit like me could do. Chopper and Sanji may think they can cause pranks with access to food or medicine, but they've got nothing on the creature who literally controls the deck you're standing on and everything else aboard."

"All right, yeah, that's suitably scary for you to win the argument, Eve," Luffy muttered, still a bit worried but deciding not to push Eve on what that last term meant right now. Instead, he changed the subject a bit, hoping to put Eve in an even better mood. "Speaking of which, we should probably actually test out our secondary guns more on this trip, and have Eve practice with them."

It worked. As should be expected from any spirit that was made up of the amalgamated personalities of Luffy and his crew, Eve was more than a bit bloodthirsty. Her expression shifted instantly, with her hair actually moving to create little devil horns for a second, something that Luffy and the others hadn't seen before but took in stride now.

"Heck yes!" she exclaimed. "I bet Franky can make up some markers or make a few floating targets for me to shoot at. And if we run into any marines or pirates who're stupid enough to mess with us and we don't want to use the main gun for any reason, I'd love some practice shooting our secondaries. Robin's done it a time or two when it comes to aiming and

firing, while I've only been using my powers to help her reload. Actually shooting the things would be awesome!"

"No worries about doing too much for a klabautermann? I remember that we actually had a discussion on that score at one point, Eve, how you didn't think you could attack other ships or people directly," Robin said, frowning a little, although not because of concerns for Eve. Indeed, given how excited Eve was, that question was probably more pro-forma than anything else. That, and Robin knew that Eve had begun to leave behind normal klabautermann limitations a while back, possibly as far back as her transfer into the Everlasting Resolve.

No, Robin's frown was because she noticed that Luffy's 'staff' was finally starting to flag, his body finally catching up to the fact that the moment's mood had shifted. This was not at all in keeping with her night's plans, and she subtly created an arm on his back, reaching down to give his rear a fondle.

The little jump this won her from Luffy caused Robin to nearly giggle, but she kept her eyes on Eve, not reacting at all. *If there is one thing that might Devil Fruit has taught me, it is to multitask like a champion... And you know what? I think I need to fondle Luffy's rear more often. Good grief, but he really does have a delectable body, doesn't he?*

As her ministrations continued, Luffy twitched and gulped a little, but thankfully, Eve had turned away from him and was making punching motions, grinning to herself evilly. "Heck no! Even back on Water 7 in my original body, I was able to make trouble for those idiot Franky family guys when they came aboard. Now, I feel as if I can way more! Hitting some of our enemies, or just some marine idiots who get in our way? That sounds like something I could do, and enjoy too! POW, BAM!"

At any other point, if he wasn't feeling the hands of Robin on his butt, and a pair of lips suddenly appearing behind his ear, her tongue flicking out to lick at it, Luffy might have wondered exactly what kind of changes had gone on in Eve's spirit when she had been transferred fully onto the ship, as before that, she had not liked the idea of fighting marines. After all, half of her spirit had been created from memories of being a marine ship before the Straw Hats stole her. That was well in the past by this point, and bluntly, Luffy did not, in point of fact, have enough concentration to ignore Robin's ministrations.

Nor did Vivi, who might well have questioned her on this point as well, despite Eve's apparent enthusiasm for the idea of shooting at someone personally. In her case, her lack of concern was due to several fingers having been conjured up on her back. How Robin was able to do so without actually seeing her back, thanks to Vivi's wearing her hair loosely at the moment, Vivi had no idea, but the subtle touches were definitely doing the job of keeping her in the mood.

Yet despite Robin's distracting him, Luffy was able to push forward one more thought, more in hopes that it would move Eve along and get her not only even happier with them, but

also to leave the trio alone at the moment. *Is this what being a father is like? You want to have sexy times with your wife, but then the kid demands attention?* “Is there anything that, you know, you want we can pick up as a present, to um, to er, apologize?”

“Hmmm...” Eve stopped her punching motions for a moment, one finger rising up to tap at her chin thoughtfully, a move that came from Robin so much that it really made Luffy twitch, considering his thoughts a second ago. “Other than a chance to actually fire at some idiots, and maybe some sweets, I don’t know. I’ll get back to you. For now, I suppose I can officially say you’re off the hook, Cap’n, but don’t let it happen again!”

With that, Eve disappeared, her form literally becoming see-through before disappearing down into the deck at the trio’s feet.

For a moment, the trio remained where they were, looking at one another, then Luffy grabbed Robin again, pulling him into her, her breasts pressing into his chest as he kissed her ardently.

Lime Start:

The two of them made out for several moments, while more hands appeared all around Vivi, playing with her before Robin pulled back reluctantly, breathing in deeply. “Now now,” she whispered throatily, blessing Luffy’s ability to kiss her just right moment to moment to get her libido going. “It’s not just the two of us, and what did I say earlier? We all need to work on being more giving...”

With that, she reached over and pulled Vivi towards them, before two hands appeared on the girl’s shoulder, pressing her down. “And our sweet maid here deserves to be punished a little bit.”

Luffy was about to ask for what, when Robin went to work on his neck, and his hands automatically found her breasts, while down below, his sagging erection, which had already begun to rise once more due to Robin’s ministrations earlier, became full-masted once more. With a breathy little giggle, Vivi pulled down his underwear, releasing the monster within, and was about to go to town on him, but Luffy suddenly had other ideas, almost certainly coming from the portion of his brain he had labeled Pervuffy. Still, it felt right, and Luffy went with it.

Pulling one hand away from Luffy’s chest to catch her hand as it moved down to Vivi’s head, he pulled it up at the same time he began to dominate their kiss, not letting her pull away. A surprised “MMMmm?!?” was his response, as he did so, shifting back away from Vivi’s questing mouth, causing her to pout.

Vivi was about to shuffle forward to pursue Luffy, but Luffy suddenly pulled back from the kiss with Robin, twirling her around so she was facing Vivi. “Actually, I think that instead of punishing our little maid, Vi-chan and I should make the mistress of the house is seen after.”

Luffy began to nip, bite, kiss and lick at Robin's neck and ear, which he knew from experience really got the tanned woman going. "Why don't you see to that, Vi-chan?"

Blinking, Vivi looked at Robin's tiny panties for a moment, noting there was a small damp spot growing there as Robin moaned, completely unmoved by Luffy's ministrations on her neck and ear, slightly worried. While she, Robin and Hancock had kissed, cuddled and even played with one another's chests, Vivi had yet to go down on either woman. Still, she nodded, and then leaned in, nuzzling into Robin's womanhood, using one hand to create a small cutting blade of hardened sand to cut her panties away.

As she hesitantly licked at Robin's puffy, weeping slit, Vivi suddenly moaned. Luffy had just moved his foot between her knees and was vibrating it in place, just enough to feel it, as he had to her chest and upper body when they had experimented with his powers in the Swallow.
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The next second, Luffy's hand worked its way into her hair, massaging her head gently. "Good girl," he whispered, barely loud enough for Vivi to hear. "What do you think, Robin, isn't she a good girl?"

As Robin whimpered, Vivi let out a little moan and began to dive in enthusiastically, causing the woman to buck her hips. While Vivi had no prior knowledge, not even any book-based knowledge, she was enthusiastic and got even more so when Luffy began to thrust his cock between Robin's thighs, his cock coming to rest against her lips as she pulled back to let her fingers get involved.

A second later, even as Robin shuddered at the feel of Vivi's thin, dexterous fingers entering her, Luffy groaned, feeling Vivi's tongue lick at his cock head. "FUuuuck..." Luffy whispered into Robin's neck. "Such a good girl, and ours, all ours and Hancock's, aren't you?"

Vivi nodded eagerly. "All yours, love you!" she nearly whimpered. Staring up from where she knelt on the deck, her gaze shifted from one to the other, her arousal spiking, her imagination and libido both stoked nicely from the short foreplay.

"We love you too," Robin whispered, smiling down at Vivi, unable to reply in any other way as those soft, loving eyes caught hers.

For his own response, Luffy just leaned down and gave Vivi a kiss. At that point, he decided he was done playing this game, and as he pulled back, he lifted Vivi into the air with one arm, followed by doing the same with Robin. He held them both in the air, kissing them ardently, one after another, as he moved them towards the bed.

End Lime

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Getting to the Red Line had been exceptionally difficult, but Kuma had finally done it. Luckily for him, his new form meant he didn't need to rest or sleep, so after he had smashed up a good bit of the snow-dusted lands of Egghead Island, Kuma had been able to simply pick a direction and go. The weather of the New World had proven exceptionally annoying, but with his thrusters, Kuma had been able to get above most of it, finding a sort of sweet spot just above the first layer of clouds and under the next layer where the White Sea began.

The first island he'd found had not been very helpful, being a primordial island and one with no human settlement. Luckily, he had found some wreckage there of a pirate crew that had been killed by the inhabitants. That gave him a log pose, which he had used to head to the next island, one called Lincola. It had a marine base, and that gave him an Eternal Pose for Marineford. Which, in turn, let him find the Red Line.

Getting up the Red Line had been the next obstacle in his way, a cliff face of solid stone that made every mountain in the world seem small. Thankfully, the only area where people actually lived was quite small, giving him a wide area he could use to get over the top of the Red Line without running into anyone.

However, by doing so, he found that the Holy Knights, Mary Geoise's elite combat force, patrolled the whole of the Red Line. All of them had mastery of the six Rokushiki, letting them fly over the Red Line easily, scanning the ground below for escaped slaves or anything else. Kuma knew even in his current, stronger robotic body, He would lose a fight against any one of them. They also traveled in packs of three, so any such battle would be more of a slaughter than a fight.

Kuma would not give the scum that satisfaction, not after living his life as a slave in Mary Geoise for so long. Not after knowing what they had done to his people, the Buccaneers, whom the Tenryubito had enslaved and then wiped out over generations. Thankfully, his robotic body meant that even Kenbunshoku could not find him very easily. With that and timing it correctly, Kuma was able to get across the top of the Red Line and then down to the ocean below.

Whereupon Kuma was faced with another task; that of figuring out where the Shabondy Archipelago was from where he had come down from the Red Line. "Well... isn't this just ridiculous?" he murmured, looking around the wide, blank ocean all around him. "Still, I know that the nearest Calm Belt is to my left, so if I go the other way, I should eventually discover the Archipelago, or at least get close enough that I might see ships heading there, or some of the markers the marines have made to tell them where the Archipelago is. I can only hope, really."

With a sigh and a mental acknowledgement that his weeks alone had caused Kuma to start to talk to himself more than he normally would to anyone else, Kuma began moving once more, zooming down to ingest some of the ocean water. He had learned that this new robotic body of his somehow turned the salty water of the ocean into fuel. He had no idea how, but it did.

Please let this not be a wasted effort, he thought as he plopped into the ocean, his mouth opening. Please let my Little Jewel still be hanging around Shabondy. Please, Nika, I have never asked for anything, but I ask this now. Let nothing happen to my little girl before I find her. After that, we will decide what to do next, but meeting with Bonney takes priority over everything, even my loyalty to the Revolutionary Army.

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The next morning, any thought the three lovers might have had about sleeping in after a rather vigorous night was for naught. A loud banging on the hatch leading into the captain's quarters came from the hatch, accompanied by Sanji's voice shouting, "Aho-spark, you better leave those ladies alone, you utter bastard, and get out here or you're not going to get breakfast, no, you're not going to get food from my galley at all, bastard!"

The shouting and noise caused Robin, who was a violent sleeper at the best of times, to lash out automatically. From her place between them, Vivi 'eeped' awake at the pain of being kneed in the side, causing her to shift into sand for a moment as Luffy grabbed Robin's flailing hand. It was only the fact that his subconscious couldn't feel any anger or intent behind the flailing arm that stopped Robin from being sent flying. Instead, Robin was pulled into Vivi's sand form before Luffy rolled up and over both of them.

A second later, a bleary-eyed Luffy stood on his feet by the bed, staring at the sand that was still spreading out over the top of the sheets, enveloping Robin as Vivi very slowly came awake. "Er, Vivi, be careful, yeah? That's Robin you've got in your grip there, and she isn't as durable as me."

Vivi's head appeared out of the sand for a brief second, a wicked giggle escaping her as Robin let loose a surprised moan. "Mmm~, I know! Her breasts are much bigger than your female form and more responsive too."

"I know. Intimately." Luffy snickered before shouting, towards the hatch, "Shut up, Maidenless! We'll be there in a bit." With flashbacks going through his mind of the many ways Akane, Nabiki, and Soun had woken him up, to say nothing of Genma, Luffy's filter was definitely set to the off position at present.

"YOU ASSHOLE!" Sanji roared. If it were not for the fact that Sanji knew (all too well) that both Robin and Vivi had spent the night in the captain's quarters, Sanji would have smashed the hatch in and assault Luffy at that point. As it was, he simply steamed, which for most people, as Luffy was currently in the mood to point out, would have simply been crying. "Argh, you, you and your multi-relationship bull-shittery, ca, can't you see what it's like, what it's been like for me?!"

As Vivi slowly reformed and Robin rather reluctantly disentangled herself from the many, if sandy, grasping hands of the princess, Sanji continued to wail. "I, I mean, it, it's been

like being on an ocean composed of all the drinkable water in the world, without being able to reach out and take a sip! An, and then there's you, you bastard, who's got, got access to an all-you-can-drink buffet!"

Sighing, Luffy opened the hatch, stopping it halfway so that neither Sanji nor the girls could see one another. *No one's allowed to see Vivi or Robin naked but me and Hancock, and I really doubt Sanji would like the girls to be able to see him right now.*

"Look, Sanji, I get it, and I understand. What that old bat did or let happen, Nyo-something, right? That was messed up. So was Marguerite and Aphelandra's response to it. But unless you're telling me ya could hear me, Robin and Vivi having fun last night, what we get up to in here isn't any of your business, and ya can't keep complaining about it like this."

A part of Luffy wanted to also point out that he was the captain, and Sanji could not tell Luffy that he couldn't eat something just because it was Sanji's galley. However, even in his current unfiltered frame of mind, Luffy felt that was a step too far. "Now, go on. Me. Robin and Vivi will be there in a minute."

"...Fine, damn it." *I really want to look, but at that same time, I really don't,* Sanji whined mentally. The idea of seeing either lady within the captain's quarters dishabille after a night of pleasure would be something out of a dream, literally, for Sanji. Especially if they were both there. Yet that dream was a nightmare at present since they would be so disheveled and sexy looking because of Luffy's actions, not just one another's, or better yet, Sanji's. "We're having hot cakes and bacon. And if you even attempt to flirt, touch or anything in front of me, I will not be responsible for my actions."

Snorting as he shut the hatch again, Luffy shook his head. "Y'know, I think our bringing Sanji along on this trip is the equivalent of a final intervention before putting someone on suicide watch. He **really** needs to be around girls that he can flirt with without them running away. I thought that kind of thing would've faded since Nyo-whatever was forced to explain things better to the rest of the Kuja, but it didn't."

"I honestly thought Brook would be coming with us for the same reason," Robin confessed as she straightened up from where she had just pulled out some clothing from the dresser she and Luffy shared. Vivi's clothing had yet to be added to it, and was up in the sitting area at present, although her toiletries had joined her lovers in the private bathroom.

"Eh, while Brook's a pervert, he doesn't have the bits necessary for it to be a driving force to that extent anymore. He told me he also was kind of terrified of the whole bubble thing, and needed to psyche himself up more before trying it," Luffy answered. *That, and there are still several Kujas willing to show him his panties. Not that I'm gonna sell the guy out by mentioning it right now.*

“Hmmm...” Robin smiled then as she saw Vivi finish reforming, pulling all the sand away from the bed as she did. “I don’t suppose we won’t have to sweep the bed for sand, will we?” she asked archly, assuming her role from the night before.

Catching that, Vivi bit her lip, winking. “W, well, if there is, I suppose you’d have to punish me, wouldn’t you, mistress?”

“But if you like it, is it really a punishment, hmm~?” Robin teased, while Luffy just chuckled. Looking back on it, the night had gone amazingly well for all three of them, with Vivi getting into her role in their play as much as Robin. She was also a natural submissive in bed, which was a sign she would be the grease that would make Robin, Hancock and Luffy get along without friction in the bedroom.

Or at least, only the fun kind of friction, Robin thought salaciously, still feeling a little horny now that she had been able to recover with a few hours from the night’s activities. That one night she, Luffy, Hancock, and Vivi had shared (well, Vivi was in the same room, and Robin had played with her a bit at least before switching out with Hancock) had not been enough to sate her after weeks of no-Luffy time during the Impel Down infiltration. Even after that, the time they had on their own had been minimal for various reasons.

And if there is one aspect of love-making Luffy has shown no hint of mastering, it is the very concept of quickies. As for Hancock, she is far too demanding for me to keep up with on a nightly basis or anywhere close. While one of us is busy with Luffy, Vivi can be with the other, and everyone is happy.

Luffy looked at Vivi and then reached forward, dragging a finger from her cheek down to her neck, where the choker from the night before remained tight around her neck. “Was keeping this on deliberate?” Luffy had learned back on Alabasta that Vivi could change out of her clothing while in sand form, simply depositing the unwanted clothing to one side and shifting the new articles of clothing into and out of sand form.

Vivi leaned into his hand, smiling faintly. “Yes. I quite like it. I think this choker will become a part of my daily ensemble.”

Shrugging, Luffy leaned in and gave her a kiss before doing the same to Robin. “Well, you do you, I guess. For now, let’s get some food.”

Sanji and the rest of the crew joined them, bar Rayleigh, who was still spelling Sandersonia at the wheel. The Everlasting Resolve had already exited the Calm Belt during the night, so Sandersonia had been able to just let Rayleigh and Franky, who didn’t need much sleep as a cyborg, to watch the wheel once night fell. At this speed, it would take them four days to get to the Shabondy Archipelago, and Sandersonia would need to be ready to help deal with any weather-related issues they ran into.

“Yo, Aniki. Heard from Sanji that you and these lovely ladies had a Suuuper time of it, huh? Glad to also know that I didn’t hear anything about it before Sanji whined at me,” Franky joked.

“Yeah, Franky, you did a super good job on the noise cancellation in the walls and everything,” Luffy winked at the cyborg as he sat down. “Changing the subject, though, is there anything beyond meeting with, er, Dan, Dent, that you wanted to do at Fishman Island?”

“Den, and not really, Cap’n. I mean, I like the ladies too, OW!” Franky explained, posing as much as he could while remaining seated at the table. “And I’m looking forward to meeting some more mermaids like Camie instead of Kokoro...”

“Ugh, don’t remind me of that!” Sanji and Luffy said as one, causing Robin to laugh while Vivi just looked confused.

Franky snorted, but continued on, “But beyond that, nothing much. Oh, I wanna learn more about coating from Rayleigh, but that’ll happen at Shabondy.” He looked at Robin. “What about you, nee-chan? Besides spending time with the Cap’n, what’re you looking for on Fishman Island?”

“From what I have learned, there might be a Poneglyph there,” Robin answered simply. “I am uncertain about what kind, but I am hoping for a historical account, although I doubt it will be the Rio Poneglyph. Even if it is just a locally used one, it could be helpful.”

“Hmm... how long do you think it’ll take you to finish the internal...,” Luffy’s voice slowed down as he saw Franky smirking. “You already finished all the minor changes you had to, didn’t you?”

“Yep. Did the engine room first.” He gestured to the nearby ladder leading up to the bridge. “Up there, you’ll find a small console with two large globes on ‘em set to one side of the wheel near the speaking tubes. That’ll let ya send power down to the engine. The runs aren’t the best they could be since I didn’t have the best conductive material to work with. With everything else we’ve been doing on Amazon Lily, those kinds of metals are in short supply. But it will still let you empower the engine to normal cruising speed; if not combat speed, without damaging the runs to the point they melt away.”

“Nice. But if you’re gonna just be puttering around, Eve and I had a thought about her practicing her gunmanship with the tertiary guns. Can you make up some floating targets? And we might want to look for ways to make those guns more powerful to boot. The Primary gun’s freaking **amazing**, but our secondary weapons and broadside could all be better, I think, and honestly, we’re probably more likely to need to use those guns than the main gun in long-term engagements if enemy ships can keep up with us at all.”

They couldn't, not really, as the *Everlasting Resolve's* cruising speed, that is, the speed it was built to use for long periods of time, was above forty knots, which was way beyond what every other ship could do. Something that Franky was going to point out rather huffily before Eve appeared, shifting up and into being between Robin and Luffy from the wood of the bench, throwing her hands up into the air. "YES! More boom, more pow!"

At that, Franky subsided while the rest laughed at the klabautermann's enthusiasm, which was somewhere between cute and disturbingly bloodthirsty. "Yeah, okay, if it's for the little lady, I bet I can come up with something. I can't rebuild the guns, though, since we don't have any spare dials. What little spares we had, we left with Laki. But I can maybe change up the ammunition to give those guns a greater kick. Make them small explosive rounds rather than simple musket balls. But what do ya mean we won't be using the main gun much?"

"Well, for one thing, even in the New World, I **really** doubt we're gonna face any single ship trying to fight us, not once the Marines and Whitebeard Pirates start spreading rumors about what our ship can do at range. So, we're also more likely to fight enemies who are too small to target at range or who can block or otherwise ignore the main gun. Think people like the main crews of the remaining Yonko or Aokiji," Luffy explained.

"From what I have read, most pirates in the New World fight crew to crew more often than ship to ship," Robin agreed. "The main gun is a game changer when we're faced with nautical combat, but I would say anyone in the New World with a bounty above a hundred and thirty million beli would be able to dodge or block in various ways."

"Then we make 'em block more than one at a time," Eve suggested. "We fire more than one round at a time, or one after another, too quick for most to block."

"Ehh, it could work, but only if the impacts would be enough to hurt the person in question. Someone like my gramps, Sengoku, or others like 'em would just smack our rounds away while using Busoshoku. Even one of them wouldn't want ta be hit without Busoshoku, but it wouldn't be much of a threat," Luffy explained.

"Hmmm... well, let's leave the main gun for now. Like ya said, it's already perfect. Me an' Laki've had several suuuuper talks about guns and stuff, and we could definitely make our tertiary guns better when we have enough resources." Franky reached inside his storage area in his stomach, pulling out a series of plans. The old plan for Pluton had long since been destroyed, letting Franky store other things in there along with his cola. "We'll need more dials for sure, but hey, any work I do on coming up with small explosive rounds now would just make the final version of the gun better."

Eve and the others leaned forward to look at the design, and Sanji snorted. "Hah, so Laki-chwan did go through with the idea of using rotating barrels she got from looking at the gun of that idiot whose face was like my wanted poster."

Luffy nodded dumbly, staring at something that greatly resembled a gun he'd seen in books back home. "Good grief, you recreated a Vulcan rotary cannon," he murmured, so low only Robin and Eve could hear.

Eve ignored the words while Robin looked at her lover speculatively. *I do believe it is time and past for that little talk we've been meaning to have about where all your strange knowledge has come from, my love.*

Sitting across from them, Franky also heard some of what Luffy had said, but only the last two words. "Yeah, we've started to call it a rotary cannon, too. If we can do that, we might want to cut down on the total number of guns, but make them more mobile, able to aim in more directions than just straightaway from the hull."

From there, the conversation segued into a conversation about the Everlasting Resolve's secondary weapons systems. The weather-affecting weapon would, like the changes to the tertiary guns, need to wait for a bit, but Franky was fully on board with the idea of waiting to perfect it. "I don't have enough knowledge about how to impact the weather right now to make such a system work as well as it should," he admitted. "Heck, I'd say that even Laki doesn't have enough know-how when it comes to dials. We'll need to work on that slowly, once Nami's come back or at least has access to Weatheria."

Franky then scowled and slammed a massive hand down on the table. Lightly, to be sure, as the table didn't shatter, but enough to set the remaining plates to rattle. "But replacing my Air Cannon? No way! It might, okay, have nowhere near the distance, but to replace it entirely. Why the heck would we do that?"

"I'm not saying we'll replace it," Luffy soothed. "I'm saying we need to make it more unique, more usable in more situations. We've got the rail gun for really long-range and mid-range single targets. The tertiary guns are for small-scale, close-in targets. The second gun needs to do something different, or else why don't we just build a second rail gun?"

"OOOH! That gets my vote, and since it's my body we're talking about, my vote should weigh a lot more than anyone bar the captain's!" Eve exclaimed, thrusting her hand up again.

"Do we want another weapon we need to rely on Luffy's lightning for?" From where he was putting food away Sanji objected. "That seems silly, given the changes you just made so he can be on the bridge."

"Yeah, I think so too, sorry, Eve." Luffy shook his head. "No, we need another weapon to use at mid-range, one that could maybe hit multiple targets at once." *Missiles are impossible, of course, but still.* "Maybe... what about a gun that can fire ammunition that will explode before it hits a target, and then spreads shrapnel over multiple ships?"

“No chance. The munition would have to be even bigger than the ones used on marine artillery ships,” Franky shook his head. “We wouldn’t even have enough room to house them. Still... a timed fuse... hmmm...” Franky frowned pensively. “I’ll think about it, Luffy. It’s a great idea, and you’re right, having something for mid-range that could hit multiple enemies at once is a good idea. But the air cannon stays, until I can perfect the new design, good?”

“You’re the ship’s carpenter here, man,” Luffy laughed. “I ain’t about to argue with ya on that.”

“SUUUPer right, there, bro!” Franky laughed before looking around. “So what’s on the agenda today?”

“Training as often as the weather allows. Considering this is the Grand Line,” Luffy shrugged. “We should be about it.”

With that, they quickly vacated the galley, heading out onto the deck. Sanji and Franky then began sparring with Luffy, with Sanji coming in close and the two of them fighting it out in the air as Franky used his long-range weapons, practicing his aiming and his own movement skills, as Luffy would zip past Sanji to close with him. Luffy kept from using his lightning powers for now, although Sanji had proven he could take it when it came to lightning bolts in the free-for-all where he had earned the opportunity to leave Amazon Lily for warmer pastures. Franky, on the other hand, well, he was mostly metal in a lot of ways, but still had pain sensors, so that was very much a no.

Meanwhile, Rayleigh watched, calling out suggestions to Franky and Sanji. Inside the bridge, Robin helped spell Sandersonia at the wheel while Sonia played chess with Vivi, who was waiting for her own chance to train later that day. She and Luffy had already worked out a training regimen for her, which both included her Devil Fruit and didn’t, with Luffy hoping she would follow soon on Nami’s heels to discover her Kenbunshoku. Busoshoku wasn’t quite as important for Vivi since it would be ridiculously hard for her to learn to use the two in conjunction, unlike Robin. Yet Luffy was determined she would be able to use it to a certain degree by the time the crew and their allies were ready to head into the New World.

All in all, the first day in the Grand Line went very well. The second day, though, the Grand Line reminded the crew as to why it was feared in the form of constant weather changes and random monster attacks. The monster attacks were easy enough for this crew to deal with. The weather, not so much. They’d gotten lucky in their first trip to Shabondy in not running into many weather-based threats, but this time, that luck ran out big time. So much so that there were barely an hour to two a day when the crew could be outside without difficulty. Which, of course, Luffy turned into training.

Still, thanks to the Everlasting Resolve’s speed and durability, they were able to reach the Archipelago in four days, just as Sandersonia predicted.

Once the archipelago was in sight, the Everlasting Resolve slowly shifted around the 'islands' under Rayleigh's direction, coming in from an angle that put them in the lower grove numbers. "Moving like this, we'll keep away from the marines and any other trouble. With Franky helping, we should be done with the Bubble Coating in at most a day and then on to Fishman Island without any issues."

When he said that, Luffy simply stared for a time, his eyes dead and his face frozen, while the rest of his crew just sighed. Eventually, Rayleigh, feeling quite uncomfortable under Luffy's deadpan stare, coughed and, breaking eye contact, asked, "Um, what's wrong, young man?"

"Just... why you gotta curse us like that, Silvers? Just why?" Luffy groaned with the rest of his crew nodding in agreement, to Rayleigh's confusion.

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"Undoubtedly, there will be those among you who look back on your former commander's leadership fondly. Undoubtedly, there are those who will miss the days of laziness, of sloth. Of doing the bare minimum, to show the flag of the World Government in a place that has historically been called the playground of pirates and Tenryubito alike. Those days are gone," Sentomaru roared as he stared at the ranks of marines in front of him. "I am here to whip you all into shape, to do what we can to stymie the illegal activities here in this archipelago. If you have a problem with that, if you do not give your all, then a transfer to the New World will be waiting for you. There are bases there that are clamoring for cannon fodder in the face of pirate aggression, particularly that of the remaining three Yonko."

A large portion of the marines in front of him stiffened, and Sentomaru smiled thinly. "Your old commander has already been assigned to one such base, one that I hear is about to face a few of Kaido's Beasts Pirates under the command of Queen. I imagine that he is in for a very interesting time."

That did it, and now every marine facing Sentomaru was utterly terrified. *Good. The world's changed, and for the Marines, there's no place in it who aren't willing to give their all.*

With recruitment so low, thanks to Garp's betrayal, and morale across the board having plummeted similarly, Sentomaru had come into this job with the idea of ruling through fear, if not fear of himself, then fear of the consequences if his marines didn't perform well. *It will work for now. Once things start to stabilize and recruitment numbers begin to climb once more, I'll ease up on the leash a little bit, and then I can hand this base over, with its people well-trained and organized and the Shabondy Archipelago pacified, to someone else, someone who has a broader skill set than me.*

As good as he was as a taskmaster, organizer and trainer, Sentomaru lacked when it came to logistics, the ability to command ships at sea, and he had no idea how to run a spy

network, which here was a must for any commander assigned to Shabondy Archipelago. At the moment, that was being run by the former Commodore's communications officer, but the man lacked the experience and authority to run even the small spy network the previous Commodore had been able to create. *Admittedly, he knew there were places and things he wasn't supposed to see, but he took that too far and enjoyed his own vices far too much. Even as weak as the Marines are now, that man won't be missed.*

"By the time I am done with you, you all will be perfect examples of marines. Strong, dedicated, fearless! We will root out corruption and crime here in the archipelago, from Grove 1 to Grove 49. We will not overstretch and try to do so quickly, but we will do so methodically, calmly and over time. That is my promise and my mission, and I intend for all of you to be a part of it."

Sentomaru waved his hands to four officers who had come with him from Marineford, one of whom was young Helmeppo. He and Coby, Garp's latest pair of apprentices, had been separated recently following a series of internal questions the pink-haired youth had been forced to answer. Sentomaru knew he was still working under the cloud of official displeasure, but Helmeppo wasn't. Coby had been assigned to Magellan, while Helmeppo, who apparently had a flair for logistics, had been assigned to Sentomaru here. He would then be rotated out to another command aboard a ship in order to get a real naval command under his belt at the same time Sentomaru probably would elsewhere.

"These officers with me will be helping me see to your training and the running of this base. For now, they will lead you in some exercises, while I get further acclimated with the paperwork here. Tomorrow, I will lead all of you in training designed to build you all up to start learning versions of the Six Techniques and see if any of you have the ability to learn haki. Dismissed. Lieutenant Jensen, with me."

Normally, the Rokushiki wouldn't be taught to Paradise-grade marines, let alone haki, although there, the marines stationed to Shabondy could have learned about it via interacting with locals or seeing other marines pass through. However, times had changed, and Aokiji had demanded that every marine at least be taught Tekkai. The others were optional, but Aokiji demanded the marines do their best to simply survive whatever came at them.

As he walked away, one of the officers from headquarters began to bellow commands, splitting up the local Marine Garrison into groups. Some of them would start on an endurance run soon. Others would be tested for their marksmanship, while a third group would be run through cannon exercises, deploying, firing, and reloading cannons.

Meanwhile, Sentomaru headed inside, glaring sideways at Jensen, a spare, short young man with pale skin and wire glasses who looked as if a hard breeze would break him. "You signaled to me before I called the troops to order that something new had come in?"

"Yes, sir!" The man saluted, looking somewhat professional despite his non-navy-like build. "Two things, actually. One a missive from headquarters, an all-hands report, that you're authorized to see, and the other a local report from one of our, er, contacts at one of the other groves." He coughed delicately. "I... also have Staff Sergeant Helmeppo's initial report on our stores, sir. He was most thorough."

"You wouldn't be mentioning it if there wasn't any issue. Give me the report from HQ first, then the local one before giving me the bad news," Sentomaru said, scowling as he and the lieutenants made their way up to his office. *What kind of ticking time bomb did Helmeppo find here? Is the base still empty of black powder? Or that most of the base's food supplies have started to go bad already, damn, that would be bad. I'd need to buy local produce, far more than I am happy with.*

There were two guards on duty outside the Commodore's office who saluted as Sentomaru came close, having not joined the marines outside. With the archipelago not being completely controlled by the World Government, there always had to be guards on the Commodore's office at all times. It was an old regulation, but it was still on the books, although truthfully, Sentomaru felt the guards would have been better served elsewhere.

"The all-hands bulletin from HQ says that our agents on Dressrosa have reported that the Whitebeard Armada has finally arrived. Why it took them so long, analysts have no idea, but battle is expected to start within hours between Shichibukai Doflamingo's forces and the remnants of the Whitebeard Armada. We have confirmed sightings of Fire Fist Ace, Diamond Jozu and Marco the Phoenix. The spies were waiting for confirmation of any other surviving division commanders, although Whitey Bay's ship was at least spotted."

Jensen paused, flipping the page and going on quickly. "I'm... not certain why this was part of the report, but one of the spies on Dressrosa also reported that an investigation will need to be launched into Doflamingo, regardless of the outcome of this war, because of some other pirates sighted on the island currently who both seem to be gearing up to fight with Doflamingo's own forces. Specifically, a young pirate named Edward Weevil, who's been going around the island shouting about how he is Whitebeard's only true son, and Who's-Who of the Beasts Pirates."

Sentomaru frowned at the name, not having heard of it before, before shaking his head at the second. He knew that one. Who's-Who was a former member of CP9, once thought to have as much potential as Rob Lucci, who had been slain by Roronoa Zoro on Water 7. Who's-Who star had fallen long ago, though, after he had been defeated by the Red Hair Pirates on a routine convoy protection mission. At that point, he had been imprisoned for some reason. Who's-Who had eventually broken out, then joined up with the Yonko, Kaido, turning up later with a Zoan-type Devil Fruit.

The implication that Doflamingo had dealings with a Yonko was disturbing, but there was nothing Sentomaru or anyone here in the archipelago could do about it. *Or... ahh... sneaky,*

Aokiji. "Do we know if the Human Auction House began operating again?" *It's a major source of money for Doflamingo, and the one here is only one of many the world over he's connected to.*

"Erm..." Jensen looked extremely uncomfortable for a moment, then, under Sentomaru's glare, nodded. "Y, yes, sir. It, um, we know it was open yesterday. Um, one of the Tenryubito passed by and um, came away with a few slaves, but was also furious that there weren't any fishmen on offer. There haven't been any fishmen seen in the Archipelago since the incident that um..."

"Demolished the Auction House, I know. Still... yes. We'll watch the Auction House closely, including anything coming out of it." *If Doflamingo has contact with Kaido, what better way than through his known illicit activities?* "Not just for slaves, but for anything. I'll assign someone to that personally from headquarters... Maybe Helmeppo if he's already finished going over the stores."

Sentomaru smiled faintly. It was just like Aokiji to be so free with such information and then expect his officers to take advantage of it however they could. Well, Sentomaru certainly would, and beyond watching to figure out what Doflamingo traded with Kaido if possible, he was already planning out an expedition into the lower groves to take the auction house and shut it down permanently.

Preferably, by executing everyone involved in the blasted place. Sentomaru wasn't about to tell the Tenryubito they couldn't have slaves, but at the moment, the marines needed all the good PR they could get. *Besides, they can get their slaves elsewhere; this is just one auction house. It will hopefully lead to others connected to Doflamingo across the globe, but it isn't like he has a monopoly on the trade.* "Anything else from the Fleet Admiral?"

"No, sir. Um... there was a list of regulations that have been removed from the books and a few others added, but that's just um, normal bureaucratic stuff," Jensen admitted. "Nothing more about the war to come in Dressrosa or any reports elsewhere."

Sighing, Sentomaru sighed, an actual smile crossing his wide, scarred face for a moment. "There are only two things that are eternal, lieutenant: the rumor mill and paperwork. With that out of the way, what about the local news?"

"One of our spies reported seeing the Bonney Pirates this morning. I wouldn't have brought it to your attention, sir, but this is the fourth time in the last few weeks we've had reports of sightings of that crew. If the crew is here, then Big Eater surely must be somewhere in the archipelago."

That caused Sentomaru's smile to fade a little, hiding in internal wince at the thought of Jewelry Bonney. At one point, the two of them have been well acquainted, back when she and Bartholomew Kuma were living on Egghead Island as Egghead cured Jewelry's Sapphire Scales.

That had ended when he had been sent away for further training, and Bonney had been sent back home, while her father remained to... pay for the medical treatments.

Sentomaru knew what those were. He objected to them on a moral level, but he was a dutiful son of the World Government. He trusted Kong and Sengoku to have made the decision there, believing it was the best way to use someone like Kuma for the most good for the World Government.

{Is that enough of his thoughts, do you think, given everything that happened in canon and his friendship with Bonney?}

Her becoming a pirate a few years ago had taken him and the rest of the World Government by surprise. To say that the World Government wanted her back under their control was an understatement. Sentomaru wanted nothing to do with **any** kind of confrontation there, but... *If the opportunity arises, taking out one of them would be just as good PR as shutting down slave auctions. Even more, considering how it would play internally if it is that particular supernova, Sentomaru reflected. I could maybe even put in my name for the Buddha Lineage Experiment that Sengoku volunteered for.*

"We'll need to keep an eye on that then," he said aloud. "We'll need to have a force ready to go at a moment's notice if any verifiable reports of Big Eater's presence come in. Her crew is less than nothing, barely up to normal Paradise standards, but Big Eater is a major threat. The group on marksmanship training will do for that."

Trying hard not to feel guilty about his decision to confront Bonney, Sentomaru pushed himself up out of the Commodore's chair, which he idly noted would need to be replaced for someone bigger-boned. He moved to look out a window that overlooked the courtyard, and was able to see the guard arrive, give his orders and then run back inside. He stood there for a moment, watching the other officers he brought with them shouting at the soldiers, shaking his head as evidently the cannon exercises were not going so well. Still, already those soldiers assigned for the day's endurance run were heading out the gate, and he could already hear some of the musketeers firing. It was a start.

Turning back, Sentomaru motioned to the lieutenant to continue. "Very Well. What of Helmeppo's report? You wouldn't have brought it up if there wasn't something wrong."

"Erm, we still haven't made good the shortfalls in powder that were caused by the previous Commodore's illicit activities. Staff Sergeant Helmeppo believes we don't have enough on hand to use during live fire drills for our cannons if we want to have enough to meet the needs of a sustained battle for now. We've received replacement cannons and muskets for those that we lost during the battle around the Auction House more than a month ago, although we are still short twenty-two cutlasses. Um... our supplies of musket balls are low as well. He, um, he demanded the stores of the ship you arrived in, sir, to make up the shortfall."

Sentomaru ground his teeth, but nodded, and Jensen went on hurriedly. "U, um, all communication snails are accounted for, including the ones we have passed out to what few spies the former Commodore had throughout the groves. Our treasury stores are in good repair, but..." Jensen swallowed. "But when he was doing an inventory of the treasury, including the Eternal Pose storage room, he found one of them had been mislabeled. Looking into it, the Eternal Pose was, um, a regular Log Pose with the plaque replaced."

Sentomaru scowled angrily, his hands bunching into fists as he leaned forward, the chair underneath him creaking disturbingly. *Don't tell me...* "Let me guess, it was the eternal pose to Enies Lobby, correct?"

The officer twitched, and Sentomaru waved him off, staring down at his large hands, clenching and unclenching them on the desk. *I knew it! Knew that all of it was that dastardly man, woman, thing's plans all along! Get a few of their crewmembers aboard a marine ship, follow the Eternal Pose to Enies Lobby, and be there in a position to go through with Gion's ship when the gates of justice opened into the Tarai Current.*

"That black heart!" he hissed aloud, clenching his hands to the point where the bones began to creak. "All of it, all of it, a plan to get into Impel Down, to invade the prison and rescue a single pirate! That redhead, only acting the part, acting like she wanted to join up, acting so friendly with Gion and with me. I will have my vengeance for playing with my heart!"

Outside, the guards were able to hear this and looked at one another in confusion. "Hwa? I was assigned to the troops helping to restock Vice Admiral Gion's ship when Sentomaru and the reinforcements with him arrived. Bounty Hunter Ranko wasn't even nice to him. Hell, they almost fought one another when he disdained her skills."

"Eh, maybe he likes a fighter girl?" the other joked. "I can kinda see the appeal, that redhead was decently good-looking, although nowhere near as curvy as that green-haired woman."

"I don't know; give me the Pirate Princess any day. Have you seen that bounty poster that's recently been going around? Blue hair, kind smile and--"

The guard fell silent as a runner rushed along the hallway, his shoulder marked by the tab for someone assigned to the communications room. He burst into the office of the Commodore, saluting quickly, before gasping out a message, "Sir, a new spy report just came in. We've got a confirmed sighting of a pirate ship arriving in the lower groves. The spy didn't know what kind of make or model the ship was, but he was able to describe the flag. It's the Straw Hat!"

Sentomaru stood up so abruptly his gut sent the Commodore's desk flying, forcing Jensen and the runner to duck and cover as it flew over their heads to smash into the ceiling above the doorway. "Cancel all training sessions! Send someone out to grab the group who just

left on the endurance run. Ready our two galleons for combat. Get them out to sea as well as the schooners for patrol duty. Ensign Gibraltar and Lieutenant Commander Tashigi will be in charge of the seaside of things. The entire garrison will be ready to march in fifteen minutes!"

So furious was his expression that Jensen, the only officer there a high enough rank to know about the blanket do not engage order Aokiji had issued for the Straw Hats and Kuja Pirates, simply nodded and raced off to do his bidding as Sentomaru smiled. *Well, it looks as if I'll be able to use that special weapon I asked Vegapunk for faster than I hoped.*

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In an alleyway in Grove 17, Jewelry Bonney snarled a little as she shifted from her old woman form to her normal eighteen-to-twenty-something body, the body that she normally used when acting as a pirate. Wiping away some lipstick that had been part of her disguise, she then pulled off the clothing that had also been part of the disguise, switching to more comfortable clothing, breathing a sigh of relief as she changed. *Gets them every time, no one ever looks for a kid, or an old woman when you're trying to find a pirate, she thought, grinning now as she finally got the lipstick off. Ugh, why do normal girls like that kind of thing?*

Still, we've been here for a few weeks, there hasn't been any sign of the Everlasting Resolve or any of the Straw Hats. Was I wrong? Did they somehow find another way to get across the Red Line? Double back to a sky island and head upwards, maybe? But how? Navigating like that in the Grand Line is impossible, I don't care how good your navigator is, the moment you leave an island you're relying on luck to get anywhere and in the Grand Line, any mistake can kill you.

That was one of the first lessons her father had hammered into her head as a little girl (all of four years ago), and Bonney had taken to it well. The very idea of trying to set out for a specific island unless you had an Eternal Pose was impossible. *Are there Eternal Poses to... well, it wouldn't even be the Sky Island; rather, it would be the island that connects up to them. And there isn't one of those in paradise, is there? Surely, news about Sky Islands would have spread further if there had been...*

Bonney raised her hands to her head, grasping her hair and growling. "Dammit! All this thinking makes my head hurt. But if they're not coming through here, what are they doing?! Surely they really, they **are** trying to get to the New World, right? Nothing else makes sense for that daddy killing bastard and his crew!"

Hands falling away from her hair, Bonney began to smack one of them against the wall she was leaning against, staring up at the sky above her for a second, fighting back renewed tears as she thought about her father again, before shaking herself and moving off. *The Straw Hats have to come through the groves sometime. It's just a matter of spotting them when they do. They're not idiots. Straw Hat and his gang won't go into the higher groves, so it's twenty and below, and I've got men everywhere looking for any information about them or any sighting of*

unusual ships. And then, when they arrive, well, we'll see how well this Lightning King fights as a baby. Right before I drown his Daddy-killing-ass!

Bonney kept moving for a time, moving from one group to another, shifting disguises every time Bonney did, never staying in her main pirate form as she had come to call it, until she was back among the lower groves, Grove 4 to be specific, where her crew had moored their ship. Since then, they had basically taken over the entire Grove. There, she found a few of her crewmates, one of them having apparently just returned. He turned as Bonney hopped up onto the bridge of their ship, grinning wildly. "Bonney! We saw it, we saw the Everlasting Resolve! It's heading towards the lower numbers near here, we're not certain precisely where."

"I'll wager they're looking for the legendary bubble coating master! That means they'll need to find somewhere near that bar place, what was it called? The really old one," Another one said.

"Shakky's Rip-off Bar," another replied. "Yeah, there are some weird rumors about that bubble coating master guy. Not sure what to believe there, but we know at least he's based out of the bar for whatever reason."

Bonney grinned wildly, thrusting her hand up into the air. "Get the crew together; we're going to give that bastard Luffy and his crew a welcoming they'll never forget. Or survive!"

OOOOOOO

While extremely concerned that Rayleigh's words had given Fate/Lady Luck enough of an excuse to fuck him over, there was really nothing Luffy or any of the others could do now that the words have been spoken but get on with things and hope for the best. As the ship was more against one of the groves, ironically near where the Auction House was, Luffy gave out orders. "Vivi, you and Robin guard the ship for now. Robin, I've got a Den Den Mushi on me, spread out your eyes and ears. If you see anything coming towards the boat, call us. If we run into any trouble, we'll call you. Sandersonia, Franky, Sanji, we'll go with Rayleigh's to grab the tools and supplies he'll need for the coating, and then you and Sandersonia can go off to do her shopping, Sanji. No one moves on their own, and no one tries to make trouble. In fact, if the two of you could somehow disguise yourselves, that might be a good idea."

Although honestly, if there was a Tenryubito here, I'd probably make an exception. Heh, I wonder if Aokiji has cancelled out that standing order about how a fleet of battleships and vice admirals are supposed to respond to any attack on a Tenryubito. Hehehehe... something to look into if the marines piss me off again and the opportunity comes up.

When it came to disguise, Robin, who had spoken to Makino about disguises numerous times, stepped in. Soon, Sanji's hair was a different color (pink, an odd choice); his suit was gone in favor of a 'kill me now' Hawaiian shirt, with shorts, although he refused to leave behind his

heavily reinforced shoes. Similarly, Sandersonia was given something similar, although her shirt wasn't nearly as bad as the one given to Sanji.

"After all, isn't it always the male of the species who has colorful colors, in order to draw in predators and be killed in place of the woman?" Robin had quipped as she finished the two disguises.

"Scary. That was very scary, but also kind of accurate," Franky snickered, shaking his head. It had been Franky who had given up the shirts and shorts for Sanji.

After the two would-be shoppers were ready to go, they and the others leaving the ship did so, heading into the groves, not towards Shakky's bar, but towards another grove nearby, where Rayleigh had set up his, well, workshop really wasn't the right name for it. After all, most of the coating work occurred on the ships themselves. Rather, this was a storage area, a very well hidden one, carved into the trunk of one of the main Yarukiman trees high up its trunk, so that few people could actually reach it, let alone see it.

Soon, Franky and Rayleigh had gathered all of the items they would need together, and with Luffy helping, they decided they didn't need Sandersonia or Sanji around just to help lug things. "Head off now, you two. Robin can give us all of the hands we need when we get back to the ship, and I don't want us to stay in the archipelago any longer than we have to."

Rayleigh chuckled at that, shaking his head. "A true artist cannot be rushed, but with Franky and Robin helping, I suppose we can shoot for beating my previous record for fastest time."

Nodding, Sanji and Sandersonia headed off, eager to buy the supplies they needed, although Luffy still had no idea what Sandersonia was here to buy for the Kuja. Hancock and Sandersonia alike had been remarkably, even befuddlingly, secretive about it. *Which probably means is either something super embarrassing, something they want to spring on the rest of us as a surprise, or just to do with their, well, being Kujas*, he reflected, as he carried several large crates over his head.

The crates carried the parts Rayleigh needed to create the bubble aperture, as well as the weight that would pull the ship downward into the water. Meanwhile, Rayleigh and Franky both had other crates, containing other things, particularly giant tubes of resin, which would be used to create the bubble and other tubes of the coating necessary to make the ship lose all ability to actually be on top of the water rather than below.

They were nearly back to the ship when Luffy began to frown, his Kenbunshoku, which he'd reined to only this one grove, not wanting to bump into anyone else using the technique just in case. "Rayleigh, how many people live in these groves? Is it unusual for a group of, like, forty to be moving together?"

“Highly unusual, actually. These groves are more populated than you might think, but most people in the lower-number groves move in groups of five or seven. I take it you’re sensing something with your Kenbunshoku?” Rayleigh asked, completely unconcerned. He wasn’t an expert at using Kenbunshoku subconsciously all the time, even if his ability to use it to perceive things in depth was highly advanced.

“Yeah, and they’re coming this way. Thoughts?”

“We’re nearly back to the ship. In fact, I can already see it through the trees. If they’re going to attack us, then they already know where we’re gonna be for a bit. I’d suggest just taking them out,” Franky said, shrugging.

“I would agree with that,” Rayleigh answered with a shrug of his own. “The calculations, coating and other aspects that need to be done to the ship are things that shouldn’t be interrupted. I think you should take them out now before work actually begins, or at least intercept them away from your ship. I’m personally not going to get involved, since I’ll be staying here and not being involved in whatever trouble is coming will make staying here easier.”

That, and even now, I have to wonder how the World Government would act if they became certain I was in Shabondy. Old I might be, but they know my skills well enough to be wary of what I can do, especially if an ally with some of these youngsters, like I have with Luffy and Hancock.

In lieu of reply, Luffy used his lightning powers to forge another hand for himself or a second, reaching and pulling out the Den Den Mushi from his normal pocket, not his ki space pocket. That would’ve killed the little critter. “Vivi, Robin, we’ve got trouble. Vivi, if you could join us? Robin, you and Eve should get ready to defend the ship from anything coming at us from the ocean side.”

“We do indeed have trouble coming, Luffy. Trouble in the form of an irate looking supernova,” Robin replied of second later. “I spread my eyes and ears out throughout this grove and several others, and I’m watching Jewelry Bonney leading her crew in our direction in real time. For some reason, she looks incredibly incensed. The rest of her crew doesn’t look nearly as angry, but they are determined.”

Luffy blinked at that, then shook his head, and zoomed forward, his legs turning to lightning for a second, crossing the distance between the ship and where they’d been in an instant, whereupon he laid down his burdens onto the deck.

Vivi came out of the bridge as he landed, followed by Robin, her eyes still closed as she concentrated on the eyes and ears that she had summoned all around Eve. “They’re coming in from the southeast. I’m also detecting some movement from another direction, but it hasn’t coalesced yet.”

Frowning, Luffy concentrated on his Kenbunshoku again, then scowled. "Eve, get the cannons loaded. We've got at least two galleons moving around the archipelago. There's also a marine patrol or something coming in from the higher numbers."

Calling them cannons on a ship that had a railgun was a little odd to Luffy, but that was the proper term for them. This also seemed the proper move, considering the jubilant yell that reverberated throughout the entire ship, shaking the trio where they were standing on the main deck. "Yes! You've got it, Cap'n!"

"Bloodthirsty little cherub," Robin giggled, reaching over to the nearby main gun's turret.

"If it doesn't rain, it pours," Rayleigh murmured, landing on the deck behind him. "I wonder what you did to Miss Bonney. She's Shaky's favorites among the Supernovas."

In lieu of reply, Luffy looked over at his blue-haired lover, having no real idea on that score either. "Vivi, do you think you can be diplomatic for a bit? I've got no idea why Bonney is looking to pick a fight with us, but I also don't want to fight her and the marines at the same time."

*The more enemies, the more likely we are to kill a few of them accidentally. Plus, I only have the vaguest idea about Jewelry Bonney's abilities in a real fight. And, again, I **really** don't want to kill any more low-ranking marines if I can help it. I've had enough nightmares about that to last a good long while,* Luffy reflected.

Robin seemed to sense some of his inner thoughts as she opened her eyes, looking at him with a faint, sad smile. "Diplomacy has rarely worked before, but perhaps we are due. Still, I would recommend that you be ready for a fight. While you could probably talk her crew down, Bonney... well, I can only describe her expression as bloodthirsty and wrathful right now. Exceptionally emotional, to put it bluntly."

"Yeah, I got nothing there. I mean, Makino and me met her when I was in my Ranko disguise, and we fought, but the fight didn't go anywhere before Brook freaked her out by being immune to her... Age powers, I think it was? Hell, we even ate a meal together, as Makino gave her romance advice..., which... looking back on it might or might not have been welcome? Can't think why, but it looked more like Bonney was just going through the motions, and Makino didn't see it since she was in full Secondhand Romance Mode™," Luffy mused.

Despite having talked to Ace a few times over the Den Den Mushi before arriving at Amazon Lily after Whitebeard's death, the whole flirting with Bonney thing hadn't come up. In Luffy's case, he just hadn't cared enough to ask, while on Ace's side of things, he didn't want to get teased by his two brothers about something that wasn't anywhere near what people thought it was.

Shrugging his shoulders and deciding to let the youngsters see to their own issues, Rayleigh began to pull out different parts, explaining what they were for to Franky, assigning him the task of putting together the coating device that would go underneath the ship. "With that accomplished, the rest will follow. Meanwhile, Robin, if you can help me take measurements of the ship, we need to be precise in our measurements for both the initial sinking operation and when it comes to the size of the bubble, the amount of coating to include and to lather on the screw to let it work with the bubble."

Robin nodded in agreement, while Luffy called into the Den Den Mushi, informing Sanji and Sandersonia about what was going on. He didn't order them to abort their shopping expedition, but warned them that with marines coming, there might be more trouble on the horizon. "The Marines might not have a lot of resources, but we're way too close to the Red Line and the forces located at their Red Port transfer station there for my liking."

The two shoppers responded in the affirmative, but Sandersonia was adamant that they continue their trip. "We Kujas have an agreement with one of the local merchants to supply us with the goods I am here to buy every other month, and if we don't take the shipment, the merchant is free to sell it to others. I refuse to allow that to happen."

Knowing better than to ask, after Sandersonia evaded the question several times, Luffy simply shook his head and hopped off the side of the ship, landing neatly on the ground of the Grove nearby. Vivi followed, and the two stared in the direction of where the pirates were coming from as the noises of people charging towards them came to them.

Vivi opened her mouth to shout something, ostensibly to maybe warn Bonney off, but before she could, Bonney shouted, pressing her hands together and blasting out a beam of her anti-aging Devil Fruit. "There they are! Keep the blue bitch off me, I've got their captain! You're going to pay for what you did, Straw Hat! Age Regression: Toddler!"

While Luffy hadn't seen Bonney use her Toshi Toshi no Mi via beams before, he had gotten used to such beam-type attacks thanks to fighting Kizaru and training against Hancock. That, as well as his Kenbunshoku, was more than enough time for him to shift into lightning form as the wave of pink energy flashed towards him and Vivi. "Geez, was it something I said? Come on, girl, ya can't be that st—"

"Luffy, kindly don't make things worse!" Vivi interrupted, lashing out with a wave of sand. Taking a cue from her captain, Vivi had also transformed into a full sand form, and the energy wave flashed through them both, doing nothing, not even interacting with either of their forms. In contrast, Vivi's wave had caused hundreds of tiny granules of glass to appear as her sand passed through Luffy's form.

They were quite pretty, Luffy reflected, before answering, "Yes, dear," in his best put-upon voice.

That caused Vivi to giggle even as Bonney followed up her initial, and quite useless, attack by charging forward. As she came, her body aged up a bit, becoming what Luffy could tell was her body's physical prime. *What the heck, how? Aging, I can get, but Bonney looks like she took those intervening years to train so hard even I'd be impressed. Is she able to transform into her perfect future body rather than just aging up as is? 'Cause that is two different things.*

Even more surprising was how her entire body began to be covered in Busoshoku. *Huh, she didn't use that when we fought before, either.*

Shifting back into his human body, Luffy deflected her punch with his own Busoshoku-clad fist. "Huh, you've got some new tricks. Neat, but—"

"SHUT UP!!" Bonney screamed, her hand shifting into flesh for a second, blasting out an energy blast as she punched forward.

Grimacing, Luffy, able to see the attack coming thanks to Kenbunshoku, transformed back into lightning a second before her energy blast again could hit him. A roundhouse kick crashed into his lightning form's head, and armed with Busoshoku, it made his human body stumble back for a second. *Fucking hell, whatever she did to herself gave her as much hitting power as Hancock!*

Another blast of pink energy flashed down towards him, but Luffy teleported away using his lightning powers, rubbing the side of his head as he made sand mounds appear among Bonney's crew, turning the ground between her previous position and their position into small streams of sand. While Bonney charged forward, sand arms grabbed and dragged them to the ground, holding them in place. Vivi didn't kill any of them, simply keeping them out of the way for now. "Gentlemen, if you all could just stay out of the way? I am thinking this is a complicated enough situation without you all charging in."

"AGH, wh, what is this?! The Sand Princess, she's really part of Straw Hat's crew?!"

"That's right." Vivi's head appeared out of the sand for a moment, then she reformed, her body still made of sand, but able to speak, directing her words towards Bonney. "Ms. Bonney, could we perhaps at least understand why you are attacking us?"

Neither she nor any of the others made any move to interfere in the actual fight. Once Bonney had engaged Luffy one-on-one, it became a fight between captains. According to the, admittedly exceptionally loose Code that pirates kept to, fights between captains like that couldn't be interrupted, or else the person whose crew did the interrupting would lose face. Of course, losing face wasn't all that important to many pirates, but most had their pride, and Vivi knew that Luffy certainly did.

"I'm going to get you, you asshole, you know what you did! You're going down!" Bonney shouted, although if in response to Vivi's words or simply still cursing out Luffy, neither Straw

Hat could tell. Blasting out her Toshi Toshi no Mi energy from one hand, her other was encased in Busoshoku as she charged into close combat.

Grimacing, Luffy did the same, one-half of his body becoming lightning, the other half becoming covered with Busoshoku. This was the kind of thing he had used against Kizaru, and he had somewhat perfected the technique of shifting from his element to his physical body and covering it with Busoshoku. *Still, best not to take any more shots from the Toshi Toshi no Mi than I have to.*

Luffy was able to dodge out of the way so that only his lightning side was hit by the enemy Supernova's energy attack, but Bonney proved she was incredibly good at Busoshoku when her fist slammed into Luffy's forearm, then blocked Luffy's own return shot. The pair exchanged more than a dozen blows faster than most people could have moved, and every blow Luffy blocked, he felt a little, even through his own Busoshoku.

Nevertheless, she wasn't anywhere near as fast as Kizaru or even Akainu. This gave Luffy enough time to block, respond and dodge every time she tried to introduce her Toshi Toshi no Mi powers, be it from touch or beam. *Huh, but she's a nearly instinct-based fighter. She's got no plan that I can sense, and while I'm fast enough to act on what I'm sensing, it's kind of annoying. Is this what Enel felt when I attacked him on the Arc Maxim? She's still not fast enough, though.*

"So, um, like, I don't think I've ever done anything to you, Bonney. And ya don't strike me as the kind of person to just pick a fight randomly." Luffy ducked under a blow, then flashed to the side to avoid a blast of energy coming up from Bonney's knee. *So she can lash out with that energy from any body part. Good to know. Hancock can only lash out with direct contact-released energy from her legs; she can't create long-range Mero Mero energy beams from them like this.* "Seriously, what's this about?"

Bonney hopped into the air, grabbing a tree limb above her and flipping herself over Luffy's head, lashing down with several bolts of energy, but Luffy again simply shifted into lightning form, following it up with a Busoshoku-clad punch, which Luffy blocked similarly. "Fuck you! You know what you did!"

"I honestly don't," Luffy drawled, his body shifting into lightning, opening up to allow a kick from Bonney, before closing rapidly, sending a bolt of lightning through Bonney even as Luffy transferred his consciousness into another lightning clone set to one side of his original body. Bonney staggered, then staggered again as a punch from Luffy caught her in the side of the face, sending her hurtling backwards. Still, she rolled with the blow, charging forward, her face almost feral as she came. It was clear that Luffy was still treating this more as a spar, Bonney was deadly serious.

Vivi spoke up from one side. "Ms. Bonney, if you don't tell us why you are attacking my captain, we can't make amends. You are an excellent combatant, Ms. Bonney, and the Toshi Toshi no Mi undoubtedly makes you even more dangerous. But this is only going to end one

way, and you're not going to like it," she warned, her diplomatic tone giving her words added weight.

Flashing away from the point of contact, Luffy knew his blue-haired princess was right. He could end this fight simply by overwhelming her with lightning. That really was not the way Luffy fought, unless he was faced with a tremendous number of grunts, but Vivi had already taken care of the rest of Bonney's crew. With that out of the way, Luffy had hoped he could indulge himself in a nice fight, but the furious expression and, yes, even some tears from Bonney were making this fight not at all fun for him, even if Bonney's skills had surprised him.

That expression and everything else were giving him some seriously bad vibes, harking back to his past life in a few ways, and making it seem as if Bonney was some kind of jilted lover or something. *Which is just weird! Unless... is this about Ace? How the hell could Makino's advice have already screwed things up between them?*

Bonney's reply to Vivi's calm words shattered that idea, although Luffy was in no way happy with the thought that replaced it.

"You killed him," Bonney shouted, charging forward is now visible to the watching Vivi, who put a hand over her mouth, her eyes widening. "You killed my dad!"

Luffy's heart fell, and Vivi's eyes widened, horror seeping into both of their expressions as Bonney raced forward. Luffy knew that he had killed a lot of people, probably a lot of parents among the Marines, and maybe among the other pirate gangs he'd fought along the way. Being called out on it like this brought that fact home in a way he hadn't really verbalized before.

But wait, even Vivi and my discussion about Whitebeard's War didn't go into detail. How the hell... who would the public know about that, who did they admit I killed... Wait, was your dad Aka-GGHH!"

Even as he had stumbled back, his mind going elsewhere, Luffy had pulled up his Busoshoku to block Bonney's attack. However, this time, his Kenbunshoku missed a trick, as Bonney suddenly lashed out a beam of power from her whole body instead of just her hand. While most of Luffy's forearm was covered with Busoshoku, the Toshi Toshi no Mi's power washed over it, hitting his normal skin just beyond the edge of his haki ability.

Before Luffy could do anything, the Toshi Toshi no Mi hit, and Luffy found himself... shrinking. *Oh, fuck me!* The sudden shift in perspective was enough to shake Luffy fully out of his stupor, and he dodged a follow-on kick from an armor-clad foot, pushing up and off the ground and lashing out with a punch that caught Bonney in the chest, sending her staggering backwards.

"Ha! Finally got you, you asshole! Now, I'm gonna kick your aSKKK!!" Bonney began, before being interrupted by Luffy, who hopped into the air, kicked off a mangrove tree behind

him, and launched himself forward. His punch caught her this time in the stomach, causing the air to whoof out of her as she was sent tumbling so hard, she smashed into and through one of the smaller Yarukiman tree branches sticking up behind her.

Unfortunately for Luffy, that didn't negate the effect of Bonney's Devil Fruit, and he scowled a little before calling on his Devil Fruit powers again. They seemed to work as he shifted into lightning, but when he shifted back to his flesh and blood body, it didn't work. Instead, looking down at himself, Luffy estimated that he was at least around ten, maybe eleven? *Same age I was when Garp tried to take a page out of Pops' book and tie a steak to me before tossing me into the woods. Thank goodness I'd already learned Geppo by that point.*

"Damn, that's a kind of terrifying power. With that and your Busoshoku, there's no wonder you're a Supernova. Hell, I have to wonder why your bounty's only a hundred and ten million!" Luffy grumbled before remembering what Bonney had said and becoming sober again. "Look, I'm sorry about your dad, but Akainu was—"

"WHAT?!" Bonney shrieked, tossing bits of wood off herself and glaring at Luffy, breathing in deeply to get some hair back. *Next time, I'm going to age him down to a baby! I couldn't put much energy into that bolt, but the next time I will! Until then, let's see what he thinks about a Nika Punch!* "The fuck do I care about that magma dog bitch! My daddy wasn't something so lame as a Marine!"

"Huh... but then... who do you think I killed? I mean, he was the only ass whose name was in the news when the WeeGee talked about who I killed," Luffy muttered, genuinely confused at this point more than worried about the age change. *Her constant tears are also kind of throwing me.* "And saying it like that makes me think he was in some kind of low-ranking pirate or government stooge, either."

A horrifying thought came to Luffy then, and he grimaced, looking at Bonney in even more horror than before. "Wait, your dad wasn't Crocodile, was he?! Because if so, damn girl, you have to be very happy you take after your mom. Even Akainu was better looking than that Asshat."

While Vivi giggled so much that she nearly lost control of her Sand Prison technique, Bonney grimaced, looking as if she was about to gag.

"What?! Ew, fucking EW! Who'd want to be related to that sandblaster!" That caused Vivi to collapse to her knees, then into sand, her giggles now tremors through the mounds of sand she had spread out through the trees, although her laughter abruptly stopped as Bonney went on. "My dad was Bartholomew Kuma!"

At that, Luffy blinked, staring at her, while Vivi reformed, her own eyes going wide. She knew the story of how Kuma had died. Luffy had told her and Garp about it on the way to Amazon Lily while they were aboard the Everlasting Resolve. About how Kuma had professed to

be a member of the Revolutionary Army, but how we would be forced to tell the World Government about Luffy's Devil Fruit and his crew's capabilities.

Luffy had made the decision to finish him off rather than let Kuma escape with that information, a decision made before he learned about Ace's capture and everything else. It had worked out for them, allowing Luffy to create the ruse that later led him and his crew to infiltrate Impel Down, and kept his Goro Goro no Mi a secret until he used it in the horrific conflict that erupted between the Marine fleet and the Whitebeard Pirates.

But now, it seemed as if it was going to come back to bite them. Although at present, Vivi had something else, she just had to ask. "Excuse me, but might I ask, how?" *The physics does not add up!*

"What do you mean by how?" Bonney growled, turning in her direction, wiping at her furious tears. Confronting Luffy like this had brought all of her emotions to the fore, and she was having trouble controlling them despite her body's advanced age.

"I, um, I mean, you're human, and Bartholomew Kuma, from all the descriptions I've gotten from him, was a giant of a man, er, as big as um, Whitebeard, and well, I mean... how exactly would that work? Shouldn't you be taller if your mother was of the same race, and if not then, well... How?" Vivi asked, her hands gesticulating as if she was trying to conjure up the words to get her point across without being crude about it.

Bonney just blinked, completely not comprehending, while a few of her crewmen, recovering somewhat from their sand-based incarceration, looked away. "My mom was a perfectly sized human, thank you! I don't get what you're saying."

Luffy did and could only wince a little. *Damn! Either Kuma was very much not proportionate, or... yeah, let's not think about this any longer. This is making me very much not want to take this fight any more seriously than I was, and definitely not want to continue it. Well, that and I've no idea if this age-change thing is permanent and I'll need her to redo it.*

Holding up his much smaller than normal hands placatingly, Luffy decided to try and calm things down. "Okay, I get that you're angry at me, and I understand. But while I have no idea how different he was at home, he **was** trying to kill me and mine, in conjunction with a few other Shichibukai at the time."

Uncertain if Bonney knew about Kuma's supposed allegiance to the RA, he kept that to himself. "I made the call of prioritizing my crew's lives over his. Wouldn't you do the same, even if you thought you were fighting someone who was a dad to someone else? Which, y'know, I didn't know at the time."

While that kind of argument might have worked against Bonney if she were really the age she was at present or even normally, the glare that Bonney gave him showed that it was not

in fact working now. "Shut up! I don't care about your lightning powers, your new status or whatever; I don't care about your reasoning for killing my daddy! You still killed him, and you're going to **pay!**"

To one side, Vivi frowned a bit, her head cocking to one side. Robin, still watching events from the ship but not getting involved just yet, also frowned a bit. While Vivi's suspicions hadn't yet reached the point she could give words to them even in her own mind, Robin's had. *I... hmm... she doesn't sound very mature. I had anticipated that given what has been reported of her general personality, but her wording, that kind of wailing is far more childish than anything else.*

Unfortunately for Luffy and everyone else there, the confrontation with Bonney had consumed Luffy's attention to the point where he had not been paying attention to his Kenbunshoku at range. That was why a second later, he and everyone else there were surprised as the group of marines he had sensed coming towards this grove before burst out of the trees all around them.

As they came, they fired, with even some cannons having been set up to fire at the pirates. The cannons fired towards the ship, only for their balls to be deflected away from the ship by sudden strings of Busoshoku-clad fists. Others were blocked or dodged by the two main combatants, although more than a dozen musket balls flashed towards Bonney's crew.

Bonney had instantly covered herself with Busoshoku but was out of position to do anything more than intercept the dozens of musket balls. Her eyes widened in horror before she saw Vivi take action, creating a wall of sand to protect her crew and Vivi herself from the incoming rounds as Sentomaru bellowed, charging forward.

"Nice job, Jewelry Bonney! Help us take the Lightning King down, and for old time's sake, I'll put in a good word so you can take your father's place as one of the Shichibukai!" he shouted, more to try to get Bonney on his side than anything else. He certainly didn't have the power to make that happen, but he also didn't really want to fight Bonney. While he would always prioritize orders from the World Government over any kind of friendship, that didn't mean that the feelings of friendship that he had for Bonney when they were living on Egghead Island had been altogether false. *Let's just hope she doesn't bring up the past right now. That's the last thing we can afford to have happen against an enemy like Straw Hat.*

In one hand, Sentomaru, whom Luffy had seen arrive in Shabondy at the same time Gion was preparing to leave, held a massive axe of some kind, an executioner's axe if Luffy was any judge, larger and perhaps just as heavy as the heavysset man who was toting it at the moment. In his other hand, he held a small gun of some kind, which looked almost futuristic. It was connected to a forearm bracer of some kind, which was bulkier than it should be if it was just armor, making Sentomaru's forearm look almost as bulky as Franky's.

He charged towards the wall of sand that separated him from Vivi and Luffy, cutting into it, his axe suddenly glowing with Busoshoku for a second as it went through the sand, allowing him to burst through without even slowing. The next second, he used a short-range version of Kami-E and Geppo mixed to get close, but Luffy had already dodged away, his Kenbunshoku more than able to keep him ahead of the man.

“Fuck you too, Sentomaru! Don’t think for one moment that I hate the World Government any less for the fact that it was this asshole who killed my dad! I know what they were doing to him! We’re going to have a long talk after this, and you’re not going to like it!” she roared, and then charged forward, towards Luffy. *I’m gonna give you the benefit of the doubt and think you might not have known what was going on with my dad, Sentomaru, but that’s only until we punch this asshole’s head in, then you better be telling the truth on that score, or else!*

“Jeez, it’s so nice to be so popular,” Luffy grumbled, before he ducked under Sentomaru’s axe as the man brought it down with a thunderous boom, still covered with Busoshoku.

“I’m going to get you, you freaking heartbreaker!” the fat man shouted.

That caused Luffy to shudder even as he flipped up and over a blow from Bonney, then zipped to the side using his lightning form to escape another blast of energy from her, which hit one of the Yarukiman branches behind him. Whatever amount of age-based energy Bonney had put into it didn’t seem to matter for whatever reason. The watching Robin, though, had removed some of her eyes from the tree just in case.

“Dude! I know ya met me as Ranko, but all I did was break your freaking axe at the time!” Luffy retorted, rolling underneath Sentomaru’s axe, then leaping up, lashing out with a punch that was redirected, but still let Luffy bounce higher into the air.

A moment later, he was forced to dodge away as a giant fist went through a tree nearby as Bonney closed. Her arm had distended and grown to a crazy degree, causing Luffy to shake his head, his next taunt towards Sentomaru forgotten. “The fuck, do you have two Devil Fruits or something? How are you alive!?”

“Fuck you, that’s how,” Bonney retorted, her upper body bulging up for a moment before shrinking back right after launching another punch towards Luffy, which he dodged.

As the two main enemy combatants charged her man, Robin went to work. “Eve, target those cannons with what guns can range on them. I will get the rest. Vivi has the musketeers under control.”

Vivi did indeed. She had already converted a significant chunk of the ground around the battlefield into sand. Now, walls appeared between trees made out of sand, once more blocking the marines’ musket shots. A second later, several marines screamed as the sand flowed over

them, dumping them all to the ground and encasing them in sand, which hardened around them. Two others squealed as Vivi rose up behind them out of sand they hadn't even noticed under their feet. The two of them fell from chops to the neck, sending them to the ground before either knew she was there. Then Vivi was gone, and more sand began to spread, while Robin's hands clutched and pulled, silencing several of the cannoneers.

Meanwhile, Luffy had found himself pushed back again from Bonney, who had smashed through one of the actually real trees that had found purchase on the ground of the grove, while Sentomaru was trying to work around Luffy, possibly unaware of how good Robin's Kenbunshoku was. *Just great. I've got a rival who blames me for something, although I admittedly did do it this time, and a guy targeting me for breaking his heart. That last is seriously giving me flashbacks to Nerima, and not in a fun way. If any of them could be called fun in the first place!*

Thankfully, Bonney and Sentomaru weren't really trying to fight together. The next blast of energy reflected off of Sentomaru's axe, bouncing up and away as he was forced to use it to defend himself, and Luffy took immediate advantage. A double kick caught each of them in the center of the face, with Sentomaru only staggering slightly, while Bonney was sent reeling. *Didn't put any Busoshoku into those strikes, darn it. Huh, Sentomaru's got a lot of natural durability.*

At the same time, Eve fired several of the starboard side guns at a few of the marine's cannons and gun crews. Most of those guns were shredded, torn apart by the smaller caliber cannonballs launched by the dial-based weapons of the Everlasting Resolve. The shrapnel from those guns tore through several of their cannoneers, but most were still alive to scream as they rolled on the ground.

However, Luffy was nearly hit by a blast of energy from Bonney. Only a last-second shifting into lightning form saved him, but that opened him up to a slice from Sentomaru. His Kenbunshoku allowed him to dodge by a whisker's length, and he lashed out with a punch to Sentomaru's face, armored with his own Busoshoku this time, which Sentomaru matched with his own. That saved him, but Luffy's Busoshoku nearly overwhelmed the fat man's, sending him stumbling, shaking his head.

His Kenbunshoku was overcome for a few seconds as Bonney lashed out with her energy attacks again from both hands, her knees and even her feet. They were small, barely there beams of energy, probably not having much age-changing energy in them, but given how young Luffy already was, he couldn't afford to be hit by any of them. Eventually, Luffy was forced to shift into lightning form to let them all pass by, only to be hit instantly by Sentomaru's new gun. *Shit!*

This gun didn't shoot out anything Luffy had expected, not an energy beam, not a larger-than-average bullet or anything similar. No, instead, it turned out to be a Super Soaker. A water gun, in other words, loaded with ocean water. Instantly, Luffy felt the shift change him into her,

and he landed, reeling for a second, before being forced to roll away from another energy blast from Bonney and a burst of something that sizzled as it hit the ground, suspiciously acting like acid.

“FUCK!” I didn’t expect that, I’m gonna need to really work on dodging those fucking beams from Bonney!

The gender shift caused both of her enemies to pause, which in turn allowed Vivi to get into the action. Several large fists of sand crashed into Bonney and Sentomaru, sending them flying, before both of them found their weapons grabbed by dozens of other hands as Robin followed Vivi’s lead. With the majority of the marines already knocked out and their cannons destroyed, the Supernova and overweight marine officer were the primary threat.

Several officers had been able to dodge and strike back, but they had made the mistake of attacking the ship directly, running into Rayleigh and Franky. Luffy recognized one of them as Helmeppo, but she didn’t have any reason or desire to engage with the blond guy in any way. As much as Luffy might have thought that Coby had been a friend at one point, she and Helmeppo didn’t even have that thin connection.

At the moment, though, he was the only one providing a real threat to those onboard the ship, as he launched several Rankyaku towards Robin, forcing her to dodge, breaking her concentration enough to stop her from using her Busoshoku to any effect. That just opened him up to a Strong Right from Franky, which caught the younger man in the face before he could use Tekkai.

As his two primary enemies began to use Busoshoku to start breaking out of the grasping hands and sand holding them, Luffy charged forward.

Before Sentomaru could go on the attack himself, he found himself isolated, with Luffy in the air above him, smashing downwards hard. A dozen Busoshoku fists flashed out at Amaguriken speed, causing Sentomaru’s Busoshoku to break, and for the man to be sent reeling backwards, blood flowing from a broken jaw, his axe shattered into pieces.

However, Vivi’s attempt to contain Bonney failed as she too burst out with Busoshoku, charging in to attack Vivi in turn. Grimacing, Vivi sent her consciousness away down into the sand, creating dozens of sand clones, saying aloud, “As a daughter of a loving father myself, I sympathize Bonney, but I’m not going to let you kill me or my Captain!”

No longer having a clear target, Bonney was still able to send several beams of energy towards Luffy, who was forced to dodge away, cutting off her attacks on Sentomaru. One of those beams almost struck Sentomaru, but he rolled away just in time. “Damn it, Bonney, we should work together here!”

“Fuck you!” Bonney shouted in turn. “Luffy might be the bigger target right now, but don’t think we’re friends!”

Luffy growled, landing on top of a branch high above into the air, ki blasts flashed out from his hands to crash into both of his opponents. Sentomaru was able to shift into Busoshoku in time to root block the blow, but Bonney didn’t, her eyes widening with shock as the energy blast hit her. That hadn’t been lightning or anything else and hit her more like a physical force than simple energy, sending her ass over cattle.

“Hahaha, for your information, I was a badass even at this age, bitch!” Luffy caroled, perched there like a monkey.

While Sentomaru made a mental note that, as Vegapunk had thought, logias couldn’t shift into their element form while drenched in sea water, Bonney simply growled, pushing herself to her feet. A second later, she leaped up towards Luffy, which anyone who had fought Luffy would’ve told you was a mistake. Her energy blast shifted across Luffy’s shoulder, missing her by inches, as Luffy launched towards her in turn.

Bonney’s next energy blast was met by a ki blast, which dissipated the energy wave, and then the two were in the air, with Luffy’s Busoshoku against Bonney’s. Although Luffy was only ten years old, she still retained all the abilities she had learned in this new life of his, and her Busoshoku was just a little bit better than Bonney’s, and her Kenbunshoku, while weaker than Hancock’s or anyone else who was truly proficient with it while in this form, was still up to the task of allowing Luffy to read Bonney’s attacks easily.

Her mastery of midair combat also gave Luffy more than enough ability to overcome her defenses, smashing her several times in the face, chest, shoulder, and then thigh, before nearly breaking her Busoshoku across her shoulder, causing her to grunt in pain as she was sent down towards the ground with a final double kick to the ribs. Luffy used that kick to flip away from a blast of energy, but it was clear who had one bad exchange.

Meanwhile, Sentomaru had tried to charge forward again, only to find Vivi in the way. Her sand blasts hit him from every direction, and his attempts to attack her in turn were flummoxed by Vivi’s ability to simply shift her consciousness away into different particles of sand. While Vivi could not use Busoshoku, her ability to read her opponent was such that no attack from him, even a few air blast attacks, his version of the Rankyaku didn’t matter at all.

Seeing that over Bonney’s head, Luffy grinned internally. *YES. Fucking hell, I bet she might beat out Nami for discovering Kenbunshoku.*

Vivi launched attack after attack against Sentomaru, from her various clones, working slowly to push him in a different direction from where Luffy and Bonney were fighting, but he realized what she was doing, and leapt into the air, using Geppo and Kami-E to zoom towards the two other combatants. “Straw Hat! You will not escape!”

However, Vivi was not about to just let him go like that. Using her Devil Fruit powers, she transformed a significant chunk of the ground beneath the mangrove trunks into sand, launching a vice-like grip of sand from directly beneath where Sentomaru had been about to attack Luffy. The sand jaws closed around the man, dragging him down, and before he could try to break out with his Busoshoku, Luffy's fists began to batter into him.

Pushing herself off the ground onto shaky legs, Bonney howled in fury from where she had crashed into the ground, slapping her hands together and lashing out with a beam so wide and tall that Luffy and Sentomaru alike didn't have any chance to dodge. "Fuck you both and be dust!"

Luffy had a brief instance to curse before she flipped herself up and over Sentomaru and the vice still containing him, putting the two of them between him and the incoming beam. Luckily, once the beam hit something fleshy, whether or not the thing was covered by Busoshoku or not, it was absorbed. Sentomaru found himself transformed into an old, if still large, man, still held in Vivi's sand as Luffy allowed himself to fall towards the ground.

"Damn you!" Needing some time to recover from her use of that Bonney charged forwards, her arms covered with Busoshoku as she raced to where Luffy had just set down. "If it's the last thing I do, I'm gonna make you pay!"

Before anything else could happen, though, the fight was interrupted by a series of laser beams and blasts of air flashed out from one side of the battlefield, carving into the ground, and sending the charging Luffy backward, while Bonney paused, scowling in anger. That anger faded a little as, almost on the heels of that attack, a voice spoke. "I would rather it not be the last thing you do. You have your whole life ahead of you after all, Little Jewel."

The phrase 'Little Jewel' and that voice had Bonney stumbling, almost losing control of her shape-shifted body for a second as she stared at where one of the Pacifistas had just emerged from the forest around them.

He took in the scene, his eyes seemingly far more human than the last example of a pacifist that Bonney had seen, ironically, here in the archipelago after the incident at the slave auction. His eyes lit on the redhead, cocking his head thoughtfully to one side. "I do not know who you are, young lady, but if you have a problem with my daughter, you have a problem with me. And I suggest you do not have a problem with me."

"What the hell!" Luffy muttered as Vivi reformed out of the sand behind her. "I don't think the Pacifistas could be that eloquent, or sound that human," she paused, then added, "And oy! I wasn't the one to start this shit. That's all on Lady Pink over there!"

Luffy would have gone on to demand what the Pacifista was acting as if it was alive and the original version, but seeing the construct turning away, he didn't say anything as it turned towards Bonney, who was just staring at it, her eyes slowly narrowing in suspicion even as they

began to tear up again. "This, this isn't... The newspapers, the World Government, they admitted that you were dead! Was that a lie, too?! Or is this a trick, some new Pacifista bullshit?"

She backed away rapidly. The little girl that Bonney was in reality wanted to hope, to believe that maybe this could be her father, but also knew that it was highly unlikely. On top of Luffy having killed him, there was the reason why she had fled her minders was because she had learned about the experiments that her father had been put through. Up to and including having something installed in his brain so he couldn't ignore any orders given to her by anyone associated with the World Government.

"When you and I lived on Egghead Island, you tried to sneak out four times to try and eat the entire candy-cane machine's allotment, only to have stomach aches the day after because of how much sugar you had. You loved the color yellow when you were younger and love furry things to the point you would always fall asleep rolled up in a fur coat rather than a blanket even if there was one to offer, Little Jewel," the cyborg answered, moving towards Bonney slowly, his hands up in front of him, giving off the appearance of someone coming close to a skittish animal or child.

Kind of on point given how she's been acting... "Fuck..." Luffy whispered, the shoe finally dropping as she glanced over her shoulder at Vivi. "How young do you think she is, really?"

"I've been wondering that for a while. Ten, maybe, just like Luffy's current age?" Vivi mused, watching as Bonney's face just kind of broke. "OOo... yes, ten. Definitely no older. Oh, dear."

Bonney's eyes teared up, her lower lip began to quiver, and a second later, she was running forward. As she did, she began to shrink and then shrink some more before she was shorter than even Luffy at the moment. "Daddy!!" she shrieked, and then she was being picked up by the far larger Kuma.

"Oh my god, I am soooo happy I wasn't fighting her seriously," Luffy muttered, while behind her, Vivi giggled. The next moment, Luffy found herself picked up and sighed, resigning herself to her fate as Vivi squealed in her ear. "EEEEEE!!! You're so cute, Luffy-chan! Ooh, I've been wanting to pinch your little cheeks since Bonney de-aged you."

"Yeah, yeah, get it out of your system," Luffy sighed, only to stiffen as Robin appeared a moment later, hopping down from the ship. Nearby, Helmeppo was unconscious and trussed up in rope with Franky and Rayleigh watching on for a moment, the carpenter having dealt with Helmeppo and one of the other officers, while the last had been taken out by Robin.

"Ara, but while you look a little cute as a redhead girl, Luffy, I think you are much more handsome as a little boy," Robin murmured as she moved forward.

“Oooh, good point, he really was cute earlier.” Vivi willingly stepped back a moment, and Luffy sighed again as she felt hot water pouring over her head.

A moment later, Robin picked him up and squeezed, nuzzling into Luffy’s air as Vivi pushed in, hugging him too, Luffy’s head disappearing in between their chests. “Mmm, yes indeed, he’s even cuter as a guy, and that resigned face, adorable! It makes me think thoughts I probably shouldn’t about the future...” Robin murmured, causing Luffy’s already atomic blush to skyrocket.

Luckily for him, Rayleigh was there, and while Franky was willing to just laugh in the background, he coughed delicately, coming up behind the two women and their new toy. “Ladies, while I would never get in the way of your fun, perhaps we should start tying up these marines before they start coming to? And maybe then speak to Bartholomew Kuma, if that really is the former Tyrant of the Shichibukai.”

Luffy mumbled, his voice unheard inside the heavenly vice his head was currently trapped in. His thumb’s up, at least, was visible, and with some reluctance, his two lovers pulled back, although Robin kept one hand on Luffy’s head for a moment, a small, amused smile on her face.

She did so, even as hands began to appear all around the area, helping Vivi and Franky to tie up the marines, while Bonney’s crew, who also seemed to be crying, were released from their temporary sand prison. Robin and Vivi began to cuddle with chibi-Luffy while Rayleigh and Franky joined them. Franky took a moment to smash Sentomaru over the head again, just as a precaution, something that Luffy had to nod at.

As the two older men reached them, Luffy paused, frowning as his Kenbunshoku warned him of further trouble. With his gender restored to its natural state, he had access to his Devil Fruit again and could feel the minds of several marine crews shifting in their direction. “There are two Marine battleships out there. They just started to come in towards the archipelago from seaward.”

“They’re battleships. Eve’s got a problem moving between the groves, of course, they’re coming from seaward,” Franky interjected, snorting.

“Hush, you,” Luffy growled mock-angrily, both men trying hard not to look over to where the exceedingly tiny-seeming Bonney was still bawling her eyes out on the shoulder of the monstrously strong... robot... cyborg? Who knew? The way the thing’s expression had shifted was giving Luffy some real uncanny valley vibes. Regardless of what it was, the real Kuma, possessed cyborg, or fake, the emotional moment was making both of them kind of uncomfortable to be near, let alone in hearing range of Bonney’s sobbing words.

Luckily, not only were those words almost incomprehensible as they were spoken directly into Kuma’s chest, but Luffy had just been given an out. “I can also sense at least three

other ships out there. They're probably within range to see us, but nothing more. Still, that's enough to cause us trouble on the return trip. Maybe."

At that, Eve shouted from within the ship, her voice carrying to where Luffy and the others stood among the now-gathered bodies of the marines, many of whom had needed some medical attention. "Yes! Captain, say we can fight them, please! Blasting those cannoneer teams into bits wasn't enough!"

For a moment, Luffy was actually in the mood to agree. If the dumbass marines were willing to attack him when they should have known they had literally no chance, then maybe sinking a few more ships would get the message across. However, Vivi shook her head, reaching out to take his, currently quite small, hand in hers. "With our abilities, even if we simply keep it to a ship-to-ship battle, a fight against those few ships would be more bullying and abuse than anything, Eve. Let them go. I've had enough excitement for one day, and remember, the common marines haven't done anything wrong beyond following the orders of venal men."

The others were more ambivalent about it, but after a second, Luffy nodded, pushing down his own combative tendencies to remember that fact once more. *I don't want any more nightmares. Can't let my temper and ego get the best of me.* "You heard the princess, Eve," he sighed, his last bit of ego and anger fleeing him as Bonney's whimpers reached him again. "Those are probably just normal marines out there, like the ones that followed Sentomaru into this stupid attack on us. I don't want to kill any men like that more than I have to."

As Vivi smiled down at him, Luffy smiled back, giving her a hug, finding that his head only came up to just below her breasts at present. "Do you want me to go out and try the diplomat thing? I'd send you, but your ability to use that air-based sand movement isn't that good just yet."

"Certainly not to the point I'd be willing to use it overlong over the ocean with hostile ships nearby," Vivi agreed, pulling out of the hug somewhat reluctantly. *Hugging Luffy as a little boy gives me an altogether different feeling, but he's sooo cute!*

Robin shrugged her shoulders. "Do so. I think that Bonney is almost done crying, but after that, well, the two of them still might have some talking to do before we can request some answers." She gestured down to a few of Eve's victims. "We can also hand over some of the marines' own wounded. Bonney's ship's doctor and I have done our best, but some of these men are still in danger of dying quickly without proper aid."

"Good point. That'll give me a bigger stick to beat those idiots upside the head with," Luffy agreed. *If that is, none of them are Absolute Justice types. Hopefully they ain't, or this'll get ugly.*

With that, Luffy zipped into the sky. Reappearing there, he allowed his Kenbunshoku to expand further, wide enough to cover the entirety of the archipelago. He didn't find anything

dangerous coming their way, although he did have to stop himself from making the Human Auction House disappear in a blast of lightning, since he could sense several people there. None were slaves, currently, so he let the proprietors live, for now. *But on my way back, that might be a different story. Ooh, right, we'll need to be aware of the Log Pose and not let it reset while we're on Fishman Island.*

Beyond the two battleships were indeed five frigates, but they were spread out. Luffy could detect enough of the surface thoughts of those crews to know they were observation platforms, a new term he hadn't heard before. *Schooner rigs built to observe from a distance with powerful telescopes, from what I'm getting from the minds of their crews. Interesting idea, and here, probably useful too.* That didn't mean Luffy was about to let them be used against him.

Zippering down, Luffy landed directly on top of one of the guns of one of the battleships, the one where he sensed a semi-familiar mind and the one he could tell was calling the shots for a moment. He remained in lightning form for a moment, sparking and sizzling, his feet deliberately being hot enough to start the metal of the battleship's main can't turret to glow underneath his feet as several of the marines on deck fired their muskets at him, their bullets passing through him without doing anything.

"Cease Fire!" a female voice shouted, and Luffy nodded to himself as Tashigi, Zoro's little stalker from before Alabasta, came out on deck. She blinked then, her head cocking to one side. "Wh, how are you so young?" she stammered, having seemingly completely lost her train of thought at the sight of a ten-year-old Luffy instead of the adult version she had thought to see.

Luffy snorted. "Big Eater decided to get involved in attacking me, along with Sammy. It didn't go well for either of them. Now I'm just hoping this shift isn't permanent, or Hancock's gonna be pissed."

"Th, then Jewelry Bonney really has the Toshi Toshi no mi?" Tashigi gaped for a second, then shook herself and drew Shigure, pointing it at Luffy. He was surprised to see a sheen of Busoshoku on the edge, something she had certainly not had back in Alabasta. It wasn't enough to make her a threat, but it was a decent showing. "Th, that doesn't matter! Commodore Sentomaru might have ordered us to attack you despite Fleet Admiral Aokiji's Directive 42, but--"

"I'd wager that order was a do-not-engage kind of thing," Luffy interjected. "And before ya get back up on yer high horse, swords-girl, we didn't kill any of his men, heck, we even let Sammy himself alive. Unconscious and battered, but your marines are still alive, even if a few are in critical condition."

He let his voice harden, which gave the watching marines a bit of whiplash, considering how short and young Luffy was right now. "On land, that kind of thing's easy. It isn't so easy and

ship-to-ship fights. You people know what I'm capable of. Do you really think two battleships and a few frigates are enough?"

Tashigi grimaced at that, wishing Smoker were there with her right now, but the two of them had been separated. Smoker was being kept close to Marineford at present for some retraining, while Tashigi had been seconded to the Shabondy Archipelago to command its fleet component, as Sentomaru had no training in ship-to-ship warfare. She had been the one to come up with the idea of an encirclement, but she did know what Luffy was capable of. She had lived through Whitebeard's War and seen what this... well, cute little boy at the moment, could do. "I... can you let us send in an away boat for our wounded? It galls me, but I won't lead my men to the slaughter."

"Pull back your frigates, and I'll bring them out to you. Don't bother trying to send them out again afterward, I'll know," Luffy warned.

"I... agree," Tashigi grumbled. "I'll send out the orders now."

Luffy just nodded and, seeing no reason to stay more, turned away. Before he could, though, Tashigi shouted, "Wait! I, I have to know. Why, how did you get Hina to betray the Marines? How did you get Garp the Hero to turn on us?! Why?!" Both of those things had been bothering her for a while, particularly Hina's seeming treason. She had been questioning a lot of things recently, and without Smoker around to ask for answers, she was floundering badly.

"Hina didn't turn on you. She ran away when she realized that she'd be made a scapegoat for not knowing something she had no way of learning in the first place," Luffy answered bluntly, causing Tashigi to flinch, as she knew all too well that could have happened. "As for my grandfather, family is a big motivator. Duh. So is the fact that the WeeGee's idea of justice has always boiled down to 'do what we say because we're in charge. Or can you be so blind as to ignore what the Tenryubito are?'"

As Tashigi actually took a step back at that, Luffy shook his head, hopping up off the turret, bouncing in midair with Geppo. "My advice? Get stronger, sword-girl. Right now, you're just one marine among thousands who have no way of changing the world one way or another. Don't like it? Get strong enough to make a difference, whatever kind of difference that might be."

To that, Tashigi had no reply, and she remained silent, staring at the young boy as he turned into lightning and zipped away, clenching Shigure's hilt with helpless anger and indecision alike.

Moments later, Luffy arrived back, carrying a large platform of wood, courtesy of Franky, on which the marines' most badly wounded and even simply still bleeding were on. They were hustled inside, and the two battleships began to turn ponderously out to sea once more.

Luffy watched from above them as the ships moved, shifting around the archipelago entirely. Luffy continued to use Kenbunshoku for a bit, sensing where they went until they docked at the marine base in Grove 1, making certain that none of the frigates tried to slink away around the other side of the Archipelago.

By the time Luffy returned, it looked as if the reunion was winding down, which was a very good thing as Luffy's body was still that of his ten-year-old self. Despite that, he ignored Bonney and Kuma, approaching them for a moment, the rest of Bonney's crew having kept their distance, to smile at Vivi, a happy smile on his face. "Well, that was one battle avoided. Here's to diplomacy, right, Vivi?"

Vivi laughed at that before Luffy paused. "Oh, and I can sense that Sandersonia and Sanji are on their way back." He looked over at Kuma, shaking his head. "Are ya ready ta give your explanation of what all you are and everything else? And is this explanation going to go metaphysical?"

"In truth, it is rather convoluted," Bartholomew agreed, while Bonney gave Luffy the stink eye.

Luffy maturely gave it right back at her, before shaking his head and looking back up, and up, and up, at Kuma. Kuma was massive, especially compared to Luffy's ten-year-old body. "Just tell me now A, that Big Eater's powers ain't permanent on other people, and B, are you really Kuma? Did I kill some kind of copy? And I ain't gonna apologize for that. It was the right move at the time."

"It was. As I said at the time, I could not have kept your Devil Fruit or anything else secret from the World Government at the time beyond my true allegiance. And you did kill me, although..." Kuma chuckled, a warm, if oddly metallic sound coming from a robot as in his arms, Jewelry Bonney shifted to the age she had taken on prior to the fight, something Luffy felt was more to help her emotional control than anything else was, although Kuma's arm was still around her waist. "Given how little of my actual flesh was still a part of me, I think you could reasonably say I had been dying in installments for quite some time."

"Yeah... exactly how much of that did Borsalino and Sentomaru know about?" Bonney growled, turning to glare at where Sentomaru's bulk could still be seen, adorned with heavy hausers despite him still being an old man at present. "Because if Sentomaru did know about it, and still called me a friend earlier, I'm going to—"

"Don't do anything. Sentomaru's not worth getting blood on your hands, Little Jewel," Kuma said, causing Bonney to blush.

"DAAAD, not in front of my rival!" she whined.

Luffy cackled at that and might've taunted her about that rivalry only going one way, but Vivi, feeling for the girl, spoke up. "Um, *ahem* you were saying, Kuma-san?"

"Ah, yes." Kuma gestured down his body with his free hand. "As for this, let me just say that there is more to my Devil Fruit, and to the soul, than even I expected. I had created a Memory Paw, a reservoir of almost all my memories about my time as a Revolutionary and as a father, for a friend to give to Bonney at a later date. But it turns out that creating such had, well, are you familiar with the term phylactery?"

While Luffy shook his head, Robin spoke up. She and Vivi had moved to sit to either side of Luffy, fighting the urge to pull chibi-Luffy into their laps, while Franky had returned to the ship for a moment. Rayleigh, on the other hand, showed no sign of doing anything but watching Kuma carefully, his expression one of intrigue rather than concern. "I have. A portion of your soul is split off and placed in a material object, then hidden. It is a common trope in fantasy stories."

"Correct. The Memory Paw I left behind with Dr. Vegapunk apparently had enough of my, my self, I suppose, in it to act as such. When Luffy finished the job, Sengoku and the Gorosei started on my body, the rest of my soul was repelled from my body into the Memory Paw," Kuma explained to the fascination of Rayleigh and Robin.

"Devil Fruits are bullshit, got it," Luffy grunted, shaking his head. *Although I could maaaaaybe figure out a way to do that same thing with ki. With, oh, a few hundred years to build up enough ki and to infuse it into something, along with figuring out how to infuse my ki with everything that makes me, well, me. Yeah, fuck that noise. There are way better projects out there than that. Besides, with my luck, it'd just result in a clone revolt kind of thing, like with the shadow incense.*

It had to be said at this point that Luffy's way of thinking, or rather his ability to think, was being affected by the physical means with which he was doing so. A ten-year-old's brain wasn't nearly as conducive to deep thinking as an older person's was, after all. Still, he was keeping a hold of things well enough.

At that point, Sandersonia and Sanji came into view through the forest. Sandersonia was leading a contingent of floating parcels, a specialty of the Archipelago. Using a coating device, the owner of the shop would create a personalized bubble over a purchase, allowing the customer to just tug it along.

Sandersonia's purchases were larger than any Luffy had seen during their last time in the archipelago, and Luffy knew for a fact they wouldn't be able to fit anywhere but in the gun deck aboard the ship. The Everlasting Resolve didn't really have all that much in the way of cargo space after all, and what cargo space it did have was given over to the crew's gold, maintenance area and the larder.

In contrast, Sanji was simply carrying a few packages, whistling cheerily, looking more like himself to Luffy's eyes than he had since Luffy and Vivi had returned to Amazon Lily. *I guess he got his flirt on already, if only shortly.* "You two get everything you need?" Luffy asked aloud.

"We did indeed, Luffy," Sanji said, smirking just a little bit as his eyes twitched sideways to Sandersonia, who ignored the look and continued on, heading towards the ship with her numerous, large packages. "And I see you handled everything here well enough without us, although I have to say, your current form is kind of hilarious."

"Ara, I think you meant cute, Chef-kun," Robin smiled, placing an arm around Luffy's shoulder and pulling him into her side. That this pushed Luffy's face into the side of her boob was not something she noticed.

Luffy just rolled his eyes at that and turned back to Bonney and Kuma, making no effort to pull away, despite a small fragment of his mind urging him to do so, because girls were icky. "Er, I don't suppose I could get you to cancel this?" Luffy requested, pointing at himself. "How long is it going to last, anyway?"

"Since I didn't hit you with a full-powered beam, it'll probably only last another... I don't know, an hour? How long was I..." Bonney trailed off, looking up at her dad, her face threatening to tear up again, until Sanji suddenly twirled in front of her.

Bonney twitched, as did her father, but Sanji simply held out a small box of candies that he had pulled from somewhere. Why he had that on him, Luffy didn't know, but the sight of it made Sandersonia twitch for some reason. "Dear lady, please, there is no more need for tears. Have some of these and calm down. They will tide you over until I am able to present to you a feast!"

Bonney eagerly grabbed the box and began to stuff her face with the chocolate within, acting far more her real age than her physical one for a moment, while Sanji twirled away and then leapt up and over towards the ship, crossing the intervening distance faster in a single bound. "Wait right there, I will be back with that feast!"

Kuma stared after the exuberant chef, before looking over at Robin. "I noticed you calling someone on a Den Den Mushi a bit ago. I assumed it was those two. But you didn't tell either of them about my daughter's age?"

"Why would we? This is going to be hilarious," Luffy answered for his lover, causing Robin to 'fufuufu' behind one of her hands and Vivi to roll her eyes. "Now, about..." Luffy was interrupted as his form suddenly began to shift and change, growing up to his normal age quickly, pushing Robin and Vivi away slightly from where they had cuddled into him from either side. He decided to ignore the 'aww' from both of them, concentrating on more important things. "Well, that was handy."

He then became serious, staring across at Kuma. "When we fought, you told me you were a Revolutionary Army Officer, yet said you couldn't keep our secrets because any order given to you you'd have to obey. Here you are in a new body, and okay, fine, I'll assume your soul's in there, but even so, how do I know that you still don't have some kind of core programming or other to make you loyal to the WeeGee? For all I know, you could've been searching for your daughter here to try to turn her into a new Shichibukai right beside you."

"Now, look you!" Bonney growled angrily, ready to push to her feet, but a gentle hand on her back kept her sitting, and she subsided.

"I believe I might have mentioned this at some point when we were fighting, but you are far more intelligent and forward-thinking than most would give you credit for," Kuma mused, looking back at Luffy.

"Considering my captain's role in Whitebeard's War, I doubt that will continue to be the case," Robin said, somehow giving the word captain enough added meaning to make Bonney begin to flush a little for some reason that the ten-year-old girl didn't quite understand. "That whole episode spoke of forward planning and the ability to keep secrets."

"I have only been able to discover what the common men know of that war since my revival, and that with difficulty, yet I imagine it might. Regardless, when it comes to proving that I am an independent operator, I honestly don't know how to go about doing so," Kuma admitted. "I am no longer a cyborg at this point, but rather a full robot, which means I am a thing of programming even with the Nikyu Nikyu no Mi having somehow allowed my soul to survive. I can use my Devil Fruit powers. Would that be enough?"

"Considering what I saw in Whitebeard's War, no. The marines had access to this green stuff that they injected into themselves, and it was able to give them Devil Fruit powers. Specifically, the Supa Supa no Mi, on top of any Devil Fruit power the users already had. If that one was possible, duplicating yours could also be possible," Luffy said, shaking his head, causing Kuma's eyes to widen. He hadn't known that.

To the surprise of the others, though, Rayleigh chuckled. "There is a very simple way to test your independence, Bartholomew. What do you think of the Gorosei?"

"I think that they are shadows of a greater evil which must be expunged from this world for the good of humanity and every other race on this planet. The one called Jaygarcia Saturn, in particular, considering that he was the one who instigated both the experiments on me and the watch on my daughter, which, thankfully, failed miserably," Kuma answered promptly, before blinking.

Luffy also blinked, while Robin hummed thoughtfully. "The Gorosei are a secret, even to most of the World Government. That you are able to speak of them so freely means you probably are not actually under any kind of World Government control." She looked at Luffy,

shrugging her shoulders. "There might be some kind of deep-buried control program still. I wouldn't recommend that we altogether trust him, but I think we can trust at least that Kuma doesn't know of any such programming, and until he hits a hard wall on what he can tell us, we can trust his word."

Thinking about it for a few moments, Luffy nodded, by which point Sanji had arrived with the first plate of food. Bonney's eyes gleamed in delight at seeing what looked like some kind of linguine pasta, and she dug in hungrily.

"Okay, I'll believe that you're at least telling the truth about you being Kuma. I'll even assume that, yeah, the Paw Paw no Mi might've been able to do what you described. Devil Fruits are bullshit, and I say that as a guy who can turn into lightning and literally feel out the thoughts of other people around me if I want to."

In fact, Luffy thought about doing that right now to Kuma. It would probably be even easier, being able to feel the synapses or whatever constituted his computer brain. However, interpreting that information would be something else entirely. They wouldn't be thoughts per se, simply numbers and so forth. Frankly, Luffy felt that aspect of the Goro Goro no Mi-assisted Kenbunshoku was just a bit too much most of the time.

"You say Doctor Vegapunk helped you store the memories and everything else, and that he then must've done something to input those memories into the cyborg form. Why?" Luffy went on, "I'm not asking for your life story or anything; we don't owe one another anything like that. I'm just wondering why Vegapunk would want to do anything that the government wouldn't want him to."

He then grinned toothily. "Well, that and if you have any info ya wanna share that we could use to hurt the WeeGee. Whatever our past interactions, we've got an enemy in common there, at least."

"Doctor Vegapunk is first and foremost a scientist. He does have some ethical constraints, unlike his fellows in the former MADS rogue research lab. However, science is still the main thing for him. That is why he allowed the World Government to recruit his services. That and total command of Egghead Island to run his various experiments. He left me a message that said that the Gorosei had decided to move him and all of his experiments to the Holy Land, to have him closer to home and to help them build up their military strength. That might not be a weakness, but it is definitely something you and the Revolutionary Army need to know."

At that, Luffy and Sanji exchanged a glance as Sanji placed a plate of pizza down. They were each individual slices for some reason that only Luffy noticed the explanation for a second later, as each of them was a slightly different type of pizza, up to and including the horror of pineapple pizza. Which was just a travesty in Luffy's mind.

Regardless of his cooking skills, though, more importantly, Luffy knew that Sanji was one of the more strategically minded thinkers in the crew. The other one was sitting right beside Luffy, and he addressed both Sanji and Robin. "Okay, that's bad. For a start, it'll mean More K9M and Pacifista being churned out faster than before. I'd estimate there were what, fifteen, maybe less, involved in the war against Whitebeard? I wonder how many Vegapunk has been able to make since then, and how many the World Government will want. A whole army of the things?"

"You hit on something that could be worse before in the short run, Luffy." Sanji sat down, taking a long drag from his cigarette, setting aside his desire to cook more for the young woman known as the Big Eater for a moment. "That gunk you mentioned. The WeeGee has access to a lot of Devil Fruits, possibly the most out of any of the powers in the world. If they are able to duplicate even half that number, like they could the properties of the Supa Supa no Mi, that green gunk could be a game-changer. And there's worse."

Luffy motioned Sanji to continue, and he did after taking another long draw from his cigarette, pointing at the Everlasting Resolve. "No offense to you, Franky," he said, nodding his head slightly to one side to Franky. "You're a world-class shipbuilder, but you can't say that anything you've done on that ship besides the railgun is beyond anyone else's ability to duplicate, can you? Especially not someone like Vegapunk."

"Ehh... The whole engine system is probably well beyond what anyone would be able to build without access to Luffy's Devil Fruit, and the ship would need a lot more sailors without that, Robin and Eve around, but yeah, I suppose beyond the rail gun and the weather-based weapon systems we're still trying to work out yeah, I guess they could duplicate it. If they had access to dials or tech that could do what they do. I can't think of tech that can do what they do and be portable enough to be placed on a ship, but yer right. I ain't a world-class scientist, I'm just a super shipwright," Franky answered with a frown.

"There is a difference between duplicating the abilities of our ship from what bits and pieces of those abilities they will be able to piece together from observation, and doing so in considerable numbers. I am not saying that both are not possible, but it will take time," Robin soothed. "You're overlooking the psychological aspect of moving Vegapunk like this."

Sanji and Luffy blinked, then looked at her in confusion, as did Kuma and the others, before Robin shrugged, pointing at Luffy. "You and Hancock both said that a Gorosei member took part in Whitebeard's War. You said that Newgate was able to kill him. Luffy and Rayleigh has described those monstrosities before. Moving Vegapunk to the Holy Land wasn't just about control. It was a move of desperation."

The other still didn't get it, but Rayleigh did, nodding firmly. "The WeeGee's hurting right now, the Marines are hurting right now. I've been keeping abreast of what's been going on as well as I can, and I can tell you flat-out, they are slowly losing control of the New World and are only retaining what it has there because they have been making new allies, and bluntly,

Aokiji is doing everything he can to consolidate their forces. It's why their position here in Paradise has declined so badly, and even in some of the Blues, many a base has been completely abandoned, allied countries left to see to their own security.

"That's partly why I'll be staying here in the Shabondy Archipelago, while you all head on to Fishman Island, to gather more information about what else is going on in the world." Rayleigh continued, "Especially considering that they're going to lose Doflamingo. My sources in the New World were clear that the remnants of the Whitebeard Armada were moving towards Dressrosa in order to have it out with him for his role in Fire Fist Ace's capture. What the World Government does after is going to be telling."

While Luffy just snorted at that, having known that was happening from the horse's mouth when last he, Ace and Sabo talked via Den Den Mushi, Sanji scowled, taking an even longer drag than normal on his cigarette as he turned to stare up at the sky. "That... ugh... that makes me wonder exactly how desperate they are for new allies..."

"You're thinking they might reach out to one of the Yonko?" Luffy asked skeptically, jumping to that conclusion, as he had no idea who else might be powerful enough to matter in the world. "That's a reach, dude."

Robin agreed, shaking her head, as did Rayleigh. "It is well known that Beast King Kaido hates the WeeGee, and Big Mom, while nowhere near as vituperative, would be remarkably hard to work with. Shanks could possibly be convinced to stop spreading his influence, but working directly with the WeeGee would be..." she looked over at Luffy.

"Yeah, there's a snowball chance in hell o' that happening!" Luffy shook his head. "Shanks might not hate them, but he certainly isn't going to work with the Marines, let alone the WeeGee as a whole. Armed neutrality is the best they would get from him."

"Then, if the Marines and WeeGee are still losing influence and power in the short term..." Sanji fell silent, shaking his head, his face worried. Luffy caught his eyes, one eyebrow rising in question, but Sanji just shook his head again, indicating an unwillingness to talk about it just now.

Luffy allowed that but made a point to think about it later. *There's been some secret Sanji's been keeping for a while now that we've brushed up against before. Hopefully, he'll be able to share it. Although I ain't one to talk. I've been meaning to speak ta the girls about my whole reincarnation thing for a while.*

"We could just question those marines? Sentomaru gotta have some information. And I wanna beat him up a bit," Bonney said, scowling angrily over at where the rotund man could be seen through the trees even as she finished off her fifth piece of pizza.

“No, Bonney, I’m not going to allow you to torture him. Two wrongs do not make a right,” Kuma said, patting her on the head in a fatherly fashion. “I also have no doubt that the Revolutionary Army is also taking advantage of things, and if we want information, the two of us can get some when we get in touch with them.”

Bonney nodded agreeably to that plan. To her, being a pirate was fun and all, but it had only been basically to get away from the WeeGee (a nickname Bonney rather liked) to find her father and maybe get a little bit of revenge for what the WeeGee was doing to him. Now, though, well, Bonney could have as much adventure with the RA as she could as a pirate, and better, her father would be right there with her.

“Are there any specifics you can tell us about experiments that Doctor Vegapunk was doing?” Robin asked politely. “Any actionable information you would be willing to share?”

Kuma nodded. “As you are quite correct about us having an enemy in common, I do have some information for you. You should know that the World Government has other scientists on retainer, Caesar Clown, for one. He was working on gas-based weaponry from what I was able to learn as a Shichibukai, and you already know that Doctor Vegapunk was working on both cyborg intelligences. While I haven’t tried all of the combat functions of this body, I can tell that it has numerous ones that were not on the original version of my cyborg body. I would say that this version is New World combat capable, whereas the original would not have been able to be of much use against New World Pirate Officers.”

He then smiled faintly and touched his daughter’s head again. Watching them together was cute, and Luffy no longer doubted the fact that they had a familial connection, although in his own mind, he was still wondering about how a guy like Bartholomew could have been with a regular-sized woman in the first place. “I will also warn you all that Vegapunk’s brilliance is not to be underestimated in any way. It is why I came to him to cure Little Jewel here of her Blue Scale disease years ago. Duplicating Devil Fruit powers is just one of the many amazing things Vegapunk has created.”

From there, Kuma explained more about Doctor Vegapunk, the Satellites and some of the experiments he knew about. Talking about the Satellites didn’t take all that long, as Kuma’s information was pretty old, and he didn’t know if Doctor Vegapunk had created more satellites since his last operation. In contrast, Kuma knew a great deal about what Vegapunk was up to for the World Government, having looked into them so he could then pass the information on somehow to the Revolutionary Army. That hadn’t worked very well, in retrospect, but the information was quite good.

In particular, Kuma knew of a project that had only recently begun called the Seraphim Project. “I do not know many details. However, there has long been an understanding that the Shichibukai system was imperfect, a flawed sword. Vegapunk was asked to come up with a means to replace the Shichibukai. Perhaps literally, given his research into duplicating what he called the Lineage Factor.”

{Anything else you think Kuma would know about that he would be willing to share? They aren't friends or anything, like Kuma and Luffy both mentioned; they just have an enemy in common, and Kuma should be somewhat wary of Luffy besides given how Luffy killed him and all.}

Eventually, Kuma ran out of things to tell about Doctor Vegapunk and stood up. "We must go. I have no doubt some spies have noticed my arrival. I have been able to keep under the radar to this point, but any sighting of me here, where my daughter's presence might also be known and where no Pacifista has been sent, will undoubtedly get back to the higher-ups. While the Marines might not be in a position to react to such things, the WeeGee will certainly try to do something."

He looked over at Sentomaru, who was slowly regaining his senses again, what they were worth at present given his age. "And while old acquaintances and friends I might have made have turned on me, without direct knowledge of how much they knew, I have no desire to turn on them in turn; beyond a certain point anyway."

With that, he marched over to the fat man. Sentomaru was able to see him coming, and his rheumy eyes widened for a second before Kuma brought his fist down, smashing him into unconsciousness again with a surprisingly gentle punch. Bonney laughed seeing it, and smirked up at her dad. "Feel better, Daddy?"

"Not really," Kuma drawled. "Although it was somewhat satisfying."

"Well, I suppose we can't keep you here, although I'm glad that our meeting went a hell of a lot better than the first time we saw one another," Luffy said, shaking his head, before winking at Bonney. "Which hopefully means that the next time you and I see one another, Bonney, you won't outright attack me either. Two times is a pattern~..."

Kuma actually surprised his daughter by laughing a little at that, while Bonney scowled, shaking her head. "I really want to hold it against you, I **really** do, but with my Daddy here, no matter what kind of form he might be in, I'll... say we're even, I guess."

The old Luffy might well have pointed out that he had been winning their little fight despite her aging trick, but Luffy had since learned to keep at least a little control of his tongue, especially with Vivi poking him hard in the side, and Robin already looking towards the ship. "Yeah, fine, whatever. If you see my old man, turn him into a baby for me, would you?"

That caused Bonney to laugh, and she nodded, turning away to join her dad as he moved over to her crew, before Luffy remembered something. "Oh yeah, and does Ace know your real age? What's going on there, because I really hope he wasn't flirting with you. Well, I hope that, but also would seriously like to tease him about it if he was flirting with ya."

Kuma whirled so fast it terrified the regular crewmen, men who he knew from the Sorbet Kingdom, in front of him. "I'm sorry, what?!"

Bonney blushed. "Wait, Daddy, it's not like that at all! Ace, he found out about my real age at one point, and we went around on an island here in Paradise, having fun. He just treated me like a little sister the whole time, but people saw us together and ran with it!"

"Damn, there goes my teasing material," Luffy muttered.

Bartholomew grumbled, "Good, I won't have to kill Fire Fist," at the same time, before going on. "Still, we're going to have a talk about this, young lady. You are far too young to show interest in boys just yet. Even if you've been going around at your current age, that doesn't change. Or at least it better not."

Giving Luffy the stink eye again for the lecture she was undoubtedly going to get, Bonney grumbled and headed over to their crew, who it kept a respectful distance before this. They now cheered, having both their princess and king together once more.

Within moments, the group had headed out into the woods and out of sight, leaving the tied-up marines where they were, some of whom were stirring, not just Sentomaru. Luffy shocked them into unconsciousness again, then looked over at the ship. "So... now that the interruptions are out of the way, ya think you can finish the coating project before nightfall, or what? Because I doubt Tashigi is gonna be willing ta let us keep our prisoners hostage for an entire night, and I really don't wanna have more trouble from them."

I'm also kind of concerned that Kizaru and a few other speedy-type Marine Officers might show up. The chance of a rematch is a nice one, but I doubt that the rest of my crew here would enjoy it. Beyond Sanji, anyway.

"We were able to get the measurements done before the trouble began, and I started work on everything else while Kuma was talking," Rayleigh answered. Not having any questions himself for Kuma, he had been able to multitask. Indeed, he had scant interest in Vegapunk's creations beyond knowing the WeeGee had access to them. It wasn't as if they could attack Mary Geoise and free the man, after all. "If you all pitch in, I think Franky and I should be able to get it done in a few hours."

True to Raleigh's words, the project was finished a bit after sunset. The surface of the ship had been coated in a special layer of film that made the whole ship less buoyant than the water around it. Underneath the ship, the bubble creator had been affixed, filled with enough resin to create the bubble and enough air to do so around the whole ship.

With the coating done, that was the only thing keeping the ship afloat, with the whole project being, in Rayleigh's words, "Remarkably tricky on a ship that is so streamlined."

Normally, the coating has more area to work with to create the anti-buoyant properties that will let you sink. Here, I had to create an entirely new bubble device as well.”

“He, I’m sorry our ship’s so awesome it made ya more work,” Luffy retorted, with Eve giggling all around them. Apparently, the coating procedure had tickled something fierce. “We’ll see you in a few days, Rayleigh. Just don’t disappear on us again, yeah?”

Snorting, Rayleigh waved farewell and hopped off the ship, still chuckling at a klabautermann being so alive. Moments later, Sanji and Luffy polled the ship away from the shoreline enough to allow the coating device to activate. Franky joined them on the main deck a second later, after having done so, and soon a bubble began to appear up over the sides of the ship, flowing up and over both the ship’s hull and the individuals on the main deck. Sandersonia headed in to take the wheel, while the others remained outside to watch as the ship slowly began to sink into the water.

“Wow, this is amazing!” Luffy enthused, watching the odd root and dirt structure of the grove pass by, followed by more of the giant Yarukiman Mangrove becoming visible to one side. Soon, they were too far down for the fading light above to help much, but Eve quickly turned on all the internal lights, powered by the batteries that Franky had created, recently empowered by Luffy.

The effect was kind of amazing, and the whole crew watched in awe, bar Sandersonia, watching the lines on the mangrove slowly shift past as the ship continued to fall further downward. Sandersonia, having been to Fishman Island with the Kuja twice in the past. She was able to pick out the current they needed, and began to follow it and the log pose further down, down into the darkness.

That darkness soon began to be broken up by more than just the scales of fish caught in the lights of the *Everlasting Resolve*. Rather, anglers with their own lights began to dominate, zipping this way and that, coming in to investigate the bubble and the lights of the ship as if it were one of their own, then out and about. A small shark flew by, followed by a pair of dolphins who cavorted around the ship for a time, much to Vivi’s delight. “Oh, look, they are so amazing!”

Even Luffy grinned at the sight, having always felt a certain amount of connection towards dolphins and otters. “Yeah, this is fantastic.” Looking over the edge of the ship downward, even he couldn’t see much beyond the lights of the ship. “How much further down are we going to go before turning for Fishman Island?”

“We’re going to go down around five thousand, five hundred fathoms, Luffy, straight to the bottom of the ocean. It isn’t the deepest it can go; I’ve heard that there are far deeper places in the world, but it’s deep enough. You all also might start to feel cold eventually. Going that deep will take us at least a full day, because we’re not going straight down, we’re in fact going in a slow spiral, following the current that will eventually take us to Fishman Island.”

Luffy shrugged at that, while Robin and Vivi headed inside to grab coats. Franky stayed for a few moments longer, talking to Luffy about what they were seeing and whether or not any of the guns would be useful underwater. The railgun probably wouldn't. It would be going far too fast, and its barrel was too short to stick out through the bubble in order to fire. There was also a concern about Luffy's lightning powers, which probably wouldn't be all that useful underwater anyway. Contrary to what many people thought, ocean water was not exactly a great conductor.

Sanji came out at that point with a plate of sandwiches, and the group sat around the deck between the main gun and the conning tower, staring out and above them as more dolphins appeared along with a school of fish, the first following the second. "God, I love the Grand Line!"

There were only two real hiccups on the trip, one of which came near the point where they were about to start seeing the floor of the ocean beneath them. By that point, Sandersonia had been spelled at the wheel by Sanji, and Franky had taken to teaching Luffy, Vivi and Sandersonia a local card game from Water 7, when Sanji called out, able to see further than the others could down on the main deck. "Luffy, we might need your Haoshoku for a second. There is a giant kraken out there, and it's looking our way hungrily."

Luffy blinked at that, then shrugged, and stood up, moving to the prow of the ship. There, he peered out, sensing the monster in question via his Kenbunshoku, although honestly, that Kenbunshoku felt a little woolly here. As if the water was interfering with the advantage the Goro Goro no Mi gave him in that area.

It was indeed a giant octopus. So big that it would only have needed a few of its giant tentacles to grab and crush the Everlasting Resolve. It was indeed looking in their direction, its wide, beady eyes glowering angrily at the large source of light that had just entered its territory, showing a certain amount of intelligence to Luffy's eyes. However, when he used his Kenbunshoku, he couldn't find any specific thoughts, only a certain amount of hunger and trepidation alike.

The trepidation was odd. It wasn't a strong enough feeling for Luffy to cause Luffy to feel sorry for it or understand where that trepidation was coming from.

Without anything to go on, Luffy simply held out a hand facing the monster in the distance, locking gazes with it through the darkness of the ocean, then released his Haoshoku. Vivi shivered a bit, but beyond that and some sweat appearing on Franky's brow, none of Luffy's crew showed any effect of the technique. Despite the distance between them, the same could not be said for the octopus. The giant creature shuddered, then its eyes rolled up in its head as it fell unconscious, beginning to float upwards.

"Nice," Sanji said, giving Luffy a thumb's up as Luffy walked past the others and up to the bridge. "Although, think of how many octopus balls I could've made out of that thing."

Luffy snickered, then gestured to the wheel. "I'll take over now. That game of Franky is kicking my ass anyway."

Moments later, Sandersonia came upwards, then nodded, and gestured down into a crevice nearby. "Turn the wheel ten degrees. We need to go that way."

The log pose wasn't pointing in that direction quite perfectly, and Luffy had been about to just skim over the edge of the crevice, but Sandersonia was adamant. "We're not down to the real bottom of the ocean yet, Luffy. We're actually on top of a mass of mountains here. Down that crevice, the current will take us even stronger and force us down to the bottom. From there, it'll sail us straight to Fishman Island under the Red Line within another day."

Luffy nodded at that and shifted the wheel in that direction, while also dipping the front of the ship downward a bit using a control lever that Franky had added under Rayleigh's direction. Being able to direct the ship downward was interesting and would take some getting used to, he reflected. After a moment, they were over the crevice, heading down.

True to the Kuja navigator's description, the moment Luffy put the Everlasting Resolve's keel over the edge of the gorge, the current grabbed them, pulling them downwards quickly. The ship positively zoomed downwards now, making Luffy wonder how fast they would be going if the bubble were shaped in the same manner as the ship itself.

Sandersonia waved him off, saying she needed to handle this bit. "Keeping the ship in the center of the crevice is tough work. If you could light the way better, that would be a major help. Our forward-facing lights are a bit too weak."

Luffy nodded, and, after stopping by to recharge the main batteries, headed forward, empowering the lights on the prow personally. Those lights had been installed during the coating process in order to give the ship the ability to see, something that was exceptionally necessary underwater. Like the rest of the lights aboard, they were electrical-based, letting Luffy just let them burn brighter than normal. They would need to be replaced quicker that way, but Franky had extras, and they could swap them out when they reached Fishman Island.

Moments later, he sensed Vivi heading inside, her thoughts a wave of annoyance and aggravation, while Sanji and Franky began a loud argument about something to do with the Tower Card from Franky's game. He also sensed Robin coming up behind him and smiled, a faint shiver going through him as she hugged him from behind, her curves pressing into his back in an altogether distracting place. "The places I take you, huh? If not for Sanji and Franky's argument, this'd be an awesome place for a date."

"Mmm, I prefer the original view of the mangrove and the various fish we saw first, not the stone walls. Your timing is a bit off there," Robin teased, kissing his ear, then his chin. "Although, at present, my thoughts are not on the view."

"No?" Luffy asked, wondering idly if this was a lead-up to request more sexy times when Sandersonia no longer needed the extra lighting Luffy was supplying currently.

It wasn't. "Indeed, I think it is time for us to have a conversation. One you have hinted about wanting to have a few times. I bared my secrets to you, but you haven't done the same, Luffy. Secrets about why you are so oddly mature at times, your martial arts skill, the ki and other tricks you have," Robin said firmly, moving around Luffy to sit on the prow facing him. "I honestly don't care any longer about the why, I love you, and that is enough. But I do want to know more about your past."

Luffy blinked, then slowly nodded. He had been hoping to have this conversation for a while, but the timing had never been perfect for him to talk to all three of his ladies. *Maybe... maybe I was using the idea of only wanting to go through it once, about the perfect time, to put off this talk too much?*

"I... okay. You're right, I have been meaning to talk to ya, especially you, about that," Luffy admitted. "It's not hugely important any longer, but it is a secret that you, Hancock and Vivi need to know. Could you call her up here? I think that I should have it with both of you at once, at least."

Robin nodded, closing her eyes for a second. A moment later, Vivi came back out of the conning tower dressed in some of the heavier clothing she had brought along. As a desert princess, she didn't really like the cold, especially when there wasn't any snow around to play with. Despite that, she sat on the prow, cuddling up to Robin as they looked at Luffy, her face quizzical. "What's this conversation Robin said I needed to hear?"

"Er... well, what do you both know about, um, second lives, reincarnation and such?"

End Chapter

I had thought to cover the trip to Fishman Island and then the introduction to the king, but some of these scenes took too long and the one comedy scene I had written up for the meeting with the Fishman pirates under Hody was too short.

Further, I know I don't show the conversation between Luffy, Vivi and Robin about what they found from Vivi's ancestor in Alabasta here. I intend to put that conversation into the fic as a flashback when Robin finds the poneglyph hidden in the forest of Fishman Island, as I didn't want to get bogged down in that scene... and then I was bogged down in several others. Ugh. I would have asked Tomon about it, but he didn't get the chapter back to me in order to be the tie breaker between me and Hiryo LOL.