Tales From the Heart

by TsarinaTorment

Summary

A series of short stories surrounding the Heart Pirates and their captain, with occasional guest appearances from other characters.

Ratings vary between Gen and Teen. Specific ratings and warnings listed at the top of each story.

This fic was written before One Piece Novel Law was released

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Sleep

Chapter Notes

Characters: Law, Heart Pirates
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Nakamaship, Family, Friendship

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To say that Trafalgar Law was an insomniac was not strictly correct. His sleeping patterns were erratic, that was true, but the bags under his eyes that led many people to the conclusion were in fact nothing to do with his poor habits (if pressed, it might be admitted that there was some contribution if he was particularly careless) and almost everything to do with his past. Bepo, Shachi and Penguin could not recall a single instance when he did not look like he'd had no sleep, and as they'd been with the captain for thirteen years, far longer than the rest of the crew, their word was accepted as truth.

He was, however, both a light sleeper and prone to falling asleep in the more ridiculous places – slumped over the controls of the submarine, half hanging off a bench in the mess hall or even tucked up in some corner otherwise full of nothing but pipes, and the crew quickly learnt that their captain became grouchy if he woke with a stiff neck. Thus began the challenge of moving their captain from his ridiculous sleeping positions without stirring him, a task made almost impossible by his subconscious observational Haki. While he was no master in the art, at least not compared to other well-known pirates, it was more than enough to wake him if his personal space was invaded. Even though this was no disaster, as Law's only reaction would be to blink blearily at the member of the crew responsible in curiosity then fall back asleep once realising there was no crisis at hand, the crew were determined to not wake him at all.

It was the inclusion of Shachi and Penguin that solved the problem. For reasons no-one could quite fathom, although theories ran rampant, they were the only two that could approach their sleeping captain without him waking. Bepo was almost as good, but his claws had a habit of snagging on his captain's clothes or skin, which in turn would disturb the sleeping captain. In the beginning, even the two senior members of the crew were unable to prevent Law stirring, although his eyes never opened, but as time wore on he reacted less and less, until the illusion was formed that he was a deep a sleeper as the likes of Bepo himself.

Some of the more playful members of the crew joked about theories, but it gradually became accepted that, having known Penguin and Shachi for so long, Law's haki could subconsciously recognise them without disturbing his conscious mind at all. It sounded reasonable enough, they supposed, and from then on, the discovery of a sleeping captain anywhere other than a bed resulted in one of the two being quietly summoned to move him.

If Law had any thoughts about waking up in bed when he certainly hadn't fallen asleep there, he never shared them, although his trademark smirk was often just a little softer when he re-joined his crew.
I don't know how many of these I'll be doing. I have a handful written already, after which I'll mark it as complete, but this may still be added to at any time. If anyone has any prompts they want to suggest, feel free. I can't guarantee I'll do them, but any excuse to write about the Heart Pirates is a good one.
Law's hands were trembling. He stared down at them numbly, unable to see anything past the blood that painted them. He'd kept it together for the operation, somehow, but the moment he allowed his Room to fall, reluctantly aware that there was nothing more he could do, the shaking began. Rationally, he knew it should be okay. His patient was strong, and with his abilities he could create medical miracles. The blown-out stomach was repaired, the flesh stitched back together leaving nothing more than the neat row of thread to betray its presence beneath the bandages.

It had been the worst operation of his life. The challenge presented by Mugiwara-ya's destroyed chest two years ago had been the most difficult, but then he'd had no emotional investment. He'd seen a potential rival, an insane captain willing to punch out a tenryubito, and been intrigued. After that, it had merely been his pride as a doctor at stake as he'd patched up the younger captain. Just his pride.

Shachi's ever-present hat and customary shades were absent. He looked smaller without them, his vibrantly ginger hair splayed out on the pillow as if he were just sleeping. It would have been easier to believe without the steady beep beep of equipment in the corner recording his heart rate, or the various tubes running from his too-still form in every direction. The breathing mask, fogging up evenly yet slowly with every breath, was just the icing on the metaphorical cake.

The other side of the bed, slumped in a chair and almost as wrongly still, was Penguin. His hat had long since been lost, and his hair was mussed from earlier frantic hands, needing something to occupy themselves with as he waited for his captain's instructions. Those hands were now clutching one of Shachi's tightly, holding it against his chest as if he hoped Shachi would feel his heartbeat and wake.

One of them needed to be in the control room. Bepo, bless the poor mink, had taken over control of the ship to get them somewhere safe, but he was no leader. Law was the captain, and in his absence, it was always Penguin or Shachi to take the reins. But Shachi was unconscious, half-dead from a blow meant for his nakama, and Penguin was numb to the world, even more so than Law himself. The two had grown up together. Law had been their nakama for thirteen years, but the two had been inseparable even back then.

Law couldn't ask Penguin to leave, which left the task of running the ship to him, as it should. He was the captain, after all. Except, he couldn't tear himself from Shachi's side, either. While clutching his hand like a lifeline was not in Law's character, it didn't stop him from wanting, needing, to wait by his side until he woke.

A large hand rested on his shoulder, jerking him out of his thoughts to look up at his largest crewmember, and most recent recruit, two years ago thought it had been.
"You're needed here," Jean Bart rumbled quietly, making an effort to avoid disturbing the stillness in
the air. From the way Penguin didn't even stir, it was successful enough. Law felt compelled to
protest; as the captain, he should be leading his crew. Their morale was down, and he couldn't leave
them to flounder. "You're the doctor," the larger man reminded him, the large hand guiding him into
a nearby chair. Law barely noticed. "We're okay."

He said nothing else, leaving in silence. Law didn't move, unsure what to do. His sluggish mind
failed to comprehend Jean Bart's meaning, until he felt the engines of the Polar Tang once again roar
to life, the room slowly heating as the submarine began its smooth descent beneath the waves.

Eventually, he gathered the presence of mind to remove the latex gloves, carelessly bundling them up
and discarding them in a nearby bin. The blood now gone, leaving Law instead staring at tattooed
fingers before his attention flicked to his nakama, he began his silent vigil in earnest.

He trusted Jean Bart and Bepo to make the right decisions.
Contrary to popular belief, Trafalgar Law was well acquainted with kairoseki and the bone deep weariness it caused. This was a fact that would surprise many, if they ever learnt of it, because surely Trafalgar Law was far too intelligent to get himself into a situation where someone would be able to land a hit on him. Smoker could testify to his inventiveness in evading it, and while there were rumours that he'd been caught in Dressrosa, few were quite ready to believe it. Kairoseki usually meant Marines and Marines meant Impel Down.

Trafalgar Law was very obviously not in Impel Down.

What no-one considered was the fact that his unwilling acquaintance with the substance was due to his own crew, who frequently performed acts of mutiny by cuffing their captain whenever they felt he was being stupid. This happened far more often than people would expect.

The first time it happened it was the fault of an innocent slice of bread. Law learnt of his new-found allergy, and his crew learnt that a panicking Law with ready access to his fruit was a bad combination. He forgave them quickly enough that time, because hindsight forced him to admit restraining him had been the best idea they could have come up with.

Sometimes he regretted being so lenient that first time. He'd never found the cuffs – he believed Shachi was the custodian but searches and even Scans of his nakama's possessions never turned them up – but they kept coming out whenever his crew thought he was being unreasonable.

Usually it was when he was sick. No matter how much he pointed out that his own fruit was the best medicine for him, they would point out his low stamina and insist on treating him the old-fashioned way. Other times, more rarely, it was when he was already exhausted. This wasn't an automatic kairoseki sentence. It was only if he tried to use his fruit for 'no good reason' (their words, not his), that the cuffs would appear.

He'd finally started to punish them – a week of night watches, a month of latrine duty, favourite meals banned for a month – but it was too little too late. Oh, it was mutiny alright, but for some reason he never treated it as such. It probably had something to do with the mantra Bepo started, and the rest of the crew picked up.

"It's not mutiny if it's for Captain's own good."

After all, hindsight always proved that they'd made the right call, even if Law didn't like it one bit.
There will be an associated oneshot posted (probably tomorrow) detailing the Bread Incident in all its glory. I'll link it here once it's up.

EDIT: Allergy is now up!
A muffled whimper jerked Penguin from his slumber, and he looked around blearily. It had been a week since he and Shachi had had their asses handed to them by some scrawny little kid for beating up a weird talking polar bear thing. Subsequently, it had been a little less than a week since the pair of them had up and left their childhood home on Swallow Island to travel in a dingy little boat with the very same kid after being completely and utterly won over by his strength.

That, and the kid didn't even know what charisma he held, but it was pretty damn powerful. Penguin wasn't one to be a follower, and nor was Shachi, but it had taken them less than a day to swear to follow the kid. Considering the kid was his captain now, maybe he should stop calling him kid.

The kid, oops, Law, was currently curled up in the bottom of the boat, clutching at the raggedy cloak he was wearing like a lifeline. He was asleep, but the muffled whimper came again from the swathes of fabric and Penguin sighed, glancing at Shachi, who was taking the night watch. The other teen shrugged, and they both looked at Bepo, who was apparently not a polar bear, but a Mink – whatever that was. The cub was fast asleep in the stern, showing absolutely no signs of stirring whatsoever.

With an irritated yawn, Penguin settled back down to sleep, only for the damn whimpering to continue, and he glowered at the captain from under the safety of his hat. He hadn't signed up to follow this.

The next whimper was almost a word, and it hit Penguin that this wasn't some stupid homesickness, but a nightmare. Well wasn't that just great. Normally he would kick someone brutally awake at that point, so he could get his own nights' sleep, but Law would probably chuck him overboard or something if he tried.

He was not standing for this all night, though. Something had to be done about the noise, and he looked at Shachi again, who did nothing except give another shrug before returning to scanning the waves for anything unwelcome.

Giving a very irritated grumble, Penguin did the only thing he could think of and shuffled over, picking up his kid-captain and getting a bleary golden eye glaring at him as the action woke him. Bepo looked comfy enough, so he lugged the too-light teen over, trying to ignore the ominous blue glow expanding around their boat, and settled them both down with the sleeping cub as a pillow.

"Go back to sleep, Law," he grumbled, pulling the protesting teen so that he was lying with his back flush against Penguin's chest. Law squirmed, but half asleep and tied up in his own cloak, Penguin had the advantage (you'd think his greater size would be enough of one but not with this thirteen-
year-old) and eventually he settled back down, although he remained tense.

Satisfied that he'd done what he could, even if his reputation back on Swallow Island would be decimated if they ever found out he was *hugging* a kid to get him to sleep quietly, Penguin yawned again and easily fell back to sleep.

Law was still there, sleeping peacefully under his cloak and hat, when he woke up several hours later, and he shared a triumphant glance with Shachi, who was more relieved than amused, thankfully.

He didn't really want to have to throw the ginger overboard.

Chapter End Notes

I'm fascinated by their backstory okay. I want to see *how* Penguin and Shachi turned from ruffians to loyal followers, Oda. Please.
Hat

Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Penguin, Law
**Rating:** Gen
**Warnings:** Implied/referenced minor character death(s)
**Tags:** Nakamaship, Hurt/Comfort, Law's Hat

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was common knowledge that their captain treasured his hat. The fluffy thing was never far from his head, and if he ever lost it in a fight it was Shambled back into his hand at the earliest opportunity, occasionally at the expense of an opening in the opponent's attack.

The time it was damaged, there was hell to pay. The unfortunate Marine received the full brunt of Law's sadistic nature, leaving him in so many miniscule pieces that it was impossible to ever reconstruct him. Reassembled in such a form that he barely resembled a human, the Marine was left unable to eat or drink, and breathing was a luxury at best, leaving him to a slow and torturous death.

When Law stared at the hat forlornly, the fluffy rim tattered beyond any repair, it was Penguin who braved his captain's wrath to attempt to extract it from his death grip.

"No," Law growled, his other hand flexing to form a Room in a silent threat. Penguin sighed and ceased his attempts to obtain the hat, although he didn't retreat.

"Captain," he began, letting his hands fall to rest limply by his sides. "Let me see the damage." The Room glowed brighter and Law growled again, not looking away from his hat. "Law." It had been a long time since he'd last called his captain by name, and he succeeded in startling the younger into glancing up at him briefly, before his attention returned to his hat. "Let me see." He held out his hands again, patiently waiting.

His captain hesitated, amber eyes flicking from his hat to Penguin's hands and back again before he reluctantly acquiesced, his trembling hands oh so slowly surrendering the hat into Penguin's calm grip. Penguin squeezed one hand briefly in the transaction, feeling Law watching him like a hawk as he gently turned the shredded hat around to look at it properly.

There was no salvaging the rim, as Penguin had already known, but the main body of the hat was relatively unscathed in comparison, and he told his captain as such. Law jerked, but remained otherwise silent and unresponsive, and Penguin took that to mean he wanted the hat repaired.

"I'll see what I can do," he said, and disappeared to his quarters, leaving Bepo and Shachi to deal with Law, who had made a noise of protest at his departure.

It was easier to assess the hat without its twitching owner hovering, and Penguin soon took a needle, thread and part of the ruined rim to the body of the hat, repairing the minor gashes there. The rim was a lost cause and he resignedly yet carefully cut away the remains. Despite his best efforts, it still looked very sorry for itself, largely due to the absence of the rim, and he sighed, absently spinning it on a finger as he thought. It was the best he could do with what he had, but he already knew Law would go spare at the sight of it. Penguin briefly toyed with the idea of tossing it and just getting a
new one. It would be easier, certainly. But if it was anything like his own hat…

He'd never forgive anyone who threw his hat out – that was why he had the tools to fix hats in the first place. That meant he had to get a new rim for Law's hat, somehow. He sighed again, then jumped as the door opened.

"I need to get more fabric," he garbled at the sight of his captain, resisting the childish urge to hide the half-repaired hat behind his back. It would do no good. Law's eyes narrowed at the sorry sight, before he slumped onto the lower bunk – Penguin's own bed (Shachi, the more childish of the two even if the younger would never admit it, had laid claim to the top bunk the moment they got the submarine, before Penguin had even known there was a bunk).

"Tell Bepo to head for the nearest island," Law ordered, looking down at his hands. They were still trembling slightly, and the captain's voice was slightly hoarser than Penguin was used to. He recognised the dismissal for what it was and left, hunting down their navigator. He was glad that they were still in North Blue, and not the Grand Line they were finally heading for – any island in this Blue would have the right material.

Message delivered, he returned to his quarters to see Law where he'd left him, although he now had his hat in his hands. One finger was tracing over the inside, back and forwards over the same spot. He stopped when he noticed Penguin, putting it down with great reluctance.

"We're a few hours out," Penguin reported, and Law nodded before standing and leaving. The hat remained on the bed and Penguin picked it up once the door was closed, turning it to see the area his captain had been caressing. He should probably respect his captain's privacy, but as he was fixing the thing… Well, he'd probably see it anyway. At least, that was how he justified it.

A small collection of black stitches greeted him when he looked, easy to overlook if you weren't looking, forming a single line of words.

Happy Birthday, Onii-sama! Love Lami

Penguin had heard the name only once, when Law had been vulnerable and desperate enough after a particularly brutal nightmare to spill his life story to his crew of three, but once was enough. His captain's baby sister, lost when Flevance burned in the fires of fear and scorn.

He made a mental note to buy as much extra material as he could. No matter what happened, he would never let the captain's hat die.

Chapter End Notes

I've been curious about the sentimentality behind Law's hat ever since he retrieved it in his fight against Vergo before striking the finishing blow, and after seeing that only the rim (later peak) appears to have really changed since Flevance, this headcanon was born.
"Captain, something's fallen on deck!" was the unwelcome cry Law was greeted with within minutes of surfacing. Gripping Kikoku perhaps more tightly than necessary, he stalked up to the foredeck, where Shachi's voice had come from. He wasn't sure what he'd been expecting – 'something' was not the most descriptive word Shachi could have used – and the simply-wrapped package tied neatly with a navy blue bow didn't fail to surprise him.

Where had it come from was his first concern as he ordered his crew back, away from the package. It was small, around the same size as the odd casing hearts were kept in when he removed them with Mes. That was plenty big enough for an explosive, or even a spying Den Den Mushi. There was an insignia in the corner that looked vaguely familiar – it wasn't the Marines, or a pirate flag – but Law couldn't immediately recall it.

Once satisfied that his crew had retreated far enough away from the package, Law activated a Room, encompassing just himself and the package, and performed a Scan. There was no explosive, no den den mushi, or even some organ or other. Instead, there was a small piece of stiff paper, another piece of paper folded up, and what looked a lot like an eternal pose.

Some sort of invitation, then.

Having determined that it was probably safe to open, and curious who would be inviting him anywhere, and why, he approached the package, keeping his Room active just in case he'd missed an unwelcome surprise, and tugged off the wrapping. The name inscribed on the eternal pose meant nothing to him, so he set it aside and picked up the card.

Trafalgar Law, it read in an unnecessarily cursive text. He noticed the 'L' looked wrong, as if that hadn't been their original intention. If he tilted it a certain way it almost looked like a 'D'. Curious. You are cordially invited to the wedding of Don Sai and-

He very nearly dropped the invitation in shock. First off, that was a name he hadn't heard since he was thirteen, secondly, was Baby 5 actually getting married, and thirdly, had she really invited him to her wedding? They'd got on well enough when they were both Donquixote Pirates, well, as well as he'd got on with any of them, but he was under the impression she felt betrayed by his defection. He scanned the rest of the card, noting a time and date that was probably achievable if he did decide to go, but nothing to tell him why she was even inviting him in the first place. He turned to the folded paper, the last item in the package, and opened it up, smoothing out the creases.

Law, it began in neat handwriting. I know this is a bit sudden, and we've barely spoken in thirteen years, but I wanted to ask you if you'd come to my wedding. We rarely saw eye to eye when we were
children, but you and Buffalo were my only friends, even if you never saw me as anything more than a nuisance. Buffalo's gone now – I don't know if he survived Kyros' attack, but if he did he'll be in the custody of the Marines, out of my reach. I thought that, as we're both associated with the same crews, it would be nice to see you again without being on opposite sides of a war.

I know our shared past wasn't the best time for you, so I understand if this is too presumptuous of me to ask. If you'd rather sever ties, I will accept that. You don't need to reply, if you don't want to.

Baby 5

Law sat down heavily on the deck, re-reading the short letter and paying no attention to his curious crew, who were edging closer to him now that his Room had deactivated – he didn't remember doing so. The letter was out of character for the girl he knew. Baby 5 never asked for anything, except to be needed, to be used. Yet here she was, tentatively asking him to watch her marry a man he barely remembered.

That he'd failed to drive her out had been one of Cora-san's biggest regrets. Her dependency on being 'useful' had kept her firmly under Doflamingo's wing despite Cora-san's best efforts. But now… If she was asking for something, however tentatively, then someone had done some good for the girl. Law had never felt too much one way or the other regarding her dependency, beyond seeing it as a convenient method of keeping her under control, but with Doflamingo's defeat he had enough mental stability to be able to look back at his time with her and realise just how unhealthy she had been.

If she wanted some sort of closure…

"Captain?" Bepo asked, having picked up the abandoned eternal pose. Law smiled.

"Set a course for that island," he told his navigator, standing up and striding back inside the submarine, the letter still held in his hand.

He supposed there was no harm in that.

Chapter End Notes

I guess this is technically AU, according to The Stories of the Self-Proclaimed Straw Hat Grand Fleet Vol. 15 but I'm definitely interested in Law and Baby 5's future interactions and so this was born.

This will be a three-part drabble; the other parts will be posted tomorrow and Friday.
Baby 5 could not be happier, as she walked down the aisle on the arm of her husband. Finally, after eight broken off engagements, she had finally found a man who needed her. That he was strong enough to survive their engagement was an added bonus, and she felt as though she was walking on air as they moved to greet their guests and accept the congratulations.

They were all Sai-san's guests, but that didn't faze her as she beamed brighter than the sun and laughed joyously at the words and gifts offered. These people, the Happo Navy and allies, were her family now, and she was determined to never let them down. She would never let Sai-san down, and as the leader of the army that meant she had to encompass everyone present with her assistance.

A woman complimented her dress, and she was quick to defer the credit to the amazing seamstress that had created it for her. A man congratulated Sai-san on obtaining such a beautiful wife, and she couldn't help but blush a vibrant red, recalling exactly how she had come to be first his fiancée, and then his wife. The declaration to Lao G, and the way he prevented her from taking her own life were memories she would treasure forever.

Sai-san touched her on the shoulder, gently and tenderly, between well-wishers and she was quick to focus her attention on him and only him. As his wife, his wishes were her utmost priority, whatever the time or circumstance might be. He nodded, as subtly as he was capable, towards the back of the merriment. She followed the line of sight, confused as to what he was after. Did he want her to go there? Was there a task for her to accomplish? An unwelcome guest to publicly evict in order to prove her worth as his wife to the audience?

When she saw who was standing by the entrance, carefully away from the crowds but still undeniably present, she froze. He had been sent an invitation at her incredibly selfish request, which Sai-san had been generous enough to accept, but she had never dared dream that he might show. For all that he was an amazing man, subtlety was not the groom's speciality, and her battle-hardened senses easily noticed when Sai-san began to move towards the man, gently guiding her along to greet the only guest there for her.

Law had scrubbed up well, compared to when she'd last seen him at the feast of the Straw Hat Grand Fleet. Back then he had been swathed in bandages, grumpy and antisocial in the face of his ally's enthusiasm. Now he stood tall, hands in the pockets of a shirt that clearly hadn't been ironed, but was still far smarter than anything she'd seen him in since he'd joined Doffy's crew all those long years ago. His jolly roger was embroidered down by the hem, over his left hip and partially concealed by his arms. She thought he'd even tried to tame his hair a little; there was no fluffy hat in sight.

"Congratulations," he said smoothly, not shifting his position one bit. She hadn't expected him to. He
offered nothing more, no further words or a gift, but she had no complaints to make. His presence itself was a pleasant surprise she'd never dared hope for.

Next to her, Sai-san nodded in acceptance of his words. She stuttered thanks of her own, well aware of another blush erupting in her cheeks as she clung to her husband. Law didn't comment on her clinginess, as he would have done when they were teens. She supposed he'd matured a lot since then, and Doffy's defeat had lifted something from his shoulders.

"Why?" she asked, not realising the word had slipped out for several seconds, then freezing when the realisation hit before rushing to explain herself. "I didn't think you'd come. I thought you wanted to cut ties with us." His smirk morphed into something a little softer, confusing her further.

"It was the first time you'd ever asked me for something for yourself," he said, turning his gaze to Sai-san beside her. "I wanted to see who finally convinced you that you were allowed to want something."

She had nothing to say to that, her mouth opening and closing like a goldfish as she tried to reorganise her thoughts to no avail.

"Cora-san always regretted he couldn't save you," Law continued after a moment, his gaze turning away from them and settling on the floor by her feet. "He'd be happy you got out before it was too late."

She wanted to say that she didn't care what the mute klutz had wanted. He'd made her life a misery, until she realised she could fight back, and then he'd left, taking away the boy that had made her life interesting. Seeing that same boy in front of her now, though, she couldn't say that. Not when she remembered the day Corazón had died, and what – who – he had died for.

Silence reigned between them, not tense but not quite comfortable either. She could feel Sai-san's uncertainty through his arm, and opened her mouth to say something, anything to clear the air. As always, Law was faster.

"We're on the same side again," he observed. "For the time being, at least." He was talking about his alliance with Straw Hat, and by extension the Grand Fleet she was now a part of, and Baby 5 smiled.

"I'm glad," she smiled. There was more to say, so much more, but her wedding was neither the time nor place, and behind her other guests were beginning to clamour for their attention again.

"Thank you for coming," Sai-san said, nodding to Law once before gently tugging at her arm to lead her away. She followed with one last smile at Law, and could have sworn his smirk fully transformed into a returning smile for just a moment before he was hidden from view by the other guests.
Law watched Baby 5 walk away on the arm of her husband as he tried to sort through what he was feeling. He'd never been especially close to the girl, a fact that was entirely the fault of his angsty pre-teen self, yet here he was at her wedding. He'd watched the exchange of vows, noticing that she'd had no-one to give her away, although from the beaming smile on her face he could tell she didn't mind. It wasn't as if there had been anyone around that could have done it. She was alone in this new world, although she looked happier than he'd ever seen before and he'd wondered, before their conversation, if his presence was healthy at all.

Her delight at seeing him, mixed with the awkwardness that came of being enemies for most of their life but there nonetheless, refused to let him regret his decision to attend. In the end, Baby 5 had escaped Doflamingo's strings of her own volition, and was forging a new life for herself where she was treated as a human, not a slave. Law himself had hardly been the kindest to her, and at the time had been far too busy with thoughts of vengeance to acknowledge it, but as he saw her now, laughing merrily at something another guest had said in the secure hold of her husband, he was reminded of Lami.

There were no similarities between the two. Lami had been unafraid to ask for what she wanted, and gentle to a fault, while Baby 5 would ask for nothing, but had all the makings of a hardened killer. Looking past the overly-feminine attire she'd always worn, she was a hardened killer. But they were both younger females who had looked up to him, pestering for his attention in their own ways.

His mind overlapped the two, replacing Baby 5 with a young woman who looked like a perfect mix of his mother and the child Lami had been with her hair in long brown pigtails, because Lami would never wear her hair any other way. Don Sai was replaced with some faceless man, because his imagination had no reference to draw on, but Law wasn't focused on the groom. He saw Lami laughing, beautiful on her special day, and found his fist clenched in his pocket. He would have been the one to give her away, he was sure. Lami would demand it and his father would raise his hands in submission, giving his little angel anything she wanted to make the day perfect. There was a flash of guilt that he hadn't been able to do that for Baby 5, but he quashed it viciously. Baby 5 was not Lami. For all that part of him longed to fake his own family again, calling Cora-san his father, Baby 5 his sister, and some yet-to-be-met woman his mother, he would not.

He had made his presence known; it was time to leave. He undid the top few buttons on the shirt and pulled his hat out from a deceptively deep pocket to once again settle on his head as he slipped from the celebration, towards where his crew waited aboard the Polar Tang.

"Let's go," he said to Bepo as he passed the mink, heading for his quarters to change into something less formal. He could feel the curious stares on his back, but no-one disturbed him as the engines
roared to life and the submarine glided away from the coast.

"Did it help?" Penguin asked him some hours later, Shachi as always by his side and Bepo trying hard to look inconspicuous in the corner. Hiding anything from those three was difficult, and Law was not in the mood to try. Not when they knew his past.

"It helped," he allowed, the unspoken *her* hanging heavily in the air. His companions felt it, but said nothing, dispersing to their stations across the ship to leave him in peace.

Chapter End Notes

And that concludes this mini trilogy. Back to pure Heart Pirate drabbles tomorrow!
Trafalgar Law was not a touchy sort of person. At least, that was the impression he gave off, and therefore the belief held amongst most people that had met him. And it was true that he never initiated physical contact for the sake of physical contact. He wouldn't even reciprocate if someone did touch him, so he was quickly written off as someone who liked his personal space.

Bepo was the first person to see through this façade. His blood family didn't count because this so-called aversion started with the Donquixote Family, and Cora-san didn't count because he didn't work anything out. He just did whatever the hell he wanted, regardless of Law's personal feelings on the matter. Bepo, though. Bepo felt the small shift the first time he hugged his captain, the twitch of someone surprised by the contact. Bepo noticed that he didn't pull away, didn't even make a move to increase the distance between them after the hug ended. Bepo caught the smile behind the smirk, the softer look in his captain's eyes, and promptly hugged him again.

The rest of the crew caught on over time. None of them were as physically affectionate as their navigator, so a hug was rare, but hands would rest on shoulders as they passed each other in the corridors. Arms would brush together even though there had been plenty of space to walk in. Supportive pats on the back grew commonplace, even if there was no reason.

Law never reciprocated the hugs. He rarely gripped a nakama's shoulder in support. Law didn't give physical contact. But he craved it, and his crew delivered.
Law didn't know what to expect as he finally followed Bepo's vivre card into the forest, leaving the Straw Hats to their own reunion. He'd been gone so long, were his crew even all still together? And if they were, from the state of the country and Nico-ya's assessment of when it had happened, were they still alive? His crew would have been on Zou at the time of whatever attack it was took place, and he knew Bepo too well to know he wouldn't just sit back and let his home be decimated. That his vivre card seemed intact was a small mercy; at the very least, his navigator was still alive, and in no immediate danger.

The call of "Captain!" and the large polar bear mink launching himself at him brought more relief than Law had expected, especially when he counted the entire crew standing behind Bepo, a fact confirmed by Bepo's own tearful report of "everyone's here, Captain."

The injuries his entire crew were sporting were not such a welcome sight. Several of them, Bepo included, had bandaging around their heads, while others had wrapped arms, legs, or a ripped suit implying torso injuries. Penguin and Shachi in particular drew his attention; on the surface they appeared to be less injured, but their usual enthusiasm wasn't quite there, nor was the spring in the step the two always had. He'd expected them to join Bepo in dogpiling him, but both hung back.

"What happened to you?" he asked them all, unable to keep the apology from his voice. I should have been here sooner.

The uneasy glances his crew shared did nothing to placate his nerves, but in the end Bepo spoke up, as Law knew he would. It was almost the last thing he wanted to hear.

"Jack came here," the mink said, looking at the ground. "Kaido's right hand man." Law's heart skipped a beat in his chest. Kaido? He'd sent his crew to Zou because only a mink could find it, or someone with a mink's vivre card. They should have been safe from Kaido's reach on Zou, of all places, yet one of the Calamities themselves arrived? There went any plans he had of staying safely on Zou to recuperate after Dressrosa. "They were looking for someone, but they didn't find him," Bepo continued. "We helped the minks defend themselves. I'm sorry."

"There's no need to apologise," Law reassured his navigator, the knot in his stomach loosening slightly. He'd feared Kaido had known his crew were there, but they'd just been caught in the crossfire. It was a lucky escape, but next time they wouldn't be so fortunate. Jack must have recognised the jolly roger his crew all wore.

"Who's got the worst injuries?" he asked, automatically stepping back into his role as the ship's doctor and activating a Room around his crew. It was shakier than normal, but Law ignored that in favour of assessing his crew's injuries more thoroughly. As one, the crew backed off and he frowned. "What are you doing?"
"What happened to your arm, Captain?" It was Penguin that spoke, but the gaze of his entire crew had focused themselves on his bandaged right arm, which was beginning to tremble from Kikoku's weight.

"It's nothing to worry about," he told them, expanding the Room further and beginning a Scan.

"Dressrosa was a week ago," Shachi piped up, frowning behind his sunglasses. "With your abilities, only a serious wound would still need bandaging a week after it happened. Even Mugiwara's injuries from Marineford only took a couple of weeks."

"I don't always use my fruit on myself," Law reminded them, although he could tell he was losing the battle. His crew could tell it too.

"You have no other injuries at all," Jean Bart rumbled, crouching down to be at a closer height to his captain. Before Law could retort that that meant nothing, Bepo reached out and tapped Kikoku lightly, dislodging her from his grip. Caught off guard, Law couldn't contain the hiss of pain as the long nodachi toppled out of his grasp. Bepo caught her before she hit the grass.

Law's Room had dissipated.

"You were saying, Captain?" Shachi asked, although there was no triumph in his voice. Law sighed and sat down on an exposed root. His crew would never let him treat their wounds now. They followed his lead, finding seats on the grass around him.

"It's healing," he allowed, gesturing for Bepo to return Kikoku. The mink wavered, torn between his captain's order and his captain's injuries, before pointedly resting the sword by Law's left arm. The message was received loud and clear and he allowed himself a fond smirk.

"What happened to it?" Penguin asked. He'd sat himself to his captain's left, and was eyeing the bandaging with an air that betrayed his desire to remove them to check the damage himself. Law knew that he'd do it, if he thought Law was lying. There was a rule in the Heart Pirates that no-one hid injuries, and while Law himself often flouted it, his crew considered it well within their rights to enforce it if they caught him.

They were getting good at catching him.

"Doflamingo cut it off," he admitted, not wanting to risk his crew's overzealous attempts to find out what happened themselves. It would do more harm than good, a fact he knew they were aware of and relied on to get him to confess to injuries of that calibre. "The users of the Chiyu Chiyu no Mi and Nui Nui no Mi reattached it."

There were various low growls from his crew, most of which promising death if they ever got their hands on Doflamingo. Law hoped the former Shichibukai never got out of Impel Down. He'd kept his crew away from him for a reason.

"Jack used poison gas, eventually," Penguin sighed, turning the conversation back to where Law wanted it. "The Minks are good fighters." Here he turned his head towards Bepo with a grin – after spending so long with a Mink, they were unsurprised at the fact. "He couldn't win, although we couldn't quite drive him out, either, so he used one of Caesar's poisons."

Law was going to kill that scientist.

"It was lucky the Straw Hats turned up when they did," Shachi picked up. "It was the day you defeated Doflamingo, and Jack had headed for Dressrosa, but by then the poison had us all. The Straw Hats saved us. Caesar removed all the poison and helped Chopper with antidotes."
Maybe Law wasn't going to kill the scientist just yet.

"Willingly?" he asked, doubtfully. The crew all chuckled.

"Kuroashi threatened to pate his heart if he didn't," Jean Bart informed him. Law couldn't help the satisfied grin that tugged at his mouth. He'd helped his crew, indirectly though it was. That thought soothed all the negativity he'd been carrying about the trade with Doflamingo failing. If everything had gone to plan…

His crew would be dead.

Never before had Law been so thankful a plan had gone so badly wrong. He leant back against an outcrop of the solid root protruding behind him, although if he was honest it was more of an exhausted slump than the casual lean it was supposed to be. The way his crew all surged forwards, once again invading his personal space to crowd around him, told him it hadn't gone unnoticed.

"We're all okay," Penguin told him quietly, actually going as far as resting a hand on his shoulder. Bepo pressed against his back, and Shachi his other side. He wasn't surprised those three had read him so easily. Being nakama for thirteen years left him an open book to them. "No-one died. We're all okay." Law let out a breath, shakier than he'd have liked, and submitted to their reassurances.

There was a time when he'd have pushed them away, denying anything was wrong despite being so clearly shaken. In front of the entire crew like this, he still felt he should have done, but the physical contact helped to ground him, to prove that no-one had died because of his plan.

Shachi gently took hold of his injured arm, running light fingers along the bandages. He wouldn't remove them, Law knew, not when he knew what they were hiding. It was Shachi's way of reassuring himself that Law's arm really was intact, and gently probing to satisfy himself that it had been well-treated. Law let him, pulling Kikoku to him again with his left arm, partially so that Penguin could move closer if he wanted. The older man didn't, but a brief squeeze on his shoulder let him know the gesture was understood and appreciated.

While those three – the original members of his crew – knew him best, it in no way meant that the rest of his crew didn't know him. It was difficult for all twenty to reach him but somehow they managed it, with backs pressed against his legs, hands on his knees, shins, thighs, wherever they could reach. The large Jean Bart settled by Bepo, a broad hand on his back.

Law was the captain. He was supposed to be the one reassuring his crew that everything had worked out fine, but as he tugged his hat down over his eyes in silence, it was his crew comforting him.

He couldn't quite deny he needed it.

Chapter End Notes

I think I died a little inside when I realised that if Law's plan had worked, the Heart Pirates (and Minks) would probably have died on Zou. Chopper and Law are good, but I don't think they'd have saved everyone without Caesar's reluctant co-operation (and their own post-Dressrosa exhaustion), and the plan didn't intend for Caesar to reach Zou. While we don't know for certain the entire crew were poisoned (I believe some of the Minks in the forest escaped), we saw Nami treating Bepo, so I don't think it's a stretch that the whole crew were there as they were all in the initial fighting.
I have a few more Zou-based ideas that'll probably appear in this series eventually. So much potential!
She had watched over them since their parents had died, seven years ago, in a pirate raid caused by the Pirate King’s execution and the resulting Great Age of Pirates. They were troublesome children, angry at the world and eager to show it as they fought anyone and everyone that provoked them. She came to love them and see them as her own children regardless, patching their wounds after yet another fight and listening to them brag about their victories. They won more than they lost, a small mercy despite her wishing they wouldn't fight at all.

By the time her two ice storms hit their teens, their losses had dwindled until she never heard of one. While she had hoped that meant they would stop trying to fight everything that came their way, it was a hope in vain. The boys had grown more and more arrogant, and she began to fear for their future.

Her fears grew to fruition, one day when the boys were fourteen and fifteen, respectively. They came back one night, the older supporting the younger, both limping and so banged up she felt her heart stutter for a moment.

"What happened to you?" she demanded, all but running to them, medical supplies in hand, as the older helped the younger collapse onto the couch before slumping alongside him.

That they didn't protest when she stripped them of their hats before treating their wounds startled and concerned her. They had long since decided that they didn't need 'mothering' and wrapped their own injuries when they got them. There was a far off look in the elder's eyes, and when she removed the younger's shades she realised he had the same look. Fearing concussions, she treated the bruises on their heads first, desperately trying to coax reactions. To her relief, they gave her satisfactory ones, although she continued to keep an eye on them as she treated the rest of their numerous wounds. Once done, she heated some broth and pressed the warm bowls into their hands. They ate obediently before stumbling off to their bedroom.

When they didn't emerge for breakfast the next morning, she hurried to their room, knocking gently at the door. When there was no response, her heart quickened as she rapped again, harder, panicking that she'd been wrong to leave them alone – maybe they had had concussion after all. With still no answer, she called out a warning before pushing the door open.

They weren't there. She ran to the front door to find their boots and hats were also missing. Worried – it would be just like them to go and challenge whoever beat them the day before, and she'd heard that Marines were pursuing a dangerous pirate crew in the area – she slipped her own boots and coat on and went searching.
A fresh layer of snow had fallen since their departure, the virgin snow concealing all traces of their footprints. Unable to pick up the trail, she began to ask around. No-one had seen them. There were some mutterings of some kid with a spotted hat, and warnings about a young polar bear, but nothing about her own charges. Soon she had half the village helping her look, despite the boys’ violent reputation, while the other half were all on look out.

They never found them.

Thirteen years later, there was a frantic knocking on her door. It was one of the boys – now a man with a wife and child of his own – that had often got into scraps with her two (always to his defeat). He was clutching a newspaper in his hand.

"Look!" he exclaimed, thrusting it at her. Two bounty posters fluttered down onto the threshold, face down, and she absently knelt to pick them up as she looked at the newspaper. The headline declared that the Straw Hat and Heart Pirates had taken down the Yonkou Kaido. She'd heard of both crews, but failed to understand the urgency of the story. While the defeat of a Yonkou was news, in their small island in North Blue it would barely affect them.

Then she saw the accompanying picture and froze. It was a battle scene, the two infamous captains Strawhat Luffy and Trafalgar Law taking the majority of the focus with their crews in the background. One wore a very familiar hat, only a different colour bobble any change at all. By him, back to back, was another man and while the hat was different, the hair and shades were heart-achingly familiar.

Then she remembered the two posters in her hand and hesitantly looked down, turning them over before collapsing to her knees, her body wracked with sobs.

Heart Pirate Penguin: 175 million beris

Heart Pirate Shachi: 175 million beris

"They're alive!" she sniffled, clutching the posters to her chest in relief. The man in front of her gave his own watery smile.

"They're alive."

Chapter End Notes

This is almost entirely shameless headcanon regarding their past, because aside from that one teasing SBS we know nothing and Oda doesn't seem to plan to tell us any more any time soon. So here's the headcanon/theory I came up with. I don't want to make this A/N too long, but I'm happy to elaborate if I'm asked (either in a reply or in a later drabble). As for their bounties, at Saboady they don't have any (the 'thirteen bounty heads' are the Straw Hats, Kid, Killer, Law and Bepo), but I refuse to believe that they won't have one after this arc. The number is pretty random.
Jean Bart was alone in the Polar Tang's control room when Nico Robin approached him, delicately perching herself in the co-pilot's chair as if she belonged there.

"Your captain has been coerced into giving a tour of the submarine to Franky and Usopp," she informed him. Unsure of her point – if he needed the captain, or vice versa, there were tannoy installed in almost every room – he simply shrugged in response, guiding the Polar Tang around an underwater mountain effortlessly.

Nico Robin waited until the manoeuvre was completed before speaking again. Jean Bart appreciated it, as her next words would have broken his concentration completely.

"How many of you did Jack torture?"

He froze, immediately looking around to make sure his captain hadn't entered the room unnoticed. He hadn't, and he spotted a disembodied hand by the tannoy, clearly having muted the microphone completely. Her earlier comment regarding his captain's whereabouts suddenly made sense.

"Four," he admitted, realising that denying it was futile. Nico Robin would just prey on other crewmembers until she got the answer anyway. He fought the urge to rub his wrists. "How did you know?" What gave them away?

"Wanda mentioned that the strongest warriors were tortured," Nico Robin told him. "I assumed that the Heart Pirates would fall within that category, even if you are mainly humans." She offered nothing more but Jean Bart was aware of her reputation from before she joined the Straw Hats. He wouldn't have been surprised if she'd noticed something in the way they currently held themselves.

"Captain doesn't know," he confirmed for her. She inclined her head in unsurprised acknowledgement. The crew had collectively agreed that Law need not know everything that went wrong on Zou, an opinion solidified after his reaction to the fact there had been a battle at all. "Bepo is one of the stronger Minks, so it was inevitable he was chosen. Aside from that, they thought humans might be easier to break."

"So, you..." She left it hanging expectantly and he turned back to the controls, seeing no reason to tell her any more. If they weren't telling their own captain, there was no need to tell another crew. Nico Robin should have learnt enough to satisfy her curiosity.

The woman rose to her feet gracefully and headed for the door.

"Penguin and Shachi are more subdued than I recall from Sabaody," she commented idly, and
breezed out of the room before her disembodied hand returned the tannoy's microphone to its previous setting.

Jean Bart's hand tightened over the controls, trying and failing to push the memories away. While he was no stranger to torturous experiences, due to his time as a tenryubito slave, it was a new experience for the two younger men, shown in their reactions and currently subdued state – while Law didn't know what had happened, he had certainly picked up on their current attitude and had attempted to probe once already with no success. Jack and his men hadn't broken them, but Jean Bart didn't want to think about how close they might have been. It had been a minor blessing, for Penguin and Shachi at least, that the humans were an afterthought; Jack hadn't truly believed the Heart Pirates knew about Raizo.

Still, their screams would haunt his mind for some time to come.

Chapter End Notes

I doubt Oda will ever reveal if this happened in the manga, but it makes sense to me that they might have tried a different angle just in case it worked. Also I'm sorry, Heart Pirates, but I can't avoid the angst plot bunnies sometimes, and Zou is a perfect setup. As for why Penguin/Shachi/Jean Bart in particular, I headcanon that they're the strongest in the crew after Law and Bepo (hopefully next arc we'll get a better grasp on the Heart Pirates' strengths!).
Law clenched the heart he was holding more tightly than he meant to as another wince of pain hit him. He needed to treat it, but the fight had gone on longer than he's anticipated, so his stamina was low. The injury was nothing life-threatening, so it would wait until he'd rested up a little. He spared a moment to pull his coat tighter, thanking the dark colour for hiding the blood. His crew didn't need to know his victim had landed a lucky hit. They'd probably do something stupid, like kill the pirate, but he wanted all the hearts to be still-beating when he handed them over.

One last check to make sure there was definitely no visible blood, and he returned to the Polar Tang, showing his crew the heart triumphantly before heading to the infirmary to put it with the rest.

He didn't anticipate Shachi chasing him less than a minute later, the slightly slower Penguin trailing behind, at the head of the stampede of the rest of his off-duty crew.

"Is something wrong?" he asked them, mildly concerned. His crew were hyperactive, yes, but rarely quite so frantic.

"Bepo smelt blood," Shachi gasped, grabbing at his coat. Law barely stopped himself from flinching as his wound was agitated by the movement.

"Did he now?" he asked, looking at the grasping hand disapprovingly. Shachi's response was to tighten his grip as the crew descended. Penguin took the heart from him before it was damaged and put it away as the rest of the crew pawed at his coat to remove it.

Outnumbered and not yet sufficiently recovered to use a Room, Law had no chance when faced with the majority of his very determined crew. His coat was forcibly stripped from him, electing a muffled hiss before Law clamped his mouth shut.

The exact moment his crew spotted the injury, a gunshot to his side, was clearly apparent from the way their focus zeroed in on it. It went cleanly through, front to back, missing anything vital. He knew it looked worse than it was, but his crew leapt into action, guiding – or rather dragging – him over to a bed to sit. Penguin and Shachi led the team in stripping Law of his top before wiping the blood away and examining it critically.

"Stitches," Penguin declared. Law opened his mouth to protest – it wouldn't be that long before he regained the energy to treat it himself, so it only needed wrapping until then – and Shachi stuffed in a piece of rawhide used whenever anaesthetic wasn't available. Uni and Clione helped Shachi in holding the gagged Law immobile while Penguin mercilessly began the treatment.

Law's pain tolerance was reasonably high, so he was never in danger of crying out although he did
clench the rawhide firmly between his teeth. Strictly speaking, anaesthetic wasn't necessary, and it was rather expensive to keep replacing.

Regardless, he was certain his crew had an ulterior motive for neglecting to use it, which he queried as soon as Penguin finished stitching and the rawhide was removed from his mouth. He received no immediate reply as Penguin busied himself with the bandages and it was only once the treatment was fully finished and he was pushed to lie down that Penguin looked at him sternly.

"You weren't going to tell us." It wasn't a question, so Law didn't dignify it with a response. Penguin sighed, clearly exasperated, and crossed his arms.

"Stop relying on that damn fruit of yours and rely on us sometimes, dammit!" he scolded, visibly irritated and upset. "You've taught us all enough to at least be able to deal with something of this calibre." He wasn't wrong, although Law didn't like to admit it. It appeared that the lack of anaesthetic had been the closest his crew felt like getting to a punishment.

"Look, Law," Shachi added, perching on the side of the bed and using his captain's given name for additional emphasis. "The no hiding injuries rule goes both ways. Your fruit takes stamina, so you shouldn't rely on it if you don't have to!" Law fixed his nakama with a baleful stare.

"Are you done?" he asked them dryly. They faced him down stubbornly.

"No hiding injuries!" they chorused, Shachi's hand shooting out to pin Law back to the bed as he began to sit.

"You're staying there for the next hour," he told him. "You need to get your strength back." Law resisted the urge to sigh, and decided it was less hassle if he did rest for the hour, as he did need to recover his stamina. He could heal himself up later.

Too bad his crew refused to give him the chance to 'cheat', as they put it, and forced him not-so-patiently heal at a non-enhanced pace.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked for Law trying to hide an injury from his crew, and this happened.
When Ikkaku had joined the Heart Pirates there had been a huge celebration, led by Penguin and Shachi. The captain himself hadn't joined in the party, but she'd been reassured that he was always like that and that it was nothing personal. As he had been the one to invite her in the first place, and was at least lurking in the corner nursing a single mug of rum, she accepted it and let herself enjoy the atmosphere. The boys, as she came to refer to the rest of the crew, were apparently overjoyed to have a woman join them. It hadn't really registered when she'd first met them that there were no other females, but that hardly bothered her. She'd always got on better with boys anyway.

Being the only girl did have its advantages. The boys, this time including the captain, had banded together to empty a small store room and put in a bed and dresser, giving her her own room. She was also given first dibs on the communal bathroom, the closest the crew could get to giving her her own en suite.

That particular privilege only lasted a couple of weeks, until their first real fight since she'd joined, where some of the boys were grubbier that her. From then on the bathroom reverted to a free for all, although Uni did fashion a sign for her to flip to make sure no-one walked in on her by accident – purposeful walk-ins were punishable by her lethal martial arts, followed by an unpleasant chore assigned by the captain, the same punishment dished out whenever any crew member disrespected another. Ikkaku had been less than pleased initially, hoping she wasn't getting special treatment because she was a girl – the private room was as much as she wanted – but her captain had assured her otherwise. While he had no issues with harmless pranks, they had to be totally harmless and not at the unpleasant expense of another crewmate.

Tailoring a uniform for her also took time. The fact that they even wore a uniform – with the exception of their captain – had surprised her until she saw the bowels of the submarine. A boiler suit was a must in there and for most of the crew it was simpler to just wear them the majority of the time. Law was the only one to exclusively wear his only when he was needed there, but as his knowledge on submarines was minimal at best (apparently, he'd tried to learn but Penguin had insisted he not overload himself and just focused on being the doctor-captain and left the maintenance to the rest of them) his presence was rare.

The adaptation of one of the spares (all designed for males) took weeks if not a month before it was satisfactorily remade for her. In the meantime, she had made do with a baggy one, hiding her hair under a hat and all but masquerading as a boy, especially while on shore.

She was glad of the masquerade on Amazon Lily – while it meant she was subjected to the same unfriendly treatment as her crewmates, she preferred it to receiving special treatment and being separated from her crew. None of her nakama had commented, either too busy with Mugiwara and
Jinbei, or preoccupied by the often scantily clad Kuja. The crew might be largely in their late twenties and early thirties, but she often thought they acted as though they were still hormonal teenagers. Not, she admitted, that she was much better. Perhaps that was why she fit in so well, despite being the only female.

She was asked, once, by a woman whose name she never learnt, and indeed only saw the one time, if she wished for a female crewmate. Surely it had to be lonely, being the only girl in a crew of boys? Ikkaku had simply laughed. If she desired 'girl talk', she simply collared the nearest unfortunate crewmate. At the beginning, it had been to watch them squirm – some, like Penguin and Shachi, still did even two years later – but now most of them were used to her whims.

No, she was perfectly content as it was, just her and the boys.

Chapter End Notes

I'm largely holding off on writing the rest of the Heart Pirates right now because I'm hoping we'll get more canon information about them soon (Oda, pretty please?) but as Ikkaku is implied to be the only female I thought I could take a few guesses from what we've seen in the manga and SBS, and my own experiences at often being the only girl in a group of boys. The designs of the Heart Pirates we see at Amazon Lily don't really seem to fit many of the ones at Zou, from my recollections, but I'm hoping it's just a matured art style rather than half the crew being dead and replaced by new members. This is my explanation for Ikkaku's apparent absence, anyway. We'll see what happens in the Wano/Kaido arc(s), I guess.
Penguin was no stranger to pain. Even before his parents had been killed, he and Shachi had always been getting into scraps, and it had only escalated after they were orphaned. Then, of course, they’d met Law, losing horrifically to him before forming a pirate crew together, opening them up to a new world of fights where even victory could come at a painful price and the victor was judged by who was still alive, rather than the number of wounds each side obtained.

Being defeated by poisonous gas, then strung up on a wooden X and tortured for information he couldn't give? That was new, and easily threatening his pain tolerance. Seeing his brother in all but blood in the same position beside him did nothing to ease the situation; if anything it made it worse. His wrists were not designed to bear his weight for so long – how long had it been? Penguin had lost track of time in the perpetual fog that clouded his sight yet not his mind. It could have been hours or days that he had hung there, listening to the pained groans and cries from the others, and intermittently contributing as one of Jack's nakama decreed that it was time to question him again. His burning nerves had long since passed into agony, and occasionally a noise would escape his gritted teeth without any further convincing. Beside him, he could occasionally hear Shachi's own noises of pain, filling him with a helpless rage.

A new burning began in his chest, hot and sharp and nothing like the burn of his nerves. If he didn't know better, he'd have said it was an actual fire, but that was a torture method he had yet to see their tormentors use, perhaps because the gas was likely flammable and the pirates had no wish to blow themselves up in their quest for information.

He was probably hallucinating. Either that or his nerves had decided to use a new signal to needlessly inform him that he was being tortured. Not helpful, he mentally groused. He didn't need more reminders, particularly not odd ones in yet-uninjured places. That was where his captain's vivre card was nestled snugly. He wasn't too keen on phantom pains there. It felt as if-

Oh. Gods, no. That was not Law's vivre card burning up. It was not. Penguin shut his eyes, attempting to block out the pain to feel the vivre card tucked against his skin.

The burning didn't go away. If anything, it got stronger. His captain's vivre card really was burning up. Law was in danger – Law was dying – and they were in no position to help him. Penguin had known it was likely – he knew that Law had been living for revenge only – but to feel it actually happening, with him unable to even tell anyone as his captain's life force burnt away against his chest, broke something within him.

His head was already hanging, his face shadowed by his hair. Hidden from sight, silent tears welled
in his eyes and trailed down his cheeks, born of frustration and grief.

A hand fisted in his hair, forcing his head up, but Penguin simply stared forwards, unseeing.

"We broke one!" a muffled voice declared, sounding both close and so very far away. More hands grabbed at him, tugging him one way and the other, but Penguin barely felt anything, continuing to stare ahead blankly, numb to the world as meaningless words passed over him.

His captain was dying.

He missed the terrified way Shachi looked at him, and the concern on the faces of the rest of the crew.

What, then, did he have left?

Chapter End Notes

I'm convinced the Heart Pirates must have had Law's vivre card (and probably intended on following it if they ever saw it flare up), even if they were probably under orders not to use it. While Bepo having the card makes more sense as the navigator, I thought it fit Penguin better in this scenario (burning fur would have been a problem). Timeline wise, we know that Jack's attack on Zou coincides with the events in Dressrosa, so if they did have Law's card, they wouldn't have seen it flare up (and likewise with Bepo's card - Nami must have seen it start to burn, but Law was a bit too occupied to Doflamingo to probably notice it and by the time he had time to look at it again Sanji and co. would have reached Zou and treated Bepo), or be in a position to do something about it if they did, as per this drabble. There's no way Law's vivre card wouldn't have flared up in Dressrosa...
If there was one place Law both loved and despised on the Polar Tang, it was the infirmary. Within it, he was a god. Everything moved to his whims and his control was absolute. The sting in the tail was that his patient was usually a member of his crew, and Law always hated it when his nakama were injured. They were often just a little too reckless for his liking, to say nothing of the carelessly self-inflicted accidents – the only time he ever entered the bowels of the Polar Tang nowadays was to rescue whichever idiot had hurt themselves on the machinery.

When Law had nothing but hate for his infirmary was when he was the patient, as was currently the case.

"Open up," Shachi instructed, brandishing a spoonful of vile tasting yet effective medicine. Law glowered at it as if it were the cause of his current misery – as opposed to the cure it was – before reluctantly allowing Shachi to place it in his mouth. The taste was no more pleasant than the previous dose and Law swallowed it down with a sour face.

Shachi put the spoon and bottle away before returning to his side and neatening the blankets Law was tightly bundled within. Law didn't bother telling him to leave and stop hovering. He'd tried earlier, only for Shachi to look at him as if he were mad.

"Leave you by yourself?" he'd asked incredulously. "Hell no. You'd use your fruit the moment I shut the door." Law had denied it, but they'd both known he was lying. He was fairly certain that if he continued to press, Shachi would leave, but not before slapping kairoseki on him. The ginger's hovering was infinitely more preferable to kairoseki.

"Just sleep it off," Shachi suggested, obviously noticing Law's restlessness. He'd produced a magazine from somewhere – with a half-naked woman on the front Law felt no desire to enquire about the contents, although if he'd had more energy he'd have suggested one of the more practical books lining one wall of the room – and was flicking through it. "You're in no state to do anything else so just let the medicine do its thing." He was right, but Law didn't want to admit it.

Not for the first time, he cursed his poor immune system, and the outbreak of flu on the winter island they'd landed on the day before. As soon as he'd realised they'd landed in the middle of a contagious epidemic Law had retreated to the Polar Tang, well aware of his own immune system's failings, leaving his crew to try and find uncontaminated supplies. But it had been too late – the virus had already struck, and his crew were uncompromising on their 'no Ope Ope no Mi' stance.

Bepo was apologetic for navigating them to such an island, but Law didn't blame him. The combination of Log Poses and the resulting lack of knowledge about the islands ahead meant his navigator had no way of knowing there would be an illness outbreak just as they arrived. The poor
Mink had then apologised for apologising and Law had sent him to the control room with Penguin to lead them further into the Grand Line.

It would probably be another several days until Law was on his feet again, but he wasn't going to let that stop his advance towards vengeance.

For the time being, he caved and closed his eyes, letting the medicine drag him into a healing sleep, to Shachi's murmured approval.

"Get well soon, Captain."
Bepo hated it when people flinched away from him. Cries of monster often followed him as he slunk from place to place, and it wasn't uncommon to be attacked. He normally escaped without fighting back, his natural defences keeping him from harm and his heightened senses and instincts showing him opportunities to flee. After all, humans were just furless Minks, the poor creatures. He didn't want to hurt them but sometimes it wasn't possible.

The two loud and angry teenage humans were the first ones not to run from him, followed by the younger one that smelt of blood and tears and illness but still stuck up for him and drove the other boys away. Without thinking, he accepted the offered hand to pull him to his feet – later his captain, Law had never treated him as an animal even at the start – only for the boy to give a muffled yelp and fall backwards, clutching at his hand. On his feet again, Bepo looked at his paw to see sparks fading away and wanted to cry.

"I'm sorry!" he grovelled, not daring to go near the boy who was watching him with an undecipherable look on his face. He'd finally found a nice human and he'd hurt him! Bepo cursed his natural weapon, and shoved his paws behind his back, away from the boy, who was slowly pulling himself upright again.

"Sorry for what?" the boy asked. "What was that? Who are you?"

"I'm Bepo!" the mink gushed, disbelieving that the boy hadn't fled. Then again, he had taken on those two boys bigger than him to save Bepo… "It's something you furless minks can't do, I'm sorry!"

The boy gave a funny smile. It didn't look happy.

"You don't need to apologise," he said, turning and beginning to walk away, although it seemed more like a stumble. "Not to me." Bepo watched him go dejectedly, his ears dropping. The first nice human and he'd scared him off. Well, maybe those other two would talk to him, once they realised hitting him hurt them more than him.

Hunching into himself, he began to trapse along a different path, when he saw the boy collapse. Not thinking, he ran over to him and pawed at the weakened body, watching as golden eyes struggled to open. The human smelt of illness, although that wasn't quite right. It was more like old illness, a lingering smell on his furless skin after the illness was gone.

"W-what are you-" the human stuttered. His skin was a funny colour, not quite like the other humans Bepo had seen. He was shaking, too, but Bepo didn't smell any fear. Was he cold? He didn't have any fur to keep him warm. If he stayed out overnight, he'd die. The human was a little smaller than Bepo, so Bepo pawed at the loose fabric draped around him to wrap it more firmly before wrapping
his arms around the boy and picking him up. It was easier than Bepo had thought it would be; humans were lighter than they looked. Either that or this one hadn't eaten recently.

"H-Hey!" the boy protested, wriggling in Bepo's grip unsuccessfully. The mink kept a firm hold of him as he made his way to the cave he'd been staying in while he looked for food and a way to the next island on his way back home.

"What's your name?" he asked the human as he set him down, realising that he hadn't shocked him once. Maybe the clothes protected him.

"...Law," the boy told him, trying to move but tangling himself up more in the cloak and falling back down. He was still shaking, although not as much as he had been, and Bepo curled up next to him.

"Will you be my friend, Law?" he asked, trying to keep the small human warm with his fur without shocking him. Law instinctively shifted closer to the warmth. "I don't have any." He thought back to the two earlier, who fought together and helped each other.

"I don't either," Law said quietly. Bepo waited, but he didn't say anything else. Dejected, he curled up closer, giving more warmth. He could at least pretend to have a friend, until morning came.
There was something unsettling about the atmosphere aboard the Polar Tang as they sailed away from Zou. The crew were quieter and Law knew something had happened that they weren't telling him. Subtle probing had been unsuccessful, telling him that he was being deliberately kept in the dark. Usually he would leave it be, respecting his crew's privacy (and the fact that a crew-wide secret normally meant they were plotting something), if it wasn't for one small fact.

Neither Penguin or Shachi, the most unusually subdued of his crew, had turned up for the once-over health check Law had requested. Many of his crew had been reluctant, going as far as to insist he didn't use his fruit (and all looking pointedly at his bandaged right arm as they did so), but they had all eventually allowed him to see their wounds from Zou. As they'd all been treated by Tony-ya, Law was unsurprised to see that they had all been treated efficiently and were healing up well. Bepo and Jean Bart were worse than most, a fact that bothered Law but he didn't press. They, at least, were still behaving normally.

Law didn't ask or expect his crew to tell him everything (how could he when he liked to keep many of his own secrets close to his chest), but one thing he would not allow was hiding injuries, leading him to enter the quarters shared by Penguin and Shachi early in the morning as they were getting ready for the day.

The startled flurry of movement as he was noticed, the pair of them fastening their boiler suits in hurried unison, concerned him and he shut the door behind him, leaning against it to prevent them slipping out.

"Captain?" Shachi asked, fiddling with a sleeve nervously.

"What are you doing?" Penguin demanded. Law stared him down in silence for a few seconds, taking advantage of the fact that neither had put on their hats, making reading their faces much easier. They looked defensive.

"Neither of you have been to see me for your check-ups," he reminded them, crossing his arms. He didn't like the stifled flinch from Penguin. "I know you two are hiding something and I won't force you to tell me," he continued, hoping to pacify them. Seeing two of his oldest nakama eyeing him as if he was the threat hurt. "But you know the rule about injuries. Let me check them."

"They're healing fine," Penguin told him bluntly. "Chopper did a good job, and you taught us enough to care for them by ourselves." Law froze. He hadn't entertained the prospect that their injuries would tell him what had a sombre mood tainting the crew, but that was the picture Penguin's words painted. After all, it wasn't like he didn't know they were injured. He sighed, closing his eyes.
and fighting the urge to scan the pair of them. He'd told them he wouldn't force them to tell him what they were hiding, and he had no intention of going back on his word.

"So you won't let me see for myself?" he asked, trying to hide his concern. From the way they looked at each other, he hadn't succeeded.


"I left you on Zou because I thought it was safe," he started, lacing his fingers together in front of him. "But I nearly lost you. Everyone got hurt and now you two, who have been my nakama longer than everyone else except Bepo, are hiding something related to your injuries." He gritted his teeth and looked at his clenched hands, the DEATH tattoos standing out starkly against the white knuckles. "You're concerning me."

If the two men in front of him were anyone else, save Bepo, he would never have let that admittance pass his lips. But these two had seen him at his worst, recovering from Cora-san's death, and struggling with the nightmares of Flevance. Were they dying too? Was he going to lose more of the few that had pushed past his walls?

The mattress sank as two bodies joined him, one either side, and wrapped an arm around him. Law looked up to see the gentle, comprehending, faces of Penguin and Shachi beside him.

"It's not serious," Penguin told him. "We're not dying." He didn't promise, which Law was thankful for. The last person that had promised he wouldn't die had died almost immediately afterwards, a fact Penguin was well aware of.

"We'd go to you for help if we thought we were," Shachi added. "We don't plan on leaving your side."

"On the topic of scaring people, though..." Penguin continued, reaching inside his boiler suit to withdraw a vivre card. "How do you think it felt when this started burning?" Law's own vivre card, then. He didn't have a response for that. "It was after the poison gas, when I-" Penguin faltered for a split second. "I couldn't move. Your life was burning away and I couldn't do anything!" Law grimaced. He'd forgotten his vivre card had been in Penguin's possession while he was at Dressrosa.

Shachi started laughing hollowly, causing both Law and Penguin to jump and stare at him.

"We're all idiots, aren't we?" the ginger chuckled humourlessly. "Worrying each other when we were trying to do the opposite."

"Shachi-" Penguin began, but was cut off by his nakama.

"How about a trade, Captain?" he continued. "We'll let you check our injuries if we can give you a check-up ourselves." Penguin sighed and cuffed the ginger around the head, although there was no malice in the action.

"Don't go saying things like that without asking me first!" he complained. Law remained silent, considering it a simple enough trade but not wanting to coerce Penguin if he was truly against it. The oldest sighed again. "Fine. But Law first." Shachi's hopeful eyes turned to him, and Law let a small smile escape.

"Sounds like a fair trade," he agreed. He was fully healed, aside from his arm, but letting them see for themselves was a small price to pay to reassure himself about the health of two of his oldest and closest nakama.
Agreements made, Shachi all but dragged him to the infirmary (he’d offered to Shambles them but they shot that suggestion down before he even finished speaking) where he and Penguin gave Law a thorough check over, finishing with an insistence that he place his arm in a sling. Law thought it unnecessary, but for the sake of their trade agreed to put one on after checking them over.

Shachi was first, and Law's gut churned unpleasantly when he finally saw the full scope of his injuries. They were similar to Bepo and Jean Bart's, although starker against furless and less-scarred skin. His fingers trembled as he treated them, desperately trying to deny what his eyes were telling him.

Penguin, when Law turned to him, was worse. Law had to keep stopping because his hands wouldn't stay still faced with the implications beneath their fingertips. When he eventually finished he sat heavily in the desk chair, silent as the two gently placed his arm in the promised sling.

Teeth clenched and fist white, he decided it didn't matter what Mugiwara-ya and the Minks thought.

Jack was his to kill.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked how Law would react if he found out his nakama were tortured. Here is the answer! As for why Bepo and Jean Bart didn't give it away, it's a combination of 'they weren't acting off so they must have been odd battle wounds' and Law just not wanting to see it. Penguin and Shachi broke his rose-tinted glasses. And while my medical knowledge isn't great (bones yes, flesh no), Devil Fruit healing or not, I’m convinced Law should be keeping that arm in a sling otherwise gravity would be trying to separate it again... It is only held together by threads and what healing Mansherry could give - even if the threads won't break, the flesh around the threads could tear. At least, that's my view on the thing. As I said, medical knowledge isn't my thing. Brook's the only one I'd ever be able to help.
Shachi cursed Bepo for putting away the salt on top of the cupboard, just out of reach. He was by no means short, but the Polar Tang's kitchen cupboards were high, and even on his tip toes Shachi's fingertips barely brushed the container, giving him absolutely no purchase to grasp it. In all fairness, the Mink had a habit of forgetting that his human nakama weren't as tall as he was, although Penguin could usually reach things if all else failed.

There was no way Shachi was asking the older teen – wait, Penguin was twenty now, wasn't he – to get it down for him. Nakama, best friends, brothers, whatever they might be, he had his pride and the other would still tease him mercilessly about that stupid two inches difference and how Shachi was too short to even get the salt. Maybe he could guilt Bepo into retrieving it for him? Or he could just grab a stool, which would work best as long as no-one walked in on him standing on it.

Settling back flat on his feet in preparation to check for potential intruders before fetching something to stand on, he was startled by an arm reaching past him to grab the salt. Damn it, Penguin was never going to let him live it down! He turned to face the owner of the arm, only to freeze.

How the hell did Law reach that? The younger teen was shorter than Shachi, and there had definitely been no Room activated, so he hadn't cheated with his devil fruit. He blinked at his captain, numbly accepting the salt as it was handed to him.

"Something wrong, Shachi?" Law asked, his face unreadable. With a start, Shachi realised he was having to look up at the younger teen. He immediately looked at the floor, expecting to see a step or something, but no, Law's feet were firmly on the ground. He wasn't even wearing boots with a heel.

"Wha-?" he spluttered, springing back and pointing accusingly at his captain. "How- what- when did you get taller than me?" Law raised an eyebrow, and Shachi's pointing arm fell to flail by his side, gesturing to around his waist in an exaggerated show of how tiny his captain was supposed to be. Had been. "You're supposed to be the short scrawny one!" he protested. "Why did you grow? Why aren't you a midget? Why are you taller than me?"

A smirk had appeared on Law's face, amused as he leant back against the counter and crossed one leg in front of the other. His trousers stopped several inches short of his ankles.

"I can give you a lesson on somatotropin and the biology of human growth if you want, Shachi," he commented, in a tone that clearly said he knew Shachi had no wish to be subjected to such a lecture. "But as your brain appears to have short circuited, I won't waste my breath. Suffice to say, I am currently in the middle of a growth spurt, and it so happens that I overtook you in height."

"But- but-" Shachi whimpered, looking his captain up and down. "That means-"
"You're the midget now!" A hand landed heavily on his head, shoving his hat down over his eyes, which in turn painfully dislodged his shades. Penguin laughed from beside him, not relenting his grip on the hat even as Shachi brought his hands up to try and dislodge him. The forgotten salt container fell to the floor, only to be caught by a quiet Room.

"Penguin!" he whined, resorting to slapping the other's hands in an attempt to get him to let go. "Get off me!" With one last chuckle, and ruffle of the hat, Penguin released him and Shachi fussily rearranged his hat and shades, rubbing at his nose where the shades had dug in. He scowled up at both the taller males – Law was not supposed to be tall, dammit! – before sulkily returning his attention to the meal he'd been attempting to cook before he was interrupted.

Law placed the salt in front of him, and Shachi glowered at it as the others left the room as if it was the salt's fault he was now the shortest. In his defence, if it wasn't for the salt, he probably wouldn't have realised.

So really, it was all the salt's fault.

Chapter End Notes

Well, Law was shorter than Penguin/Shachi on Swallow Island, but he's now taller than them by a reasonable amount, so I figure at some point this realisation would have happened (as the older sister yet also the shorter sister I have some experience with the tiny one suddenly getting taller and it sucks). It took some hunting to find a scene that actually showed their comparative heights in the manga, though, which I wanted to find just to prove to myself I wasn't making it up. Normally, Law's sitting down or not in the same frame as these two, but I did find two frames that proved he is taller - one on Zou and one when Hancock boards the Polar Tang in the Post-War arc.

Because of the White Lead Poisoning, I've got Law going through a late growth spurt (like Coby clearly did in canon). Ages in this snapshot are 18 (Law), 19 (Shachi), 20 (Penguin).
Chapter Notes

Characters: Heart Pirates
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Polar Tang

Life on a submarine had its own challenges. Unlike a sailing boat, there was little fresh air to breathe, no wind and spray on their faces. The sun was a distant concept, often failing to penetrate the depths at which they glided. Their direction and advance was advocated by machinery, the low hum of the engines a constant accompaniment to everything they did, rather than sails and the wind.

Their territory was not the waves, a vast expanse of blue churned by the wind and tugged by the moon, but the currents, controlled by shifts in the seabed and rarely provoked by the weather up above. Sight-seeing, lounging on deck, and even fishing was a treat, not the norm, declared by the red light indicating the door to the outside world was sealed, trapping them inside indefinitely (until the air ran stale or their navigator complained about the heat – the latter almost always came first).

It was not a lifestyle for the light-hearted. Nor was it a lifestyle for the easily bored.

The Polar Tang was filled with many additional chambers, compared to a regular pirate ship. Excluding the vast medical areas, a must when the captain is a doctor with the Ope Ope no Mi, the library was one to rival that of the late Ohara, stuffed with books on anything and everything from medical applications (of course) and fantasy, with side stops to engineering, cooking, and even yarn work (no law-abiding tailor would willingly sew a feared jolly roger onto so many clothes and the ones on the wrong side of the law were hardly trustworthy). The control room and meeting room were embroiled into one, a corner reserved for Bepo and his navigation tools.

Bedrooms were not a communal bunk area, but several small rooms clustered together to sleep between two and four people. Law, Bepo, Jean Bart and Ikkaku were the only ones to have private rooms – the right of a captain, decency for the only woman, safety for Bepo (sharp claws and Electro made for an unnerving combination at night when nightmares struck) and practicality for Jean Bart (no room was large enough for a bunk mate to fit).

The kitchen bordered the mess room, large enough to house the whole crew with ease. Excluding the medical facilities, there were only two rooms larger. One, large and sparse, was for training. In such a generally cramped environment, it was a necessity that the crew had somewhere to keep in shape. The life of a pirate was not forgiving. The other, filled with sofas, tables and a stack of games in the corner, was the communal room.

On a regular ship, this would be the deck. When not keeping the Polar Tang moving, eating, sleeping or on watch, most of the crew would intermingle in the large room, sharing tales, jokes and drinks. A common pastime was the card games, timeless in their popularity.

They'd bet chores over a game of poker, stakes including the washing up and laundry. An amusing game of go fish would allow them to let off steam afterwards, complaining about cheating without
meaning it when the wrong person was asked for a card.

In the games there was no hierarchy. Captain, first mate, newest recruit, they were all the same. It was more fun like that, leaving them to act like a family of brothers (and sister), no overbearing parents or weird uncles in sight. On a more practical level, it prevented serious fissures in an environment where getting away to cool off was more often than not impossible.

Life in a submarine was tough. But the Heart Pirates would have it no other way.
It hurt to breathe, the poison burning first his mouth, then his windpipe and finally his lungs with every inhalation. While his body was beaten and tattered, weakened to the point that raising his head was an impossible chore, it was the poison that Shachi noticed, feared. Injuries could heal, even if left for several days before treatment (he may be spoilt by his captain's ability, he admitted), but poison was impatient. The poison wouldn't wait for their captain.

The pain in his heart was nothing to do with the poison. Nor was it a result of the battle and subsequent torture he was intermittently undergoing, cries unwillingly torn from his throat as fresh agony bloomed, only to be overtaken by the next burn of poison as he gasped. No, the pain came from the knowledge that Penguin wasn't moving. Shachi could only see him out the corner of his eye, but it was enough to see the sightless gaze, even as their tormentors pulled out all the stops to try and get words out of the broken pirate. The two of them had been inseparable for as long as Shachi could remember, best friends, brothers, nakama, but a pang from his heart told him their time together was over. Penguin would leave him behind, if he hadn't already. He hadn't made a sound since the pirates had converged on him, drunk with success, with the delight of breaking someone.

He didn't know why Jack's group left. He hadn't heard anyone give in, but the Calamity was gone. The poison was still very much there, reducing Shachi's airways to bloody sandpaper, but with their unexpected freedom – still tied to the wooden X but no longer in the shadow of a monster – he fought against his body to speak.

"P-eng…" he rasped. It was swallowed by the background noise of pained groans, muffled but still louder than anything Shachi could produce. Still, he tried again, desperate for something, anything, from the man beside him. "P-eng…"

Nothing. Shachi fought to turn his head, managing barely a shift but it was enough to see nothing had changed in Penguin's countenance.

"Pe…" his voice gave out on him as the tears welled, stinging as they slid down his ragged face. Don't be dead, Penguin. Please. I'm begging you. Say something. Do something! Don't leave me here!

A wave of nausea washed over him, his body attempting to reject the poison but failing miserably as stuttering gasps merely drew more into his pained lungs, his racing heart pumping the toxin around and around his body until his vision faded.

"Gods." He was dragged unwillingly back to consciousness by the breathed word, forcing his eyelids to separate to see what awaited him now. It felt as if his eyes had been sewn shut from the
effort merely squinting required, but he persevered, looking through the shattered lens of his glasses, or what was left of them, at a red-haired woman whose hands were clasped to her mouth in horror. She looked familiar, but Shachi's thoughts slipped around in his mind, refusing to be organised into any sort of coherency. There was only one thing that stood out.

"P-eng…" he managed again, his voice rougher and bloodier than earlier. Soon his lungs would be totally useless, the first of his organs to shut down as death slowly reeled him in.

"Chopper! Sanji-kun!" the woman called — when had she moved? Her hands were no longer covering her mouth, but rather fiddling with the cuffs that kept him on his cross. The names triggered a recollection, slow and hazy but there. He knew these people, somehow… A blond man entered his line of sight, reaching for him, and Shachi recoiled, or tried to. In his state it was little more than a flinch.

"P-eng…" he insisted weakly. He didn't know if they were friend or foe — his hazy recognition was unclear — but he had no choice but to trust them. Penguin might already be dead, but if there was any chance to save him…

The man's hands stilled, resting lightly on his shoulders.

"Peng..?" he wondered out loud, turning his head to the woman, who had one of Shachi's cuffs open and was working on the nest.

"Hel-p P-eng…" Shachi clarified as best he could, coaxing his head into falling sideways in the direction of his nakama. "Firs-"

"Brook!" a young-sounding voice called, from somewhere in Penguin's direction. "Help me get him down!" There was movement, and the sound of breaking. Shachi had no strength to look, but prayed it was Penguin's cross. "Nami, Sanji, keep getting that one down!" The stilled hands resumed moving and Shachi let out another groan.

"P-eng…” He had to know. They had to treat Penguin first!

"Chopper's got your nakama," the man told him, taking his weight as the cuffs holding him in place opened. Shachi had no choice but to fall limp against him. "You're Shachi, right?" How the man knew his name was a mystery for another time. As he was laid on the ground, some distance from his cross, he forced his numb, unresponsive limbs to turn him over. Penguin lay beside him, some small furry thing — a mink? No, it didn't look quite right — by his side. He wasn't moving. Shachi couldn't see well enough to decipher if his chest was rising and falling.

"P-eng…” His body gave out and he slumped over, now on his front but Shachi didn't care. Crucially, he was facing Penguin, only inches from his nakama. He tried to reach out to him, fingers trembling, but his arm barely moved, all his energy drained, and he fought back a curse. So close yet so far.

Something cool and smooth wrapped around his hand and gently brought it to rest on Penguin's. Choking back a sob, Shachi felt the tension drain from his body. There was a pulse, Penguin's skin was still warm and alive. Then the hand twitched, fingers loosely wrapping around Shachi's, and he dragged his head to look at Penguin's face. A light had returned to his eyes, his mouth twisted in something that might have been a smile, in other circumstances.

"It… st-opped…” the older breathed, his voice at least as raspy and thick as Shachi's own. Shachi looked at him blankly, uncomprehending. Their torture was over, but he knew that wasn't what Penguin was talking about, so what..?
Slowly, shaking with the effort, Penguin's other hand dragged itself to his chest, slipping awkwardly through a tear in his clothes to withdraw some paper – a vivre card.

Law's vivre card. Shachi felt his heart skip a beat, comprehension crashing over him like an avalanche. It was small, too small, and one edge glowed a dull amber. Law had been dying, just as they had been, and Penguin had felt it. They watched it together, Shachi's vision blurring as his body insisted on shutting down in a last defence against the poison, as the glow faded away to nothing, leaving just a too-small vivre card.

Slowly, oh so slowly, it began to restore, flakes of ash reattaching themselves as if they had never burnt away.

Relief tore down the last mental barriers Shachi had held up against the encroaching darkness, and he once again succumbed to unconsciousness, certain of one thing.

They would be okay. All of them.

Chapter End Notes

In my defence, I was asked for them to realise Law was going to be alright... okay, I have no excuse for the angst that came first, though. I'm sorry. I'll stop torturing these guys one day... probably.
Never look at the full moon. Bepo had no memories of his homeland, could not describe it if asked, but the warning was as crisp as the day he first heard it. There's no face to go with the voice, no name, but as a cub Bepo was easily cowed by the words. He didn't know why he couldn't look at it, not when the humans around him oohed and aahed at the vision, piquing his curiosity every time. It was a crutch, in a way. Of Zou, of his homeland, it was the only thing he had to remember it by. Over the passage of time, even his brother's face had faded, blurred beyond recognition with only a name and emotions attached. A crutch to cling to, when the wide world got too much with its humans and giants and everything except furred minks everywhere he went.

That didn't mean he understood the warning. No other species feared the full moon, averted their gaze when it rose high in the sky. The small scared cub underneath the layers of fur and fighter and pirate never dared to peek, even when Penguin and Shachi, in their well-meaning but ignorant way tried to get him to look up – "isn't it beautiful, Bepo?" "look, there's even a ring around it!" – for fear of disobedying the voice.

Even Law didn't understand it, although he left it well enough alone once he realised Bepo wouldn't look. The captain's ability to know when to press and when to stop was one of the many things Bepo came to first appreciate, and later love, about him. Despite Penguin and Shachi's lack of understanding, he came to appreciate their enthusiasm, and love them for the gentleness he eventually found buried under the tough exterior they gave off.

It was that love, a pure untainted devotion, that one day destroyed his crutch.

An ambush, late at night when only he and Penguin were on deck – Law sick in the infirmary and Shachi watching over him – by marines seeing and fearing the black flag, left them off kilter and horrendously disadvantaged. For all their prowess, he and Penguin were not enough to win, the noise of the battle summoning Shachi and later their sick captain, but the sheer numbers overwhelming the four of them.

That night was a full moon. Bepo had always been aware of the full moon, even if he'd never seen it. Something about it raised the fur at the back of his neck, a tingle of electro running down his spine without conscious command. That night, though, it pressed against his mind, reminding him in a way it never had before. Coaxing him to turn his gaze skyward.

Never look at the full moon, the voice reminded him, but another softer, silkier presence pushed it aside.

Do you want to save your nakama? it asked, a subtle caress of his mind. Bepo didn't dignify it with a
response as he slashed down another marine only for three more to take their place. He would do anything for his nakama. Then look. He did, glancing around the deck to see the pale Law stumbling backwards as his Room flickered, struggling to remain present. Penguin and Shachi fought side by side, as always, but their clothes were torn and both were limping badly. They were going to lose.

*Look at me,* the presence coaxed, drawing his attention up towards the moon. *Look, and save them.*

*Never loo-*

The old saying washed away as Bepo straightened his back, reaching his full height and startling the marines enough for them to take a step back.

"I'm sorry," he murmured, apologising to his past, to the voice, to his crew.

Then he looked.

The full moon was as bright and beautiful as Penguin had always told him, a halo of washed-out colour crowning it as Shachi had always claimed. Beautiful.

Dangerous.


His vision cleared abruptly, to a vision of carnage. He wasn't on the Polar Tang any more, but rather a bloodied chunk of debris that bore the green and blue patterns of a marine hull. Around him floated other chunks, some bloodier than others, some with bodies, or just body parts.

His own claws were dyed red, and he looked at them, trembling. A fearful glance to the sky showed daybreak blooming, the full moon safely tucked away for another lunar month.

*Never look at the full moon.*

As Bepo looked around, seeing a distant speck of yellow heading his way and a shipwreck full of bloodied corpses, with no recollection of what happened, he thought he understood why.

Chapter End Notes

So, who else was psyched at chapter 888? Sulong looks amazing and I can't wait to see more of it (why isn't chapter 889 up yet dammit). As we don't know much about it yet, I've kept this pretty vague. From what we have been told, it requires training and the mink has to look at the full moon, so here's what I've gleaned from that. I'm sure I'm going to revisit the Sulong idea later once we know more - I already have ideas, I just want canon to give me a few more details...
"We're not here to have fun," Law reminded his crew when they landed on Sabaody Archipelago, already realising that they were eyeing up the amusement park and determined to veto it before anything got out of hand. Left to run wild, they could and would spend all day jumping on the rides as if they were at least ten years younger. Maybe twenty.

"We're not," Shachi agreed, causing Law to look at him suspiciously. Penguin or Bepo he might expect an agreement from, but not Shachi. Especially not with the gleam he could see even though the ginger's shades. "But that doesn't mean we can't have some along the way." To his credit, he didn't lead the crew away immediately, waiting for Law's sigh of defeat before they all tore off – all of them, including Penguin and Bepo, the traitors – towards the relevant grove, leaving their captain in their dust.

He supposed getting all that childish energy out of their systems before getting to the serious mission was probably a good idea, readjusting his grip on Kikoku and following along, careful to keep an eye out for the other Supernovas. Hopefully none of the others had children masquerading as adults for a crew, and would therefore stay in the lawless zones, well away from the amusement park his own crew were currently terrorising.

" Took you long enough," Penguin told him when he finally caught up with the older man, leaning casually against a wall as he watched Shachi dragging Ikkaku onto a roller coaster. On second glance, it looked like it might actually be the other way around… yes, Shachi was definitely starting to look a similar shade of green to his hat as he took in what ride, exactly, he was being coerced onto. Penguin passed him a box of popcorn, which Law took and began to eat as he looked around to locate the rest of his crew.

Bepo was curled up in an ice cream parlour, gorging himself on as much of the dessert as he could presumably afford – Law would not be helping him pay for all of that, especially as the mink was probably going to throw it all back up the moment he stepped onto a ride. Law would quite like to get off the island without his crew destroying his reputation as one of the Supernovas, thank you very much. Perhaps he should have insisted they went out without their boiler suits on, although whether they'd have obeyed…

His crew were very proud of their flag, he'd noticed.

"They'll calm down soon," Penguin observed, stealing some of the popcorn to chew on as he watched Shachi finally escape Ikkaku at the last second, leaving her to brave the ride alone. Clione clapped him on the back in congratulations before scurrying as Ikkaku turned her attention to him, and Shachi stumbled back over to join Penguin and Law, seeing the popcorn and swiping a handful.
"That woman is a demon," he declared, chewing with his mouth open. Law frowned at him and he hastily swallowed. "Wasn't once enough?" So Shachi had already been subjected to the ride before Law had caught up, had he?

"I believe you were the one to imply coming here would be a good idea," he pointed out. Shachi looked totally unrepentant, gesturing to the scene before them. Familiar beige boiler suits sprinkled the area as the rest of the crew explored the park, although Law noticed they were slowly gravitating back towards him.

"Do you ever plan on coming back?" the ginger asked, and Law had to admit it wasn't something he'd considered. Doflamingo was the other side of the Red Line, in the New World. There was no point looking backwards; he'd glean all the information he could, then move on.

"If we don't unwind now, when will we?" Ikkaku asked, done with her ride and stealing her own handful of popcorn from the container Law held. He glanced down to notice it was almost empty, yet he'd only had a mouthful. Thieving crew.

"Come on, captain," Bepo whined, reaching his own paw towards the popcorn. Law moved it away – he'd seen how much ice cream the mink had consumed and was in no hurry to provoke the illness that was looming. "You need to relax, too."

The rest of the crew made agreeing noises, bringing his attention to the fact that they'd all gathered around him. Law looked at them, and his now-empty popcorn – which one had stolen the last handful, dammit – before looking at the park again. It looked busy, full of things he would never touch. Hadn't touched since he was a kid being dragged to festivals. The rides looked horrendous and the food was just screaming out for cases of food poisoning later. No, Law didn't think any of that was a good idea at all.

He looked at the hopeful faces of his crew again and sighed. What the hell. Once wouldn't kill him. Probably.

"Which would you suggest?" he asked, only for his crew to cheer and grab his arms, dragging him over to the thick of it. The empty popcorn container fell to the floor, only to be trampled by the stampede of Heart Pirates.

No, they weren't here for fun, Law mused as he was manhandled onto some ridiculous ride, most of his crew surrounding him. But maybe there wasn't any harm in having some anyway.

Chapter End Notes

I thought I should probably throw in something light-hearted again, after the last two. I refuse to believe the Straw Hats were the only pirates to investigate the park when there's so much fun to be had!
When Jean Bart found his way to the infirmary, after getting changed out of his slave outfit and into something that made him feel alive again, his first thought was _Gods what have I got myself in for._ He hadn't had much opportunity to learn anything about the current Supernova generation – the tenryubito had no interest in such a thing and slaves didn't get a chance to find out anything – so all he’d known about his new captain's abilities was what he'd witnessed during the brief fight, which the other two captains had honestly dominated in terms of visible badassery.

Walking into the infirmary – captain's orders, Law wanted to give him a health check because apparently he was also the ship’s doctor – the last thing he'd expected to see was the ginger's (Shachi, was it?) severed head floating around with the most ridiculous grin on his face.

"Oh, Jean Bart's here, captain," it said, turning around to face Law, who was currently playing some sort of bizarre jigsaw puzzle with his nakama's bodies. It looked like the scene of a horror story, with a confusing lack of blood. Jean Bart had seen him pull a similar trick on the marines, and surmised it was part of his devil fruit ability, but why would he be using it on his nakama? What sort of captain dismembered his own crew? While it was still infinitely preferable to remaining a slave, he couldn't help but wish Mugiwara or Kid had picked him up instead. Mugiwara was interesting and Kid looked like a typical bloodthirsty captain. Jean Bart could handle that.

"Oh, come in, Jean Bart," Law said, looking up from the dismembered body parts to gesture casually to a nearby bed. "Take a seat; this won't take long to finish up." Apprehensive, Jean Bart obeyed, and nearly jumped in the air when a disembodied hand tapped him on the shoulder.

"Relax," the other crew member in the room, or so it seemed – the lack of a cohesive figure made it hard to work out how many were there, but he thought it was just the two – said. This was the one with the strange hat, Penguin or something. "Captain knows what he's doing." The fact that his head was sat on a different bed, while his arm was close enough to touch him did nothing to reassure Jean Bart that he was going to survive the health check.

"And you're done, Penguin, Shachi," Law told them, waving his hands around as if conducting an orchestra. Body parts began to converge in one place, slowly reassembling themselves into figures recognisable as those from the auction house. "Next time I tell you not to try and take on a cyborg Shichibukai without a weapon, perhaps you'll listen." Now they were reassembled into human beings, Jean Bart could see the bandaging both sported, alongside additional bruises.

Neither gave an affirmative answer, and Law sighed – the long-suffering sigh of a captain whose crew lived to give him headaches, and one Jean Bart had once been intimately acquainted with – before turning to Jean Bart and raising his hands.
"Are you planning on turning me into a human jigsaw too?" the larger man couldn't help but ask. He owed his captain, so he wouldn't protest, but he thought he'd like a warning before he was diced up.

"Not if you don't want me to," was the peculiar answer. "Scan." Nothing seemed to happen, but Law hummed after a few moments and turned to a cabinet. "All things considered, your health is good," he told Jean Bart, who gaped. He hadn't even touched him yet already he was making assessments? "Malnutrition is an issue, but that's easily rectified. Come find me if anything bothers you."

Jean Bart knew a dismissal when he heard one, but remained glued in place, glancing over at the other two still lurking in the corner, and startling when the blue sheen in the room disappeared, retreating back towards Law as if he was the source. From Sabaody's experiences, he was. Law looked up at him, then followed his gaze to Penguin and Shachi before sighing.

"Those idiots like it," he explained. "Hell knows why."

"The whole crew does, captain," Penguin corrected, and Law simply rested a hand over his face in exasperation.

"Hell knows why," he repeated, and Jean Bart silently agreed, looking to the other Heart Pirates for an explanation on why they'd request their captain dismember them and play with the separate parts for fun. Shachi inclined his head, an invitation to walk outside that Jean Bart accepted, determined to get answers from the insane crew he'd apparently joined.

"You'll feel it too," the ginger told him, flanking him on one side while Penguin appeared on the other. "When you're in the thrall of captain's powers… it's like nothing can hurt you. It's safe."

"He's a bit aloof at times," Penguin continued, drawing Jean Bart's attention. "But when he's got you in his power, that's when you can really feel he loves you."

Jean Bart still thought they were crazy, even if it made sense in a twisted fashion.

Later, when he located his captain to ask about a pain in his knee to find him disassembling another crewmember and holding his heart in his hand as if it were the One Piece itself as he performed strange checks, he thought maybe they were onto something.

When it was his turn to need to go under his captain's Amputation, he realised just how right they were.

Chapter End Notes

I don't think I'm done with this particular headcanon yet. It's one of my oldest Heart Pirate ones, and I'm glad I finally managed to write something for it.
While it wasn't uncommon for the Heart Pirates to make their disagreement known in they didn't like their captain's decision, there was only one occasion that they seriously considered mutiny.

Punk Hazard.

The fact that their captain expected them to leave him, alone and without backup, on an island controlled by his nemesis was ludicrous, to put it mildly.

"No," was the blunt response from Penguin when Law revealed his intentions, in sight of the frozen shore.

"Hell no," Shachi added, arms crossed firmly.

Their captain looked down at them, unsurprised but unimpressed. No-one backed down, not even the often apologetic Bepo.

"That isn't your call to make," he reminded them. "Last I checked, I was the captain."

"And this crew won't let their captain go off on a stupid suicidal quest," Penguin retorted. "Infiltration, sure. We know that's a one person job. We also know you're the only one of us that stands a chance getting in, Shichibukai-san. But like hell are you sending the rest of us that far away!"

Law frowned, unrelenting in his decision.

"Be as that may, you will leave me and continue on to Zou," he stated, laying down the order flatly. Looking at Bepo, he added "Bepo's been waiting long enough."

"No, captain," Bepo corrected. "I don't want to go there without you. I want to be able to show you Zou!"

"Show it to me once you know your way around it," Law countered, his knuckles white where he gripped Kikoku. Bepo shook his head.

"I want to learn it with you!" he protested. "Please, captain. Don't make us leave you." The rest of the crew gave noises of agreement. Law's face tightened, looking slightly pained.

"You have to," he told them, a slight edge of desperation tinting his voice. That was enough to make them pause, looking at each other in concern. Their captain was never so open with his emotions when he gave them orders.
Predictably, it was Penguin and Shachi who stepped up, taking hold of their captain by his arms and leading him away. An uncomfortable silence stretched over the rest of the crew as they waited, unsure what was going on, and hoping Penguin and Shachi would get to the bottom of it one way or the other.

It was a long wait, at least a quarter of an hour, before the three emerged. All eyes focused on Law, but it was Penguin who spoke.

"We're heading to Zou," he told them, his reluctance clear in his voice. This time, no-one dared complain.

"I will stay in touch if I can," Law continued, looking more like his usual confident self. They all knew the risks of infiltration, knew Law couldn't promise anything, so they nodded numbly, wondering what on earth was going on that Penguin and Shachi had been convinced to let Law go through with his scheme. "Bepo, I'll take your vivre card with me so I can rejoin you once this is finished."

The mink gave a silent nod, handing over the slip of paper. Before Law could continue, he withdrew more paper, also pressing them into his hands.

"Maps," he explained as Law raised an eyebrow. "Even if we're not there, you're not going alone." For the first time since Law had announced his plan, he smiled.

"Thank you, Bepo," he said sincerely. The mink nodded, paused for a moment, then enveloped the captain in a tight hug.

"Be safe, captain!" he wailed, rubbing his cheek against Law's hat and dislodging it slightly. "Look after yourself!" Exchanging a glance, the crew surged forwards, each claiming their captain in turn for their own hugs once Bepo released him. Penguin and Shachi were last, simultaneously wrapping their arms around him.

"Don't go doing anything stupid," Shachi told him, squeezing tightly enough to draw a small oof from their captain.

"You'd better come back in one piece," Penguin added. "Otherwise we're never letting you out of our sight again. Got it?"

"You've made your point," Law sighed, patiently waiting for them to release him. They did so after another couple of seconds. "Wait for me on Zou," he repeated.

They all nodded, watching a Room expand to reach the icy shore of Punk Hazard. There were no more words; Law simply disappeared, leaving everyone staring at a chunk of ice and wondering what they'd just done.

"Let's get going to Zou," Shachi announced after a few moments. The crew sluggishly began to move, before Penguin spoke up.

"Our orders are to wait for him," he reiterated. The crew paused, waiting for him to continue. He held up a vivre card. "But like hell we're staying put if this lights up." Suddenly far more accepting of the situation, the crew cheered.

Their captain could say what he liked, but the Heart Pirates would never abandon him.
There's no way they let Law leave them without a fight. The question is, how did he convince them? Admittedly, I didn't really answer that here, although I may visit the conversation Penguin and Shachi had with him at a later date.
The Polar Tang had to be the only pirate ship in existence that didn't boast a single cannon. Of course, a large reason for that was that it spent most of its time submerged, and gunpowder and water mixed about as well as a devil fruit user and water. That is to say, water made it totally useless.

That didn't mean that the crew themselves couldn't use guns, of course. Being kept nice and safe and dry within the metal shell meant that guns were as viable a weapon for the Heart Pirates as they were for any other pirate crew. And yet, for the longest time not a single member owned so much as a single pistol. Odd, especially in a cutthroat world where any and all weapons could and should be taken advantage of to keep themselves alive.

Guns were banned in the Heart Pirate crew.

It was a rule as old as time. Most members didn't even know the reason why; all they knew was that not a single one of them used a gun, and those who looked as if they might be invited to join the crew based on their aptitude were never offered the flag if their main weapon was a gun (Jean Bart had managed to make himself an exception, but on captain's orders the gun stayed locked away unless its use was justifiably required; Zou had been one such case). It had become a way of life to them, although none of them could say they missed gunpowder. It stank, was a nuisance to look after, and was far too volatile.

Guns meant marines, or an enemy crew. It didn't escape the crew's notice that when their captain made the call to propose an alliance, he did it with a crew that used minimal gunpowder – barring the cannons on the ship itself, one of which was cola powered, of all things, only the cyborg used anything remotely resembling guns and that was a dubious connection at best.

There was no reassurance to be gained from the gleaming muzzle of a gun.

What was never stated, although in time the crew came to suspect, was that guns were banned because the captain hated them. The why was something that only speculation could tell, and speculation on a nakama's secrets (that is, anything not explicitly revealed) was heavily frowned upon and severely punished.

What less people came to consider was that Law was not the only member of their crew with a sincere hatred of the weapons. Few noticed the glare Penguin or Shachi reserved specially for someone with a gun in their hands (the hats and shades probably helped), particularly other pirate crews. Bepo's flinches at the sound of a shot had tamed over the years until his own trauma faded away to nothing.

When the Heart Pirates had formed, thirteen years ago, it had been comprised of four children, all
traumatised in their own way by a gun. The young captain, first hounded by guns when his home burnt and later shattered by the death of his surrogate guardian by the same weapon; the fighters, who bore scars of the bullets they survived, but their parents did not; the navigator, hunted in a case of mistaken identity.

Now adults, leading a crew into the heart of the New World, they had begrudgingly learnt that there were times when a gun was the only way out, a responsibility taken up by their newest crewmate, who was most familiar with the things and least set in the Heart Pirates' original views.

Still, the sound of a gun could never bring them comfort.

Chapter End Notes

I realised recently that only Jean Bart has ever been seen with a gun in the crew. Coupled with Law's past trauma (and his comment about lead bullets in Dressrosa), and my headcanon past for Penguin and Shachi, I figured it's (currently) realistic to assume there's a reason behind it.
"Hey, Penguin," Shachi commented idly, perched precariously on the edge of the rails around the Polar Tang's top deck with his feet swaying out above the sea below. It was rare for them to be sailing above the water, but the engine was starting to run low on fuel so they'd decided to sail as far as the wind allowed.

His companion, sat rather more sensibly on the deck with his back to the rails in question, looked up from his hat, which he was repairing after it got caught while he was checking said engine oil levels earlier.

"Do you ever think… maybe we shouldn't have done this?" Shachi asked him, staring out at the waves as his knuckles clenched his makeshift perch tightly. "Left Swallow Island. Become pirates."

Penguin sighed and set his hat down on his lap.

"I have," he admitted, looking at the needle and thread in his hands. "You too, huh?"

"Yeah…" the ginger sighed. He took a hand off of the railing to pluck his own hat from his head, holding it in his hands. "It's not stupid, right?"

Penguin shook his head.

"We lost almost everything to pirates," he pointed out. "Now we've become the very thing we hated. All because some scrawny kid bested us in a fight."

"When you put it like that, it really does seem stupid," Shachi laughed. His mirth was short lived, their conversation dredging up memories he liked to keep buried. From Penguin's own silence, he wasn't the only one.

The smoke that had risen from their village had been the first clue something was amiss, and like the naïve children they had been, they'd run back home, wanting to see what was happening, what they could do to help. Piracy had been a rare concern for the island, small and sparse enough not to have any resources a pirate crew would want, and only a couple of islands away from a major marine outpost. With piracy being a minimal concern, Swallow Island had been peaceful.

Naïve.

The execution of the Pirate King in East Blue had far-reaching consequences, even across the Red Line and into North Blue. Piracy had gone from a minor concern to the most frequent threat overnight, and the small island's complacency killed them.
They didn't have much, but what they'd had the pirates took. Material possessions were not enough to stifle their greed; before long they pushed further, harder, and the first shots were fired. The slaughter had been unnecessary; Swallow Island's inhabitants had no idea how to defend themselves and their possessions. The pirates just wanted to make a name for themselves as the captain proclaimed loudly that he would be the one to claim the One Piece.

To the young Penguin and Shachi, it was incomprehensible. The hail of bullets that greeted them as they careened back into the village to see what was going on, to find their families, left nothing but blood and agony in their wake. No-one escaped unharmed.

A bullet to the arm, the leg, skimming the side of the face and cheating death by a fraction of an inch. Immobilised, in agony, they were the lucky ones. The cries of their mothers, running to them amongst the deadly rain, the howls of their fathers, charging forwards to protect their families, all cut abruptly short in bloody gurgles as bullets found their marks, snuffing out the lives just as the wind howling through the shutters on a winter's eve had no respect for the candles that tried to burn.

The survivors had banded together after the pirates finally deigned to leave and continue on their quest for destruction and death, rebuilding their shattered lives as best they could. For children like Penguin and Shachi, it was a push in the wrong direction, towards fights and away from their old peaceful lives.

"But, you know," Penguin mused, pulling both himself and Shachi out of their unpleasant memories. "Law hates pirates, too. And Bepo. We're a crew of pirate-hating pirates. We're not looking for One Piece, fame or fortune."

"At least Law remembers who it is that ruined his life," Shachi mused. "We don't know who they were, or if they're even alive anymore."

"We'll know them if we see them," Penguin said confidently, returning to stitching his hat. "And if we never see them, that's no skin off our backs."

"That's true," Shachi conceded, jamming his hat back on his head and clutching at the rails as he threatened to overbalance. "Whoops!" He caught himself, hauling his centre of gravity back to where it should be, safely away from the edge of the long fall. Just because he could swim didn't mean he wanted to; the water looked cold.

"Besides, we were never going to be content cooped up on that island for the rest of our lives. At least being hypocrites makes life fun."

They shared a chuckle, looking up at the black flag flying proudly above their heads. Maybe it wasn't what they'd thought they'd be doing when they grew up, but they never had been ones to follow the rules.

Chapter End Notes

Once again, Oda please give me more backstory for these two. Otherwise I'll just have to keep expanding on my own headcanon here...
There were some perks to having their captain also being their doctor. That is, unless you weren't a fan of doctors in which case the compulsory check-ups were a nightmare. Members of the Heart Pirates very quickly got over any reluctance to see their captain, because with his Scan he could tell if they were hiding anything and corner them anyway. It was far simpler to instigate the meetings.

Every so often, the crew were subjected to various forms of massage as part of the check-ups. Many of them relied on their bodies remaining limber and agile for their techniques, and being trapped inside for days at a time with minimal training opportunities left them often tensing up, which Law saw as something that required additional treatment. While never trained as a masseuse, the combination of his medical knowledge and the Ope Ope no Mi meant he quickly picked up on which muscles needed the most attention to suit that particular nakama's fighting style.

It wasn't until Uni joined the crew that anything changed. Health check-ups, occasional massage, then back to whatever they'd been doing prior to the summons.

"Who treats you?" he asked his captain after his first check up with the crew, slowly sitting up to zip his boiler suit closed.

"I'm the doctor," Law pointed out, busying himself with reorganising the infirmary before he summoned the next member of the crew.

"Yes, but you can't massage your own back," Uni pointed out, only to be struck dumb when Law simply cut off his own hands with his fruit and waved them around, tapping his own back to prove a point.

New to the crew, Uni accepted that his captain's abilities were weird and left, not wanting to do anything out of line, only to be collared by Shachi outside the door.

"He won't let anyone else touch him because none of us know what we're doing," the ginger had told him, sending a fondly exasperated look at the infirmary behind them. "Using his own abilities when it's supposed to be relaxing sounds stupid to me but hey, what can we do. Unless we get hold of a masseuse somewhere that he trusts, he's going to keep contradicting himself." The long-suffering tone of voice implied that Shachi had tried to get hold of someone before, to no avail.

"My Mum suffered from tense muscles a lot," Uni confided, seeing a loophole and determined to exploit it if Shachi, one of the senior members of the crew, would be on his side. "I had to learn."

"Seriously?" Shachi squawked, gripping him by the shoulders and invading his personal space. The peak of his hat nudged at Uni's lower jaw as he looked up at him intently. "You mean, you can…"
"I don't know how to convince him," Uni shrugged. "I'm just new."

"You're nakama," Shachi said firmly, pulling away to grab at a passing crewmate. "Oi, Penguin. Apparently Uni here knows massage stuff. Want to help collar the captain?"

"You even have to ask?" Penguin responded, tilting his head back slightly to look at Uni for himself. "He hasn't let himself relax at all in a week, and even that wasn't great when he did. This is way past due." He barged straight into the infirmary, Shachi hot on his heels. Uni trailed along behind, entering the room just in time to hear his name mentioned.

And that was how Uni found himself under heavy scrutiny of his captain's eyes for the second time that day.

"Shachi is under the impression you can do a better massage job than me," Law commented, sounding amused. Uni gave a helpless shrug, not sure if he was allowed to consider himself more competent at something medical than his doctor-captain. "I suppose there's only one way to find out." The words were hesitant but the tone was inviting as the captain shrugged off his hoodie, revealing numerous tattoos Uni hadn't known he had.

"Go on," Shachi encouraged, giving Uni's back a nudge. Law had positioned himself on the bed, lying on his stomach with his cheek resting on his overlapping hands. He was quick to obey, eyeing the straining muscles dubiously before another encouraging gesture from the ginger had him lightly laying his hands on his captain's back, just above the tattoo of their jolly roger. He felt the muscles briefly seize up further at the touch, and faltered. Even with Shachi and Penguin backing him up, and his captain's consent, he felt as if he was crossing a line that shouldn't be touched.

"It's not too late to change your mind," his captain spoke. For all that his body felt like it was about to bolt, Law's tone was open and relaxed.

"It's fine," Shachi added, perching on the edge of the bed with a hand resting gently on his captain's elbow. Penguin mirrored the action on the other side. "Relax." Uni wasn't entirely certain which of them they were talking to; while Law's muscles didn't budge, after several long seconds he let a stream of air escape his lungs before cocking his head to look back over his shoulder, at Uni. Realising that there was no point hesitating, he finally began to apply the pressure.

As he'd thought, Law was totally tense. It took every trick in his repertoire to work out the kinks in the muscles before soothing them into something far healthier. Shachi moved away from the arm he was touching so that Uni could properly work on the muscles there, followed by the other arm as Penguin did the same. Neither returned to their previous positions, content to watch from the side of the bed, and Uni felt a bit like he'd passed a test.

By the time Uni considered himself almost finished, there was silence in the room, the only sound the friction between his hands and his captain's skin. Muffled groans and sighs from his captain had ceased after a while, and as he eventually stood back, finished, he saw why.

Eyes closed and breathing even, Law had fallen asleep. Shachi and Penguin drew Uni into a triumphant (quiet) high five before pulling a blanket up over their captain and removing his hat to reveal his untamed hair.

"Thanks," Penguin said quietly, guiding him out of the infirmary and leaving Shachi behind, not that the ginger seemed to care as he took a seat by the occupied bed and withdrew a magazine from his suit. "Captain needed that. What say you we make this a habit?"

Uni glanced down at his hands, remembering how tough the muscles had been and how much stress
had been piled on those shoulders.

"Sounds good to me."

Chapter End Notes

Law is always way too stressed. Why Uni? The one I randomly picked. We'll see if that makes any sense after he's properly introduced in canon. Some people may be aware that I rewrote this; I was pretty tired the first time and didn't realise how off track it got until after I posted the original version.

I know nothing about massages and google/wikipedia just confused me more so I kept that side of it vague.
Penguin surveyed the damage and wanted to cry. Law was going to be furious. Not with him, or any of the other members of the crew, he hoped, but that almost made it worse, because without a clear target he didn't know where was safe to escape to. He tentatively rested a hand on the crackling machine in the corner, flinching whenever its flying sparks of electricity landed on his unguarded skin, and hoped vainly that there was some way to fix it.

Why couldn't Mugiwara have woken up like a normal person, regaining consciousness yet no immediate motor functions, giving him time to calm down before he jumped out of the bed. With injuries like his, he really shouldn't have been able to move, let alone create a new exit out of both the infirmary and the Polar Tang itself. The submarine worked perfectly well without a hole in the roof and while carrying equipment for repairs was a must, Penguin wasn't totally confident they had enough to do more than patch up the external damage to make it watertight again. Certainly they didn't have the necessary equipment to repair such extensive damage to their infirmary, because it was in the safest place on the ship. If an external attach reached it, then they'd be sunk anyway.

They'd never expected an internal attack, and now the machinery was paying a heavy price. It was going to cost a fortune to replace it all, and Law was notoriously picky about his equipment. Penguin wasn't even certain they knew of anywhere in the Grand Line that could meet the required standards, let alone affordably. They were going to have to go on some uncharacteristic raids to get the funds, weren't they?

The shouts of his fellow crewmates had died down, and in their place Penguin could hear the sound of repairs beginning – all external, as he'd expected. With a sigh, he left the decimated infirmary to check up on his nakama. Mugiwara had hardly been gentle in his bid for suicidal freedom, and he'd seen more than a few of the crew fall trying to restrain him. Law was presumably busy making sure Mugiwara wasn't undoing the last two weeks' of work, or dealing with Jinbei (or both), as he appeared to still be on the shore, rather than investigating the damage to the Polar Tang himself.

Penguin was not looking forwards to playing the messenger.

Helping his injured crewmates – admittedly most of them were dazed rather than hurt although there were a couple of concussions – was a valid form of procrastination, right? With the infirmary hardly in a state for patients, he corralled his nakama towards the recreation room, convincing them to take a break on the sofas rather than jumping straight into the repairs. Law had probably dealt with anyone that had been in the way of the Mugiwara-tornado on the shore, but Penguin couldn't in good conscious not check. After all, if Mugiwara really had driven himself back to the brink of death, Law was going to have to prioritise him.
Poking his head out of the door, Penguin could see no further casualties. Annoyingly, before he could slip back inside to return to those he'd already treated, he was spotted by an irate Shachi, who was leading the repair effort.

"Hey, what's the damage?"

Penguin winced, wishing he hadn't yelled that from the other end of the ship. There was no way to avoid Law's attention, especially as his captain was still sitting on the same rock, straw hat once again in hand. A torn divider explained why he wasn't with Mugiwara, although didn't explain Jinbei's absence unless he'd braved the wrath of the Kuja to follow.

"Three concussions and another four dazed," he hedged, knowing full well that Shachi had been asking about the Polar Tang and not their nakama.

"And the Tang?" Law pressed, joining in the conversation. Penguin tried to bury his face in the collar of his clothes with little success.

"The infirmary's totally wrecked," he mumbled, pointedly looking at the horizon, away from his nakama. The surrounding temperature seemed to drop, and Penguin hastily vacated the threshold, shuffling across the deck as far away from the door as he could get.

"I didn't quite catch that, Penguin," Law lied. Penguin knew he'd heard just fine. "I could have sworn you said Mugiwara-ya wrecked the infirmary." Hiding would do him no good, so with one last sigh, and a prayer to anything benevolent that might be listening that Law wouldn't go completely crazy, turned to face his captain.

"The ceiling is obliterated," he reported. "All the machines are shattered, as are half the beds and the operating table. The electrics fried, leaving it with no steady power supply."

Straw hat still clenched in his hand, Law sprinted inside. Less than a minute later there was a cry of outrage, followed by the tell-tale blue glow of a Room, presumably as Law attempted to piece back together anything that could be saved. Penguin decided a safer place to be was joining the loud-mouth ginger in leading the external repairs.

When the Room disappeared, and Law emerged from the door, he made a beeline straight for Penguin and Shachi, who both froze. He bore the tell-tale signs of frustration, and while their captain wasn't one for emotional outbursts, that didn't mean they didn't sometimes happen.

"You two," he started, and they stood a little straighter, not in the slightest bit reassured by his tone. "Next time I think it's a good idea to bring a rival pirate into the infirmary, stop me."

Chapter End Notes

The real reason Law wanted to delay going into the New World: the Polar Tang infirmary still needed fixing. The amount of damage the Polar Tang takes from Luffy's grief isn't clear, especially as by the time Rayleigh appears it seems all fixed up again, but Luffy is a bundle of chaos in rubbery human form, so I don't think it's too outlandish to think there was some reasonably serious internal damage.
When Shachi had realised that all eleven Supernovas were going to be converging on Sabaody Archipelago at the same time, he had to admit he was a little uneasy. Law, a firm believer in 'know thine enemy', had religiously kept and filed away any and all mentions of the rival crews, which was all very well and good, except Shachi wasn't too fond of the reminder. Especially as several of them had higher bounties than Law, and reputations to match (Eustass "Captain" Kid and his crew's brutality struck a little too close to home if he thought about it for too long, and anyone insane enough to openly declare war on the World Government was someone to steer well clear of - and that was just four of the other ten).

Of course, he mentally groused to himself as he not-so-casually reclined in a chair at a human auction house beside his captain, it had to be those two particular crews they'd end up in an enclosed space with. Drake and Urouge earlier, while definite challenges in their own right, had at least been more interested in each other, and in an open space like that escape wasn't unfeasible.

Watching Mugiwara prove his insanity by punching a tenryubito in the face, while entertaining, was something Shachi would have much rather done from the safety of outside. Human stampedes were a headache to deal with, an opinion Bepo clearly shared, but while Shachi wanted out before the inevitable Admiral appeared, getting caught inside said stampede seemed like a bad idea. Never mind the fact that Law's reputation rode on him not fleeing at the first sign on trouble in front of the two highest-bounty supernovas of their generation. Mugiwara might be more interested in causing trouble for those on the side of the law, but Eustass Kid had no such beliefs.

Having never been a fan of pirates (aside from his own crew, he still wasn't), the sudden appearance of the Dark King himself did nothing to ignite an inner fanboy the same way he saw in some of the other pirates present, but that haki. Shachi had always considered himself to be at least competent in haki, and he had been fairly sure he was stubborn enough that the famed conqueror's haki wouldn't be too much of an issue, so the encroaching darkness was both terrifying and confidence-shattering. Worse was the fact that none of the other pirates seemed even remotely affected – and then the Straw Hats had to go and rub salt in the wound by showing total ignorance as to what haki even was.

Busy licking his bruised pride, Shachi almost missed Kid taunting the other captains, which was only ever going to end one way. Trust Law to get riled up when his own pride was threatened. Mugiwara was almost surprisingly predictable for a change, and Shachi watched the three retreating backs numbly.

Being the lowest-bounty captain, Law was going to do something stupidly over the top to prove he was worthy of sharing the supernova title with the other two, wasn't he?
Yes, yes he was, Shachi discovered five minutes later, as the three crews came to some sort of mutual agreement to go see what their errant captains were up to – as if the noise outside wasn't indication enough. By the time the three crews reunited with said captains, the marines were little more than a groaning heap, far more than necessary reassembled. Law had indeed gone over the top, as he heard Penguin half-heartedly complain.

Still, Law's over-use of his fruit (and oh Shachi hoped he hadn't used too much of his stamina, because he was certain there were more monsters they hadn't even encountered yet between them and the Polar Tang) aside, they did at least get away before the Admiral showed up, complete with a new crew member in two, and left the other two crews.

Then the Shichibukai turned up and Shachi, for the second time in less than an hour, got an unpleasant reminder that there were far bigger fish around than him as Bartholomew Kuma, or some cyborg clone of him, swatted him aside as if he were merely an irritating fly. He was certain that broke a few ribs.

The consolation prize was that at least he was still alive, which was more than he could say for some of Kid's crew. There had been five of them, excluding the captain, but when they finally won and tried to escape again, there were only three.

Then another Kuma-cyborg-clone turned up and Shachi wanted to scream in frustration. He didn't, but it was a close thing. Miraculously, the Law-Kid tag team managed some semblance of teamwork that time (or rather, Law predicted what Kid was going to do and reacted accordingly to take advantage of it, but Shachi figured that was as close to 'teamwork' as Law was ever going to get with a member of a rival crew), for which he was incredibly thankful.

Battered, bruised, and with no clear recollection of how he got from fighting the second cyborg to the safety of the Polar Tang, Shachi was certain of one thing.

Sabaody sucked.

Chapter End Notes

As of this moment in the story, Shachi's the only character we know of from Sabaody who struggled to deal with Rayleigh's haki (we've hardly met the Kid Pirates aside from Kid/Killer and there's no way they had trouble). While we don't know if the Heart Pirates do know about haki at that point, I don't think it's too far fetched (the Straw Hats get by on a lot of luck in Paradise, and they're the main protags, so I don't consider their power development to be at all typical), and why would I pass up on a chance to make Shachi feel he might just be a little out of his depth?
Despite humans being merely furless minks, there were many things about them that just made no sense. Bepo had always been aware that there were cultural differences, not a difficult thing to notice as a young mink hunted by them, but after meeting Law, Penguin and Shachi he'd thought that he'd found a few that largely did. Of course, there were some things, like willingly shutting themselves up in an overheating metal box underwater for hours at a time, that Bepo failed to see the appeal of (he went along with it after Law mentioned the word 'hiding' and Bepo understood hiding and that it wasn't meant to be fun), but largely the three humans behaved as he expected.

They'd play games with each other, like jumping on the other's shoulders just to make them start, which would often devolve into some sort of sparring (mainly Shachi and Penguin, although Bepo had caught Law in the act once or twice). Stealing clothes while one of them was in the shower was a common ruse to begin with, until Law had proven that his Room could reach far enough to Shambles his clothes back to him without leaving the bathroom and Penguin and Shachi ceased caring if they were wearing anything. They may not have cared, but Law did, and Bepo thought the whole thing was silly.

Small human-quirks aside, they quickly became a family, and Bepo found himself adjusting to the human way of doing things (except eating mammals – a fact which threw the humans on dinner duty for quite some time until Bepo pointed out that fish were not mammals and they were easier to catch, anyway). Just when he thought he'd finally got the hang of furless minks (or at least, his three, which were the only ones that mattered), they decided to go and dye their skin.

Dying fur, Bepo understood. It washed out after a time, and was useful for disguises (not that he ever did it but he'd watched Penguin play with fur-dye on a few occasions, and added to the absence of his hat it made him look very different very quickly). Dying skin made no sense at all. For starters, it was permanent.

Their jolly roger, a dye ("tattoo," Shachi corrected) all three of them shared, although in different places – Law's back, Shachi's shoulder, Penguin's hip – made some sort of sense. They were a family, and would always be a family. But then Law and Shachi had to go and get more. Bepo never asked what the swirls on Law's chest were for, almost but not quite their flag, nor the circles on his arms. DEATH, stamped across the knuckles of one hand, he had to question.

Law had just shrugged and said it was a reminder that no-one was immortal. There was a heaviness in the air, feeling almost like it hadn't quite been what he'd wanted to say, but Bepo didn't push any more. He hadn't expected an answer at all, in all honesty.
Shachi had dyed ("tattooed, Beppu. Tattooed!") a complex mass of squiggles on his forearm, trailing further up his arm and finishing just shy of the jolly roger on his shoulder. Beppu couldn't see anything distinct in it at all, although Penguin had sighed when he'd seen it – a strange exasperated-but-not-unhappy sigh – so maybe it was a Swallow Island thing. Again, Beppu didn't ask.

Not to be left out, he'd dyed some of the fur on his chest, with the help of his nakama, in the pattern of their jolly roger. Unlike their skin-dyes ("Tattoos! Tat-Too!"), it wasn't permanent – the supplier had claimed it was but it still needed redoing every few months as it began to fade with his shedding fur – but Beppu could live with that.

A little bit of dye couldn't accurately describe their bond anyway, no matter what the humans thought.

Chapter End Notes

Bepo is really hard for me to write - balancing his intelligence with his different culture is quite a delicate balancing act - but I thought he'd be the best voice for this. Aside from Law, we don't know much about the other two's tattoos so this is purely headcanon and likely to be disproved by Oda later, but until then I'll go with this. Penguin may not even have any tattoos, and I'm still waiting for a clear look at the tattoo on Shachi's forearm...

There won't be an update tomorrow (computers are banned on Christmas Day in my family), but I may get another one out before I go to bed, or a double update on Boxing Day. We'll see.
Family

Chapter Notes

Characters: Law, Heart Pirates
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Nakamaship, Family

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A well-hidden fact about Law was that he despised being alone. While his life had been far from pleasant, since he turned ten and lost everything, he had always found something to cling to. In the early days, it had been his family, his classmates, and the people at the church. Even if most of them thought he was slightly strange, even back then (frogs were fascinating creatures and he didn't get told off for dissecting them, as long as they were already dead), there was always someone just around the corner.

Perhaps that was why, out of all the pirate crews in the area, he'd homed in on the Donquixote Family. Brutality aside, although that was hardly a detriment to a grieving, insane Law, they were a family. The Blood Law, whilst strictest when Corazon was involved, gave off a sense of safety and a feeling of home, even if Law was hardly in the mental state to appreciate it. They taught him to defend himself, and when that wasn't enough, they would defend him (in hindsight the memory that Doflamingo had repeatedly come to his rescue was a bitter feeling, but Law liked to brush it aside as Doflamingo jealously hoarding his possessions and refusing to let them be damaged by anyone except him). Dysfunctional it might have been, but it had been family and home.

Until Cora-san opened his eyes and saved his life all within six whirlwind months. Despite Law intentionally being the worst, most ungrateful brat he could possibly be, Cora-san had bundled him up and carried him when it was too cold, or his disease was too fierce that day. He'd dragged him to unwilling hospital after hospital, optimistic to a fault that anyone would see past the government lies, and when his hopes were once again smashed, stood up for Law and refused to abandon him.

Law had appreciated that, even if he'd never let it show. But then Cora-san went and lied and died and once again Law was left all alone, only where was there for him to go? The marines and pirates alike were hunting him, and Law had learnt enough from his days in the Donquixote Family to know that finding another crew to shelter in would be incredibly stupid. Doflamingo dealt in information, and was rich enough to be able to pay a lot for the whereabouts of his precious Ope Ope no Mi. No self-respecting pirate would be sane enough to turn down such bribery; he'd be sold out within a week.

Resigning himself to a life alone and on the run, he had smuggled his way to the next island over, hoping to raid supplies and hide away to recover for a few days (Doflamingo wouldn't expect him to hang around, would he? Not with Tsuru around and the false information that he was in marine custody, although Vergo would probably disillusion Doflamingo about that as soon as he next made contact). Meeting a talking polar bear – mink – and two bratty kids had not been part of the plan, and Law was honestly at a loss what to do when all three, in their own ways, decided that he was interesting to be around (Penguin’s words) and stuck with him despite all his attempts to shake them off.
Now there were four of them he had to hide from Doflamingo’s far-reaching intelligence, and Law should really have protested harder at their tag-along attitudes. Four was four times as hard to hide as one, and none of his companions, save maybe Bepo, would even stand a chance against the infant Dellinger, let alone anyone else in the crew.

"Would he expect you to team up with anyone?" Shachi had asked one day after Law had tried to make them understand why them following him was a bad idea. It had made some sense – Law had always been individualistic and reluctant to rely on others so maybe Doflamingo would only be looking for a child by himself and not a group – and Law's reluctance to be left alone again overrode all his arguments.

Thirteen years later, with Doflamingo finally gone and Cora-san avenged, Law reunited with his family with more delight than he could show. They'd grown, multiplied by five since their beginnings on Swallow Island, but each one of them was his family and he would fight to the death to keep them.

His family were everything to him.

Chapter End Notes

Well it's gone midnight here so I guess this is technically the update for the 25th...

I find the fact that, despite everything, Law's never really been alone for any length of time very interesting. He doesn't give off the impression that he prefers company, granted, but aside from Punk Hazard I don't recall any scenes where he's away from his crew or allies by choice.

Well, happy holidays, everyone! I'll be back on the 26th.
Swim

Chapter Notes

Characters: Penguin, Law
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Swimming, Drowning, Devil Fruits

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Penguin had always been a good swimmer. Better than good, if his family were to be believed (there was a reason everyone called him Penguin, his real name long since forgotten to the realms of obscurity, and it wasn’t just because his favourite food was fish). The sea, even frigid in the depths of winter, held no fear for him and he could often be found taking a dunk, sometimes dragging Shachi in with him. The ginger could swim too, but he didn’t have the effortless glide that Penguin exhibited and preferred boats.

Law was an enigma in several ways – physically small and frail, yet capable of landing both older boys flat on their backs in less than a minute; pale blotches of skin that slowly faded with time; aloof but afraid of being left alone – but to Penguin the most bizarre thing was that he couldn’t swim.

Devil fruits, while not especially uncommon among North Blue pirates, were not something Penguin had had much, if any, interaction with before Law, so the old wives’ tales about superhumans cursed by the sea were merely a story to him. After all, there was no way curses and stuff like that actually existed, right?

Then Law fell into the sea.

It was nothing major, just a minor skirmish with a few low ranking marines, but Law’s footing hadn’t been steady and an awkward lunge by one of the marines had startled his precarious balance, tipping him off of the wooden boat and into the frigid water. Forgetting the old wives’ tales, Penguin had continued to fight, taking down the marines with relative ease, with the help of Shachi and Bepo, before turning to face his captain. Or rather, where his captain should be.

There were some bubbles, small but there, popping on the surface of the water where Law had fallen. The water was frigid, small chunks of ice resting sporadically above the waves as if they belonged there, and Penguin knew that the sudden temperature shift could startle the body enough to send it into shock.

The knowledge, combined with the fact that Law had clearly not resurfaced since his tumble, had Penguin diving straight into the water, a redundantly-barked reminder to Shachi to get some towels and changes of clothes ready. Even he could barely tolerate the extreme temperature change in the area, and he feared for Law’s life. The kid was too skinny to have enough reserve fat to stop himself shrivelling up.

Finding Law was easy; he had fallen straight down, unmoved by the current gently caressing his black hair. The short locks framed his head like a dark halo, freed from the usual confines of the cap to dance in the water, and his piercing golden eyes were closed. Terrified, Penguin wrapped his
arms around the smaller boy, pulling the limp form tight to his chest as he kicked for the surface, praying that he wasn’t too late.

The instant he had hauled himself and his cargo back on deck, the pair of them were swathed in any and all materials they could think of to keep them warm. Law’s breath – slow, unsteady but there – returned following an impromptu coughing fit of water erupting from his mouth, and only Penguin’s own sopping wet state stopped him from joining Shachi and Bepo in the impromptu embrace one of them had started.

When golden eyes had finally blinked open, looking around dazed and unfocused for several seconds before settling on Penguin, Law had managed a small smile, a mere echo of what he was usually capable of.

“Thank you, Penguin,” he rasped, his voice fainter than usual, but as he’d just almost drowned, Penguin figured that was an understandable weakness to show and didn’t comment, resting a damp, mostly-dried, hand on his captain’s shoulder.

“Try not to make it a habit,” he scolded lightly. The idea that someone genuinely could not swim was still foreign to him, and would remain so for several years, but his captain had just given him indisputable evidence that people like that existed.

Haunted by visions of a rag doll helpless in the currents, Penguin decided he didn’t like it.

Chapter End Notes

As much as I like seeing Luffy and the other Devil Fruit using Straw Hats falling into the sea, I'm impatiently waiting for a similar fate to befall one of the other non-antag characters (especially Law)....
Acquisition

Chapter Notes

Characters: Penguin, Shachi, Law, Bepo
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Piracy, Stealing, Polar Tang

One of the first questions a new crewmember always asked, without fail, when joining the crew, was "how the hell did you afford this?" The question was accompanied by some sort of gesture, from wild flailing to a simple point depending on each person's general response to something big, shiny and obviously expensive, towards the Polar Tang. The submarine sat proudly in the water, the bright yellow (well maintained, of course) and identifying marks (with their jolly roger and the captain's DEATH emblems how could it not be theirs) gleaming in all its considerable glory.

A submarine was rare, expensive, and far beyond the treasure hoards of any rookie crew, and that was before they entered it to see the state of the art infirmary.

"We didn't." The admittance would always come from either Penguin or Shachi, whichever one was in earshot at the time. Sometimes they'd answer in chorus. The full story would always wait until they were out at sea, buried safely beneath the waves as the Polar Tang once again proved its invaluable worth.

Setting out from Swallow Island in a small, stolen, fishing boat (it had belonged to the father of a boy Penguin and Shachi really hadn't got on with), the four of them had very quickly realised that if they were going to travel together, let alone have any viable shot at this piracy thing they seemed to be heading for, if Law's half-answers and nervous glances were any indication, they were going to need a better boat. Without so much as a cabin to keep them dry in the rain and snow (they had to pull a stray tarpaulin over themselves when such weather occurred), it was impractical at best and suicidal at worst. Winter was reaching its peak, and if nothing else they would freeze to death without somewhere sturdy to shelter from the elements.

Penguin and Shachi had wanted to go to Minion Island, always on their horizon but never before in their reach, reasoning that as a pirate base (former, apparently), there should be something there. Law had vetoed that so fast they'd got whiplash, so rather reluctantly they had instead changed course for the other island in their triangle. Law hadn't been much more impressed with that one, apparently, but they needed provisions at least, and a sturdier boat. Not designed for long journeys at sea, their current vessel had begun to buckle and more often than not there were dredges of water in the bottom, around their ankles. It was likely that that, resulting in eternal lethargy for Law, had persuaded him to cave.

The large, grey metal boat they had seen as they docked caught all of their attention. It looked unlike any boat the four of them had ever seen, riding low in the water with minimal deck space and a thick, heavy door.

"So cool," Shachi had sighed, Penguin wolf-whistling behind him.
"How much to you reckon that'd be?" he'd wondered, despite realising that a boat that large would be too much for the four of them to control. Even as adults, rather than their teen selves, it would be a huge ask.

"We're taking it."

Law's declaration was totally absurd, but the conviction in his words had made it sound almost believable. *Almost.*

"Unless you've got some hidden fortune you've not told us about, we've barely got 100 Beri between us," Penguin had pointed out. "How, exactly, do you expect to afford that?" Law had looked at him as if he was an idiot.

"I don't recall saying anything about paying for it."

Oh, right. They were pirates, weren't they? Well, kinda. Penguin and Shachi didn't know if it counted when they didn't have a boat, a name, or a flag. Also, the whole piracy thing… Law's charisma had got them that far, but their resolve was beginning to waver in the face of reality. Crazy ruffians they might have become, but they'd never actually *stolen* anything before (they conveniently forgot that the dying ship they had just tied to the shore hadn't been taken with permission).

"So we fight for it?" Bepo had asked, finally contributing to the conversation. The mink cub had been content to remain silent for much of their time, offering himself as a bed where possible to keep Law out of the water at the expense of his own comfort and occasionally changing the course when he thought they were going wrong.

"If that's what it takes."

Fights Penguin and Shachi knew, and the prospect – plan – had calmed their jittery nerves against the idea of actual piracy. Law's own calm, measured response to the situation helped to further ground them, effortlessly taking on his duties as captain as if he'd been born to it. As far as Penguin and Shachi knew, he probably had been. They'd certainly never met such a *ruthless* thirteen year old before.

Luck had been on their side that day. It transpired that the strange yet alluring boat had only just been finished, and was in the dock awaiting its christening by some important official or other. The quartet hadn't hung around to find out who.

While subtlety wasn't Penguin or Shachi's preferred method of doing things, their inexperience was more than covered for by Law and Bepo's own stealth as they had silently taken down the numerous guards on the walkway from the ship to the shore and slunk on board the ship. It had smelt of fresh oil, the last hinges still settling into place. Within the narrow corridors were more guards, easily caught off guard and subdued – Penguin and Shachi weren't entirely sure what to make of them alive yet in pieces, and Law had seemed almost as surprised despite being the perpetrator – and, leaving Bepo on guard just inside the ship's entrance, Law had led the other two through the maze until they found a control room.

For all the complicated controls (hopefully there was a manual somewhere), someone had very helpfully labelled a couple of the buttons – THRUST; LOCK; DIVE. It had probably been for the self-important official to use on the maiden voyage, but the thieves had not been about to look a gift horse in the mouth. The third button in particular had brought a gleam to Law's eyes.

"A submarine," he'd breathed, looking far more excited than they'd ever seen before. "This is perfect. We're definitely taking this."
Why a submarine was perfect – and what that even meant; Penguin and Shachi couldn't claim to know much about anything more than a fishing boat – was a question for another time, as Law had pressed the button labelled LOCK, watching the steady green light by it flash for several moments as an accompanying klaxon sounded before turning red. That done, he had then pressed THRUST, and the sudden roar of the engines deafened the four of them – Bepo having run to join them with breathless reports that the outer door had "just suddenly shut, Captain!" – before they'd felt a lurch as the ship pulled away from its berth, tugging some of the dock with it.

Unable to see what was going on – there were no windows, just screens showing indecipherable graphs talking about things that Penguin and Shachi couldn't even begin to understand – they had clutched at each other as Law waited, watching the screens with apparent comprehension, at least on some level, before deciding to press the button labelled DIVE.

For several moments, it didn't appear as if anything had happened. The ship was still moving forwards at a steady pace, and the horrid thought struck them that something was wrong.

Then their bodies told them very firmly that something was wrong – the metal beneath their feet wasn't level, as it had been, but very slightly slanted downwards and felt as if it were falling away from them. Either that, or they had suddenly lost a lot of weight and were about to float. It had not been a reassuring feeling.

It had only stopped when Law lifted his finger from the DIVE button, gravity catching up with them all at once and buckling their knees so that they fell to the floor.

"What the hell just happened?" Shachi had gasped, deciding against trying to get up. Law, sat in a chair and looking decidedly unruffled by the whole thing, had turned to look down at him with a satisfied grin on his face.

"We just stole a submarine. Now, what should we call it?"

Chapter End Notes

No, the people on the shore were not very happy about the theft, but also too reluctant to do anything to potentially damage the very expensive new ship to prove much of a threat once the kids were on the ship (as for the ones left inside yet in pieces, they were the infirmary's first 'patients'). I'll almost certainly explore more of the Polar Tang's origins later, because this is only the tip of the iceberg as far as my headcanons go about its beginnings - and how exactly are three teenagers and one mink cub supposed to control a sub that big?
Law looked down at the four currently unconscious prisoners they'd inadvertently taken alongside their new ship, and sighed. They'd been incredibly useful, telling him both everything there was to know about the submarine – apparently it was supposed to be called *Wave Slicer*, but Law was far happier with their own choice of *Polar Tang* – and proving valuable test subjects for his new technique, which he'd called Amputate.

Now, however, they'd outlived their usefulness, and it was time to evict them. From the way Penguin and Shachi were hovering behind him, he realised they thought they were going to actually let them go. Alive. Law shook his head, glancing the other side to Bepo, whose countenance suggested that, despite being younger, he had a far better understanding of the situation.

"Dispose of them," he ordered the three, stepping back to watch what they'd do. Predictably, Penguin and Shachi went to drag the prisoners off of their tables, and out of the room. Law stopped them with a raised hand. "What are you doing?"

"Dis… posing of them..?" Penguin hedged, his voice going high at the end that had nothing to do with the fact that his voice was in the middle of pubescent breaking and everything to do with the fact that he was very clearly nervous. Beside him, Shachi nodded uncertainly.

"So that they can go and report everything about us to the nearest authority?" Law demanded, crossing his arms. They shared an uncertain glance, and Law wanted to scream. He'd let the tag-alongs follow him because they had potential, but if they were this squeamish then they would be worse than useless, a liability. Determined to get the point across, he grabbed a knife from his waistband and jammed it straight through the heart of the nearest prisoner before slitting his throat to make absolutely certain that he was dead.

He offered the knife, handle-first, to Penguin, drawing a second one for Shachi, and the colour drained from their faces, leaving them a pasty white.

"It's them or us," he told them, scowling as Shachi fumbled the weapon and it fell to the ground. No-one moved to pick it up. "If you don't kill them, you're off the ship at the next island. I won't have crewmates that endanger us." With their determination to follow him, he'd thought that would be enough to override their useless conscience.

He was proved wrong when the bloodied knife Penguin shakily held fell to the ground with a clatter and the two high-tailed it out of the room. Realising what that meant, that the two older boys that he had dangerously started getting attached to would be abandoning him, he slid to the floor, wrapping his arms around his knees. He was going to be left alone again, punished for his inability to keep his
emotions under control by losing Penguin and Shachi so soon after he found them, and it was going to be **entirely his fault**.

A wet gurgle startled him out of his self-pity, and he looked up to see Bepo's left paw stained with red. The second of the four prisoners was no longer breathing, his throat slashed, and he stared at the mink cub in hopeful disbelief.

"You…"

"Kill or be killed," Bepo murmured, sliding down to join Law on the floor. "I understand how to survive, captain." There was something messed up about the whole situation, the youngest two capable of ending a life in a flash while the older two didn't understand how to place the worth of their own lives above those of others'.

They stayed like that, on the floor with their hands stained with the blood of their victims, for several minutes before Law begrudgingly moved, gesturing for Bepo to help him with moving the dead bodies out of their clean submarine.

Their small size meant the task took a long time, and by the time they'd thrown the two corpses overboard and returned to the infirmary, Penguin and Shachi had returned. Law held up a hand for Bepo to halt, and they waited just outside the door, out of sight of the other two, to see what would happen.

"I can't," Penguin sobbed, the clattering of metal falling to the ground accompanying his shaking voice. A scrabble, a stumble, another sob, and he cursed. "If I… I'll be just… I-like them." Law didn't know who 'they' were, not privy to their life before they'd met him. He supposed it made sense they hadn't had a life filled with happiness, otherwise they would never have left their home to follow him.

"Y-yeah," Shachi's quiet voice, shaking but not quite tearful, agreed. "But… we… we swore we'd kill them, i-if we ever saw them ag-again." There was an intake of breath, or maybe both of them in unison – Law couldn't tell. "I-if we can't do this, then L-Law's r-right. We'd be b-better off going back!" Shachi's voice rose, ending in a shrill scream as there was the unmistakable sound of a blade puncturing flesh.

The prisoner woke with a scream, and Law winced. It hadn't been an instant kill.

"Damn it, damn it, damn it, damn it," Shachi chanted erratically, accompanied by the sound of the blade's stabs and the victim's screams. Penguin's sobs could be heard in the background, and Law looked at Bepo, who glanced at him briefly before finding the floor more interesting. The decision was his own then, and he squared his shoulders before edging in.

He hadn't heard Penguin move over Shachi's frenzied screaming and stabbing, which was still ongoing, but there was a knife buried in the throat of the fourth and final prisoner. Penguin himself was on the floor, arms wrapped around his knees and staring blindly at Shachi, who seemed incapable of silencing his own victim.

Joining the ginger's side, Law decided to end his torment and gripped his wrist gently, guiding the last strike straight to the heart and finally killing the prisoner before letting Shachi slump to the floor alongside Penguin. Recognising that the two were at their limit, he gestured for Bepo to dispose of the bodies while he sat in front of them, waiting for them to calm enough to look at him.

They seemed to be getting worse, not better, and Law dimly recalled lessons of shock treatment from the days before everything went wrong, reaching for blankets to wrap around the pair of them.
"I'm sorry," he apologised to the sounds of broken sobbing, belatedly realising he'd pushed them too far, too soon. They weren't cut out to be killers, and while he'd feared that their first kills would have been on the battlefield, potentially crippling them in an uncontrolled environment that would result in their own death, seeing the aftermath in an controlled environment wasn't much better.

At least their first kills hadn't got them killed, he consoled himself as he wrapped his arms around the two larger boys as best he could and pulled them in for a show of affection he hadn't realised he was still capable of.

"I'm sorry."

Chapter End Notes

Oops. With Law's past and consequent general lack of empathy at this point, there was no way everything was going to be smooth sailing right from the start... He was only trying to help, he just went about it all wrong.
Their captain was many things, it was just often hard to see them past the exterior he showed to the world. Outside of the Polar Tang, he was the feared Surgeon of Death, supernova and member of the Worst Generation. His greeting, regardless of the other's status, always comprised of a mocking grin, frequently accompanied by a raised middle finger and verbal jab, carefully constructed to deflect the conversation wherever he wanted it. It wasn't surprising, then, that most civilians ran at the sight of him.

Hidden away on the Polar Tang, under the water where no-one else could see or hear, the walls relaxed. It was rare for them to fall all together, and in the past year since the Whitebeard War it hadn't fallen once, but it was enough for his crew to see the real man behind the titles.

Trafalgar Law was a gentle man. It was almost entirely due to his early upbringing and later occupation as a doctor, and definitely helped by his abilities, which allowed him to treat them without any pain. It didn't always seem it, as he slashed away with a scalpel (Kikoku, despite his weapon of choice, was not his surgical tool of choice) to separate their bodies and forcibly eliminate any virus that took hold of a crew member, but the careful way he handled their parts betrayed his feelings.

The event of illness on the ship, while rare due to the meticulous precautions Law had taken, would draw him like a worried mother. Due to the shared accommodation, and the sheer superiority of the infirmary as opposed to a bunk room, any ill crew members were immediately transferred. While slight, Law was strong, and there were few members that he could not carry if it came to it (regrettably, Bepo and Jean Bart would always require a Shambles, as much as Law hated to use it to transport the sick).

Cradled against his chest, it was the closest the crew tended to get to an embrace from their captain, although it was usually accompanied by protests that they weren't so sick they couldn't walk by themselves. Law always ignored such comments, gently settling them down on a bed in the infirmary before Scanning his patient and rummaging his cupboards for the appropriate treatment.

If they thought he was bad when someone was ill, he was far worse when it came to the more common occurrence: injuries. Bepo was the one with the nose for blood, but Law was the one with the uncanny sense for even something as insignificant as a paper cut. Any and all protests were ignored or cut off (Clione had once attempted to claim it was "just a scratch"; Law's response had been a vividly detailed description of the worst-case scenario in the case of a severe infection. The words 'just a scratch' were never heard again, except from Law's own mouth – the hypocrite).

Battle injuries were always accompanied by a lecture on recklessness, Law's nimble fingers and Room working to heal even as he berated them. After a particularly horrid scare, where the blow had
been near-fatal and even Law's considerable knowledge and experience had only barely been enough, their captain had resorted to hoarding their vital organs before an expected battle, reasoning that if he couldn't cure them of their stupidity, he could at least try to make it so that it didn't kill them.

A knife through the empty space where Penguin's heart should have been the first battle he did that convinced him that it was a very good idea – a week earlier, or a different decision on Law's part, and he'd have lost one of his oldest nakama to some relatively minor rival crew, whose captain's bounty didn't even peak 50 million. Even knowing that the heart wasn't there, wasn't stabbed, Penguin still gained a fretting captain the moment they were back in the Polar Tang.

Law didn't do casual hugs, or use words; the crew weren't sure he knew how to verbally demonstrate his feelings. As their captain, he kept them in line and safe.

As their doctor, he reminded them over and over again how precious they were to him.
The first time Law met Eustass Kid, his opinion of the man was very low. For such an impressive bounty, he was crass, obnoxious and self-important. Boringly predictable. The fact that he had the gall to imply that Law needed someone else to 'save' him and his crew was the figurative nail in the coffin.

He hated the man. Child. Whatever he was.

Being able to fling metal around was nothing overly impressive, either, although Law wasn't so biased not to realise the threat it nonetheless held – having a ship made entirely of metal meant that Eustass-ya could potentially do a lot of damage very quickly. Keeping the other pirate away from the Polar Tang became a point of priority in Law’s mind. He didn't recall seeing the other docked anywhere near his own ship, and unlike the rest he didn't need to wait for a coater to finish before he could continue his journey.

The Polar Tang was well hidden for that exact reason. So close to Fishman Island and the imperative underwater route, it was inevitable that his submarine would be an enticing target for many. That, and the need for a potentially quick getaway if events at the Auction House went sour (with Doflamingo’s influence around, Law was expecting it to), was why most of his crew were on board the submarine, leaving him with just his three closest nakama for support.

It was difficult to make a 'quick' getaway when some red-haired self-important idiot insisted on pressing Law’s buttons and winding him up. He heard Penguin whine about him going overboard when his crew finally decided to leave the building and join with him but ignored it. At least the other two crews were similarly unimpressed with their captains.

Having to fight alongside Eustass-ya again less than five minutes later left a sour taste in his mouth, although his attention was far more focused on the way Penguin, Shachi and Bepo were being tossed around like rag dolls. He regretted not insisting Penguin and Shachi bring their weapons, although with Eustass-ya flinging any and all metal in the vicinity around at his whim, perhaps it was for the best after all. Kikoku was difficult to keep hold of, and he knew her curse was binding her to him to stop her from being so easily stolen.

Eustass-ya made an appalling ally. Mugiwara-ya had been both more entertaining, and easier to work with (even with his habit of flinging cannon balls around erratically). When the opportunity finally arose for him to get his crew, one more in number than when he'd arrived at the Auction House (and a very useful addition indeed he mused as he watched Jean Bart subtly keep Shachi on his feet as they ran, a limping Bepo extending a similar courtesy to Penguin), he took it.
Leaving Sabaody undetected had only worked because he'd been prepared for pursuit, but Law chose to hang around, safely submerged, a few miles from the coast instead. He wanted the other Supernovas – especially the infuriating Eustass Kid – to go on ahead and stay out of his way. He was watching over his shoulder enough already, he didn't need to add the zealous idiot to the list.

Sadly, fate was not kind to Law. While Paradise's set-up had meant that he'd been on a different path to Eustass-ya (although not Drake; he'd met the man several times on his journey), the New World had different rules, and different ideas. It was as if the sea somehow knew that Eustass Kid was the last person he wanted to re-encounter, because despite delaying his entry for several months, he met the man almost immediately after entering, and was forced to suffer the idiot's presence and ego until Eustass-ya finally got bored and moved on (or got dragged away by Killer, as appeared more likely).

For several months, Law began to fear that Eustass-ya had somehow got his hands on his vivre card and was actively pursuing him, because they met everywhere. Eventually, it reached more luck than skill that he'd never laid eyes on the Polar Tang (although Law was very aware that his entrance to Marineford had probably been filmed and broadcast, so it was more important to keep Eustass-ya away from discovering just how vulnerable the submarine was to his abilities than anything else).

Then Law didn't see him for several more months and finally breathed a sigh of relief. Collecting hearts was difficult when he was around someone so eager to kill everything to prove himself. The peace wasn't to last, of course (when would Law's life ever let him have a break), but the next time they met there was a very obviously metal arm in place of what had once been a flesh and blood left arm, with angry scars to match.

Law wished he'd been there to see the idiot get his comeuppance.

Chapter End Notes

Metal ship+Eustass Kid seems like a combination to avoid, especially when its captain can't stand him. Looking forwards to their reunion on Wano!
Diet

Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Heart Pirates  
**Rating:** Gen  
**Warnings:** None  
**Tags:** Food, Celiac!Law, Dietary Requirements

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The cook of the Polar Tang had a difficult job. Feeding twenty daily was a major undertaking, especially as the combination of who did what watch shift and who was in the control room when meant that meals weren't all taken together. And that was before the individual natures of each of his twenty nakama were taken into consideration.

First and foremost was the captain's allergy to gluten. So many staple foods contained the substance, yet he'd been informed very firmly that the captain's allergy was very severe and that the risk of cross contamination should be taken extremely seriously (the captain himself had not been the one to issue that statement, indeed the cook wasn't sure he even knew of it – Penguin and Shachi had been the messengers and it wasn't unknown for them to make calls without consulting their captain, especially when it concerned his own well-being).

The short answer was that gluten-containing foods were banned from the ship, therefore forcing him to place the entire crew on a strictly gluten-free diet. It was at times difficult, especially when something as simple as sandwiches made for a perfect grab and go snack, and enough of the crew had a sweet tooth to occasionally request (demand) cake or other such desserts, but experience was the best teacher and soon the avoidance was second nature.

Shore visits were accompanied by a critical eye, and the cook refused to let anyone else select the food for their supplies, even if he dragged multiple members along to be pack mules. The Polar Tang's ability to submerge, alongside their captain's preference of keeping it so for as long as possible, meant that shore visits were like gold dust in their rarity and the cook had to make sure he had easily enough food to feed all twenty of them for weeks at a time.

If the captain was the only issue, then perhaps life would not be quite so difficult. The second issue was Bepo's ethical issues. Not only did he refuse to eat any meat that came from an animal with fur – which was most of them in the North Blue and still the majority of land-creatures in the Grand Line – but he also showed extreme judgement if he ever caught any of his nakama eating the same. Thus, alongside gluten, all mammals became banned from the Polar Tang's kitchen, because an unhappy Bepo was not a pleasant Bepo (this had ended up an order from the captain after one incident too many where the mink had flown into a longwinded ethical rant that had lasted all the way from lunch to lights' out and would have gone on longer if they hadn't all hidden themselves in their respective rooms).

Fish, while a perfectly reasonable source of food and usually easily obtained, did not quite provide the variety their diet needed ("we're not all Polar Bear Minks, Bepo!") and so the struggle began to find reptilian and bird meat where possible. If the occasional News Coo disappeared when the cook got particularly desperate, it was never pinned on them (having a submarine was very useful for
hiding).

This didn't even account for the general likes and dislikes of the crew (the captain hated umeboshi, Penguin didn't like milk unless it was flavoured, Shachi acted like most green vegetables had personally offended him, Jean Bart wouldn't touch anything if it resembled gruel), and it was a delicate balancing act that had him struggling not to pull his hair out as he tried to find something everyone would eat, and would also keep until their next island visit, whenever that would be.

(He later met the Straw Hat's cook and developed a very definite not-man-crush on the man's ability to not only feed the glutton he called a captain but also to keep all the meals varied and interesting, while catering to everyone's tastes and allergies. Perhaps he should take advantage of their alliance to get the man to teach him his magic).

Chapter End Notes

We all know Sanji's an exceptional cook, but other pirate crews have to make do somehow, especially with larger crews. While the Heart Pirates aren't necessarily huge compared to a lot of the crews we've seen, they're still twice the size of the Straw Hats, and there's canonically two diet requirements (Law+bread, although not necessarily an allergy, and Bepo+mammal meat; Penguin and Shachi's are totally made up, while Jean Bart's is more of an assumption based on what slaves were likely to be fed).
With the absence of one Monkey D. Luffy, Law had hoped that he would be at last permitted some peace and quiet, especially as he was now on board his own ship and therefore the captain in charge (while 'alliance' meant the captains were on equal terms, it was difficult not to feel on the back foot on board the Thousand Sunny, especially as her captain didn't follow traditional alliance rules anyway). He still had four of the Straw Hats with him, but in the grand scheme of things he thought peace and quiet still wasn't too much to ask for; Zoro-ya and Nico-ya preferred keeping their mouths shut anyway, Nose-ya was still terrified of him and Robo-ya…

Well, Robo-ya was turning out to be the problem. Law chided himself for not realising that the shipwright, who had built both the Thousand Sunny and its personal submarine, would be incredibly interested in the Polar Tang, which was a far more superior specimen than the Shark Submerge (although Law would admit the quirky submarine was well built for its size and purpose). In the confined space, the cries of SUUUUUUPERRRRR reverberated nauseatingly, and no amount of creativity employed by the Heart Pirates (Law included) to block their ears was even remotely successful. Irritatingly, the other Straw Hats seemed totally deaf to his cries.

A sacrifice was required, and as Law looked around at those of his crew in the area, he realised he would have to be the victim. As difficult as it was to believe, his time with the Straw Hats had mildly desensitised him to their antics and he only had to take one look at Penguin and Shachi, concerningly out of sorts even before the cyborg’s cries had begun, to realise that there was no way his crew would survive close quarters with the shipwright for any length of time with their sanity intact.

Choosing not to ponder what that implied of his own sanity, he followed the noise to find not just Robo-ya, but also Nose-ya prodding at the security lock of the engine room. Unnerved that no alarms had been set off at the intruders’ attempt, and also relieved that Nami-ya wasn't around to assist otherwise they would have definitely succeeded in gaining entry unsupervised, he strode up to them and placed a hand over the passcode input.

"Torao-bro!" Robo-ya greeted cheerfully, not at all abashed to have been found trying to force entry into the most delicate part of a ship that wasn't his. Behind him, Nose-ya at least had the decency to cower. "Just the man! Show us around, would ya, bro? This girl's a SUUUUUUPERRRRR beauty, yeah!"

Law wanted to refuse. As the ship's captain, he had every right (and with the absence of Mugiwara-ya he technically held captaincy over the four guests although he knew full well that only Nico-ya had any inclination to obey him and even that was on her own terms). However, these were Straw Hat Pirates. He had never, either through personal experience or the newspaper, heard of a single occasion when the Straw Hats didn't get their way in the end. The fact that the security alarm on the
door had already been bypassed without his knowledge, and that they’d had no qualms about even
trying in the first place, made it clear that sooner or later they’d be back, and he didn’t really want to
unduly punish his own crew by adding an extra watch to the rota (especially as he could quickly
narrow down who had a chance of stopping the Straw Hats one-on-one to barely a quarter of the
crew, including himself – there were reasons the entire crew had their own bounties, after all).

Thus, with a sigh he gestured for the two of them, apparently now three, as Zoro-ya had materialised
while he was considering his options and (while Law was certain the swordsman hadn’t intended to
find his way there) was standing with all the poise of a man who was exactly where he wanted to be,
to follow him to the nearby locker room, where he located boiler suits for them all.

"I am not treating you for stupid injuries," he ground out when all three looked at the Heart-
emblazoned outfits dubiously. "The Polar Tang’s machinery is far more dangerous than the Sunny’s."
Having seen both, he felt qualified to make such a claim (the Sunny ran on cola, for goodness' sake!
Then again, with a captain like Mugiwara-ya, a child-safe mechanism was probably wise).

Nose-ya was first to cave, and Zoro-ya followed suit after Law began to pull his own on – a nice
yellow colour, to distinguish him from the rest of the crew at a glance. He wasn't even sure what
persuaded the cyborg to eventually pull on one of Jean Bart's spares, but he'd learnt to never look a
gift horse in the mouth, especially not when the Straw Hats were involved.

Hoping he was not going to regret his decision, Law keyed in the code, making sure to block the
others' line of sight to the passcode as he did so, and the door slid open with a quiet hydraulic hiss,
revealing the heart of the Polar Tang.

Clione, the crew member currently tending the engine, looked up in surprise before looking at Law
questioningly. Law simply shrugged as Robo-ya carefully advanced into the room, eyeing the
equipment with a look Law couldn't quite name. It was almost as if it was what he'd expected,
although Law was under the impression there were little to no other submarines of the type in
existence. It was possible Robo-ya had the required genius to work out what was most likely,
though, so he tried not to dwell as Nose-ya started asking questions. Law was glad for Clione's
presence, as he didn’t know the answer to many of the more technical ones (the Straw Hats had no
room to comment on that, though, as Law was confident Mugiwara-ya knew about as much about
the workings of the Thousand Sunny as he did the Polar Tang, if not less. Mugiwara-ya likely would
proclaim it all a 'mystery' or simply point out it was Robo-ya's job to know).

Eventually, Clione became the main spokesperson and Law perched himself down on a bench near
the entrance (Zoro-ya was sat on the same bench but closer to the door, and seemed unnervingly like
a jailer; Law put the thought that he was being intentionally trapped far out of his mind, paranoia
would do him no good). It was hot in the room, almost unbearably so to Law, who had never
managed to shake his North Blue roots of preferring the cold, even if he hated winter, but Robo-ya
and Nose-ya seemed a long way from running out of questions, so he endured in silence, watching
the two like a hawk. Allies or not, unconventional allies or not, he refused to let them near the
delicate part of his ship without strict supervision.

It was probably an hour before their curiosity was sated, just in time for Ikkaku's shift to begin – she
gave him a quizzical look as she entered to relieve Clione, which Law responded to with a pointed
glance at their guests – and he managed to shepherd the three out of the room and into slightly cooler
air.

It took no time at all for Zoro-ya and Nose-ya to strip out of their borrowed boiler suits and disperse
back towards the living area of the Tang (Nose-ya kept tugging at Zoro-ya's sleeve when he tried to
take a wrong turning), but Law waited for Robo-ya to finish as well before daring to leave. Robo-ya
appeared to be being intentionally slow, and Law wasn't sure what to make of it as he folded his own boiler suit and put it away neatly.

"Torao-bro," Robo-ya began, uncharacteristically serious as he finally freed his legs from the suit. Law turned to give him his full attention. "Where did you get this girl?"

It was a loaded question, and Law wasn't sure he wanted to know why Robo-ya was asking. The cyborg had somehow positioned himself between Law and the door to the room, though, and while Law could teleport himself out with a Room, he didn't like the unusual behaviour. He was getting enough of it from his crew as it was, he didn't need the predictably-unpredictable Straw Hats adding to the headache.

"What does it matter?" he hedged. There was a click, and a compartment opened up in Robo-ya's arm. Rummaging around, the cyborg withdrew a wad of paper.

"Those two years," he began, and suddenly Law knew it was serious because the Straw Hats never talked about the years they'd vanished from the limelight, "I was on Karakuri Island – Vegapunk's home island. He'd left a lot of blueprints behind, and I thought they were all incomplete projects, so I took some with me when I left." He offered the paper – blueprints, Law realised – to him. "Seems like this isn't incomplete after all." Law took them and glanced down, only to freeze.

In his hands were the unmistakable blueprints of the Polar Tang.

Chapter End Notes

I'm convinced the Polar Tang must have been built by Vegapunk or a scientist of similar calibre, because it's so technologically advanced. While there are other submarines in One Piece, the Polar Tang seems to be one of the most advanced from what we've seen. What I want to know is if it has a kairoseki hull like the Marine ships (how else did it get away from Amazon Lily without a Kuja escort)? Why the Polar Tang was in North Blue but the blueprints were in the Grand Line? Well, Vegapunk canonically has some connections with North Blue, so while he designed it in the Grand Line it was built in North Blue.

This is a sort-of companion piece to Calamity (chapter 12), and Zoro's job was to make sure Law stayed away from Robin while she made her inquiries.
Shachi woke suddenly, blearily looking around into the pitch darkness of the room he shared with Penguin as he tried to identify the cause. Below him, Penguin's light breathing could be heard, perfectly even in sleep, and Shachi sighed, closing his eyes (not that it made much difference when there was no light in the room anyway) and focusing on his haki, trying to find the cause of his waking.

Someone was wandering the ship. After lights out, the only one that should be moving around was the unfortunate soul on night watch – Uni, tonight – but the night watch didn't involve ambling around the sleeping quarters, pausing outside every room for up to a minute before moving on to the next. No, there was only one person that ever did that, and Shachi let out another sigh, although this time accompanied by a fond smile.

He tracked Law from where he had been, in front of Ikkaku’s room (currently shared with Nico Robin), to the next bedroom along. While Shachi couldn't see exactly what his captain was doing, he didn't need to in order to know that he was standing outside the door, staring at it as he reached in with his haki to check the occupant(s) were fast asleep, breathing normally and generally fine. He could have done the spot checks from his room, using the Scan, and Shachi was sure that sometimes he did, but there were times when Law dragged himself out of his room to perform the checks manually.

It was one of those nights.

Eventually Law began to approach their own door, and Shachi moved, shimmying down from his top bunk and prodding Penguin harshly in the shoulder before flicking the light on, onto the lowest setting, and heading to the door. As Law arrived, he opened it, revealing his captain's dishevelled appearance. The younger man was dressed simply in a baggy top and trousers, embroidered as always with their jolly roger. His hat was absent, leaving his messy bedhead clearly on display, and his feet were bare. The sling that he and Penguin had forced on their captain earlier was still present, cradling the healing arm protectively.

"Law," he said, because right now this wasn't his captain, but a younger man restless and disturbed by nightmares, impulsively checking on his crew to reassure himself that it hadn't been real – whatever it had been. Shachi never asked and Law never told.

Law didn't respond, but Shachi wasn't waiting for anything as he reached out, taking hold of his left arm to guide him into the room. There was no resistance, and Shachi nudged the door shut with a toe before gently directing Law to the lower bunk, where the mostly-asleep Penguin shuffled over to make space and reached out to tug at Law's left arm – not his right, because even half-asleep Penguin
was aware of the injury – who climbed in with no complaint.

Shachi slipped in as well, sandwiching Law between the pair of them as they both looped an arm over him, keeping him secure between them. The three of them sharing one bed was not as easy as it had been as teenagers, before they grew tall and bulked out from years of piracy. Penguin was pressed right up against the wall, Law tightly pressed against him. Shachi clung to Law in turn, dimly aware that the edge of the bed was under him, not behind him.

He reached out, a delicate balancing act as he kept himself on the bed while contorting to reach the light to turn it off, plunging the trio back into darkness. One by one, first Penguin, then Law and finally Shachi following several minutes later, they fell asleep, Law on his back while the other two cocooned him from both sides.

Shachi didn't know how often the nightmares hit. Sometimes it was Penguin who woke, prodding Shachi into just enough of a wakefulness for him to shuffle down to the lower bunk. Sometimes neither of them woke, and in the morning they'd find their captain instead curled up with Bepo in the next room over. There were probably nights when none of the three stirred enough to invite him in, but as he tightened his grip on his captain and pressed his face against his shoulder, Shachi hoped it wasn't too often.

Chapter End Notes

Check out this amazing art of this chapter by [mathemayjicks](https://mathemayjicks.tumblr.com) on tumblr!
Surgeon of Death. Law's first bounty poster, a measly 28 million beri obtained as he finally allowed the marines to identify him on his approach to Reverse Mountain, declared the words loudly above Law's own name. His crew, now numbering some fifteen strong after Law decided, ten years after forming the crew, that they needed more members to survive the Grand Line, looked at it dumbly, trying to work out where the hell that had come from.

Realistically, it probably had something to do with the Ope Ope no Mi's ability to disassemble people at a distance, and the black, unrepentant tattoos on his fingers. Still, Law hadn't gone out of his way to kill people, usually content to leave them alive (if in pieces) unless provoked too far. The epithet did its job, however, and soon civilians and weak-willed pirate crews alike fled at the sight of him, screaming pleas that he show mercy.

Law, because despite his general lack of killing he was still in possession of a large sadistic streak, usually responded with a knowing smirk. If he was annoyed rather than amused he could even be known to demonstrate his abilities. It was enough to cement his reputation, without any need for deaths.

Penguin was the first to voice (out of hearing of the captain) the idea that the epithet was accurate after all, in its own twisted way. Law was a surgeon, so the suitability of that title was indisputable. And perhaps, he reasoned, that was the key to the epithet.

Shachi, predictably, was the first to realise what he was getting at, and laughed at the irony. The marines had portrayed Law as a merciless killer, but in reality, it was the opposite. Law was a merciless healer. No matter how badly injured they were, if they begged for the sweet release of death rather than face a life of rehabilitation or disability, Law would not let them die.

The Surgeon of Death controlled who lived and who died. Once Law decided someone would live, nothing could change his mind. With his vast medical knowledge and the Ope Ope no Mi, he could perform medical miracles, keeping death at bay indefinitely (and that was a whole other kettle of fish that they were careful not to dwell on too much).

It was a fact the Heart Pirates were thankful for, knowing that no matter what happened their captain would do everything in his considerable power to heal them. Law scolded them for their recklessness in battle, but for as long as he would keep them alive, they saw no reason to fear injury. The Surgeon of Death had a crew with no fear of dying, a fact the marines were slow to learn but other pirate crews not so much.

The marines themselves didn't realise the true meaning of Law's epithet until Marineford, almost
three years after bestowing it upon him. The miraculous recovery of Mugiwara Luffy, re-invading Marineford barely two weeks after leaving it comatose in the Heart Pirate's submarine, could be attributed to no other.

The Heart Pirates would forever be amused at how the marines had come up with something so fitting, without even realising it.

Chapter End Notes

Despite his apparent reputation (even commented on by Kid), Law doesn't seem to be an active killer nowadays (his past is another matter entirely, of course). While the likes of Vergo and Monet's deaths are attributable to him, he's openly acted to keep enemies alive (G5 on Punk Hazard, and those hundred hearts of pirates were still beating), so I just couldn't understand why he's the Surgeon of Death, until I looked at it from the other way and realised that he controls death more than just about any other character in the series, and that's before we get into that mess that's the Eternal Youth Operation...
Having your heart crushed usually had consequences. Law had been aware of it at the time, desperately attempting to reclaim it while Vergo watched on in glee as he writhed in front of one of his nightmare's more prominent antagonists. With no immediately obvious effects, a Straw Hat alliance, and Doflamingo's very real threat hanging over him, it was sent to the back of his mind while he dealt with more important things, like keeping hold of his sanity and trying to herd the Straw Hats into a plan with a chance of success. The fact that he'd hardly expected to survive Dressrosa did nothing to help.

Then Dressrosa happened, Law somehow didn't die, but did walk (limp) away with far too many injuries to be able to tell without using his powers what pain came from what injury. His powers were firmly out of reach after his final stunts in the battle, but with the Tontatta Princess around they were, thankfully, not needed. All it meant was that Law had to deal with pain for longer than usual, but that did little to faze him.

Amongst all that, small pains from the left side of his chest went largely unnoticed, attributed to the bullet wound he received in the vicinity on the rare occasion they did catch his attention. The battle to retain his sanity on a ship of fanboys, in addition to half the insanity-inducing Straw Hat crew, won out over physical discomfort (aside from when he wasn't fast enough to escape an unlucky Gomu Gomu no Rocket or the like), and then there was Zou, where the delight of seeing his nakama again was tainted by the fact that Kaido knew where they were, and that his nakama were injured.

It wasn't until he was on the Polar Tang, injuries all healed (barring his arm) thanks to more treatment courtesy of Tony-ya, whose skills were nothing to dismiss, that the occasional chest pains began to catch his attention, although his concern for his crew's subdued attitude proved a successful distraction.

Only once the mystery of their behaviour was solved, the answer brutal and nightmare-provoking, did he find himself paying attention to the now frequent chest pains and recalling the torture from eons ago on Punk Hazard. Even dead, Vergo was determined to haunt him, it appeared, and Law trudged to the infirmary to find painkillers.

Being caught in the act by Penguin was quite possibly the worst-case scenario, or so Law thought when he was fixed with a scrutinising look from underneath the peak of his usual hat. That Penguin himself was in the room for the very same thing he was concerned him, but with his crew stubbornly refusing to allow him to use his powers there was little he could do for his nakama's injuries. He'd noticed their supply dropping slowly but steadily even before he'd found out how badly, exactly, they were injured.
Then a particularly violent spasm erupted from his heart, knocking the breath from his lungs and sending him to his knees with a painful jolt, unable to catch himself with his injured arm as his left clutched at his chest.

"Law!" Penguin exclaimed, diving to his side and wrapping his arms around him in support. Law didn't miss the slight flinch at the action but couldn't do anything about it. "What's wrong?" the older man demanded, beginning to lean Law backwards as he gasped for breath. The pain increased and Law barely swallowed the cry, but it was enough for Penguin to stop his movement, instead tentatively pulling him forwards, into what was more or less a hug.

Realising he was practically in Penguin's lap, Law prayed that no-one else was going to walk in, but the world had never been particularly inclined to do what Law wanted, meaning that Shachi and Ikkaku happened to invade the room at that particular moment, in time to witness another spasm as Law's heart decided it had been ignored long enough.

"Captain!" they chorused, joining Penguin by his side. Law attempted to ask them what they were in the infirmary for, but was shushed the moment he opened his mouth. He presumed they were also after painkillers – or at least, Shachi was, as Ikkaku appeared to have been vaguely supporting him with a grip on his elbow – but like Penguin they'd abandoned their original aim at the sight of their captain in trouble.

"What do you need?" Penguin asked him after a moment, one hand gently rubbing Law's back even as the other kept him in a sitting position. Ikkaku shifted, poised to move as Shachi joined Penguin in supporting Law, hiding his own wince with minimal success as he did so.

What a state they were in, Law mused, as he clutched at his chest against another throb of pain. Certainly not anything optimal considering they were headed straight for a Yonkou's lair. Out loud, he simply gave the name of the painkiller he was prescribing himself, adding in one of the antibiotics as an afterthought. Short of a heart attack, which he really hoped it wasn't, the likely options were minimal and with surgery currently not available, he was going to have to rely on medicine. He wished Tony-ya was with them, not haring off on a suicide mission to Whole Cake Island. The reindeer's expertise in herbal remedies would have been perfect. Law could admit to himself he was jealous of the rare herbs the other doctor had in his possession.

"Here," Ikkaku said, breaking him out of his thoughts as she offered him the medicine he'd requested. She'd prepared it as well, to Law's surprise, so he simply opened his mouth to let her administer it, making a face at the taste. While medicine was supposed to be bitter, he still had no love for it. The effects were sadly not instantaneous, forcing him to remain in his nakama's hold until they were satisfied he could move. Law was grateful that Ikkaku also fetched the medicine the pair of them had arrived for and gave it to them; just because he did it himself didn't mean he liked seeing his crew put aside their own needs in order to deal with his.

Eventually the pain dulled, the medicine kicking in, and Law slowly straightened again, fighting Penguin and Shachi's holds as they protested. The painkillers had done their work on them, too, and he could feel the tenseness leaving their bodies as their own pain dulled.

"It's okay now," he told them, cautiously making his way to his feet. They followed him gingerly, not even bothering to hide the way their arms stretched out, ready to catch him if he fell again. "It's nothing serious," he promised them, to disbelieving faces. "The medicine will hold it at bay for now, and I'll deal with it once you mother hens let me use my abilities again."

All three made noises of protest, but Law cut them off before they formed actual words.
"So, Penguin, Shachi, how are your wounds doing?"

The change of subject was blatant, and the way that the two of them shared a glance told him that neither were fooled in the slightest, but as Ikkaku none-to-subtly directed all three to perch on the closest bed, they began to talk, realising that a little bit of heart pain was never going to stop Law fussing over his crew.

Chapter End Notes

Because there's no way Law's heart is fine after all the crushing Vergo did... Hearts aren't designed to take that much abuse, that's why they live in their nice safe rib cage! Symptoms of pericarditis can be gradual to appear, and with Dressrosa and all the stress Law's been dealing with it could probably go unnoticed for a while. At least, that's my excuse for it appearing so long afterwards.
Hey..." Usopp picked up a card from the pile in the middle, regarding it for a moment before settling it in his hand and discarding another. His playmates looked at him in askance. "So... I was wondering... Why do you all wear a uniform?"

Ikkaku laughed, picking up his discarded card to replace it with an unwanted one from her own hand.

"You've been in the engine room, right?" she commented, sighing when Uni dove for her own discarded card with far too much glee in his eyes and tossed another for Shachi to claim. "It's too dangerous in there without one of these, and it's just hassle to have to change all the time. They're comfy enough."

"Yeah..." Usopp dragged out, frowning down at his hand as Shachi's discarded card once again did nothing for him, picking a fresh card from the pack. "But why are they all identical? Aside from Bepo, they're all the same colour. Why haven't you guys customised them at all?"

The three Heart Pirates present looked at each other and shrugged.

"Never crossed my mind," Ikkaku admitted, Uni nodding in agreement. "It's been like this since I joined, so I just went along with it."

"And me," Uni added, fiddling with his neckerchief. The two of them turned to their third nakama as Usopp laid a card down from his own hand.

"Shachi?"

The ginger shrugged again, whining when Ikkaku picked up Usopp's discarded card and placed down one of her own before adjusting his hat.

"Honestly? We found these things onboard when we got the Tang," he admitted as Uni went for the pack for his next card. "Well, the originals. We've grown a lot since then, obviously." He laughed, before pouting at Uni's discarded card and picking up a new one from the pack, which was quickly discarded in a huff. Usopp very obviously refrained from lunging for it, picking it up with comically feigned reluctance.

"'Grown a lot since then'?" he quoted, very obviously looking the ginger up and down as best he could in their sitting positions as he casually discarded the latest reject. Ikkaku snatched it up.

"Well, yeah," Shachi said. "The Heart Pirates formed thirteen years ago. We're Grand Line rookies,
but not pirate rookies." Usopp's eyes went wide and he looked around the recreation room again, taking in the rest of the present crew.

"Not strictly true," Ikkaku corrected as she discarded a card from her hand for Uni to collect. "Most of us only joined within a year of heading for the Grand Line. Some, like Jean Bart, we only got once we were here. It was just the four of them before that." Shachi laughed awkwardly, claiming Uni's discarded card.

"True, true," he conceded. Usopp frowned at his discarded card and grabbed another from the pack. "But these boiler suits date back to when we were brats, that's for sure." He rubbed at the side of his face, just under the arm of his shades, watching Ikkaku internally debate over the merits of Usopp's own discarded card before deciding against it and picking up a fresh one. "I mean… well, you know a bit about the whole Doflamingo thing. Putting it simply, we were hiding, and we hadn't exactly set out with much stuff, you know?"

Usopp made a slightly confused face, but it could have been attributed to Uni picking up Ikkaku's discarded card – not in the theme of his earlier selections – rather than the idea that they'd left home without much stuff. Shachi barely looked at Uni's discard before picking up another from the pack, discarding it with a sigh.

"Well, anyway," he continued. "These were in the Tang already, and we didn't have much to wear and they were practical so they kinda stuck. By the time Doflamingo left North Blue and we had some breathing room, it seemed stupid to get rid of them. I mean, we did," he said, watching Usopp go for the pack and discard the card immediately, disappointed. "But we'd come to like the design, so we just got ones that fit a bit better. We were only so good at resizing them ourselves, especially Bepo. So we commissioned new ones and stuck our flag on them, because they were ours, you know?"

Uni grabbed at Ikkaku's latest offering with a smug air and discarded a different card.

"Captain didn't stick to it but then again, Captain doesn't go into the engine room. He rarely wore the old ones, anyway. Said they messed with his concentration, or something." Shachi pouted at Uni's discard and grabbed another from the pile, which he stared at for a few minutes. "So yeah, that's basically it. Not exactly an inspiring story."

"Well not quite as much as the time I defeated a gigantic multi-headed cat with a thousand claws with nothing but a single pebble," Usopp mused, collecting Shachi's discarded card. "But still a worthy tale." He discarded a card of his own with a grin. "Rummy, by the way."

Shachi squawked indignantly as the sniper laid down his hand.

"No fair! I was collecting those!"

The others just laughed.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked about the origin of their uniform earlier, so this happened.
The windows of the Polar Tang rarely served a purpose. In the deep sea, even with the exterior lights and powerful forward-facing beam, the water around them was a pitch black, leaving no view outside. The darkness was a comfort to the crew, the knowledge that they were invisible and, to most things, undetectable allowing them to sleep easy at night (or what passed for 'night' according to their many clocks, because the cycle of sun and moon didn't reach their favoured depths). Even their captain, who as a devil fruit user should by rights be uncomfortable so far beneath the waves, separated from the sea by only metal panels, was at his most relaxed when the windows showed black.

The submarine was of course fitted with sonar and other high-tech radar to allow for unimpeded travel even without sight, so the darkness wasn't even a concern for navigating. Bepo well versed in reading the screens to make up for the lack of sun and stars navigators on other crews relied on so heavily. All in all, their ship was perfect for staying concealed for extended periods at a time (the building heat notwithstanding), and most at home in the darkness.

While the darkness was their comfort and their home, it was not the Heart Pirates' favourite place in the sea. Above the darkness was a thin layer of water that seemed magical to look at. Any member of the crew, even their captain, could be found staring out the nearest window as the Polar Tang gained altitude, leaving the blackness of home behind to emerge, slowly but surely, into the shimmering kingdom between the depths and the surface.

Here, the sun's rays reached, rippling through the water like silver and gold ribbons. The command would go out for the exterior lights to turn off, allowing their way to be illuminated solely by the glittering water surrounding them. The rays of sun danced through the water, highlighting the paths cut by the wildlife that thrived in that level.

Law had been impressed that the Thousand Sunny had had an aquarium, but such a tame sight had done little to excite him, despite Mugiwara's best efforts. The wildlife within it had been specially selected, ready to be caught and cooked by the chef, and couldn't contain natural predators. It was a poor imitation of the sight he liked to lose himself in on the rare occasions he was relaxing in the recreation room, or waiting for dinner to be served in the mess hall.

In the open sea, fish of all sorts could be seen swimming together, weaving in and out of each other's paths with no hesitation, as if it were a long-practiced dance. Many would be simple fish, content to live their lives swimming around without a care in the world.

But then there were the bigger fish, the predators that stalked and ensnared the simple fish, a flash of brutality in an otherwise tranquil scene that would bring a smirk to Law's lips when he spotted it.
There was always a bigger fish in the pool.

To be able to see the raw untamed power of nature without any meddling was a gift. Any coated ship could reach those depths with ease, it was true, but they needed to surface often and renew their coating, the air sucked out by the crew's own breathing.

The Polar Tang was made for such depths, content to cruise amongst its personal underwater wonderland for as long as it desired and experiencing the nature in a way no other ship could.

There were many things to love about being a Heart Pirate, but the unique views would always be the first thing to steal their heart.

Chapter End Notes

Why does a submarine have windows? So they can go underwater sightseeing, of course! Why would the Sunny's aquarium impress Law when the entire sea is his personal aquarium?
While Bepo had no clear memories of his childhood on Zou, standing on Zunisha's back once again after so many years brought back vague recollections, muddled recognition of some of the minks he saw among them. While his nakama oohed and aahed at the sights, throwing themselves into the customary garchu with glee, he hunted for familiarity he knew he should feel.

One mink in particular, with a single eye and shaggy hair covering half of his face, niggled at his memory in a way few did, and he found himself subconsciously seeking the older out. For his part, the other mink appeared determined to avoid Bepo, vanishing into the safety of the trees whenever he was around.

Discomforted, Bepo began to back off, fearing he had somehow offended the older. It had been so long he knew his manners were lacking – he'd failed to remember garchu, for a start – and the mink in question had an air of experience that reminded him of Law. Bepo had learnt that people like that (admittedly, Law was his only prior experience), found a group they were willing to talk to, and shut out everyone else. Just because Bepo was in Law's trusted group, didn't mean he could find his way into anyone else's.

Realising that the mink, for all his niggling familiarity, was not interested in his presence, Bepo eventually gave up completely, finding other, younger, minks that were instead all too willing to talk to him and listen to his tales of life as a pirate. Unlike the other mink, they were fascinated by him, and Bepo spoke until dawn, and subsequent bed time.

Life under the sea in eternal darkness meant that the Heart Pirates were less averse to nocturnal living than most, and shuffled to their loaned quarters as a group every night, reuniting from where they'd scattered to explore Zou and its wonders. One night, Bepo felt a paw on his shoulder as he headed to the rendezvous with his crew and paused, turning around to face the owner of the paw.

It was the one-eyed mink that had drawn his attention from the start.

"You're Bepo, aren't you?" he asked, and Bepo nodded. "I don't know if you remember me, but my name's Pedro. Zepo was my best friend."

Two things hit Bepo. Memories of the mink before him running and laughing with his brother – back then with two eyes and far less of a Law-aura – came first, triggered by the name. Yes, he remembered Pedro, as much as he remembered anything from his childhood on Zou.

The second was the use of past tense.

"Was?" he asked. "Did you have a falling out?" Logic told him that wasn't what Pedro meant, not
with his solemn tone and scarring he never used to have. Not when Bepo hadn't been able to find any news on Zepo since he'd arrived.

Bepo quashed logic with denial.

"I…" Pedro stammered, and Bepo knew, even as denial hammered down logic with all its might. "I'm so sorry, Bepo. Zepo's dead."

Denial only held up to so much weight, and Pedro's words smashed it into so many pieces it was impossible for Bepo to reconstruct it, to hide behind it with his paws over his ears as he ignored the truth.

*Zepo can't be dead. My big brother can't be dead.*

"How?" he asked, his voice cracking in so many places the word was barely there. Pedro looked at the ground for several long moments, silence stretching between them, before raising his head to face Bepo squarely.

Like Bepo had told tales of piracy to the younger minks earlier, so Pedro described the journey of the Nox Pirates, from leaving Zou to gaining bounties to Whole Cake Island and the terrors it entailed. Sometime during the tale, they had found seats amongst the trees, hiding from the sun as it rose to signal the end of the cat's reign, and the start of the dog's.

The end of Pedro's story was met with silence, only the wind singing through the leaves to disturb the pair.

"I-"

"I'm sorry," Bepo interrupted Pedro's own apology. Not knowing what else to say, how to react to the news he'd been subconsciously hiding from since he left Zou, he reverted back to the safety of apologies. "I'm sorry you went through that."

Pedro stared at him, struck dumb with confusion. Bepo went for the other thing he knew best, and wrapped his arms around the older mink, rubbing his cheek against him gently.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." He repeated the words over and over again, a quiet mantra as the sun finished rising, bathing the two of them in light. Eventually, Pedro returned the affection, rubbing his own cheek against Bepo's in a comforting *garchu* before the two split apart, bound by the laws of the country to retire for the day.

Bepo didn't recall making it back to his cabin, stumbling through the door with an inelegance he'd lost years ago through a life of piracy. Startled voices spoke up, his nakama surging to surround him as he somehow made it to a seat, blind to the world around him as the story sunk in.

He didn't know how to cry. He could express emotions – joy, sadness, anger, love – but tears were beyond him and grief was too much to handle. One by one, arms wrapped around him, burying in his soft fur as his crew surrounded him, panicked cries morphing into sympathising murmurs as realisation set in.

Bepo had always been the one his crew went to when they needed a hug. Physically affectionate, and the perfect size to envelop most of them in a crushing bear-hug, he was used to giving them.

Now, with the world muted by grief, it was his turn to receive.
Bepo having no contact with the minks since he fell off Zunisha means that he can't have known his brother was dead until he finally returned to Zou. I realised that and cried a little inside because Bepo didn't deserve to only find out seven years after Zepo died.
If there was one member of the crew that disliked bath time more than Bepo, it was Law. Unlike Bepo, whose bulk and fur demanded bathing, Law could usually get away with a quick shower to clean off, preserving hygiene while avoiding the indignity of almost drowning.

Sometimes, to his despair, there was no choice. Blood was notoriously difficult to scrub off without a good soaking, and while Law's fighting style rather intentionally avoided the substance, in a battle not everyone could kill without spraying blood everywhere (some pirates were total animals and Marines were rarely much better).

After every such battle, Law would stand and stare at his poor clothes – always grateful that as captain one duty he'd managed to successfully shirk completely was the laundry – until his arms were grabbed by Penguin and Shachi, who would frog-march him to the bathroom. As a devil fruit user, his crew had unanimously decided that he was not permitted to bathe by himself (Penguin and Shachi were particularly insistent, likely because of a certain event not long after forming the crew when Law hadn't emerged from the bathroom after an hour so they'd disregarded privacy over to concern to find him mostly submerged and losing the battle to keep his head above water).

When it had become clear to Law that this was non-negotiable, he had been firm in who, exactly, he would permit in the room with him. He trusted his entire crew, of course, but of the crew there were only three that knew everything, three that he was willing to see his body for extended periods of time (the white splotches weren't immediately apparent, and hadn't been for years, but the paler patches of skin were still there and the tattoos didn't hide them completely). Bepo's own hatred for baths left him an impractical choice, leaving Penguin and Shachi the only two allowed.

Sometimes it was only one of them, usually if the other had suffered an unlucky blow during battle, but often it was both, a task shared the same way they shared everything. Law suspected he wasn't the only one who preferred to keep reminders of the past close to his chest (water was a valuable commodity so baths were usually shared, but Penguin and Shachi would only share with each other and Law). Like him, they had their own childhood scars, lines and spots from bullet wounds obtained as children, before they knew how to fight back, to save themselves.

It was an unspoken rule that scars were never mentioned at bath time. Penguin and Shachi would coerce Law into the warm water, occasionally picking him up to dump him in if he was feeling particularly adverse – Law never Roomed away, realising that as much as he hated it and occasionally denied it, getting wet was a necessity and being childish about it helped no-one, least of all himself – before jumping into the water themselves, one either side. On particularly bad days, when the battle had been difficult and Law's stamina already depleted, he could do little more than sag against the side, relying on the pair of them to keep him above the water as they rinsed the blood...
from his skin. Other days he was less weary, capable of at least wiping the blood away himself.

If he ignored the bone-aching weariness the water brought – on some days an easier feat than others – those moments were almost enjoyable as he placed all his trust in his oldest nakama and lazied in the water, enjoying the warmth. Weighted down as he was, getting out unaided was impossible, but Penguin and Shachi had long since honed the art of noticing when he'd had enough. He never let a bath go on for too long, reluctant to be separated from the rest of his crew and the decisions to be made for longer than necessary. The times when someone was injured, a lucky strike from the enemy connecting, Law would only suffer a bath long enough to get rid of the blood before demanding to be helped out, determined to check on his injured nakama as soon as possible (initial treatment was always done before a bath, unless there was a risk of infection his abilities couldn't negate, but Law would never leave a recovering nakama for any longer than necessary).

Rarely, the injured party was Law himself, who needed the blood washed away before treatment could begin. Those were the days Penguin and Shachi never let go even for a moment, keeping him strictly upright and safe even as the water drained his strength. They'd treat the wounds then and there, too, if it wasn't too severe, supplies kept in a cupboard by the sink so Law didn't have to go far, didn't have to use his Room so soon after submergence.

Occasionally, injured or not although always when exhausted, Law found himself drifting off to sleep, lulled into security by the warmth and his nakama's presence. It was never a deep sleep – not with the danger of water ever-present, if subdued – but Penguin and Shachi would take extra precautions then, keeping movement to a minimum in the hopes that he'd sleep through extraction from the bath and subsequent dressing, to wake later in the comfort of his own bed. It usually failed, even their familiar presence not enough to defend him from the potential horrors of the water, but the effort was appreciated.

Warm and dry after a bath, Law would always admit that while he still hated the things, it could be far worse. At least he could trust his nakama would never let him drown.

Chapter End Notes

Oda's confirmed that devil fruit users are weakened by submergence in any water, not just salt water, which immediately begs the question what do they do for baths? We know the Straw Hat fruit users go 'to hell with it' and bathe anyway (with the Sunny's bath, who wouldn't?), but Law's rather more sensible than most of them. This is also just an excuse to bring White Lead back into it, and allude once again to my headcanons about Penguin and Shachi (I'm fighting the urge to describe things like scars because we just don't know yet but we might later... not sure how much longer that'll hold out for, though).
They hadn't heard from Law once. The Heart Pirates had set a constant watch on their den den mushi, ready to pick it up at the first puru puru but it never came. While disappointing, it wasn't surprising – they'd known that he'd be hard pressed to safely contact them – and as long as Law's vivre card didn't light up, they could deal with the silence.

The mess with Jack scuppered their rotation somewhat, too exhausted to keep up watch during the day and busy fighting during the night. Subsequent poisoning and capture did nothing to help, and it wasn't until the advance party of the Straw Hats arrived that they got any news of their captain. They hadn't expected to see another pirate crew at all (although as they patched themselves up again and rallied around the worst-affected they could hardly complain). Zou was notoriously difficult to find, so it was disconcerting how half the Straw Hats were present. The ginger haired navigator brandishing none other than Bepo's vivre card when eventually questioned did nothing to calm them. Only one person outside of the crew had that, and none of the Heart Pirates could imagine Law willingly giving it to a rival crew.

Kuroashi tossed them a copy of a newspaper, dated the day before the Straw Hats had arrived at Zou. Scrambling around it, they were shocked to see Doflamingo's resignation, but that had paled compared to the news below it.

"An alliance?" Shachi demanded, looking at the other pirate crew with eyes wide. His reaction was shared by the rest of the crew, unable to imagine their self-reliant, paranoid captain ever considering forming an alliance with another crew, let alone giving them a vivre card. The four Straw Hats nodded, their own faces carefully neutral.

"It was your captain's idea," the navigator – Nami – told them. Something in her tone of voice betrayed her own misgivings. "Our target is Kaido."

Having just experienced one of the Calamities first hand, that was unwelcome news. While Jack's underlings hadn't been the worst challenge, the poison gas itself had been and they were unwilling to face it again. Law didn't know about that, so they couldn't blame him for the decision… but a Yonkou? With just two small crews?

"I don't like this," Ikkaku declared.

"What does Kaido have to do with anything?" Clione added, frowning. To their knowledge, Law's only target was Doflamingo. While it was true that Doflamingo worked for Kaido, challenging the Yonkou in any capacity was foolish in the extreme.
"The whole alliance makes no sense," Uni added, crossing his arms and glowering at the floor. "With this, Captain loses his Shichibukai status! There's no way the marines won't strip him of it if he's allying with active pirates."

"Enough," Jean Bart rumbled, cutting off further protests. "The captain's decision is absolute. If we're in an alliance, so be it."

"And if the Straw Hats are here, that means Captain should be coming soon, too!" Bepo piped up, looking at the other crew hopefully. "Right?"

"That's the plan," Kuroashi assured them. "Take down the factory, then come here." He was clearly not telling them everything, but the knowledge that their captain was on the move was enough for most of them.

Returning to the forest, their home under Nekomamushi still, despite the battle, they immediately resumed their watch over their den den mushi. They didn't have one to contact – Law's baby den den mushi would be far out of range – but if Law was on the move, perhaps he'd call them at last.

He didn't, no matter how much they waited, wanting to hear from their captain's own mouth that they were in an alliance, and why. An alliance cost them so much, they wanted to know what they were gaining. What was worth such a loss?

They got their answer only when their captain finally arrived on Zou, never calling in advance but they were beyond caring when he appeared before them in the flesh, following his own fragment of Bepo's vivre card. Doflamingo was defeated, like the newspaper had reported but they'd hardly dared to believe. While injured, their captain had a spring to his step that hadn't been there before, as if a weight had finally been lifted.

Then, finally, they understood. They'd lost the Shichibukai status, with all the perks of the job. They'd lost their privacy, the ginger navigator guarding her fragment of the vivre card viciously. They'd gained a new, dangerous enemy. But their captain had gained a long-overdue peace of mind, closure.

For that, the consequences of the alliance were worth it.

Chapter End Notes

We know that Ikkaku, Clione and Uni were all unimpressed with the idea of an alliance, so I thought I'd explore why, especially as they seem perfectly okay with the idea by the time Law and Luffy arrive themselves.
Homesickness was something Law would never admit to. Even as a child, he'd been fine away from home (that one sleepover didn't count; Lami had been sick so of course he should have been with her, not off curled up in the corner of a classmate's bedroom. It was simply his duty as an older brother. So what if he never went on a sleepover again?), and through the teenage years there had hardly been a place to call home.

Well, in hindsight that wasn't strictly true. Bepo and Penguin and Shachi and the Polar Tang had been where he lived, where he was safe. It just took his broken mind a few years to put itself back together enough to recognise that.

The point was, Law didn't get a heavy feeling at the pit of his stomach when he was away from his crew, not at all. The unease on Punk Hazard had been because Caesar had his heart and who knew what sort of mischief he could get up to with that?

The Straw Hats were a breath of fresh air when they arrived, smashing through all his plans with the same effortless grace as their captain had punched a tenryubito in the face two years ago. Law hadn't planned on making an alliance, but with his original plans well and truly scuppered (and yes, he had to give Smoker-ya and the G5 marines credit for their part in that), his options were suddenly limited. If he could just find a way to control that ridiculous force of nature that was Monkey D. Luffy…

So that plan didn't go particularly smoothly either, but in the end it worked and Law was sat on the edge of a celebration that really needed better timing – he'd even told Mugiwara-ya that Doflamingo would be on his way but the other captain had completely disregarded him – watching a crew that wasn't his own party in a way that was nauseatingly similar to the way his own crew partied, loudly and unashamedly. At least his own crew knew when was a good moment, though, he mused as he deflected Smoker-ya's probing comments with half-truths, already setting up the next stages of his plan.

If he was planning, he wasn't comparing the Straw Hats to his own crew. That wasn't fair to his own crew, after all. They were reckless idiots to be sure, but not quite to the extremes of stupidity exhibited by the Straw Hats.

It was hard to plan when he was being talked over as if he didn't exist, though. Sure, Mugiwara-ya had asked him what they were going to do, but then a switch flipped and he ignored the answer, instead charging off to go get breakfast – sandwiches, of all things. It was a little like how Penguin and Shachi went behind his back at times if they thought he was getting too hyper-focused on one thing, keeping the crew in line while Law plotted and plotted in his own head. But only a little.

Dressrosa was too much, full of chaos and memories and pain. Thoughts of his crew were all but
forgotten in the face of his adversary, the man he'd successfully avoided for the last thirteen years whilst tracking with dogged determination, and for once he could see the Straw Hats without being reminded of his own crew. They shone differently – not brighter, because to Law no-one alive could shine brighter than the crew that kept him from falling apart completely, but differently – with Mugiwara-ya's smile finally being replaced with that one look Law remembered vividly from Sabaody, once again aimed at a tenryubito.

The Straw Hats partied like his crew, he mused in the gladiator's cabin when he was supposed to be sleeping but the pain in his arm was too distracting. They cheered like them, enjoyed life like them. But they didn't fight like his crew. The Straw Hats were showy, big moves and loud explosions and everything appropriate for a crew that had long since overcome fear. His own crew knew the value of subtlety, hit and run tactics honed from years of staying under the radar.

The heavy feeling in the pit of his stomach returned. Law attributed it to the healing wounds.

More parties, more celebration, with even more crews involved, and Law saw what he'd missed the first time. There was no hatted double act, dancing and cheering together as if they were joined at the hip. No mink, chugging alcohol like water until he keeled over, fast asleep but never drunk (Zoro-ya was far too unapologetic, and nowhere near furry enough). No high-pitched giggling as the inebriated sole woman took advantage of the situation to embarrass her nakama. No gentle giant watching from the side lines with a large grin (and alcohol-induced flush) on his face.

Finding a spot to valiantly try for some peace and quiet on the ridiculous ship that ferried them to Zou, Law finally admitted to himself that he missed his crew, looking down at Bepo's vivre card – ragged where he'd torn it in two to give Nami-ya her own copy what felt like an eternity ago – and watching it shift in greater and greater increments as they got closer to their destination.

Soon. He'd be home soon.
Awaken

Chapter Notes

Characters: Shachi, Law, Penguin
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Nakamaship, Hurt/Comfort

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everything hurt. Or rather, that's what Shachi's mind expected to find as it resurfaced from the depths of a coma. Having very definitely had his stomach blown out – he'd fainted, sure, but not for several seconds after it had happened, his body too in shock to realise it shouldn't be conscious – meant there should be agony to go with it.

The truth was that there was little more than a dull ache, leaving him to wonder if it had been a particularly vivid dream. Not that he'd be complaining, of course. He'd take a vivid dream over actual near-death any day.

His eyes wouldn't open, feeling a bit like they'd been sewn shut. Well, as long as he wasn't actually blind, he could deal with the darkness a little longer as he tried to sort out what was fact and what had been a dream. No shades, no hat. That told him nothing; either he was in his own bed, or a bed in the infirmary. Either way, he wouldn't be wearing either item.

His left hand was far warmer than the rest of him, and at a funny angle. Lifted up away from his body, it felt like someone was clinging to it. That didn't bode so well for the 'just a dream', although if the nightmare had been violent enough, then maybe. How anyone was holding his hand without touching him elsewhere if he was in his bunk was a mystery, though. There wouldn't be room... so maybe it hadn't been a dream?

Or he could have been lazy and crashed in Penguin's bunk. That was an option too.

The incessant beeping in the corner didn't sound like their alarm, though (and if it was, Penguin would be jostling him by now, reminding him it was time to get up and face the new day). The room smelt clean, the crisp scent of a sterilised environment, not the slightly musky scent of a room lived in by two men in their twenties. That was a couple of concerning points for the 'not a dream' camp.

"He's waking up," he heard, a voice off to his right and therefore not belonging to the hands clutching his left. Said hands tightened in response.

"Shachi?" the presumably owner of the hands said, the voice weak and cracking slightly in the middle. It sounded like they hadn't spoken for days, their throat scratchy and hoarse. Uh oh, that really didn't bode well for the whole 'probably real' thing.

"Don't hurry him," the first voice chided gently. It was strained, worried, and familiar. Shachi knew that voice, now who... "Let him wake in his own time." Law. That was Law's voice. Okay, definitely in the infirmary. Law didn't invade their room unless they dragged him in. And if Law was there, then that meant...
He fought with his fingers until they moved, twitching lightly in the grip that held them. His reward was a sharp intake of breath, the hands encompassing his shifting slightly in response. Emboldened by the success, he tried again, this time managing to distinctly squeeze them.

"Shachi?" the other voice repeated, full of hope and pain and yes, that was Penguin. Oops, the blown-out stomach thing really really had happened, hadn't it? While far from averse to physical contact, Penguin rarely did something quite as sentimental as hand-holding.

"Yo," he croaked, pleasantly surprised that his voice was still in working order. From the state of Penguin's, he'd probably been out of it for some time. He attempted to open his eyes again, succeeding long enough to see his nakama was hatless and a mess before wincing and closing them again. "Ow, too bright," he complained. He'd never been a fan of bright lights, and the whiteness of the infirmary after unconsciousness was not at all welcome.

"How are you feeling?" Law asked. Shachi heard some shuffling off to his right, where he deduced his captain was, before the familiar weight of his shades very gently returned. He opened his eyes again, easier now that the tinted lenses were defending his eyes from the brightness.

"Better than you two look," he replied, looking at them both and seeing just how dishevelled they were. Like Penguin, Law's hat was nowhere to be seen, and his usually untamed hair looked downright wild. Both had bags under their eyes (not that that was anything new for Law, but they were more pronounced than usual), so it was easy to deduce that they'd barely slept since... "How long was I out?"

"Four days," Law admitted. Huh, that was a long time. Law could usually fix them up in less than a day. Oh yeah, blown out stomach. Shachi remembered Mugiwara's nightmare surgery and recovery. Two weeks. Maybe four days made sense. His right hand crept towards his stomach, feeling for the bandaging, only to be caught in a gentle yet firm grip. As his left hand was very definitely still in the custody of Penguin's hands, it had to be Law. "Leave it alone."

Shachi acquiesced, turning his hand in the grip to squeeze Law's hand softly instead.

"I'm okay," he reassured them. It probably didn't have the desired effect as he was still weak. "You two go get some rest." It was clear that neither of them had done so since the battle, and Shachi felt guilty for worrying them so much. "Shachi's Orders," he added with a grin that was more forced than he'd wanted when neither so much as twitched.

"Since when do you have authority to order me around?" Law asked him, although he sounded more amused than offended. Penguin's response was to merely tighten his grip on Shachi's hand.

"Since you two are being idiots and not taking care of yourselves." Shachi retorted.

"Says the one that got a hole to the stomach," Penguin groused. Shachi squeezed his hand again, trying to convince him to move. He appreciated the company, he really did. If he'd woken up alone, he probably would have panicked. But he wasn't having his nakama run themselves to the ground on his behalf. They didn't need all three of them out of commission. Presumably Bepo had taken command, possibly assisted by Jean Bart – he might be the newest, but he had a good head on his shoulders and didn't panic as easily as some of the rest of them – but Bepo hated being in charge. The weight of responsibility was too heavy for him to bear for long.

"Says the one that got a hole to the stomach," he agreed, not that he could feel it. That was probably due to a large amount of anaesthetic and his captain's abilities rather than because it was already fully healed, though. "Now scat, you're helping no-one running yourselves down. Not me, and certainly not the rest of the crew."
He saw the two share a look and frowned. It wasn't often that they teamed up – usually it was him and Penguin teaming up on Law when he was making stupid calls – but this was clearly one of those rare occasions. A familiar blue sheen expanded, encompassing more of the infirmary than Shachi could see without turning his head, and in all honesty he wasn't sure he had the energy for that.

"Shambles."

He didn't see what Law moved, although the resounding thuds sounded heavy enough that it was something substantial. Penguin let out a noise that almost passed for amusement.

"Works for me," he said, and dammit now Shachi really wanted to know what stunt his captain had pulled. Penguin stood up, releasing Shachi's hand gently and letting it fall back to the bedside – Shachi had no energy to keep it suspended even if he wanted to. Shachi let a satisfied grin grace his face, until Penguin simply lay down on the bed that definitely hadn't been there earlier and closed his eyes.

"You don't get to tell me when I'm leaving my own infirmary," Law said from his other side, and Shachi glanced across as best he could to see the taller male mirroring Penguin's actions on a bed the other side of him. Shachi just sighed, hearing his companions succumb to sleep faster than he was willing to bet they'd wanted. It was another reminder that they'd been neglecting themselves for him – if he found out they'd been skipping meals there would be hell to pay – and he stared at the ceiling, letting the steady sounds of their breathing, as familiar to him as his own, calm him.

He couldn't blame them, not really. If it had been either of them in his position, he wouldn't have left their side for anything either. He took a deep breath, exhaling slightly shakily as he mentally reviewed how close he must have come to leaving them. Far too close.

"I'm sorry for scaring you," he murmured to his sleeping companions.

Chapter End Notes

A follow-on from chapter 2, Vigil, because someone asked for Shachi waking up.
"Excuse me, Trafalgar-san," a quiet voice murmured in Law's ear. He looked up from observing his crew intermingling with their allies to see the skeletal musician of the Straw Hats looking down at him. For a skeleton, Bone-ya's face was usually very expressive – uncannily so – but this time the skull looked as blank as it should.

Too normal for a Straw Hat. Law was instantly on guard.

"What is it, Bone-ya?" he asked, frowning when instead of giving an answer a single set of phalanges – second right, medial and distal, his mind automatically supplied – cocked in a silent request that he follow as the musician silently slipped into the surrounding trees. Looking around, Law determined that his presence wouldn't be missed and casually followed.

He found the skeleton sat against a tree out of earshot of the party, quietly picking at strings on his guitar. He didn't look up as Law approached, but gestured for him to join him on the ground. Law didn't, choosing to lean against the tree opposite him instead. Apparently that was good enough, as the musician finally began to speak.

"For perhaps obvious reasons, this is something I've never told anyone," Bone-ya began. Law's immediate reaction was to wonder why he was being told something so secret – surely his own captain would be a far better choice – but he held his tongue, knowing the skeleton wasn't finished, and undeniably curious. "However, Rocinante-san is very persuasive."

Law's breath caught in his chest, painfully tight. While he had never called the man by that name, it was a name he knew – a name the skeleton shouldn't.

"How do you know that name?" he demanded, completely failing to hide his distress. There was no yo ho ho or light-hearted response, as he'd half-expected, thinking it was perhaps a joke in incredibly poor taste. The skeleton remained solemn, his distal phalanges stilling on the guitar strings.

"He told me himself," he said quietly. "As you are no doubt aware, my fruit gives me an affinity with souls." Law had heard talk of that. "It does not just extend to the souls of the living. Sometimes, the departed choose to linger for a time." Law couldn't resist the urge to glance around, seeking any sign – any sign at all – of Cora-san. The disappointment when he failed brought a crushing weight to his lungs.

"Where… is he?" he asked, fully prepared to dissect the skeleton to find out exactly how the medical miracle worked if he broke into one of his yo ho ho's and declared it all a joke.

The skeleton did no such thing. His head twitched and Law got the impression that if he'd had eyes
they'd have flicked somewhere. Due to the lack of an eyeball, he couldn't see exactly where the glance had been aimed and tightened his grip on Kikoku.

"I can make Rocinante-san visible for a brief period," Bone-ya told him. "It will only last for a few minutes, and understand that I will never do this again." The severe tone of the last words was lost on Law as the world fell from beneath his feet. He was glad he'd rested most of his weight against the tree behind him, as it meant he sank slowly to the ground rather than an all-out collapse.

"You..." he began, trailing off when he realised he didn't know what he wanted to say.

"Rocinante-san has asked if he can speak to your crew," Bone-ya continued. "But only with your permission."

To his crew...? Law frowned, trying to understand what that meant. Did that mean just his crew? Did Cora-san have nothing to say to him? Was Cora-san... disappointed in him? After Sengoku's words, it felt all too likely.

He stood, readjusting his grip on Kikoku, and strode back to the celebration.

Jean Bart was the easiest to collar, the large man watching the festivities from the sidelines. The ever-attuned Penguin and Shachi drifted over without prompting, snagging other crew members on their way. Bepo was the last to slip away from his conversation partner – Law assumed he had been discussing navigation techniques with Nami-ya – and join the trail into the forest.

Cora-san was waiting for them.

Idle thoughts flickered through Law's head; how he didn't have to kill the skeletal musician for a too-elaborate prank, didn't have to come with an excuse for pulling his crew away. An observation that Bone-ya was nowhere to be seen, but Law's haki located him a few trees over, out of earshot but close enough to maintain his ability. They were insignificant in the face of Cora-san was there.

"Who are you?" Shachi demanded, his voice not quite steady. He recognised him, Law realised, his own tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth and unable to move. Penguin and Bepo too, from the way they moved closer to his side.

Cora-san broke into a huge grin, delighted about something.

"Just a ghost," he told them, approaching Law. His crew crowded around him defensively, Shachi taking point. "I've been gifted partial corporeality for a short time." The crew turned to glance at Law as one, only Shachi determinedly keeping Cora-san in his sights. Law nodded numbly at their silent questions – yes, he knew who it was; yes he'd known he was going to appear – despite the doubts that crowded his mind. Ghosts didn't just become visible, devil fruit or not...

The ghost took a step forwards, tripped over air and tumbled to the ground, his shoulder somehow on fire. Most of the crew jumped back, startled. Shachi almost landed on Law's foot. The familiarity of the clumsy actions soothed Law somewhat. If it was a copy, it was a very good one. The creator at least knew Cora-san.

There was a disturbing feeling of nothing resting on his head, and he glanced up to see a large, slightly translucent hand there, reaching over Shachi's head with ease.

"I wanted to thank you," Cora-san said to his crew, who were all immediately struck dumb. "Thank you for looking after Law! I know he's a brat, but you've stuck with him as his nakama, so thank you!" He stepped back enough to lurch into a clumsy bow, once again overbalancing and crashing to the ground – there was no sound, but while it seemed eerie to his crew, it was another refreshing
sense of normal to Law. His shoulder was still burning.

Law was the one to break the dumb silence.

"I'm twenty-six, Cora-san!" he protested, forgetting that this was a ghost, or more likely than not an elaborate hoax, at the familiar fond insult.

"Still shorter than me," Cora-san retorted, clambering back to his feet as if to emphasis that Law was still nowhere near his height. "Still a brat."

At that the spell of silence was broken and the crew began to laugh. Law should have been offended – he never liked being the butt of the joke – but all he could think was that this was right, his crew and Cora-san ganging up on him in jest.

"We'll keep looking after him, don't worry," he heard Penguin quietly tell Cora-san among the laughter. The blinding grin he was given made Law's heart ache.

"I'll continue to leave him in your hands, then," Cora-san replied, as if Law wasn't close enough to hear them discussing him as if he were a child.

The rest of the crew, who had gradually quietened since Penguin began to speak, piped up with further reassurances, finally breaking their defensive formation around their captain.

Watching his crew and Cora-san interact, an event beyond even his wildest dreams, brought an unbidden smile to his lips. Law didn't think he'd ever felt so loved than at that moment, the people that meant the most to him promising each other they'd look after him.

Cora-san finally turned to him, reaching out to place his hand on his head again with the nothing weight.

"I'm proud of you," he murmured, talking too quietly for the rest of the crew to hear as he stepped forwards to envelop Law in an embrace. With nothing to touch, Law simply stood there, fighting the tears. All ideas of a trick, the fact that he was wide open for an attack, fled entirely as he stared at the all-too familiar heart patterned shirt in front of him. Cora-san really had been a giant of a man, hadn't he? "Now you can live free," the ghost continued, the feeling of nothing resting on Law's head again. He surmised Cora-san had rested his chin there.

They remained like that for several seconds before Cora-san pulled back, resting his hands on Law's upper arms. The nothing was minimal on his right, and he realised Cora-san knew about his injury.

"By the way…" Cora-san began, louder again, his smile briefly slipping. "Tattoos? Really?" Law gaped as his crew laughed. "And if you must have a goatee, at least keep it neat!" The idea of being scolded for his appearance like a rebellious teenager was unfamiliar and unwelcome, except for the smile that reappeared. "Take better care of yourself, okay?" Cora-san added softly, before turning back to his crew. "Make sure he does," he told them. They saluted – was that a Marine salute? – and chorused an agreement, matching grins on all their faces.

Cora-san saluted them in return, leaving Law speechless because yes that was a Marine salute – he sent a far-too-pleased Shachi a glare.

"I'll be off now," the former Marine said, turning back to Law. "Time's up. I'll be around for a little while longer, Law." His voice had dropped to a whisper, and the crew retreated out of earshot. "I can't ask Brook-san for this favour again, but I'll be here."

Law finally let himself hug the nothingness, reverting to the scared child in the chest for a split
second before the ghost began to fade away.

"I love you," Cora-san whispered, his grin far less bloody than the last time. Law watched him fade to nothing, a lump in the back of his throat.

"I love you too, Cora-san," he whispered past it, his arms falling limply back to his side as Penguin, Shachi and Bepo led the rest of the crew towards him to wrap him in a group hug, as best as a group hug of twenty people could work.

Above the heads of his crew, he saw Bone-ya slip past, clearly exhausted and only staying upright with the help of his cane. Their eyes met – well, Law's eyes and Bone-ya's empty orbits – and Law gave a minute nod, which the skeleton returned.

*Thank you.*

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I was asked ages ago for Cora-san meeting the Heart Pirates, which was kinda hard to do because he's dead, so it was time to bring in the 'Brook can see dead people' headcanon, which seems to be reasonably popular, alongside my one step further 'Brook can make souls visible if he tries hard enough' headcanon (he can make his own visible, so I don't think it's too much of a stretch). I've been working on this for about a month, but if I keep fiddling with it I think I'll go mad, and I thought it would make a nice 50th oneshot (I never thought I was ever going to reach 50, but here we are). I know the 'Roci uses Brook as a medium to talk to Law after Zou' isn't a brand new idea, but I'm hoping I've added enough of a spin to it to make this particular scenario still new.
"Hey, Law," Penguin said, entering the control room of the Polar Tang with Shachi hot on his heels. The younger boy looked up at them from where he'd been fiddling with the monitors, perched on Bepo's lap to gain the extra height necessary. The mink cub didn't seem to mind.

"What?" he asked, rubbing at his cheek distractedly. The pale patches were slowly disappearing, far darker now than when Penguin had first seen the boy a month ago, but they obviously still bothered the kid. His captain. Whatever.

"What are we?" he asked bluntly. He'd had the nagging impression, back when they first set sail, that they were headed for piracy, but a month later all they'd done was steal a ship – and kill four men, but he was trying to forget that one; he still saw phantom blood on his hands from time to time.

"Pirates," Law responded, in a tone of voice that made it clear he thought Penguin was being stupid. "What else?"

"That's what we thought," Shachi spoke up from Penguin's side, rubbing the palms of his hands on the sides of his boiler suit in a way that was probably supposed to be surreptitious but failed miserably. Penguin didn't comment though, knowing the ginger still wasn't over the killing. "But we don't have a flag."

Law frowned, appearing to finally take them seriously as he slipped off Bepo's lap to stand on the floor, losing his height advantage. The mink cub blinked blearily a few times before straightening up to join the three humans, turning it from a triangle to a circle.

"We don't," he admitted, bringing a curled hand to his chin in a thoughtful pose. "I wanted to keep under the radar until Doflamingo left North Blue, but I suppose we do need a flag, at the least." They'd torn up the world government flag they'd found on board the Tang weeks ago and their mast had been bare ever since, although they could hardly fly one underwater anyway. "And a name," he continued. "Otherwise eventually the Marines will name us themselves, and I refuse to let that happen."

By this point, Penguin had at least some idea just why Law was so anti-Marine, so he just nodded in agreement. He wasn't overly fond of them either, for failing to protect Swallow Island when they'd needed it most…

He jerked himself back to the present, away from memories he didn't need resurfacing, as Shachi withdrew several sheets of paper and pens from his pocket and offered them to Law.

"You're the captain," he said when Law looked at him in confusion. "This whole piracy thing was
"I seem to recall three hangers on refusing to let me leave the island without them," Law replied dryly, but he took the offered sheets and knelt on the floor, spreading them out. Penguin pretended he hadn't said anything, and from the silence of the other two as they knelt as well, he wasn't the only one.

He'd heard talk that pirate flags had a skull and crossbones, but that wasn't what Law drew with a precision far too advanced for a regular thirteen year old boy. Penguin supposed that his surgical training had something to do with it.

First came a circle, which Law bisected viciously before turning it into a smiley. It looked a lot like Doflamingo's, from what little Penguin knew of it, but he held his tongue. Law knew far more about the whole pirate thing than he did, and certainly knew Doflamingo's flag better than he did.

"Will this do?" Law asked after a few moments, his bored tone failing to distract from the way his hands were trembling now they were no longer touching pen to paper. The design meant something to him, but Penguin clearly didn't know his captain well enough yet, because he wasn't sure what was so emotional about it.

He glanced at Shachi, and the two shrugged.

"Nice and simple," Shachi agreed, nodding. "I like it."

Simple, and nothing like the flag burned into Penguin's memory. If Law wanted a flag that looked a bit like his enemy's then that was Law's call. Penguin wanted nothing to do with the flag that had ruined his and Shachi's lives, and that was really all he cared about.

"I like it too," Bepo yawned, a paw reaching out to touch it. "It's smiling at us."

"Good enough for me," Penguin admitted when Law's golden eyes focused on him, and the younger teen's posture slouched slightly. "Does it have a name?" The way Law had barely hesitated when he drew it meant he'd been thinking about it for some time, probably. He knew he was capable of coming up with something like that on the spot, but the pen had been sure in its strokes. One day, he'd ask what it meant, when he was ready to open up himself.

"Heart," came the unexpected, yet sure, answer.

"Who's going to take that seriously?" Shachi asked, ignoring Penguin's elbow as it made sharp contact with his ribs. Law didn't seem offended.

"If they don't take us seriously, it's easier to hide," Law reasoned, which made sense, but surely he didn't plan on hiding forever? Penguin enjoyed the underwater views, but he also liked being able to breath non-stale air every once in a while. "And once we're ready, it won't matter what their first impressions are. We'll make them take us seriously." The grin on his face was slightly alarming, and Penguin was suddenly reminded of the sick kid that floored him as if he were nothing.

"Better than Law Pirates," Shachi grinned. "Or Trafalgar." Law swatted at him, and Shachi fell backwards trying to dodge. He escaped the hand, but let out an 'ow' as his head hit the metal floor of the room instead.

"People took the Roger Pirates seriously, didn't they?" Bepo pointed out. "Besides, Captain knows how to cut out hearts."

Penguin had forgotten that one, mainly because he'd been trying to forget all of the darker things he'd
seen and done since leaving Swallow Island, but it was true. None of them knew everything Law could do with the Ope Ope no Mi, but it was obvious in the way he'd been setting up the infirmary that medical knowledge was hardly new to him.

"So we're the Heart Pirates?" Shachi clarified, dragging Penguin back to the present. "I guess we can make that work." He pulled himself back up into a sitting position and reached forwards, resting his hand by Bepo's paw on the drawing. Penguin followed suit, and felt cool fingers brush against his as Law joined them.

"The Heart Pirates."

Chapter End Notes

Law had been thinking about it already, but he'd been waiting for the others to bring it up so he knew they were actually interested in it as a concept, bearing in mind their earlier reluctance to steal the Polar Tang. We see with the Strawhats that even though the crew are close, the jolly roger was solely Luffy's design (even if Usopp was the one to draw it properly), and it's heavily implied that the Heart Pirate's flag is inspired by Cora-san, so Law's probably the one that designed it. Unlike the Strawhats, who I believe were named by the Marines, 'Heart' again has a personal meaning to Law (and not quite as obvious as the straw hat is to Luffy), so I don't think that was a Marine creation.
While he was no stranger to hand to hand combat (with Lao G as a childhood teacher he'd hardly had a choice), Law vastly preferred using a sword in battle. A cursed blade like Kikoku was strong enough to deal with even the most stubborn of armament haki, especially when he combined it with the Ope Ope no Mi's abilities and his own haki, and while she was large and at times unwieldy to use (at least, until he'd grown tall enough that she didn't drag on the ground behind him) there was something comforting about her bladed edge that fists just couldn't compete with.

Wincing as he looked down at his poor hands, Law was reminded once again why hand to hand was a last resort. He'd been caught short, attempting an undercover supply run without bringing the marines down on the heads of himself and his crew. Kikoku was unmistakeable, so like his beloved hat she'd been left safely on the ship, Law confident that if a situation did arise, he'd be able to get out of it with his martial arts. His devil fruit abilities too, if it came to it, although that would ruin his attempt at anonymity.

While the subterfuge had worked enough to keep him unrecognised (it was amazing how many people overlooked him when he did something as simple as take off the hat and pass Kikoku to Bepo), it hadn't kept him out of a fight. Ruefully, he considered that maybe the drunk pirates would have left him alone if they'd known who they were messing with.

He had won, naturally. A group of no-name drunk pirates never stood a chance against him, even with his self-imposed handicaps. However, it hadn't been as simple as it should have been. He tried to flex his fingers and hissed in pain.

It looked bad, in the way anything looked bad the moment blood got involved. The pirates hadn't been impressive, but some of them had been physically large, and strong. For all his capabilities, Law still couldn't hide from the fact that his slender figure worked against him in a brawl, and he was relatively easily out-muscled by the majority of pirates. Another reason he preferred using weapons. Kikoku didn't care how muscular her victim was, they all bled red, and to a cursed blade that was all she needed.

The other problem was that if Law's hands were out of commission, the Ope Ope no Mi's abilities became that much harder to control. A lot of it was mental power, but the deft flicks of his fingers were the focus required to channel it without even more strain. Having his knuckles bruised and battered to the point that he could barely move his fingers boded ill for his ability to use his powers until his hands healed. Sadly, he couldn't accelerate their healing, because his hands were out of commission. A catch twenty two, and not one Law was fond of.

*Next time*, he groused as he lugged the fruits of his supply run back to the Tang awkwardly, *I'm*
"What the hell happened?"

He looked up at the deck, distracted from working out how he was supposed to board with injured hands full of supplies and no access to his powers, at Shachi’s indignant demand. The ginger gave him no chance to respond before jumping down onto the dock, hollering for the Heart Pirates closest to him to follow and extend the gangplank.

Most of them gathered up the supplies, slipping them from Law's protesting fingers with ease, while Shachi and Clione pulled Law's arms over their shoulders to help him up the tightrope-esque gangplank. Why they thought his injured hands meant he could no longer walk unaided, Law wasn't sure, but suspended above the water with only a misstep between him and an unwelcome dunking he let them do as they wished.

"What happened?" the ginger repeated once they were back on the safety of the Polar Tang's aft deck, tugging him none too gently through the door. Law followed because it wasn't worth the hassle to break free, not when he knew Shachi was leading him to the infirmary. Dragged or not, the destination would have been the same.

"Drunk pirates," he supplied, seeing no need to delve into the full story. His bloodied knuckles told the rest, and Shachi sighed as he directed Law to take a seat while hunting down the necessary antiseptics and bandages.

"Let me guess," he sighed, dabbing gently at Law's left hand to clear the blood and see the actual injuries. "You decided it wasn't worth blowing your cover by using a Room, so you went hand to hand. But one of the guys was tough enough to break your hands, and because you hadn't already activated a Room that left you a sitting duck."

Law saw no reason to dignify it with a response, especially as it was largely correct, as Shachi already knew full well. He watched Shachi work in silence, remembering the days, now long past, when he could barely tie a bandage properly. Now he and Penguin were the two best medics on board, excluding Law himself. Law’s critical eye saw nothing wrong with the treatment his hands received, and he waited patiently for Shachi to finish.

"No Rooms for a few days," Shachi informed him as he clipped the last bandage in place. "It'll be enough of a challenge eating for now; there's no point straining yourself." Law nodded, knowing he could hardly scold Shachi for telling him what to do when the medical training he'd imposed upon the older had included telling patients what to do, even if said patient was a doctor himself.

He stood and made his way towards the control room, only for Shachi to intercept him and direct him to the recreation room instead.

"I'll take things from here," he said, and while Law wasn't entirely sure what he was planning, Penguin and Shachi were his seconds for a reason. Relaxing sounded like a welcoming idea, anyway, so he changed course silently, watching Shachi stride off towards the control room purposefully out of the corner of his eye.

His crew didn't bombard him with questions when he settled in his favourite seat – in the corner, by the window but with a perfect view of the room as a whole so he could watch his crew relax – only double checking that there was no-one they needed to educate.

Such offers were quickly stifled by the Polar Tang's sirens, indicating that the exterior doors were entering lockdown. Beneath them, the engines roared into life and the submarine glided away from
the dock before entering a gentle dive.

Apparently Shachi's idea of 'taking things from here' was reading Law's mind and rounding up the crew so they could leave the island. Despite his bandaged hands, residual pain reminding him of his vulnerability for the next few days, Law managed a smile as he watched the waves lap against the window.

It was nice to have a crew he could rely on.

Chapter End Notes

Aside from the one filler arc (Breed), I have no recollection of Law fighting hand-to-hand. Kikoku and Amputate appear to be his weapons of choice, although Doflamingo does say that Lao G taught him martial arts so he must have some ability. On that note, Law seems to control his powers using his fingers, so in the grand scheme of things his hands are probably as important to him as Sanji's are to Sanji, although he doesn't go to the extremes Sanji does to protect them.
Jean Bart had known, ever since Trafalgar Law approached him instead of fleeing the auction house at the first opportunity, that he was in for interesting times. Few captains would see a chance to increase their crew in a weakened slave, and less would take on one they knew the reputation of. That Trafalgar did so marked him as either incredibly stupid, or incredibly confident. Or both, although it took less than an hour for Jean Bart to scrub 'stupid' off the list of possible descriptors for his new captain. 'Cocky' was added, but Jean Bart could deal with cocky as long as he had the strength to back it up.

He did. He also held firm loyalty from his crew, or at least the three that were with him, because there was no way he'd sailed so far into the Grand Line with only four people. That was a definite plus; you could tell a lot about a captain from their crew, and one with such dedicated loyalty was unlikely to turn into a tyrant as soon as they were onboard the ship.

His first impression of his new life was interesting, but in a good way. Trafalgar clearly had a brain on him, which he made full use of for schemes and plots, and Jean Bart could appreciate that. What was slightly harder to get his head around (aside from his ability and the fact that apparently the crew treated being turned into human jigsaws as some sort of bizarre comfort) was when it was announced to the crew just what, exactly, was in their immediate future.

Storming Marineford to rescue a rival captain on a whim? Jean Bart was certain there was no mere whim involved, but if Trafalgar was going to remain tight lipped about his reasons, then who was he to argue? He had thought, then, that there was nothing Trafalgar could do that would surprise him anymore. It was a naïve thought.

A month later, the Polar Tang finally fixed from Mugiwara's destructive spree, Trafalgar revealed a new bombshell.

He was going to aim for one of the recently-vacated Shichibukai positions.

Jean Bart knew a bit about the Shichibukai, having spent far more time on the Grand Line than the rest of the crew, but couldn't for the life of him see how that was going to work. Trafalgar was too young, for a start. Admittedly he didn't know the age of his new captain, but he knew that the only Shichibukai to receive the title in less than a year of entering the Grand Line was Donquixote Doflamingo, and the name by itself was enough to put a shiver down his spine.

Trafalgar thought he could match that monster?

He didn't, to Jean Bart's private relief. It took a particular brand of cruel insanity to rise through the ranks that quickly, and pirate or not he had no intentions of associating himself with that type.
Law did, however, manage his macabre aim of collecting a hundred still-beating (he was very particular on the still-beating; Jean Bart began avoiding the infirmary because there was something so fundamentally wrong with the sight) hearts within the first year of Jean Bart joining the crew. A few calculated impressive orchestrations (Rocky Port had been magnificent; he believed Law's name would be synonymous with that particular incident for several years), and the macabre offering, and he indeed claimed a spot.

Being an active pirate with a frozen bounty was a surreal experience. Law, as always, breezed through the Grand Line and Marejois alike as if he owned them both, for all intents and purposes seemingly unaffected by the change as he methodically took advantage of the position to gain the information he so desperately craved (the fact that Law had for once joined in the party thrown by the crew after his official appointment betrayed otherwise).

Sitting at the controls of the Polar Tang, listening to Law and Bepo discuss directions and adjusting their course accordingly, Jean Bart thought back to his first impressions of this crew he had found himself so solidly integrated in over the past year.

*Interesting* was certainly the right word. He wouldn't trade it for the world.

Chapter End Notes

Jean Bart doesn't know about Blackbeard, although he still doesn't really count as a 'rookie'... Law is the youngest known Shichibukai, although his bounty is the second-highest of all known Shichibukai at the time of induction (only Weevil's is higher at 480million). Fun facts you probably knew already.

Jean Bart gets used to his new crazy crew eventually... (he's pretty settled by the time we see him on Zou, at least).
Everyone had their own share of scars on the Heart Pirate crew. Injuries were an occupational hazard, and while their captain was good, sometimes it was better to leave the scar than not. They served as reminders for their mistakes, and warnings against their recklessness. Some of the crew had their own scars from before they joined, the founding four chief among them.

Law's scars were well hidden, concealed under black ink and other techniques designed to draw the eye away from the slightly paler patches of skin he hated to see. There were some from his time as a Donquixote Pirate, too, and a couple on his fingers, flashbacks to a young boy playing with his parents' scalpels unsupervised, sneaking into the office when they were busy to admire the sharp edges and what they could do.

Similarly, fur covered Bepo's own scars, occasional odd tufts of fur the only indication that the skin beneath was not as unblemished as the pure white implied. His wounds were mainly from bullets; a hunted young cub lost in North Blue, where no-one knew what he was or what he could do. Where he was seen as a predator, or as dinner, depending on the human in question.

And then there were Penguin and Shachi. While neither were particularly self-conscious of their numerous scars, they didn't go out of their way to display them, either. The hail of bullets had pummelled Penguin's right arm and leg, hobbling him at the time but healing up well with time and begrudging patience. Shachi's were similar, temporarily-crippling wounds that had pinned him just long enough to watch his parents die but with no long-lasting affects.

For Shachi, the one that stood out the most was the one by his left eye, usually covered by his shades. That was one that was intentionally covered for much of the time, as much as he claimed the constant use of the shades was due to a case of snow blindness he'd contracted as a wilful child who refused to listen to his parents and wear snow glasses when he went out to play. It wasn't strictly untrue – he did have snow blindness, and while Law had offered to treat it once he'd finally learnt the nuances of his fruit, Shachi was too used to the sensitivity to accept, although the offer had been left open.

It was only after he'd been shot, the bullet grazing by his eye and gouging out a line that would never disappear, that he willingly wore glasses, as if his sudden obedience would bring his parents back, despite his snow blindness having nothing to do with the pirate attack. The scar left by the bullet was another reminder, how close he had come to death that day, and while that by itself rarely bothered him (he had several other scars, many from dancing on the edge of death and giving his captain conniptions over his recklessness), the placement did.

If he'd been wearing glasses, like Penguin, like everyone else, then he wouldn't have a scar there. It
was a reminder of his constant disobedience as a child, a disobedience he grew out of too late to apologize for. Perhaps that was another reason he'd never taken Law up on the offer of a cure, putting himself through some twisted penance to ease the regret of his suddenly orphaned seven year old self.

Penguin didn't approve, one of the few things they disagreed about, but his best friend never forced him to see Law, to get things fixed. Instead, he would be the one to fish out a spare set when Shachi's shades were damaged in battle, or guiding him into the darkest place around until he could get them, letting him close his eyes and stumble along like a trusting blind man. And when Shachi got his new shades, Penguin always placing them on his face for him, he'd be there with a steady smile.

Maybe one day Shachi would take Law up on that offer, finally putting his regrets behind him. But until then, he'd hide that scar behind his shades and his nakama's kindness.

Chapter End Notes

Shachi's shades could just be a fashion statement... or they could have some nice angsty backstory reason for them. As for the snow blindness, while it's usually temporary, repeated exposure can presumably cause long-term damage. In the SBS image that accompanies the Penguin and Shachi backstory, Penguin's also wearing shades, and there's snow around, so it's also a probable risk on Swallow Island.
They'd got too confident. With the news that Doflamingo had finally left North Blue to go on to bigger and better things in the Grand Line, they'd stopped hiding and started acting a little more like pirates. You'd have thought that Penguin and Shachi, at least, would have remembered that there were always bigger fish around, but with Doflamingo their only focus for the past three years, they'd long since stopped seeing other pirate crews as a credible threat.

Hence Penguin's current situation.

"Listen kid," the clearly-drunk man spat in his face, saliva landing unpleasantly on his cheek. His breath stank, and it took everything Penguin had not to recoil in disgust. "Playing pirates is all well and good, but you've gotta do it at home, where you can run to Mummy once the day's done. Leave the real pirating to those that know what they're doing."

Penguin spat back in his face, grinning triumphantly when he scored a direct hit to his aggressor's eye. The vicious backhand he got was worth it, even giving him an additional liquid to spit, which he did, admiring how the crimson made it look like the man was crying blood.

"You punk!" one of the man's companions roared, kicking him solidly in the back. His hands shackled behind him, Penguin failed to keep his balance and crashed down onto his side. From the corresponding pain in his arm, he'd at the least pulled a muscle in all the chaos.

He hadn't been looking for trouble, per say. It had been his turn to do the supply run, while Law browsed the town for medical whatsits (the captain might have been teaching them basic nursing, but that didn't mean he understood half the jargon the younger teen spouted). Shachi and Bepo had been left behind to guard the Polar Tang. He'd thought – they'd all thought – that he could handle a small bit of trouble if it arose, but he'd failed to realise the drunk pirates were out of his league until it was too late. His shopping was long since ruined, trampled into the ground by muddied boots, and he knew he would be sporting a beautiful black eye the next morning, to say nothing of the bruised bones and cuts he'd suffered when the assholes revealed they weren't averse to using a knife on an unarmed kid.

Penguin figured he should probably start arming himself, if he was going to be trounced that easily by a group of drunkards. Of course, that relied on him getting himself out of his current situation without irreversible damage. The crude yet effective cuffs on his wrists were proving to be quite the problem, the locks out of reach to pick.

A rough hand grabbed his arm – the one with the probably damaged muscle, the bastard – and began to drag him down the cobbled street, towards the harbour.
"I'll show you what happens to disrespectful brats," the drunk pirate declared as Penguin bit back as many noises of pain as he could. They stopped at the end of the wharf; Penguin could see the grey of the Polar Tang at the other end of the harbour, recognisable only by its unusual shape. At that distance, Shachi and Bepo wouldn't be able to see him, and they weren't stupid enough to interfere with random fights. On the plus side, the Polar Tang wasn't that far… if, as he suspected, he got thrown into the water then he could just swim for it, leaving the pirates none the wiser.

That plan went out the window the moment his ankle was grabbed, hoisting his leg up and overbalancing him, leaving him suspended by the grip on his ankle.

"You think you can swim for it, little water bird?" His hat fell from his head to land on the boards below him. Of course the drunkard had read what it said, because he clearly wasn't so intoxicated he wasn't aware of his surroundings. Penguin cursed silently again, and tried to lash out with his foot as he felt something heavy clamp around his captive ankle. "Let's see how well penguins swim with their wings clipped, shall we?"

He barely had time to take a breath, storing as much air in his lungs as he could before he was flying through the air, helpless against gravity as he crashed into the surface of the water and sank like a stone.

He dimly heard someone scream his name as the water closed above his head, and looked up at the surface to see the distorted view of his captain throwing himself at the drunk pirates, short sword in one hand and a blue Room expanding from the other.

The water was Penguin's playground. He could cut through the waves as easily as Law's Amputate sliced through flesh, finding comfort and solace in the way the water moved against his skin.

Not this time.

He writhed, fighting against the cuffs binding his wrists together tightly behind his back, but the water hadn't weakened them at all, and his injured shoulder cried out in protest as he tried to manipulate it to get his bound hands in front of him to no avail. A problem, but not an insurmountable one. Penguin refused to panic. He'd swum without using his hands before. It was harder, but not impossible.

Swimming with his hands bound behind his back, a shoulder in agony, and lead weights tied to his ankle was outside of even Penguin's ability, he discovered in horror as his attempts to kick towards the surface were thwarted by the weight. With his arms behind his back, he couldn't manipulate himself to tug them off, so he renewed his efforts to move them over his head, gritting his teeth against the pain in his shoulder. A dislocation was better than death.

He'd managed to claim a decent amount of air just before being dunked, but it wasn't infinite. As he sank lower and lower, dragged down by his weighted ankle, the bubbles escaping from his mouth were increasing in number. His time was running out rapidly, and the exertion and agony he was putting himself through to try and contort his body into a position he could use to swim was wasting more air than he'd have liked.

It might have been smarter to let himself sink limply, preserving his air for as long as possible, but Penguin had no delusions about rescue. While Law had seen him sink, his captain couldn't swim and wasn't stupid enough to think his devil fruit would suddenly forget it hated him in light of Penguin's drowning. The Polar Tang was the other end of the harbour, and Law had been too busy fighting to call for Bepo or Shachi. Quick calculations told Penguin that his air wouldn't hold out long enough for one of the two to find him.
A particularly rough twist of his shoulder had him involuntarily crying out in pain, air rushing out of his mouth all at once before the water began to rush in. A rookie mistake, he cursed himself even as he tried to close his mouth to the invading water. His air was out now, and it would be seconds, not minutes, before the pressure forced him to gulp, drawing water into his lungs faster than Law could make a Room.

The harbour was deep – they’d chosen it for that exact reason – and the light was beginning to fade. It could also be the lack of air clouding his eyesight, Penguin realised as the pressure got too much for his jaw and lungs, wrenching his mouth open in search of air that was nowhere to be found.

As the water rushed in and his sight dimmed, he thought he saw a dark shape in the water, heading straight for him.

A whale? was his last, delirious, thought.

His eyes snapped open suddenly as he retched, water expelling itself violently from his mouth before he shuddered, pained lungs labouring to draw in the precious air between coughs that felt as if his respiratory system had decided his body was a dead weight and was seeking freedom from its limp confines.

"Oh, thank god," he heard someone breathe, fingers carefully dragging through his hair.

It was then that the hard surface beneath his side registered, and the sweet sweet oxygen filling his aching lungs.

He wasn’t in the water any more.

His eyes didn’t want to open, but Penguin fought them until they begrudgingly gave in. An orange blob floated in front of his face. Odd. He forced a slow blink, and then another, watching as it began to gain definition.

Shachi. A dripping wet, very worried Shachi. Oops.

"Is he awake?" That was Law’s voice, strained and oddly choked up. "Penguin, can you hear me?"

A familiar spotted hat forced its way into his view, and he gave a weak grin, his eyes finally focusing enough to take in the scene presented to him. Behind Law and Shachi was an arm. Just one, singular arm. It wasn’t attached to anything at all. Beside it was a head, which seemed to be screaming profanities. Penguin hadn’t even noticed, but the sight was satisfying. The drunk pirate still had that trickle of blood falling from his eye. "Penguin?"

Law sounded in pain, so Penguin returned his attention to him. He didn’t look injured, but his eyes were red and slightly puffy. It didn’t look right.

"Sorry," he finally rasped, feeling like he’d swallowed sandpaper and washed it down with an impressive dose of metal filings. "I lost the shopping."

"Who cares about the shopping, you dumbass!" Shachi erupted, the fingers in his hair tightening. Penguin didn’t have the energy to wince. "Don’t you dare scare us like that ever again, you hear me?"

Penguin grinned again, closing his eyes to a sharp call of his name from Law.

"Lemme sleep," he slurred, too exhausted from his ordeal to bother with proper diction. "M okay, promise," he added as a small hand rested on his shoulder lightly. The action reminded him of his aching shoulder, and he let out a groan of protest, which devolved into further coughing.
"No, you're not," Law said sternly, sounding as if he'd entered his 'doctor mode', as the rest of them liked to call it. "Shachi, help me." There was a grunt of acknowledgement, and Penguin felt himself being manoeuvred to his feet, arms wrapping around him from both sides. Feeling utterly boneless, Penguin slumped forwards, almost dragging them back to the ground with him.

"Watch it," Shachi complained, but it lacked his usual bite as Penguin felt him readjust his grip.

"Penguin, you need to stay awake until we get back to the Tang," Law told him. "You can sleep there, I promise."

He let out a sound that was supposed to be acknowledgement as he felt them pull him along, although it sounded like a drunken slur, and tried to persuade his legs to cooperate with limited success.

He made it as far as Bepo, who sounded like he'd jumped off the submarine as soon as they were close enough, before he couldn't fight any more, collapsing into warm fluffy arms.

"Close enough, I suppose," he heard Law sigh as Bepo lifted him easily to carry him the rest of the way, before he knew no more.

Chapter End Notes

A muse given to me by a friend who puts up with my headcanon ramblings at stupid times of the night, because what character better to almost-drown than the most confident swimmer in the group? I may well write a companion piece to this later, because there's so much I couldn't put in from Penguin's PoV.
It was just supposed to be a supply stop. No fights, no ruckus, just a simple investigation of what the town had to offer them (nothing Law cared for) before setting sail once more. Penguin was handling the mundane shopping, or so Law had thought until his attention had been caught by a commotion at the harbour. It was almost as far away from the Polar Tang as possible. He'd thought that was a good thing, until he'd recognised the victim, barely visible between the thickset bodies of the rowdy pirates tormenting him.

"Penguin!" he screamed, blowing any and all chances of taking them by surprise, as his nakama was tossed into the water. It shouldn't be a concern, Penguin was the best swimmer out of the four of them, but he was injured, and Law thought he'd been tied up, too. Could he still swim? He charged the adults, uncaring that they were all twice his size and brandishing knives with a glint in their eye.

"Another brat playing at piracy?" one – the one that had thrown Penguin, and probably the captain – jeered. His breath stank of stale rum and Law wrinkled his nose even as he summoned a Room and slashed with his sword, delighting in their startled shouts as their bodies separated.

Penguin wasn't surfacing. That wasn't necessarily a cause for concern, Law tried to tell himself as he wildly slashed again, relieving the pirates of their ability to use their legs; if Penguin was in trouble, they wouldn't need them again. He might not have known Law was there, so he might be swimming towards the Polar Tang, escaping rather than risking another beating. It would be the sensible thing to do.

Law Shambled his nakama's abandoned hat into his hand, clutching it tightly while he continued to dice the pirates that had dared hurt Penguin. Still no sign of Penguin. Law wanted to dive in himself, to check that Penguin was simply staying out of sight and wasn't in trouble, but common sense prevailed. Penguin only might be in trouble. If Law entered the water, he would definitely be in trouble.

He hated feeling so useless. All he could do was distract Penguin's attackers and hope he was getting himself clear, even though a heavy feeling in his gut told him that even Penguin couldn't swim if he was trussed up. He squashed it ruthlessly, because what could he do? Bepo and Shachi were too far away, and he hadn't finished dealing with the drunk pirates. If he left without finishing the job, they might pursue him to the ship, endangering them all, or dive into the water after Penguin, to make sure he drowned.

"Damn it!" he cursed, his next violent slash taking out the edge of the wharf as well as slicing a man's head neatly in half. If Law was in a better mood, he'd have grinned, but all he could think was that it had been over a minute since Penguin fell in, and there was still no sign. The average human
could hold their breath for about that long, and while he knew Penguin was above average, if he was injured, or otherwise weakened, he wouldn't be at his peak. Penguin could already be-

"Captain!" Shachi's yell was perfectly timed to stop Law thinking the worst. He risked a glance back to see the ginger sprinting towards him, and bit back the scolding on his lips. Shachi was supposed to be guarding the Tang with Bepo. But Shachi could swim. "Captain, what's-

"Find Penguin," Law ground out, finishing dicing the lackeys and turning his attention to the captain, whose face had turned an interesting shade of purple. "He's in the water but he hasn't surfaced yet."

To his credit Shachi didn't ask any questions, leaping straight in. Shachi would be fine. He wasn't injured, had entered the water under his own terms. Law kept himself occupied by dissecting the drunk captain, who had started jeering about how the even the 'water bird' couldn't swim 'tied to an anchor'. If it weren't for the words in question, Law would have been fascinated by the fact that his tongue still worked even after he Amputated it.

"Law!" He whirled around in the direction of the cry, seeing Shachi bobbing in the water frantically. In his arms was the limp form of Penguin, whose lips were far too blue for Law's liking. His breath caught in his chest before he threw himself to the ground, reaching an arm out to the pair of them as far as he could without falling in himself. Shachi manoeuvred the two of them closer, and Law's hand closed on the collar of Penguin's clothes, tugging him up onto the pier with help from Shachi below.

He didn't waste time helping Shachi out, hyper aware that Penguin wasn't breathing as he frantically began treatment, ignoring the jeers of the severed heads surrounding them.

"Don't you dare leave me," he growled as he pounded on the unmoving chest, his vision blurring. He couldn't lose anyone else, not when he'd been standing right there. He should have been faster, used his Room before Penguin hit the water, anything to prevent yet another death right in front of his eyes. "Please, Penguin. Please."

He barely registered a dripping-wet Shachi pulling himself out of the water beside him, the ginger uncharacteristically quiet as he started to reach for his friend, only for his hand to stop short, hovering uncertainly. Law didn't have the time to tell him contact was okay, might help. In the end, he didn't need to, Shachi occupying his fingers with removing all the restraints as he bit his lip, before resting his hand on his friend's wet hair.

"Come on, Penguin," he heard him mumble. "Water? After everything we've been through?"

Whether it was just coincidence, or Penguin had heard his friend, Law didn't know, but he didn't question it as sudden coughs wracked the unconscious form. Law hurriedly rolled him over onto his side, into the recovery position, as he vomited water before valiantly attempting to cough up his lungs.

Shachi's murmured relief was clearly audible to Law, who backed off slightly to let the older teen coax the initial responses out of Penguin. When he heard nothing, but saw Shachi's face relax slightly, he furiously wiped at his face with his sleeve, getting rid of the excess moisture forming there before inserting himself into the one-sided conversation. Penguin was shivering badly, although he seemed unaware of it as he apologised for losing the shopping, of all things.

Law agreed with Shachi's outburst. Penguin's life was far, far more important than some replaceable groceries. His heart skipped a beat when the older teen's eyes began to drift shut again, not reassured in the slightest by the slurred attempts to pacify him. Penguin could be in shock, he was already showing symptoms of hypothermia which needed immediate attention, and Law didn't even want to
think about secondary drowning. He had to get back to the Tang immediately.

The groan of pain as he got Shachi to help him shift the taller teen was not reassuring in the slightest. He didn't know how badly Penguin had been injured prior to his dunking, didn't know if moving him was making it worse, but he couldn't treat him there on the jetty, and Penguin was easily the tallest and heaviest of the three human Heart Pirates. Neither Law nor Shachi could safely carry him.

Penguin managed some semblance of movement as they half-carried, half dragged him back towards the Tang. Law's breath caught as he didn't quite make it to the Tang before passing out, but as Bepo had sprung from the deck the moment he thought they were close enough and lifted him bodily into his arms, Law supposed that was the best he could ask for.

"Bepo, take him to the infirmary," he ordered, and the mink obeyed without question. "Shachi-

"I'm going to the infirmary," the ginger cut him off, his voice tight. Law gripped his shoulder tightly, forcing him to a stop once they were on the deck.

"You are going to dry off and get changed," he demanded. "Then bring a change of clothes for Penguin to the infirmary."

"I can dry off later!" Shachi protested, and Law growled.

"I am not dealing with two hypothermic patients. Dry off and warm up." Shachi wasn't visibly shaking, but Law could feel the starting tremors under his hand. He didn't wait to hear any more protests, hurrying down to the infirmary where Bepo had laid Penguin on a bed.

"He's so cold, Captain," Bepo reported, his voice subdued with worry. Law grit his teeth, approaching his unconscious nakama and frowning. He wasn't shaking quite as much as he had been on the jetty, but that wasn't a good sign. Not when his fingertips were going blue.

"Find towels and blankets," he ordered. "As many of both as you can, but leave a couple for Shachi." The ginger hadn't appeared in the infirmary yet, so hopefully he was doing as he was told. Bepo disappeared with a short sound of acknowledgement, leaving Law alone with his patient.

The wet clothes were the first concern, and Law wrestled them off as best he could, using Amputate when his physical strength wasn't enough. Multiple bruises greeted him, as well as gashes courtesy of the pirates' knives. They were probably infected, thanks to the dunking.

The first thing he needed to do was make sure all the water had left Penguin's system, an easy enough feat with his powers, although still time consuming. Bepo returned, almost hidden behind the mound of towels and blankets, and Law set him straight to drying Penguin off. Shachi reappeared, largely dry (his hair was still dripping but Law would throw a towel on his head once Penguin's lungs were back where they belonged, water-free), and helped Bepo without being asked.

Finally satisfied that secondary drowning was no longer a probable concern, Law turned his attention to the wounds. The bruising he could do nothing for, but the cuts were cleaned and wrapped before he utilised Shachi's help to dress Penguin in the pyjamas he'd brought along. The older teen finally treated and dry, he wrapped him solidly in blankets and watched in relief as the shivering returned.

Eyeing Shachi, and tossing the promised towel on his head, he directed Bepo to curl up with Penguin, hoping that the warm fur and the physical contact would help. That done, he wrapped a blanket around the protesting Shachi, who was still colder than Law would have liked, although thankfully not hypothermic, and ruffled the ginger hair with the towel to dry it off.

Finally freeing Shachi and allowing him to sit by the bed, Law mentally ran through everything he'd
done, trying to check he hadn't missed anything, anything that might pose a risk to Penguin's recovery. Get rid of the water, dry him, warm him, wrap his injuries, warm him more-

An arm wrapped around his waist and yanked him towards Shachi, who felt marginally warmer than he had a minute previously.

"Stop worrying," the ginger sighed, pulling Law into the confines of the blanket wrapped around him. "He's going to be fine now, just you wait and see." There was a minute tremble in his voice, and Law knew he was trying to reassure himself as well. The effort was appreciated, and Law wrapped his arms around the ginger to a quiet noise of surprise, donating his body heat to help him warm up as they watched Penguin's steady breathing.

At some point, probably when Law had been fussing with Shachi, he'd passed from unconsciousness to merely sleeping, and Law managed a relieved smile. Everything was going to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

"Drown" from Law's PoV. It's pretty much a direct sequel, hence me posting it in sequence. I couldn't fit it in either version, and I think doing the same scene from a third PoV is overkill, so the reason Shachi came over was because he saw Law's Room activate and came to investigate.
The relationship between a captain and their crew was rarely as clear-cut as it sounded on paper. By definition, a captain was in charge and the crew did whatever they said. Sometimes, a first mate or similar rank existed, to assist the captain where required, but they were still tied to the captain’s orders.

Penguin and Shachi were well aware that they hardly fit into such neat boxes. It was difficult to keep Law constantly on that pedestal. Bepo managed it, somehow, and the newest members of the crew also tried their hardest to conform to what they believed the hierarchy should be, but the distinction had long since blurred away into nothing for the two from Swallow Island.

Law was their captain, yes. If he gave an order, they would follow (although some orders demanded questioning and who better to do so than them). But there were times when Law needed supporting as much as anyone else. After all, he was only human, no matter how much he tried to quash his humanity and general mortal requirements (food and sleep were never optional extras, regardless what he sometimes thought). Occasionally he got injured, or sick, and they needed to step up to keep the crew running smoothly. Other times he was just too tired, too stressed, to make decisions, so they’d gently prod him in the right direction with casual remarks he could take cues from. He probably didn’t even realise they were doing it half the time, but that suited them just fine. They weren’t doing it for recognition.

The first time they’d met him, he’d laid them flat on their back in less than a minute, yes. He’d also been recovering from illness and swaying on his feet. They hadn’t noticed it at the time, too busy nursing bruised egos and licking their wounds to draw themselves out of their selfish bubbles they lived in, but in the weeks that had followed it had become obvious. His energy came in fits and starts, improving over time as the white blemishes on his skin faded away, and nightmares were a common visitor if he wasn’t curled up with one of them, using Bepo as an all-too willing pillow.

Somewhere along the way, Law had wormed his way into their life as more than just the crazy strong brat that broke them out of the confines of their going-nowhere lives (with no interests other than brawling and no parents to teach them family trades, they’d never had a future). He was their captain, their leader, but as they silently held him together during yet another restless night, he became their brother.

Their younger brother, who tried to face the world by himself but sometimes couldn't quite do it. The one they held up from the shadows, hiding their support even from him, yet unyielding all the same. They weren't strong enough to defend him from the world – no, Law was always the knowledgeable one, the better fighter, the leader – but they were strong enough to hold him up so he could face whatever it was he needed to face.
Even thirteen years later, gearing up to face down his worst nightmare determinedly *alone* regardless of any and all protests from the crew, they stayed the steady support, dragging the truth of why he was leaving them out (he didn't want to worry about them getting hurt, Doflamingo had taken too much from him already) before putting on the front he needed to see to know that they'd be okay without him. They'd go to Zou, give him the peace of mind he so desperately needed.

The fact that they'd come running the moment he was in trouble was a fact he didn't need to know, but it would take far more than some flamingo with a couple of strings to keep them from protecting him, if the situation demanded it.

(It turned out that while a flamingo couldn't stop them, a mammoth could, but they gritted their teeth and pushed through because Law needed them to be okay when he came back. So they were going to be okay, come hell or high water).
Like any self-respecting pirate crew, the Heart Pirates were always looking for reasons to throw a party. Nothing beat the flow of rum and subsequent drunken singing and dancing, safe hundreds or even thousands of metres below the surface. A new crew member, a successful raid, or a victorious fight were popular reasons to break out the alcohol and throw their inhibitions out of the metaphorical window for the evening (the next-morning hangovers were totally worth it, even if their stubborn captain refused to accelerate the recovery in a vain hope that they’d stop drinking quite so much).

The favourite occasion, by far, was a birthday.

A calendar sat on the wall of the mess hall, carefully inscribed with the birthdays (and ages, if disclosed) of every member of the crew. Parties were always personalised, because there was nothing worse than celebrating in the wrong way on someone’s birthday. For many of them, alcohol was ripe, but there were a few who preferred a more sedate celebration.

Penguin and Shachi, the presumed instigators of the original party planning (long since transformed into a crew-wide activity), liked it loud. For them, no party was over until at least one of them passed out cold from over-consumption (if they drunk too much, Law would always save them from the dangerous side effects, no matter how much he grumbled in the process and pointedly left the hangovers intact). Many of the younger members followed their lead, singing off-key songs from their hometowns in North Blue as a little bit of home.

Others, generally the older, more mature members of the crew, preferred something slightly quieter where no-one got so smashed they couldn’t remember what they did. Favourite games were brought out and played over and over again, late into the night until the friendly buzz of alcohol coaxed them all to sleep, sprawled all over the recreation room with no-one leaving for the safety of their bunk rooms (even Law would stay, curled up awkwardly in his favourite chair and watching over them all fondly until sleep claimed him, too).

Bepo had no real love for alcohol, but aside from that his party was the same, with games and good cheer taking them long into the night. His was the only one to happen on deck, out in the fresh air he craved so much.

It was totally unsurprising that Law’s birthday was a subdued affair, in comparison. Many of the crew didn’t even know how old their captain was (questions got answers anywhere between twenty and thirty five), but the general feeling was that it didn’t matter. For Law, a birthday celebration was less a celebration of his age, and more marking the achievement that he’d survived yet another year. He liked to spend it with his crew, listening to them exchange stories over and over again, curled up in the centre of the room, amidst them all, with a single mug of rum and a slice of his (gluten-free)
birthday cake.

That was one more night in the year where no-one retired to their bunk rooms for the night, instead curling up in blanket nests on the floor of the recreation room, with their captain firmly in the centre.

It didn't matter how much alcohol was consumed (or not). It didn't matter if they sang, played games or swapped tales. A party brought them all together, time and time again, no matter what the world threw their way.

Really, was it any wonder they loved them so much?
Penguin clutched Shachi tightly, nudging the younger to bury his face in his chest as best he could with their height difference. He didn't have any spare shades on him, and the unforgiving dessert they'd found themselves in had nowhere to hide from the sun. Returning to the Polar Tang was their only option, but with Shachi blinded the journey faced complications Penguin was in no position to overcome by himself.

He'd called Law on a baby den den mushi, giving him as much information as he dared, conscious of the risks of a Marine's black den den mushi potentially in the area. The thugs that had attacked them and smashed Shachi's shades were all dealt with, but facing more enemies was not high on his to-do list. In his current state Shachi couldn't defend himself, and Penguin refused to let go of him when he knew their current position was the best way to ease his pain.

It reminded him of their childhood years, when the ginger repeatedly ran out to play without his glasses, only to later hide his tears at the pain as the light bouncing from the snow damaged his eyes yet again. Back on Swallow Island, treatment was easily obtained, but at their current location – a summer island – snow blindness didn't exist, and subsequently nor did any treatment.

"We can head back," Shachi mumbled, voice muffled against Penguin's chest. "I can walk."

"No," Penguin said firmly, the hand pressing against the back of his head fiddling with the ginger strands poking out from underneath Shachi's hat. "Captain's coming to get us. If we move, he might miss us."

"You shouldn't have called him," the younger grumbled. "The Tang's not that far away." Penguin sighed, surveying the horizon once more to check for enemies, or their own captain's approach.

"I refuse to let you add to the permanent damage," he retorted, tightening his grip when Shachi started to wriggle away. "You can refuse to let Law repair your eyes all you want, but I won't let you make it worse." Physically the two of them were evenly matched, but with Shachi already pinned, keeping hold of him wasn't too much of an issue. It helped that he knew the ginger was in agony, regardless of how much he tried to hide it. His front was slowly getting damp from the involuntary tears.

He caught sight of a lone figure approaching them from the direction he knew the Tang was moored, and narrowed his eyes, trying to discern if it was their captain, or someone to worry about. They were certainly tall and lean enough to be Law, but Penguin hadn't survived ten years of piracy by being complacent.

"I take it you lost your first aid kit somewhere along the way?" The familiar drawl allowed Penguin to finally relax, looking up at his captain with a sigh of relief when he saw a familiar box in one
hand. He nodded to the slashed packet on the sand a short distance away. A lucky swipe of a dagger had taken it out, and with so much sand around Penguin didn't trust anything in it near Shachi's eyes, the reason he'd called Law rather than administering his own initial treatment. "I see." Law handed him Kikoku, which Penguin held awkwardly, pressed to Shachi's back. The ginger had gone still at the arrival of their captain.

Both hands free, Law carefully opened the box, keeping it close to his chest to shield it from the risk of sand particles getting in, and withdrew thin bandages before resting a hand on Shachi's shoulder. Penguin helped coax him to shift back slightly so Law could gently place them over the weeping eyes, shifting Shachi's hat out of the way for easier access.

"How's that?" Law asked once it was secured, carefully turning Shachi to face him. Depending on the severity, sometimes the ginger needed more layers than others and they could never tell until they started.

Shachi's flinch betrayed him even before he opened his mouth, but he dutifully answered nonetheless.

"Gonna need another layer, captain," he admitted, raising a hand to cast shade over his bandaged eyes. Law made a noise of acknowledgement before fishing out a second strip to place over the first. Shachi nodded once it was fastened, and both Law and Penguin let out a sigh of relief. Two layers wasn't so bad. With the sun glancing off the dessert around them they'd half-expected it to need more.

Penguin placed the hat back on his head for him, and Shachi grinned up at him. He'd told them before that with only two layers of the thin material, he could still see vague shapes, and the fact always reassured Penguin, who hated it when Shachi was totally blinded.

"Now we can go back," he said, slipping an arm around Shachi's shoulders semi-casually, holding him close enough to guide him without seeming like he was supporting him. As Shachi had said earlier, he was perfectly capable of walking. Law reclaimed Kikoku from Penguin's grip before positioning himself by Shachi's other side although he didn't touch the ginger, knowing that Penguin's hold was all Shachi needed and unwilling to treat him like an invalid.

Once they were back in the safety of the Polar Tang, Law could do more for him, amid curses that Shachi wouldn't let him cure him once and for all. Until then he'd act as an extra lookout, allowing Penguin to concentrate on making sure he didn't accidentally lead Shachi somewhere he'd lose his footing.
Hormones

Chapter Notes

Characters: Law, Penguin, Shachi
Rating: Teen
Warnings: mentions of brothels
Tags: Nakamaship

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They'd started visiting brothels as their teenage years drew to a close, the call of hormones too much to resist. Law, his own hormones markedly absent in that sense, had long since resigned himself to spending the night curled up against Bepo's stomach on the deck, waiting for his two older nakama to come back.

He didn't have to wait up for them, they insisted one night when they came back particularly late to find him struggling to keep his eyes open any longer, Bepo already snoring away. Law had ignored them, remaining up night after night when they were on shore until he knew they were back safely. He refused to admit that he was uneasy the entire time they were away – brothels had the potential to be an all too obvious trap for the unwary pirate, and for as long as Penguin and Shachi were letting their hormones think for them, he couldn't relax. That they had no bounty, no target painted on their backs, was a small blessing, he supposed. The workers had no incentive to stab them in the back (and that was the only reason he allowed the visits at all).

When Law finally went through his growth spurt, stretching out like a gangly beanpole with constantly too-short trousers (and overtaking first an irate Shachi, and then a resigned Penguin in height), he began to notice things himself, when he went ashore. In the past, his small scrawny self had been able to slip reasonably unnoticed wherever he wanted to go, while the taller, fitter two drew the spotlight and appreciative catcalls and whistles that almost always preluded a late night for Law, waiting on the deck for them to come home.

Now, those same calls were aimed at him, as if he'd suddenly become far more desirable as a specimen of the human race just by growing a foot or two. Where before the calls had been for ginger or Penguin-boy, now they were for golden eyes. Law ignored them, no more interested than before.

The other two started to whine, realising that the spotlight had been well and truly stolen by their captain, but Law ignored their petty complaints, too. It still hadn't stopped them from seeking out company some nights; being upstaged had hardly led to a decline in interest no matter what Shachi whined ("why would they look at me when they can look at you. It's like I'm invisible nowadays, captain!")

What did stop them, to Law's surprise, was the issuing of his first bounty poster. Both of them, not to mention the other crewmembers that had slowly been trickling in over the months, were still completely bounty-less and therefore theoretically as safe as a pirate could be in such establishments, so Law hadn't expected any change to the routine at the first island they landed on after his poster was released.
He supposed they must have discussed it, although he'd never caught them in the act, because that night they pointedly headed below deck to find a bed to crash in (they ended up claiming Law's, dragging the captain in with them when he began to complain). Surprised, Law allowed the contact, even as his mind asked the questions – why were they here and not at the brothel less than a five minute walk away.

"Our jolly roger is easily visible," Penguin explained, not waiting for a question. That was probably a good thing, as Law hadn't been planning on asking. "They're not using us to get to you."

"Besides," Shachi added, his face buried in Law's shoulder. "With the Grand Line coming up, we should probably curb that habit anyway." That, Law couldn't argue with, and was secretly relieved that the two had always been aware of the risks – and could bring themselves to stop when they deemed the risks too high.

He chose to turn a blind eye to the subsequent increase in dubious reading material around the ship, considering it a fair trade for their safety. Sometimes they slipped up, bewitched by hormones that by all rights should have died to manageable levels by the time they reached their mid-twenties, but Law watched out for them (Amazon Lily was a particularly memorable example of unwelcome teenage hormones resurfacing). He'd keep his crew safe, even from their own hormones if he had to.

Chapter End Notes

This is as close as I'm getting to addressing sexuality, unless we get something solidly canon, because that's an entire can of worms I'm not interested in opening, even if I have my own ideas on the topic. We know Penguin and Shachi are at the very least visibly enamoured by Hancock (while Law is not).
Abnormal

Chapter Notes

Characters: Heart Pirates, Law
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Marineford

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They'd all known, back when they'd joined the crew, that their captain was not normal. Whether it be small quirks, like his avoidance of the colour white, or big things like his abilities (cutting someone with no resulting blood was odd no matter how you looked at it), Trafalgar Law defied all definitions of the word 'normal', often going so far as to raise a middle finger at it as he wandered with some deliberation far away from the straight and narrow.

Of course, he was a pirate, so some eccentricity was expected. They all had that; that spark in them that made them seek out a life on the wrong side of the law, abandoning a simple, safe, life for one wrought with strife at every turn. It was what made a pirate a pirate. His open taunting of the Marines was more blatant than perhaps some pirates, but it wasn't outside the realms of usual piracy.

But Law took it one step further. The Marines, the World Government… those were their natural enemies. Other pirate crews, not so much. Rivals, certainly. Potential opponents? More likely than not. Natural enemies? Not by the usual unspoken laws of piracy. Law, though, had a way of needling even the most mellow captains (and wasn't that a relative scale) into a full-blown ire. Effortlessly, he'd break through all their defences with a single verbal jab, winding them into an uncontrolled frenzy with the same smirk fixed on his face the entire time. Anger led to mistakes, and Law never showed any signs of biting off more than he could chew, even if sometimes his gait back to the Tang wasn't so steady, or his skin was stained with splashes of his own blood.

His clear antagonistic nature towards Marines and pirates alike was the reason the Heart Pirates all but shut down the moment he declared they were heading to Marineford.

They'd been watching the battle, like everyone else in the vicinity. The clash of the Whitebeard Pirates and the Marines was legendary – and totally out of their league. A Supernova crew they might be, but compared to the Yonkou they were but snowflakes before an avalanche. Most had assumed that, alongside the other Supernova crews, they'd observe from a safe distance, watching one era crash to its end and another rise to take its place. Certainly, they had no reason to get involved.

They'd obeyed, though, because what else could they do in the face of their captain's determination? Bepo had been the first to snap out of it, hurrying to the control room to set the course while Penguin and Shachi picked themselves up to follow him. Like a re-oiled machine just starting up again, the rest of them slowly fell to their positions as the Tang submerged and headed towards what felt like certain death.

It almost had been certain death, saved first by the cry of a Marine – of all things! – and then by the cock of Benn Beckman's gun against Kizaru's head. In the end, their new recruit saved them,
pushing the Tang to its limits to escape first the ice, and then the lasers that looked to puncture the metal protecting them from the pressure of the deep sea. It would only have taken a single scratch from one laser to breach their hull, a fact those of the crew not involved in the surgeries were all too aware of as they watched the never-ending light show outside the port holes.

They'd infiltrated Marineford, of all places, to save a rival captain. Nor was it just any captain, but another Supernova, with a higher bounty than Law’s and the recklessness to punch out a tenryubito. That was concerning enough in its own right, but then Law dropped the final bombshell on them.

It had been a whim.

Trafalgar Law did not do whims. Trafalgar Law did strategies wrapped up in plots and schemes with a final dose of contingency plans at least as detailed as the original, if not more so.

What was it, they wondered on Amazon Lily as they shot glances over to their captain, still clutching that straw hat, about Monkey D. Luffy that had their paranoid captain throwing caution to the wind to save him?

More importantly, what did that mean for them?

It was almost a relief, two weeks later, when Law vetoed any suggestions of advancing into the New World, citing that it was better to let the other crews destroy each other rather than get involved themselves. Their captain was back, schemes, plots and tactics in place as if they'd never left.

The damage Monkey D. Luffy had inflicted upon their poor infirmary was an unwelcome reminder otherwise.

Chapter End Notes

If even Law himself can't give a solid reason why he saved Luffy, what hope does anyone else have of justifying it? Certainly not the poor crew that got dragged into the middle of a warzone way over their heads...
Amid everything else, there was a singular fear that never left Penguin's mind. It had spent most of the time at the forefront, aside from Jack's attack on Zou and the subsequent events that happened – he preferred not to think about those now that they were over, but with frequent pain wracking his body whenever the previous dose of painkillers wore off they were difficult to ignore.

The fear that Law would never come back.

Their captain wouldn't abandon them, of course. Penguin was all too aware of what they meant to him (so much that he wouldn't risk them even nearing Doflamingo's webs), and knew that it would kill Law to tear him away from them permanently. Sadly, kill was an all too likely scenario. Law had spent half his life – the entire time Penguin had known him – working to take down the Shichibukai in the memory of a man whose place in Law's heart had been larger than the crew could ever hope to achieve. He might not be going there with the intention of dying, but Penguin knew him.

If it took Law's life to end Doflamingo's, that would be a price he'd pay in an instant. He'd seen it in the square of his shoulders before he'd teleported himself off of the Tang's deck and onto Punk Hazard. Law was prepared to pay whatever cost it took (short of his own crew, but wasn't that the whole reason Penguin was stuck on Zou worrying instead of covering his captain's back like he should be) to take Doflamingo down.

When Jack was over and done with, the Calamity abandoning them to their fate, only for half of the Straw Hats to turn up just in time to save their lives and then bear the first news they'd had in months of their captain, he wasn't pacified. The vivre card had flared up badly, even if it slowly began to repair itself, and what could the Straw Hats do to stop Law? They didn't know him, wouldn't know that the whole reason Penguin was stuck on Zou worrying instead of covering his captain's back like he should be) to take Doflamingo down.

Then the News Coo brought word that Doflamingo was defeated, using pictures Penguin recognised as the same old, same old photographs they churned out whenever Law featured. There was nothing there to suggest his condition, to tell him the price Law had paid to win. His only comfort was that the vivre card hadn't lit up again, but there were several things Law could have lost without the vivre card identifying a risk to his life, and Doflamingo and his crew had the ability to take so many of those things away.

When Law finally stood before them again, one arm wrapped in a bandage but otherwise looking as healthy as when he'd left them, the only reason Penguin didn't jump on him was because Bepo got there first. He satisfied himself with close contact as they caught up, unbelieving that Law had managed to save his arm – the apparent price – and watched how relaxed he'd become, now that his
nightmare was over.

It brought a delight that his own injuries couldn't dampen to see him. Carefree was the wrong word – with Kaido looming on the horizon, and the crew's own injuries, such complacency was suicide – but a weight had lifted from Law for the first time in the thirteen years Penguin had known him. For the first time, it was as if he was seeing his captain for who he truly was, without the distortion of revenge separating him from the world.

Penguin immediately decided he preferred this new captain, whose smiles reached his eyes and whose laugh came from the belly. He still hated bread, still loved that tattered hat, still loved them, but it was purer now. Untainted. (That's not to say there was no shadow at all – Cora-san had been one thing, but Flevance was a whole other mess and defeating Doflamingo would do nothing for that grief – but now the light reached further into the enigma that was Trafalgar D. Water Law).

Still, Penguin had never been afraid to speak his mind to his captain, and he wasn't about to start now.

"Promise," he said, joining Law in the silent confines of the library as they headed off to Wano in their next crazy scheme. His captain had a book open in front of him, but he was paying it no attention, piercing golden eyes staring out through the porthole beside him at the dark ocean outside. "You won't do that again." Law was silent for a long while, his gaze never shifting. Penguin chose to join him in looking out of the window, preferring that to watching his captain's face for clues as to what was going on in his head. It would only be an exercise in futility.

"You'll have to be more specific than that," Law eventually spoke, his eyes finally flicking in Penguin's direction for a split second before returning to the dark view outside. "I've done many things recently."

Penguin took a glance around the room, to check that they were alone. They weren't – Nico Robin was at the other end of the room, surrounded by books she was seemingly engrossed in. Penguin didn't believe for one second she wasn't capable of eavesdropping, but the same was true wherever she was in the ship, so he'd have to hope she was courteous enough to keep her curiosity in check.

Shachi had also followed him in, silently taking his place on Law's other side. They'd never discussed it, not wanting to air the horrors in their mind in case it somehow made it a reality, but Penguin knew he'd thought the same way, held the same fear.

"Make any plan that considers your death a viable option," he said bluntly, keeping his voice down so that Nico Robin didn't have the convenient excuse that she couldn't possibly not overhear. From the way Law's back stiffened, that had not been what he'd been expecting. Penguin wasn't surprised. 'Never leave us behind again' would have been a far more predictable answer, but he wasn't naïve enough to think that he could ever get Law to agree to that.

"What makes you think I did?" the younger man asked slowly, almost nonchalantly. Penguin wasn't fooled, and nor was Shachi.

"We've known you for thirteen years," the ginger pointed out, his voice slightly louder than Penguin's had been, yet still not enough to disturb the silence at the other end of the room. "Did you honestly think we couldn't tell?"

Law let out a short bark of laughter, Nico Robin raising her head briefly at the sound before returning to her books.

"I can't promise that," he said, closing his eyes. "It would be remiss to exclude entire stratagems
simply because the price is less than ideal." Penguin's hand curled into a fist, but Shachi beat him to a retort.

"Yes you can," he growled. "I may not be the naïve kid that followed you from Swallow Island thirteen years ago, but your own death is still never the answer."

"If you can't promise," Penguin cut in, interrupting Law before he even had a chance to do much more than open his mouth in some nonsensical response that appealed to only Law's twisted sense of logic, "then I can't promise, either."

"Promise what?" Law's voice was low, dangerous. He clearly didn't like the turn the conversation had taken, but Penguin wasn't about to back out now. He would extract the promise from Law, whatever dirty tricks it took.

"Promise not to use my own life as a price for success," he said, refusing to let himself react to the sudden hiss of air from his captain. "Or not to follow you if you do."

"You're being ridiculous!" Law snapped. Penguin saw Nico Robin quietly gather up some books and slip out of the room at the raised voice. "Your life isn't worth-"

"And yours is?" Shachi interrupted, folding his arms. "I'm with Penguin. If you don't promise, I won't either."

Law glowered at them both.

"No," he said firmly, standing up suddenly. "You're both talking nonsense. I won't let you do such stupid things."

"If you've already sacrificed yourself, how do you plan to stop us?" Penguin challenged, stepping closer so that his chest was barely an inch from Law's, crowding him against the porthole. A shark flashed by behind Law's back. "We swore we'd follow you. Thirteen years hasn't changed that. We gave you space to deal with Doflamingo, yes, but we were ready to jump in the moment your vivre card lit up."

"Now Doflamingo's gone," Shachi took over, joining Penguin in crowding Law. "That was your battle, the one we had no right to intrude on. From here on out, we're working together, whatever your aims are. Kaido? One Piece? You need a crew for those. The World Government? If you think for one moment you're the only one in this crew with a beef with them, you need to think again."

Law had started to tremble, his left hand coming up to tug the bill of his hat down over his eyes.

"We're in this together," Penguin reminded him, letting his voice soften just a fraction. "Have the last thirteen years told you nothing?"

"Idiots," Law muttered, although there was no bite to the word, just heavily-concealed fondness. "You're both idiots. That hasn't changed at all." The two of them laughed softly, watching the corners of his mouth twitch up into a smile. "Fine. You win this time. I promise I won't consider my death a viable plan." Penguin grinned, Shachi sporting a matching smile beside him. "But only for as long as you two promise the same. I refuse to lose you to your own stupidity."

"I promise," they chorused, bringing Law into a tight hug, which was tentatively returned after a few seconds. Penguin's injuries complained, but he ignored them, considering it penance for knowingly using his captain's fear of losing them against him to extract the promise.
I finally got around to watching Brook vs Big Mom in the anime, and Brook's line about worst case scenarios ("What kind of fool would ever plan to die") immediately made me think of how willing Law was to sacrifice his own life to defeat Doflamingo.
Law sat in the recreation room, looking out of a window despondently. None of the crew had approached him, knowing that there was only one person that could draw him out of his funk, and that one person currently wasn't ready. Long fingers flexed and fidgeted, determined to find something to occupy themselves with. Shachi had already dragged them out of his hair several times, the only crew member in arm's length, although he'd said nothing.

He was the guard, Law assumed. Penguin had made it perfectly clear that no-one was allowed to disturb him ("and that includes you, Captain") while he worked, and the ginger had immediately taken up Captain-watch. It could be worse, Law mused. Shachi could be talking, filling the silence with inane chatter in a vain attempt to cheer him up. He'd half-expected it – Shachi was one of the noisiest members of the crew – and was grateful to be wrong.

Still, what was taking Penguin so long? It had been well over an hour since the older man had secluded himself away in the bunk room he shared with Shachi. Law knew pitifully little of the craft in question, but surely an hour was plenty of time to finish it?

Firm fingers wrapped around his and coaxed them out from his hair again. Law didn't remember putting them there.

"Law."

He turned to face the speaker so fast he almost fell of his chair. Penguin approached him steadily, calm and confident in his strides. Law paid the observation no heed, his focus solely on the item Penguin was carrying gently in his hands, as if it were made of glass.

"I'm sorry, the fabric didn't match exactly-" Law tuned out Penguin's babble as he moved to meet him in the middle of the room, taking the precious object from his hands and turning it around to check it from all angles.

It wasn't the same as before, a fact that pained Law, but the repair work was neat and all but invisible. The new fabric was fresher, fluffier than the old, which was beginning to show its age despite Penguin's careful maintenance, but as Law checked the inside, the most important thing was still there, untouched.

He ran a nostalgic finger over the black stitches once, before affixing his beloved hat back on his head, where it belonged. Opening his mouth to thank Penguin, he found that his throat had all choked up and swallowed his words unspoken. Instead, he rested a hand heavily on Penguin's shoulder as he walked past, heading for the sanctity of his room.
He had to pass Penguin and Shachi's room to do so, and paused when he saw the open door. That in itself was nothing unusual, but what caught Law's eye was the piles of fabric on the lower bunk, all bearing a striking similarity to the hat on his head. What did Penguin plan on doing with all that? He highly doubted buying that much had been a mistake.

A puzzle for another time, he decided, sensing the man in question approaching, and continued to his own room. Sitting on the bed, he took the hat off to look at it again, disbelieving that Penguin had truly managed to repair what he'd thought had been serious damage. The rim was no longer plain, but spotted like the body of the hat itself, but while the change had jarred Law at first glance, as he looked at it again and remembered the pile of unused fabric, he smiled.

Nothing stayed the same forever. Everything grew, and changed as the world influenced it. This change, small but notable, to the thing he cherished the most was its own growth.

He ran a finger over the inscription again, remembering the smile that had accompanied the presentation of the hat to him, so many years ago. Lami's face had faded with time, but her enthusiasm could never be dampened, even in memory. This hat was a little piece of her, with her words and love forever imbued into it. Now he realised, as his finger moved away from the letters of its own accord, that it was more than just Lami.

A small singe mark, barely visible even when he looked for it, marked the time Cora-san had dropped his cigarette on Law's head in the middle of one of his spectacular falls. The damage had been minimal, but Law remembered the rage he'd flown into clearly, alongside Cora-san's clumsy attempts to pat out the ashes before he gave up and drowned it in water, leaving Law with a soaked hat for days after.

The hat's heart was Lami, but Cora-san had made his own little niche, and now Penguin had unknowingly done the same as he poured effort and time into restoring it as best he could, leaving a little piece of himself in it as a result.

Law laid down, holding his hat over his chest gently yet firmly, and wondered who would be the next one to give a little bit of themselves to his treasure.

Chapter End Notes

Companion piece to chapter 5, Hat.
Shachi picked at his new boiler suit, admiring the way it was tailored to actually fit him at long last, after years of self-tailoring attempts that never quite rested on his shoulders properly. The greatest point of pride was, of course, the yellow depiction of their jolly roger emblazoned over his heart, and if he craned his neck, he could see some of its large counterpart on his back.

Beside him, Penguin was similarly fascinated with his new attire, running his fingers over the flawless stitches comprising the emblem with a smile on his face. Bepo, too, was delighted with his, a vibrant orange because the pale shades would blend in with his fur too much, or so he'd argued. Law had shrugged and let him do as he pleased.

The captain himself had found himself a gaudy yellow hoodie, which he'd insisted the tailor add the emblem to as well. Their jolly roger grinned at them from where it was plastered all over his front. Now that Doflamingo was gone from North Blue, safely entrenched in the Grand Line and clearly uninterested in returning to his roots, the time for hiding was over. Shachi found it amusing how blatant Law was willing to be as soon as he had the chance, not that he didn't understand it. Hiding who he was for the past six years had no doubt been exhausting, and while they had no intention of gaining bounties quite so early in their lives, bounties weren't dependant on their appearance. As long as their criminal acts couldn't be traced to them, they'd be just fine.

His line of sight drifted over to their faithful submarine, still the same nondescript grey she had been when they'd acquired her three years earlier, and his smile slipped into a thoughtful frown.

"Something wrong?" Law asked him immediately. Shachi hadn't realised he'd been watching him and jumped.

"N-no," he stammered, caught by surprise. Law looked utterly unconvinced. "I was just thinking, if we're all getting new clothes now we're not in hiding, doesn't the Tang look a little left out?"

Law turned to eye the submarine instead, resting a curled finger on his lower lip thoughtfully. Shachi followed his gaze to look at the Polar Tang once again, the only clue she was a pirate vessel the small black flag hanging limply from the mast in the still air.

"You're right," he said after a few moments, his mouth curling back into the smirk Shachi knew all too well. Law had an idea. Part of him almost regretted speaking up, wondering what sort of makeover he'd condemned the poor ship to, but looking at her forlorn grey again, he couldn't quite bring himself too. Like them, the Polar Tang no longer needed to hide, so why should they keep her that overcast colour?

"Get her into a dry dock," Law ordered, turning to walk back into the town. "Bepo, you're with me."
Shachi shared a look with Penguin, who shrugged. Well, it was a peaceful enough port town. No-one had called the Marines on them yet, and as long as they kept their head down and paid their way legally, no-one should.

Bartering with the dockyard for the use of a dry dock for long enough to first paint the Tang, then keep her until she was dry enough to return to the sea, was a painful chunk of their savings, but it would be worth it in the long run. They'd need to tread the dubious side of the law in a few islands' time to stock their funds up again, but that was a concern for the future.

Law and Bepo joined them an hour after they got her settled, the poor Mink carrying more barrels of paint than Shachi thought possible for one person. Law himself was carrying a large black fabric, and some smaller pots. They'd also enlisted the help of what Shachi presumed was the merchant himself to bring the rest of the paint, and some weird contraption that was probably supposed to help them apply it.

"That's a ship you don't see every day," the merchant said appreciatively. Law merely waved him away with some extra coins. Payment, or a bribe of silence. Shachi didn't care enough to ask which. Even if he had, he was quickly distracted when he saw the paint.

Bright yellow. Well, it matched Law's new gaudy hoodie, he supposed. The younger teen was definitely taking the fact that they weren't in hiding any more as a challenge to see how obnoxiously obvious they could be instead. It was a clear overcompensation, but Shachi wasn't going to call him out on it. Besides, yellow was a happy colour. It matched the grin on their jolly roger just fine.

"Let's get started," Law declared, picking up the weird contraption and pointing it at the Polar Tang. It had already been loaded with the first batch of paint, as the first swathes of yellow cut through the grey. "We'll leave the area below the sailing waterline grey, so we can leave sooner." It made sense, and Shachi dove for one of the other nozzles to join in the redecorating.

It was a total mess. Somehow the Tang herself looked neat even as her colour changed, but the same could not be said for the four teenagers wielding the paint. It didn't show up that well on Law's hoodie, being a matching colour, but he'd removed his hat after the first spray had caught it, a mistake on Penguin's behalf that had been revenged by an accidental spray of his own hat. Shachi had jumped the gun and preemptively removed his own before he too gained a yellow hat.

The result was that all four of them now looked like they'd had bad dye jobs, with the yellow paint sticking to and completely overpowering their original hair colours. Their uniforms had suffered a similar fate, and Shachi could only see out of one lens of his shades. The other had been entirely blotted out by paint flicked his way by Penguin in retaliation after he'd dumped the remains of an almost-empty pot over his head.

Bepo hadn't escaped the carnage either, although he'd made a good attempt by working on the other side of the Polar Tang to his human nakama (Law could pretend to be as serious as he wanted, he was still flinging just as much paint around as the other two with that self-satisfied smirk on his face). As a result, he was only half-yellow, rather than mostly.

The Polar Tang was a fair-sized vessel, and with two coats required before they were satisfied she was completely transformed it took the better part of a week for the four of them to finish the base colour. Shachi and Penguin had been eyeing the black and red paint suspiciously during refills, wondering what it was for, but they'd never been used.

"You'll see," was Law's cryptic answer when they asked, and they huffed before returning to their work.
Finally, while they were waiting for the Tang to dry enough to paint over again, Law brought out the huge black fabric he'd bought alongside the paint. Unfurling it, he revealed that it was a sail, the exact size and style of their current white one. The mystery of the red paint was partially solved when he mimicked their flag, painting on a large version of their jolly roger.

It transpired that he'd had a similar plan for the sides of the Polar Tang, and no-one had any complaints as he finally deemed the paint dry enough to overlay it with the black outline and red fill for their jolly roger, similar barring colour to the designs on their new boiler suits, which were definitely in need of a deep clean by the time they were finally done.

"Much better," Law admired, two weeks after they'd started their project. They'd just lowered her back into the water, and as she bobbed on the slight waves, the flag flying boldly in the slight breeze present, Shachi couldn't help but agree.

The Polar Tang looked much happier now; their proud fifth nakama.

Chapter End Notes

Can't leave the Polar Tang out of the makeover now, can we? Also all that ridiculously bright yellow has to be overcompensation for having to be invisible for so many years (White Lead Poisoning, then Doflamingo). Although I also have another theory about the yellow, which I'll be bringing in later when I get the chance.

The DEATH letters only appeared after Law got his tattoos and epithet.
Raised voices was the first sign that something was wrong. Law paused in his tracks, outside the recreation room, cup of coffee clutched tightly between his palms. He needed to get back to the control room, having left Bepo there alone while he went to make himself a drink, but the distorted echoes of two people screaming at each other reverberated through the submarine and drew him to a worried stop.

"-sick of you bossing me around!" came Shachi's voice, almost unrecognisable in its squeaky pitch.

"I wouldn't have to tell you if you-"

"Just 'cause you're a year older doesn't mean you're better than-"

"Someone's got to tell you-"

"Well *someone* isn't you!" Shachi roared, completely overpowering whatever Penguin was yelling about. "It's not like you're my big brother!"

"Damn straight I'm not your brother!" Penguin shouted. "And I'm glad! Who'd want a brother like you?" The description that followed was full of many words that would never be uttered in polite company, including blatant implications about Shachi's parentage and genealogy. Law had never heard Penguin use even half of them before.

The explicit tirade was cut off suddenly by the loud thump of a body striking something larger and solider than itself, and Law's limbs suddenly remembered how to work as he barged into the room to see Penguin dragging himself back to his feet with heavy assistance from the wall behind him. From Shachi's posture, that same wall had been the one he'd been flung into.

His presence went ignored as Penguin heaved himself upright to launch himself at Shachi, words lost in a pure roar of rage, knocking the ginger back into the table behind him. It toppled over, one leg breaking off and spilling the playing pieces it held onto the floor.

"What are you two doing?" Law demanded, finding his voice again. He may as well have been in Cora-san's bubble of silence for all the notice either teen gave him as they charged at each other, grappling fiercely.

Horrified, Law found himself frozen again. He didn't know what to do, had never had to play peacemaker before in his life (if anything, he'd always been one of the antagonists), and if Penguin and Shachi didn't stop fighting soon they were going to cause some serious damage, either to themselves or the ship. Neither were acceptable in any form.
"Stop it!" he tried, only to be forced to dodge out of the path of another table as it crashed over. Those tables were supposedly bolted to the floor. That was concerning. "Sto-"

His voice died in his throat at the flash of a blade. He'd given them those knives months ago, something to defend themselves with if their brawling wasn't enough. They were only to be used in self-defence, he'd told them firmly as he'd handed them over.

They weren't supposed to be used aggressively. They weren't supposed to be used on each other. The shoulder of Penguin's jump suit tore open, a sluggish red dying the fabric to let Law know that the blade had reached his skin. A similar thing occurred to Shachi's right arm, blood oozing out as he aggravated the injury with more swings of the blade.

When had they got so proficient? They'd barely known how to hold them properly when Law had given them the knives. The two were evenly matched, as they always had been, perfectly in sync like they truly were brothers by blood, but for once Law could find no comfort in that fact.

It was the matching slashes across their abdomens that snapped him out of it, realising that this was real and they were going to kill each other if they didn't stop immediately.

A Room, a Shambles, and the knives were replaced with playing cards. An additional Tact got the weapons over to Law's hands, where he placed them carefully behind him, out of sight of both the older teens.

"Stay the hell out of this, Law!" Shachi spat. The pair of them had stopped when they'd lost their weapons, but neither had looked away from glaring daggers at the other. Law was mildly surprised he'd been acknowledged at all.

"Enough," he ordered, walking over to the pair of them. His Room remained active, in case they turned violent again. He wanted to be able to subdue them without hurting them if they didn't back down peacefully. "No more fighting. You're going to kill each other."

Shachi was breathing heavily, bleeding sluggishly from the numerous wounds Penguin had inflicted on him. Penguin himself was in a similar situation, swaying slightly from what Law assumed was a concussion courtesy of his first encounter with the wall.

Neither made any move to continue the fight, but nor did they stand down. Law glowered at them, unimpressed.

"If you two don't go to the infirmary right now I will make you," he threatened, twitching his fingers. Both staggered forwards slightly from the minor Tact Law had used to get his point across before deflating, pointedly now looking everywhere except each other. Law felt a surge of disgust course through him at his own actions, reminded briefly yet all too clearly of the way Doflamingo could make anyone dance to his strings.

To his relief, the threat had been enough. They shuffled forwards, past the carnage that was once their recreation room, and Law firmly shepherded them into the infirmary, his toe nudging the sherds of what had once been a cup of coffee he didn't remember dropping, and barely getting them to sit before they collapsed.

Their injuries were severe, Shachi passing out completely during treatment and Penguin only failing to do the same because Law wouldn't let him, not with that concussion.

"What was that all about?" he demanded of the elder as he wrapped his shoulder snugly. Penguin huffed, making a movement to swat Law's hands away before apparently thinking better of it. Good.
Law was not in the mood to deal with mutiny on top of their spat.

"Stupid egotistical idiot," Penguin muttered, but refused to elaborate. Law sighed and stood.

He really needed that coffee now. And then he needed to go and help Bepo in the control room.

But first, he had to make sure Penguin wasn't going to kill Shachi in his sleep the moment he left the room. Just the way he'd planned to spend his day.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked for a serious argument within the crew. I'm fairly sure the person in question was trying to kill my heart with that request, and almost succeeded, but I somehow survived enough to write this. Two hot-blooded teenagers with weapons plus bruised egos equals a dangerous combination...

Might do a follow up at some point. We'll see.
Tickle

Chapter Notes

Characters: Law, Penguin, Bepo, Shachi
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Fluff, Nakamaship

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Law hated them, Penguin and Shachi considered them a declaration of war and responded appropriately, and Bepo never meant to start it. What had once been a simple greeting, ingrained somewhere in the back of his mind as the Right Thing, quickly spiralled out of all control at the revelation of one particular fact.

Penguin was ticklish.

Naturally, a nervous *garchu* from a young Bepo shortly after they finally declared themselves a proper crew with a flag - *nakama* - did not go as plan the moment his soft cheek flipped up one side of Penguin's hat and rubbed against his cheek, catching the sensitive, ticklish skin of his neck in the process.

Unaccustomed to Mink etiquette and startled, Penguin had done the first thing he could think of and pushed Bepo away, only to cave at the sight of an apologetic cub who looked close to tears – could Minks even cry? Bepo seemed like he was about to.

Nothing Penguin said seemed to cheer him up so, flustered, he leaped on the poor cub and tried to tickle him back. Not ticklish, but recognising the peace offering, Bepo started to laugh and reached out with his paws.

Shachi found them like that, rolling on the floor together and laughing, and naturally jumped on top of them both to join in. He wasn't as ticklish as Penguin, but clever fingers and wandering paws found what weak spots he had, and he was definitely *louder*.

When Law poked his head in to see what all the shrieking was about, his face had paled and he'd attempted to beat a hasty retreat. Being the smallest in the crew, and subsequently the one with the shortest legs, he didn't get far before the three successfully pounced, dragging him into the centre with the sole aim of coercing a laugh out of him.

Law wasn't ticklish at all, and suffered through the indignity in total silence, wearing what he would later deny resembled a pout at his crew's antics. The stalemate broke when Shachi finally tried another tactic and blew a raspberry on his cheek, provoking a jump and a hurriedly-covered yelp from the younger boy, who immediately wiped the afflicted spot thoroughly with a sleeve as he tried to squirm away. Back then he was unsuccessful and was forced to suffer until the other three wore themselves out laughing before he could slip out of the tangle of limbs.

To all appearances, tickle fights were the bane of Law's life, and their decreasing occurrence over the years was noted with great relief. However, it never escaped the notice of his crew that they could always catch him, even when he grew taller with longer legs, and perfected the teleportation and
Shambles techniques always used in his escape seconds later.

Bepo was apologetic for starting them, and Penguin and Shachi considered them a declaration of war and responded accordingly. Law hated being tickled, but the physical contact? Not so much.

Chapter End Notes

Something short and hopefully sweet, to make up for last chapter (and also because I had almost no time tonight so I couldn't delve into the longer stories I've got planned). If Law was ticklish, I'm sure we'd have seen it in the flashbacks with Cora-san, so while it would be amusing to see him break down in laughter, I'm not sure tickling is the way to make it happen.
The question first crossed Law's mind when the Minks revealed their boat storage high on the elephant's back. In hindsight, he should have considered it when they finally arrived at Zou, the Thousand Sunny bobbing alone in the elephant's wake, but his mind had been preoccupied with escaping the insanity of Bartolomeo's ship, wondering how they were supposed to climb the leg (the resulting answer did nothing at all to help him keep his grip on what sanity he had left after such brain cell murdering company) and most importantly of all, the precise whereabouts of his crew.

Where was the Polar Tang?

Obviously she had been well-hidden, as he'd seen no signs of her wreckage in the wake of destruction left by Jack, but when she turned out to not be stored with the rest of the boats on Zou he grew puzzled. His crew would, of course, never have left her somewhere vulnerable, not with the existence of the frequent downpours courtesy of Zunisha washing its back, but a bright yellow submarine of her size should have stood out clearly amongst the natural colours of the foliage.

Maddeningly, he found no chance to quietly ask any of his crew before Zoro-ya bluntly demanded to know where the ship they'd be travelling to Wano on was, the swordsman clearly having reached the same conclusion as Law that it hadn't been in the boat sheds. How he knew that despite not knowing what the Tang looked like wasn't entirely clear, but as none of the Mink ships, understandably, bore a jolly roger of any sort, let alone the one that decorated most of Law's wardrobe, it was likely he'd based the correct assumption on that fact.

Still, it left Law in the awkward situation of being unable to answer where, exactly, his own ship was, despite the question being aimed very definitely at him.

"We hid her!" Bepo, bless the Mink, piped up in an immediate response, saving Law from having to verbally admit he hadn't found out yet. "…Sorry…" Law glowered at the Straw Hat for upsetting his navigator before sending a meaningful glance towards the rest of his crew. It didn't go unnoticed by Nico Robin, of course, judging by her smile, but at least the woman had the grace not to comment.

Penguin and Shachi, who were still far too quiet for Law's liking, their forced rowdiness during the feast notwithstanding (to a stranger it may have seemed genuine, especially with Penguin dancing along with his arm firmly around Nose-ya's shoulders, but Law was far from a stranger and knew a front when he saw one), took the lead and headed straight back to the heart of the island.

The whale-tree loomed above them as imposingly as the first time, but unlike their previous visit the parade did not climb up the tail to a small hidden door but rather went to where the front reared up from the ground, not far from the now-decimated Guardians' settlement. A swipe of a well hidden...
lever in the form of what looked like a sapling and a rumbling sound emitted from the huge tree itself as a section slid away to reveal a large cavern.

Law hadn't realised there had been a fake section of the trunk, and from the impressed whistle of the cyborg behind him, he hadn't been the only one.

Then again, the whistle could have been for a very different reason, as the movement of the fake bark had revealed the Polar Tang in all her glory, held in suspension by a complex arrangement of tree trunks to keep her hull from damage. Not, he mused, that she would be damaged so easily, but the care was good to see.

"That's a super beauty!" Robo-ya whispered, almost reverently. Law struggled to force back the grin the words brought. The Polar Tang was one of his treasures (alongside his hat, Kikoku, and his crew), and to hear her complimented always warmed his heart.

"Get her out," he ordered instead. "We need to stock up provisions and then be on our way." His crew leapt to obey, manipulating the logs in a practised manner to begin rolling her out. It was a long way to what passed as docks on Zunisha's back, and even with the remains of the Straw Hats and the Minks joining in the journey took well over an hour.

"Isn't this a submarine?" Nose-ya squawked as they finally stopped, many of the labourers flopping to the ground in exhaustion. Law let himself grin.

"Her name is the Polar Tang," he introduced, his crew gathering around him and the submarine as he did so. "She'll get us to Wano."

"How come you'll introduce her but not us?" his crew demanded in sync, totally ruining whatever atmosphere the Polar Tang's presence had brought.

Law ignored them.

Chapter End Notes

Where is the Polar Tang? We didn't see her tied to one of Zunisha's legs (thankfully, considering Jack's attacks), nor was she in the boathouse, and there's only so many places you can hide a big bright yellow submarine in the forest - and she must be hidden, otherwise Jack's rampaging would have found and destroyed her, and I refuse to consider that possibility. If there's one hidden room in the Whale Tree, surely there can be one more, and it's also close to where the Heart Pirates were staying... That's my logic anyway.
There was no such thing as a 'no name' pirate crew in the New World. There were still tiers, of course, ranging from the Yonkou and Shichibukai to the Supernovas of their varying generations, to the veteran crews that took their time to pass the Red Line and the crews that didn't quite reach the hundred million bounty before their entrance, but every single one had a history that only required brief research to reveal. Even those formed in the New World were quick to gain infamy, mostly because they spawned from one of the Yonkou territories. Independence from such beginnings was an impressive feat in its own right (although it was rumoured that Akagami no Shanks was less sticky-fingered when it came to fledgling crews).

The Heart Pirates knew this. It was one of the admittedly many reasons for their own delayed crossing of the Red Line as they hung back to gather the final research on the current crews sailing the New World and bolster their own abilities before entering the most dangerous stretch of ocean in the world. By the time they finally ventured past Fishman Island some months later, they were far stronger than they had been at Sabaody. Law was confident that they'd no longer need to form unsavoury truces with unwelcome parties in order to at least deal with one of the Kuma Clones (although the pirate himself was still another matter).

These facts combined to result in their current situation: a battle between the Heart Pirates, freshly into the New World at last, and a crew from the previous years' Supernova delegates. On paper, they were evenly matched, but paper rarely reflected reality. Experience was a teacher that could not be mimicked, and the Heart Pirates were at a distinct disadvantage, enhanced by their smaller crew size.

Law gritted his teeth, Kikoku bathed in blood as he endeavoured to save his stamina with minimal Rooms. There were too many to simply Amputate in one go, and exhausting himself would both make him a clear target, but also advertise his fruit's drawbacks to the world. They were disadvantaged, but as he kept as much of an eye on his crew as he possibly dared he could see that they were adapting well, working together in groups rather than attempting to fight one on one. Law himself had Bepo watching his back, the comforting wordless cries of the Mink a constant reassurance as the tide of the battle slowly swayed in their favour.

It would be too easy, too much like the protagonists in any fighting story, if they overcame the odds just like that. Law had never considered himself a protagonist.

"Penguin, move!"

Out of the corner of his eye, Law saw a flash of beige, the streak of green and orange betraying it as Shachi, diving towards his nakama and shouldering him out of the way even as a haki-coated fist blasted into his stomach. Armament haki had never been Shachi's specialty, and what meagre
resistance he may have generated was annihilated as if it had never existed.

"Shachi!" Penguin screamed, recovering his balance with a roll away from a sword that meant to separate his head from his shoulders and leaping back to his feet, charging the culprit with his spear in hand. The opposing pirate grinned, revealing many missing teeth, and charged up his haki again defensively. Unlike Shachi, Penguin's specialty was armament and his spear pierced through as his offense overpowered the enemy's defence, disabling him instantly (honestly, from the way he fell like a stone Law was fairly sure the man would never rise again).

Shachi was still on his feet, unmoving for several long seconds. Law watched him in horror, frozen in place as his brain automatically catalogued the damage – there must have been something more to that punch, a simple haki-enhanced punch would never have done that much damage – and faintly heard Bepo behind him as the Mink intercepted a blow aimed for the back of Law's head.

Oh so slowly, Shachi moved, his katana slipping from limp fingers as his hands travelled to the bloody mess that was supposed to be his abdomen. Behind his shades, Law got the impression of a single blink.

"Ow," he said dumbly, blood spilling from his mouth and dying his teeth a mottled red before staining his lips and chin. Then he crumpled.

It was as if the world had slowed down. First his knees buckled, legs folding in on themselves as they lost the ability to remain locked in place. His torso followed, arms seemingly floating upwards ever so slightly before gravity shackled them with a violent tug, crashing them into first his torso and then the ground. As his head succumbed to the fall his hair remained suspended, playing around his face as if he were underwater before following the weight of his body to the ground. His hat slipped off in the process, settling all too lightly on the bloodstained ground beside him. The finale was a simple crunch as the impact proved too much for Shachi's shades, shattering the lenses and distorting the frame to reveal eyes lightly closed, as if he were only sleeping.

"SHACHI!"

At Penguin's anguished cry the world abruptly regained sentience, the sounds of the battle crashing over Law all at once as his limbs obeyed subconscious orders to get to the ginger's side. Penguin was already there, tentatively unfurling as much of the crumpled form as he dared to get a better look at the wound. The time for thoughts was long past as Law sacrificed his hoodie – his favourite yellow one with the black hood and three-quarter length sleeves he'd worn on Sabaody – for Penguin to use to staunch the bleeding as best he could even as he generated a Room to assess the damage.

They were in the middle of a battle. Leaving his back undefended to tend to the wounded was suicide, but all Law could think of was how quickly the yellow material was turning red, how Shachi's skin was already several shades lighter than it should be and still paling rapidly.

How Shachi was dying.

It was only once he'd stabilised him as best he could with field medicine that was of barely any use at all, expanding his Room in preparation to teleport them directly into the Tang's infirmary where he could work properly, that he realised his crew had manoeuvred themselves into a protective circle, defending his and Penguin's backs as they worked.

The battle was lost, Law realised. With the crew no longer on the offensive at all, they would be hard pressed to turn the tide back into their favour, especially with three of the strongest fighters down or otherwise occupied.
He sacrificed small boxes, barrels, anything not necessarily a requirement for their ongoing journey, and Shambled the entire crew onto the Tang. The sudden change wasn't good for Shachi, as the ginger was jostled slightly on landing and Penguin lost his grip on the now blood-drenched hoodie, but Law had at least ensured he landed on an infirmary bed, getting straight to work in his home domain.

There was no time to give his crew orders, to tell them to put the Tang into a dive and escape before they were followed, but someone must have kept their head in the panic, because the next thing Law noticed outside of his desperate surgery was the roar of the engines and the rising temperature signifying a racing dive.

He shut the distraction out, too busy with his hands buried too deep in Shachi's abdomen as he desperately pieced the stomach back together. He refused to let Shachi die.

What use was the potential for medical miracles if he couldn't use them to save his nakama?

Chapter End Notes

Someone wanted a prequel to Vigil (chapter 2), including Shachi's 'last words' so... enjoy? The Heart Pirates (and Law) were not as prepared for the New World as they thought they were...
One of Bepo’s favourite things was to watch; to lay back in the open air on the deck of the Polar Tang, and simply watch his human nakama's antics on those occasions they had surfaced and raised the sail to glide on the waves rather than under them.

Law, of course, would protest at the implication that he was getting up to 'antics' and the immaturity that implied, but as Bepo was careful to never say the world aloud, and also offered himself up as a comfortable pillow whenever Law sought one, that was rendered a non-issue. (Penguin and Shachi most certainly got up to antics, and hijinks, and pranks, and whatever other childish terminology Law would come up with, usually with a small fond smile playing at his lips, but that was hardly a surprise to anyone that knew them).

What Bepo privately termed Law’s own antics, in the safety of his own mind (because Law couldn't read minds, no matter how much he liked to pretend he could sometimes), could also be called experimenting. The abilities of the Ope Ope no Mi were numerous, and even years after he'd eaten the fruit he was still finding new ways to use it.

One occasion in particular would always sick in Bepo's mind with fondness. At the time it had been terrifying, all four of them fearful that irreversible events had occurred (none of them dared call it damage, because how could they when nothing was actually broken), but hindsight offered a new lens through which to view the events, and Bepo had heard Penguin and Shachi loudly recounting it to new nakama as if it hadn’t been one of the most unnerving things they’d ever experienced.

It had been like any other day out on deck; the sun was shining, the wind was a calm breeze – enough to caress Bepo's fur in a soothing manner, but not enough to threaten the security of hats on human heads – and Law was using Bepo as a willing backrest while he poured over documents pinned down with old bottles that once housed tablets but had since been repurposed as paperweights.

Penguin and Shachi were lounging around, keeping half an eye on their sail and all but ignoring the fishing rods they’d set up to try and bolster their food supplies as Penguin good-naturedly teased Shachi about his inability to tan, shrugging the shoulder of his tank top down to show a very definite tan line. Shachi was scowling half-heartedly as he prodded at the sunburn he'd gained on his own bare shoulder after attempting to gain some colour to his skin (Bepo wasn't entirely sure what he had against being so pale, but he'd long since discovered that humans had some very un-Mink-like views on many subjects). Law had plastered the burns with ointment earlier before barking out an order to keep the area covered if he wanted to stay out on deck with the rest of them.

"Cover up or go inside," their captain muttered, shifting some papers around without looking up. The
ginger's scowl morphed into a pout before he sighed and shifted his clothes around so they returned to Law's specifications. "If you do that once more I'm forcing you inside," Law threatened, holding one hand up in the semi-clawed position that indicated a Room.

"I'm done! I'm covered up again, see!" Shachi spluttered, leaning into Law's personal space to gesticulate wildly at the part of his body in question. Law held out his other hand, palm up, still focusing his gaze solidly on the papers in front of him. "Eh? What's that supposed to mean?"


Bepo looked over at the bucket by the reclining Penguin. Despite only half-watching their rods, the other two had accumulated some catches, two of which a very confused Shachi fetched for his captain. Curious, Penguin followed him and the pair of them squatted down by the aquatic creatures, watching the poor fish flop around limply on the deck as the crab tried to scuttle away. Law caught it and dumped it on its back to stop it escaping. Bepo winced slightly at the sight. He wished Law didn't play with their food sometimes, although he understood that it was better to use unknown and unrefined techniques on their food rather than each other. Did they still have to be alive, though?

A twist of Law's fingers inside the Room that covered half the deck, and… nothing happened.

The fish still flopped helplessly, and the crab still struggled to right itself in order to flee. Bepo saw Law frown, and deduced that whatever he'd been trying to do hadn't worked.

"Ow, my arm!" Shachi whined, reaching up with one hand to subconsciously touch the fabric over the sunburnt area.

"That's what sunburns do," Law snapped, the failure leaving him on edge as they often did. He prodded at the fish moodily, only succeeding in making it flail more desperately.

"But Shachi's the one that's sunburnt, not me!" Shachi complained. Bepo felt rather than saw Law freeze.

"Yeah, but whatever Law did, I like it because my arm doesn't hurt anymore," Penguin said, sounding far too smug.

"…Shachi?" Law asked, raising his head away from the poor hapless sea creatures for the first time since they'd been presented to him.

"What?" Penguin asked, or as Bepo realised, Penguin's voice asked.

"Penguin?" Law continued, as if no-one had answered.

"Yes?" Shachi's voice responded.

There was a moment of stunned silence, before a single expletive slipped from Law's mouth, shattering the suspense.

"What the hell?" both older humans yelled at the same time, leaping backwards and pointing at each other aggressively. "Who the hell are you?" Bepo saw Law place his head in his hands despondently.

"Captain?" he asked tentatively, shifting his position slightly so he could place a gentle paw on the other's shoulder.

"Fuck," Law bit out again, his fingers clenching in his hair. Penguin and Shachi – or was it Shachi
and Penguin now – paused to look at him in concern.

"What's up?" they asked in unison. That hadn't changed.

"It was supposed to swap the fish and the crab," Law bemoaned. "I only know the theory, I wanted to test it to see how it worked before I tried it on humans." The unspoken on you hung in the air. Once Law knew his newly researched abilities didn't kill or irreversibly harm the animal test subjects, he'd taken to using a usually willing Penguin and Shachi to trial them on humans.

"You swapped our bodies?" Penguin yelped – or was it Shachi? Bepo wasn't sure which was which any more. That was more of a Shachi reaction, so he decided to assume it was Shachi, even if the hat on the man's head clearly said 'Penguin'.

"Is that even possible?" Penguin-in-Shachi's-body asked, frowning. He poked at his shades, lifting them slightly before pulling them back down with a hiss of pain. "Okay, that was snow blindness. Not my eyes."

"Don't just take my shades off like that!" Shachi-in-Penguin's-body complained. Penguin-in-Shachi's-body flapped a hand at him in what Bepo understood was supposed to be a pacifying gesture. The currently-not-ginger-ginger was not pacified at all, from the way his (or rather, Penguin's) chest puffed out and he crossed his arms.

"Look-"

"Can you two stop?" Law asked, sounding miserable enough to incite automatic obedience.

"Law?" the pair asked, crouching down beside him.

"I don't know how to fix this," the youngest human admitted, his hands curling into fists. Penguin and Shachi took hold of them and unfurled them gently.

"Hey," Shachi-Penguin said gently.

"It'll be okay," Penguin-Shachi told him. "You'll work it out."

"I can live in this guy's body for a few days," Shachi-Penguin grinned. "No sunburn and I can get a tan now!" Penguin-Shachi shoved him lightly.

"I'll take better care of Shachi's sunburn than he would, you know," he told Law. "It's going to be fine. Don't stress yourself."

"But-" Law started, only for the two humans to simultaneously press their fingers to his lips, indicating that he should stop talking.

"It'll be fine," they repeated. "We trust you."

Law still fidgeted, until Bepo heaved himself fully into a sitting position and enveloped all three of them in a massive bear hug.

"Don't worry," he told them, watching his frail-looking nakama sag slightly in his hold. "I'll keep everyone safe, Captain."

He couldn't help Law switch them back, and he couldn't help them adjust to each others' bodies. But they couldn't fight properly like that, and if there was one thing Bepo had always been able to do, it was fight.
Just as the silence after his words got too heavy to bear, he nuzzled them all affectionately, refusing to let them squirm away until he was certain the tension had defused.

Panic would do none of them any good at all. Law would fix it, and Bepo would have their backs like he always did.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked for the first time Law performed the Mind Transplant Operation. Obviously here it's very unrefined and therefore doesn't quite go to plan... He'll figure out how to target the individuals he meant to later!

Considering pre-Flevance!Law used to experiment on frogs, using animals definitely wouldn't be beyond his morals to trial the Ope Ope abilities if there are no non-nakama humans around.
"So how are we getting away from here?" Clione wondered as he finished bolting down the repairs to the Tang's roof. It needed more work before he'd confidently call it watertight but Law had decreed that it was time to go, and that they could finish those repairs on their way back to the Grand Line.

"We're sailing," Bepo told him, as if he was stupid. Well, obviously they would be going by water, but… the Sea Kings?

"Are the Kuja going to guide us back?" he asked hopefully, glancing over at the remains of the Sea King Rayleigh had battled on his way in.

"I doubt it," Shachi sighed wistfully, appearing in the doorway having evidently finished the engine checks Bepo had asked him to do – after all, there was no wind in the Calm Belt so if their engines failed on them, they really would be Sea King snacks. "Such a shame…"

Clione couldn't help but agree as he glanced over at the torn barrier depicting where Mugiwara had crossed into forbidden territory every warm-blooded male on their ship would have killed to enter, if killing would have been enough to gain entry.

"Well, they only sheltered us because of Mugiwara," Penguin pointed out, as despondent as the rest of them as he slung a commiserating arm around Shachi's shoulders. "They don't care about us at all."

"That doesn't mean we know how we're getting back," Clione pointed out. "Do we even know the way?" He immediately realised that he'd made a mistake as three pairs of eyes turned to look at him disapprovingly.

"Of course we know the way," Bepo exclaimed. "All those female humans have put fur in your brains!" Penguin and Shachi reached out to lightly cuff him around the head and he mumbled an apology to their affronted navigator, who huffed.

"That aside," Clione muttered, "why is Captain so confident we'll get through in one piece? We're not like Rayleigh. Isn't this basically suicide?"

"Why are you grumbling?" Law asked, coming up behind them. They jumped, having thought he was still talking about things with Rayleigh.

"Don't do that, Captain!" they groused in unison, turning to face him. He smirked as he leant against the yellow external wall of the submarine's main cabin, glancing up at the patchwork repairs.
"Everything ready for us to leave?" Law inquired, ignoring their complaints. "We should be gone before Mugiwara-ya gets back." Clione suspected he didn't want to see what damage the other captain had invariably done to his injuries, and was no longer in a charitable mood towards him after the mess the rubber man had made of his infirmary.

He hadn't raised his voice, but it was the cue for the entire crew to gather in front of him, taking advantage of the fact that they were still docked to have an entire crew meeting while no-one was forced to keep an eye on their bearings.

"Bepo."

"Aye!" the Mink began, standing straight and dwarfing most of the crew in the process, the gigantic Jean Bart sitting down but still taller than the rest of them. "From here we need to bear that way-" he pointed in a direction that made no sense to anyone else, but that was Bepo's job anyway. "Our Log Pose is pretty useless now, thanks to Amazon Lily, so if we follow that we'll just end up spending another month or so in the Calm Belt before the magnetic route spits us out, and there's no guarantee it'll lead us back to the Grand Line rather than East Blue."

"But is crossing the Calm Belt at all possible without the Kuja?" Uni asked, to the agreement of many of the crew, Clione included.

"With the right ship, it's possible," Bepo told them all confidently. "It's how I got to North Blue from Zou."

"And the Tang is 'the right ship'?" Clione asked, frowning. "How? A submarine isn't going to save us from the Sea Kings."

"Of course not," Law agreed. "We won't be submerging. We'll use the Tang's engine to travel without wind, the same as when we followed the Kuja in."

"And the Sea Kings?" Ikkaku asked. "We can't fight them off the entire way. We're not monsters like the Dark King." Law chuckled.

"Did you know the Marines use the Calm Belt all the time?" he asked. Most of the crew nodded.

"Something about Vegapunk and kairoseki," Uni commented. "How does that help us?"

"Penguin and Shachi have told you all the story of how we got the Tang several times," their captain pointed out. "Work it out yourselves."

The distant screeching they'd barely registered over the sounds of repairing their ship stopped, meaning that either Mugiwara was dead, or Jimbei had successfully calmed him down and the pair of them would be soon returning to the shoreline, where Rayleigh was sitting with Mugiwara's trademark hat.

"Start the engines," Law ordered, striding over to the edge of the deck, Kikoku clutched firmly in one hand. "We've been here long enough."

Barely reassured, the crew scrambled to do as they were told. The familiar hum started up, and barring Uni – who stayed in the control room to steer – they slowly made their way back to the deck, watching their wake nervously as they headed away from Amazon Lily and the safety of the cove that had been their shelter for the past two weeks.

"Are you positive we'll be okay?" Clione asked, biting back a gulp as he thought he saw a shadow pass below the ship. It was far larger than anything he'd ever seen before that day, and he really
hoped it was his imagination. Nothing like that had been anywhere in sight when they'd followed the
Kujas.

"Do you want the optimistic answer or the realistic one?" Law asked him. Clione shuddered,
muttering about insane captains and their equally insane crews.

"If the Marines can do it, so can we," Shachi grinned, slapping him on the back. Clione lurched
forwards slightly, and caught sight of a fin breaking the surface of the water some distance away. It
was easily the size of the Tang.

"How?" he asked weakly, trying and failing to not think about how the owner of that fin wouldn't
even consider the entire ship a mouthful.

"Kairoseki hulls aren't World Government-exclusive," Penguin pointed out, coming up the other side
of him and whistling at the sight of the Sea King, still a safe distance away, although still visible –
which was more than they had been when they'd been safely tucked in the Kuja ship's shadow so
'safe' was a relative term at best. "At least, not after we stole one of their precious kairoseki-hull ships
eleven years ago."

"The Tang has a kairoseki hull?" Ikkaku asked, echoed by several other crewmates in their
confusion. "But Captain-"

"It's only the outer hull," Law told them. "Enough to conceal the ship, but not enough to affect devil
fruit users on board. Many Marines have eaten fruits too, remember."

"Well, yeah…" Clione trailed off, still eyeing the shadows in the water dubiously. Despite Law's
words, the captain hadn't stopped clenching Kikoku once since they'd entered the waters, and didn't
appear inclined to change his stance any time soon.

As he watched two Sea Kings begin to duke it out on the horizon for some unknown reason, he
decided that they couldn't get out of those waters and back to the safety of the Grand Line fast
enough.

That was probably the first time anyone considered the Grand Line 'safety'.

Chapter End Notes

Does the Polar Tang have a kairoseki hull? Who knows, but they had to navigate away
from Amazon Lily somehow and I doubt the Kuja helped them, so unless Oda says
otherwise I'm going with 'yes it does', especially as I think it was originally a ship
designed for the World Government (and therefore theoretically Vegapunk had a hand
in its design).
Overdo

Chapter Notes

Characters: Shachi, Law, Penguin, Bepo, Heart Pirates
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Exhaustion, Fever, Protective!Heart Pirates

Shachi frowned as someone plucked at his sleeve before turning to face the culprit. The sight of their newest recruit greeted him and he sighed. The guy looked scared, and Shachi had never been good at dealing with scared people. Besides, he was covered in blood from some inconsiderate Marine that just had to topple onto him when he died, and really really wanted a bath.

Still, the guy was new, and also nakama, so he had to at least try.

"What's wrong?" he asked, not liking the way the other pirate fidgeted.

"Uh… Shachi-san…" the newbie asked, doing nothing to help Shachi's mood in the slightest. "Is it… normal… for Captain Law to, well…"

"Spit it out," Shachi growled, wishing he hadn't been the one chosen right that moment to deal with the 'Captain's powers are creepy and terrifying' reaction. After a bath would have been far, far better timing.

"Captain Law looks like he's about to pass out," the other pirate garbled, gesturing back towards the shore, where Law was theoretically finishing off the last Marines while the rest of the crew loaded the loot onto the Tang and started preparations to leave.

"He gets tired sometimes, yes," he admitted in a low voice, glancing over at his captain out of habit before freezing. Tired was not the word to apply to Law at that moment, and Shachi did not like the way he was swaying. "Okay no, you're right. That's not normal. Get Bepo."

He didn't hang around to see if he was obeyed as he barged back off of the ship, elbowing his nakama out of the way to disgruntled shouts that slowly gave way to cries of alarm as they turned around to berate Shachi and ended up catching sight of their captain's state instead.

The final Marine fell, and with him the flickering blue sheen of Law's Room. The captain himself followed suit moments later, Shachi arriving too late to catch him and having to make do skidding on his knees the last couple of feet to Law's limp form.

"Law?" he asked, reaching out to touch his shoulder. There was no response, Law's chest rising and falling too rapidly. Shachi cursed himself for not noticing earlier, for blindly following orders to get ready to go while Law finished up. That wouldn't be happening again.

"Captain?" He glanced up to see the members of the crew he'd muscled past gathering around worriedly. "Shachi, what happened?" one of them asked, chewing his lip. Shachi sighed and pulled the unconscious Law into his arms before staggering to his feet.
"He overdid it," he told them quietly, conscious of their exposed position. "Finish up as fast as you can. We're leaving." They hesitated for a moment, but Shachi shot them a sharp look and they leapt to obey as he carried his precious load back to the safety of the ship. On the shore, he'd kept up appearances, as if Law fainting after a battle was a normal occurrence. Panicking the crew would do no good at all, so he'd crushed his own panic behind layers of responsibilities.

But the truth was, he'd never seen Law faint after a battle. Using his abilities to experiment had occasionally left him sleeping for longer than normal, and he usually needed to rest after difficult operations, but this was new and worrying.

"That's the last time he's finishing up a fight without us," Penguin commented, appearing by Shachi's side as he headed for the infirmary. Law's room would probably have been the better choice, but Shachi's instincts told him something wasn't right, beyond the obvious, and he wasn't in the habit of ignoring gut feelings.

"Definitely," Shachi agreed as Bepo came barrelling towards them.

"I heard Captain collapsed!" the Mink gasped, narrowly avoiding careening into Shachi and his burden and instead crashing into Penguin, who let out a loud *oof* as he was crushed against the side of the corridor.

"We're getting off this island," Shachi told their navigator, who was too busy apologising to a still-trapped Penguin to respond. "Bepo."

"Hmm?" Bepo peeled himself off of the cursing Penguin to give Shachi his full attention.

"Get the crew all on board, then set a course."

"But the Log Pose hasn't set!" Bepo protested. "We can't leave yet!"

"Since when did you rely on that thing to navigate?" Penguin grumbled, shoving the bulk of fur to regain his personal space. "I thought you furred Minks didn't need such 'crutches,'" he quoted one of Bepo's earlier rants about navigation in the Grand Line.

"But… Captain doesn't like it if I don't use it," Bepo reminded them, glancing at the prone form of Law still in Shachi's arms. The ginger shifted him slightly as his arms began to protest.

"Not the time, Bepo," he snapped, eliciting a 'sorry!' from the Mink. "We can't stay here. Get us on our way."

"You're not the captain," Bepo sulked, but slunk away nonetheless. Shachi knew he'd do it, even though he was right – Law hated it if they set sail before the Log Pose set. It wasn't because he didn't trust Bepo's uncanny sense for direction, even in the notorious Grand Line, but because if something happened to him, they needed the backup for the human members of the crew to use.

They just couldn't risk that a survivor had seen Law's collapse and reported it. They were safer in the sea – under the sea – than waiting like sitting ducks for the Log Pose to set while Marine reinforcements (and other pirate crews) headed for them.

Finishing the journey to the infirmary, he set Law down on one of the beds gently, not liking the flush of his cheeks. Simple exhaustion didn't put so much colour into his cheeks, and Shachi feared that Law had worked himself into an illness.

Penguin helped him settle Law, determining that he was developing a slight fever and running for a damp cloth to try and keep his temperature under control before it got too severe. Law's weak
immune system was a complication they always hated to deal with.

"I'll help Bepo," Penguin said once he'd done everything he could for Law. Shachi nodded, and the older man left the room. Less than a minute later, as Shachi was preparing fresh cloths for when the one currently in use got too warm, the crew member that had brought the entire situation to his attention stumbled in, looking around nervously before making his way to Law's side.

"Good spot," Shachi told him, far more favourably disposed towards him than he had been earlier. It was amazing the sort of things that could change someone's opinion. Disturbing a blood-soaked grouchy guy to ask an obvious question? Unwelcome and annoying. Pointing out that the captain had bitten off more than he could chew? Gratitude and respect became more prevalent.

"Is... he going to be okay?" the other pirate asked. Shachi pushed a grin onto his face with more effort than he'd wanted.

"He'll be fine. He just overdid it with his abilities and now he's made himself ill, but he'll be on his feet again before long." Shachi once again buried his own concern beneath the confident words, not wanting to spook the rest of the crew, who had begun to filter in with varying degrees of concern on their faces.

The sirens wailed suddenly, indicating that they were about to enter a dive. Shachi did a quick headcount – excluding him and Law, there were ten of them in the room. His haki found another three putting away their spoils, and one more tending the engines. If he added in Penguin and Bepo, busy in the control room plotting the course and steering, that was everyone accounted for.

Satisfied, he returned his attention to Law, in time to see Clione changing the damp cloth while some of the newer members fussed with the covers, needing something to occupy their hands. Shachi didn't have the heart to banish them to help put away their spoils, and busied himself with sorting through the medicine cabinets to find something Law could take once he was conscious enough to swallow without choking.

That desperately-desired bath was little more than a distant memory, despite the sticky red still covering his uniform and the ends of his hair. That could wait until Law opened his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Someone wanted Law pushing himself too far and getting a fever (and the crew panicking), and I'm not going to pass up a chance to write something like that!

As far as Bepo not needing a Log Pose is concerned, so far we haven't seen any evidence that Minks use them (despite being named the crew's navigator, Bepo's never been seen with one in his possession), and even if they did it wouldn't get them back home again, as Zou doesn't register on one. It's been stated that only Minks or those with a Mink's viver card can find Zou, so unless Oda contradicts me, I'm going with the theory that they don't need them. Of course, the rest of the crew do, so they still have one in case Bepo's ever in a position where he can't navigate.
Law's breath was heavy in his chest. His lungs laboured to draw in the oxygen and exhale the deoxygenised air his body no longer needed. Something cool rested on his forehead, and he mentally catalogued it as some sort of damp cloth. A fever, then, most likely the trail end of one, considering his return to consciousness.

Opening his eyes, his vision was assaulted by several faces looming over him wearing similar expressions of concern that morphed into relieved smiles as they registered his awakening.

"Captain!" his newest find exclaimed. Law noticed that he looked uneasy – that all the crewmembers crowding his personal space looked a little wary despite their smiles – and gave him a grin that he hoped was reassuring. As his senses fully returned to him, it wasn't difficult to pick up on the source of their nervous disposition; although out of his immediate line of sight, his haki picked up a dark aura in the room. Moving his head to the side, seeking the source, his eyes landed on Shachi, who stood a little way back, arms crossed.

The shades always made him harder to read than anyone else in the crew, hiding his eyes and whatever emotions they held. Part of Law wondered if he did it on purpose, refusing to let his eyes be healed so he had the convenient excuse of hiding what he felt when he wanted to. On this occasion, with the brim of his hat pulled low to throw extra shadows over the top of his face, his lips set into a thin line and his clothes, hair and cheek stained with blood, Law didn't need his haki to tell him Shachi was in a bad mood. The black aura only served to sow unease amongst the crew; even those without observation haki could tell that something wasn't right.

The normally cheerful, almost always smiling Shachi rarely fell into such a black mood, so it was unsurprising that even the older members weren't sure how to handle it. Law spared a moment to wonder where Penguin was, and if he would share in Shachi's mood or lighten it. On the rare occasions that the ginger's temper flared up significantly, his best friend was usually there to calm him. His absence was concerning.

"How are you feeling?" His eyes sought out the crewmember that had spoken, landing on the shorter man, and he offered another hopefully-reassuring grin.

"Fine," he told him, trying and failing to ignore the way the haki in the air soured further. "Weaker than usual, but it'll pass." The heavy air intensified again, and Shachi finally joined the circle surrounding his bed – or rather, the infirmary bed he was occupying, he noticed. Their nakama shuffled away slightly, giving Shachi plenty of space to thrust medicine into Law's mouth with little ceremony.
Law swallowed, making a face at the taste, but didn't complain. Whatever fever he'd had may have broken, but he was far from healthy.

"In that case," Shachi said, sounding as if he'd been the one forced to swallow the bitter medicine, "I'll go clean up." The blood must be from their battle – Law vaguely recalled the remains of a marine crashing into him – and he wondered how long his fever had raged for that Shachi had still not cleaned up.

A clink caught his attention in time for him to see one of those damned kairoseki cuffs snap shut around his wrist, and Law glared at him, only to receive an equal glower in return.

"Overusing your abilities landed you in here," Shachi told him bluntly, turning away and walking towards the door. "You don't get to use them again until you're back on your feet." Law watched the older man stalk out of the room, feeling the atmosphere lighten as soon as the door shut behind him, before turning to the members of his crew still present.

"Well?" he asked, managing to shift his wrist enough to lightly jangle the chain attached. Most of the crew were used to the occasional display of mutiny – he would be having words with Shachi when he got the chance – but the newer members had never seen anything of the sort before, so Law levelled them with an expectant look, hoping to coerce them into removing the insufferable restraint.

"Sorry, Captain," the newest whimpered, looking around at his nakama for support. "But… I think Shachi-san would gut me if I touched them." Law frowned. The refusal was hardly new, but he couldn't have Shachi establishing such terror amongst the newer recruits. Nakama should not have to fear each other. Unwilling to unnerve the new pirate further, Law changed the subject.

"Why are the engines running?" he asked, having registered the background rumble.

"We've set sail for the next island," Ikkaku told him, perching on the side of his bed and adjusting the cool cloth on his forehead. Law assumed his temperature was still higher than it should be, even if the main fever had broken.

"How long was I unconscious?" he asked, quickly doing the maths in his head and finding that it didn't work out, unless Shachi had been in the same bloodied clothes for almost a week.

"Approximately six hours," Clione told him, and Law frowned.

"The log pose wasn't due to set for another five days," he pointed out, watching them fidget. "Don't tell me you didn't wait."

"Shachi-san gave the order to set sail," the new recruit volunteered, and Law wished he had the energy to pinch the brow of his nose, because he felt a headache coming.

"And no-one reminded him about log poses?" he asked, wondering where Penguin and Bepo had been throughout all the madness. They looked at each other before shrugging.

"Penguin and Bepo were the ones that took control of the ship," Ikkaku told him and Law sighed. Well that answered that question, if rather unsatisfactorily. Penguin was supposed to be keeping Shachi in check when he came up with stupid ideas, not enabling him, and Bepo never stood a chance against the pair of them in a battle of wills.

"We wouldn't have had to set sail if someone hadn't been an idiot." Ah, the black cloud had returned to the room, still firmly accompanying Shachi, although the ginger was now free of bloodstains. His hair was still wet, dripping slowly onto the floor and Law wanted to forcibly dry it because Shachi knew better than that. More pressing was the issue of Shachi's attitude, though. He had long since
crossed the line most captains would consider mutiny, and with that last comment was dancing dangerously close to Law's own definition.

"Sorry, but I want to speak to Shachi alone," he told his crewmates, who took one look at the ginger and all but scurried from the room.

"What?" Shachi demanded the moment the door shut behind the last one. "You-"

"Do *not* speak to me like that," Law interrupted in a low growl. "I do not care how angry you are, there is only so much insubordination I can take and you are testing my patience."

If Shachi had been anyone else, anyone he hadn't known for the past eleven years, the resulting glower Law received would have seen him off the ship for good. As it was, Law chalked it up as one more strike in the tally he would be paying for later and took the sullen silence to mean Shachi was done antagonising him for the moment.

"Explain to me exactly why you decided we should set sail without setting the log pose," Law demanded, wishing he had the strength to sit up. He watched Shachi take a deep breath, and then another, clearly calming himself down before he said something they'd both regret. The fact that Penguin had apparently not argued implied that the reason had been genuine, but Law required details.

"It was too dangerous to remain on that island that long," Shachi eventually ground out, having the grace to at least look Law in the eyes – or as best he could tell, with the shades in the way. "If it were only hours, I might have risked it, but five days was too long."

"Why?" There was little that would scare Shachi enough to make a call like that at the crew's current strength. The Marines on the island had been difficult to handle only due to the numerical advantage they'd held, not because they were particularly strong. What else had revealed itself after Law had collapsed?

"One survivor," Shachi told him. "One witness. That's all it would have taken to bring more Marines to us, or even a rival pirate group." Law frowned, but Shachi cut him off before he could express his annoyance that they'd fled for such a cowardly reason. "Our captain just outright fainted in full view of anyone that might have been watching!" Shachi was getting heated again, but as long as he stayed on topic Law would allow it for the moment. "What sort of message does that send out, huh? That we're weakened, easy prey! Every single Marine unit, rival pirate crew and bounty hunter in the area would have been nuts not to jump on that opportunity! We can handle one or two enemies at once, but not everyone in this area of the Grand Line. This isn't North Blue anymore, Captain! They call this the Pirates' Graveyard for a reason!"

Law begrudgingly admitted that Shachi was right, but the ginger wasn't done with his rant.

"What happened to the subterfuge we used to be so good at?" he demanded. "What happened to not drawing attention to ourselves? Making a name for yourself is all well and good-" Law knew Shachi was actually proud of the fact his captain had a decent bounty, when he wasn't wound up and ranting "-but not when you push it too far! You put us all in danger with that stupid stunt of yours!"

Law winced at Shachi's final sentence. He had no doubt it was specifically crafted to hit him where it hurt – Law's crew were everything to him and Shachi knew that – but that didn't mean it was any less effective.

"Don't you *dare* do that again," Shachi growled, his voice fading back to its normal volume, before turning half away from Law, nudging his shades up with his arm as he swiped at his eyes. The fabric
Law froze, the missing piece to the puzzle finally sliding into place.

"Shachi..." he murmured.

"My shades slipped," the ginger mumbled, fussing with them. Law didn't buy it, but chose not to call him out on the lie, too stunned at the revelation that should have been obvious.

Shachi had been worried about him. The whole crew had been. They'd set sail, deliberately not following a log pose path, to protect him while he recovered. They'd encounter less ships on this route, and anyone that might have thought to pursue them if word did get out that he'd fainted wouldn't be able to follow them easily.

"Come here," he ordered, gesturing for Shachi to move closer to him, within arm reach. He was instantly obeyed, and Law forced one hand up, resting the fingertips lightly on his cheek. "Close your eyes and take off the shades." Again he was obeyed, and Law was struck by just how much Shachi trusted him as he carefully swiped away the beads of tears that had been forming in a rare show of affection. "You should be more careful," he scolded lightly, letting Shachi hold up the pretence that the tears were from light exposure and not overflowing emotions.

"I'll try," Shachi replied, a weak grin gracing his face as Law let his arm fall back to his side, permitting the ginger to replace his shades.

"Good," Law said. "And Shachi?"

"Hmm?" the older man hummed, looking at him questioningly. The dark aura had lessened significantly during their talk, to Law's relief.

"I'm sorry."

Shachi grinned properly, leaning down and wrapping his arms around Law tightly.

"Don't do it again," he scolded lightly. Law didn't bother replying to that, smiling into damp ginger hair.

"One last thing," he said after several minutes, as Shachi finally began to pull back. "I want you to apologise to the crew. You were angry at me, don't take it out on them." Shachi bit his lip and tugged the peak of his cap down, casting his face firmly in shadow again.

"I wasn't angry at you," he mumbled. "Not really." Law lifted an eyebrow, clearly recalling the way the ginger had ranted at him. "I was angry at myself. I didn't notice at all! I was just blindly sorting out the loot on the boat while you were getting weaker and weaker. The new guy had to point it out to me. We've been nakama for so long... but I couldn't even see that."

There were tears rolling down Shachi's cheeks again, but this time he made no move to wipe them away as he reached out and undid the cuffs with a quiet clink, startling Law. He'd expected them to stay on until he was fit enough to get out of bed at the very least.

"Don't use your fruit for a while, yeah?" Shachi said, heading for the door. "I'll be back soon. Got some nakama to apologise to."

Law watched him leave, for once the idea of using his abilities to end his misery faster unappealing to him. He'd used them too much already, and Shachi would blame himself for leaving him unsupervised without the cuffs if he exhausted himself again.

Law had had quite enough of Shachi blaming himself for one day.
This got a lot longer than I'd thought it would, and also a bit more angsty. Following on from the last chapter - Law waking up and Shachi finally getting to admit how scared he was, in a roundabout fashion.
Penguin looked up from where he'd been consulting with Bepo over their course – a distraction as much as a practicality for the pair of them – when the door of the control room opened. Shachi entered, finally clean and Penguin grinned until the depressed slouch of his friend's shoulders caught his attention. The grin slid away as if it had never been there and he was on his feet in an instant, Bepo following suit.

"Did something happen?" he asked, crossing the room to him and noticing that his hair was still wet. He'd only just cleaned up, and Penguin plucked the hat off of his head – Shachi knew better than to wear a hat on wet hair, and Law would complain about him setting himself up for a cold if he didn't dry off.

"Is Captain okay?" Bepo piped up just as Penguin registered the dried tear tracks streaming down Shachi's face. His heart sunk in his chest.

"He's fine," Shachi reassured them both, leaving Penguin very confused as to why the ginger had clearly been crying. "The fever broke about half an hour ago and he's awake now, although he won't be getting up any time soon."

"Thank goodness," Bepo sighed, glancing at the puzzled log pose and his own navigational notes. "I'm going to go see him!" The Mink was out of the door before Penguin could protest, not that he planned to. Knowing that Law was awake and okay was enough for him for the moment. He waited until the door closed before he returned his attention to Shachi, reaching out to ruffle the wet hair.

"You need a towel," he pointed out, only for Shachi to pout. "Did scolding Law not go too well?" If Law was recovering fine, there was nothing else he could think of that would upset his friend. Shachi's posture slumped further, and he shook his head numbly.

"I thought he was going to throw me off the crew," he mumbled, and Penguin froze, disbelieving. "I just got so wound up and started shouting and-" he broke off with a hiccup and Penguin realised he'd started crying again. "A-and he said I was pushing too far and I've never seen him t-that angry at anyone in the crew." Penguin wrapped his arms around him and let him sob the story out – how he'd been angry at himself but it had spilled over and he'd ended up lashing out at the crew and then Law himself and Law had been furious.

From what Penguin gathered, Law had eventually worked out what was actually going on and Shachi was forgiven, but while Shachi knew it, he was still too shaken by everything that had happened over the past few hours – from not noticing Law was struggling, to Law's collapse, to Law's awakening and subsequent argument – to properly calm down.
"Come on, you," he murmured once Shachi finally finished gulping out the story, sobbing quietly into his shoulder. "Go get some rest." He guided him out of the room (snagging the unfortunate Uni as he wandered past to direct him to the control room and the navigational notes Bepo had left) and over to their shared bunkroom, where he deposited the trembling ginger on his own lower bunk. Mussing his hair with a towel, he got rid of the worst of the water before he pushed him to lie down and kick off his boots.

"I'll be back in a minute," he told him, knowing full well that Shachi was never going to relax enough to sleep without some medical incentive, but also knowing that he was going to be a wreck until he slept the worst of it off. Shachi nodded weakly, rolling over onto his front and burying his face in his arms. Penguin mussed his hair gently once again before slipping out of the room and towards the infirmary.

True to Shachi's word, Law was awake, if clearly exhausted and unlikely to be moving any time soon.

"I wondered when you were going to drop by," his captain commented from where he'd clearly been shifted to curl up against Bepo, who was draped around him protectively. "Where's Shachi? He's been gone longer than I thought he would be."

Penguin could hear the concern in his voice, and that was enough to reassure him that his surmising had been correct and Shachi's insubordination had been forgiven at least enough that his place in the crew was secure.

"He was a wreck so I sent him to bed," he said, rummaging through the cupboards to find the sleeping aids he knew Law kept in there somewhere.

"How bad?" Law asked, and the guilt was clear to Penguin's ears. He was having none of that.

"It's not your fault," he said firmly, turning around to look at uncertain yellow eyes. "Like you collapsing wasn't his fault. So if the pair of you could stop blaming yourselves for the other's condition that would be great." Law managed to let out a small chuckle, which he counted as progress. "He's not great, but he just needs to calm down and then it'll be fine. You know how wound-up he can get." At Law's fond nod, he turned back around to hunt through the cabinets again – had Law rearranged everything recently? He could have sworn they were in that cabinet over there…

"Middle-right, bottom shelf in the corner," Law told him, and nope, that had definitely not been where the sleeping aids used to be, but when Penguin obeyed he found exactly what he was looking for. "Just one tablet in a glass of water will do."

"Got it," Penguin affirmed, already knowing the required dose but recognising Law's need to make certain everything was as it should be. "I've left Uni in charge of navigating for now, so I'll have to get back once I'm done with Shachi," he told his captain as he shut the cabinet door and turned to face him. "I'll be back later, though." He felt bad that he couldn't dedicate his time to either his captain or Shachi, but the crew needed someone to keep them in order and right now he was the only one up for the task. Law gave an understanding smile.

"Before you go," he said, shifting against Bepo – either the Mink was asleep or pretending to be, because he hadn't stirred at all the entire time Penguin had been in the room – "could you pass me a glass of water?"

Penguin did so, helping him upright enough to drink it easily before settling him back down against his Mink-pillow and adjusting the covers over him.
"Just so you know," he said as he put the glass back on the side, because while he wasn't angry like Shachi had been but he still had opinions on Law's recklessness, "I hope you realise we're never obeying orders to leave you to finish up a fight by yourself again." Law let out a soft sigh, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"I expected nothing else," he admitted. "Now don't you have Shachi to tend to, and then a ship to command? I want everything and everyone still in one piece when I get out of this bed."

"Yes, Captain," Penguin grinned, accompanied by a brief salute before he left the room, bottle of tablets held firmly in his hand.

By the time he made it back to the room he shared with Shachi, the ginger's breath had lost its hiccups and the tears had dried, although from the way he shifted at the closing door Penguin knew he wasn't asleep. He had, however, changed out of his boiler suit and into lighter clothes more suitable for sleeping in.

"How is he?" Shachi asked as he watched Penguin drug his water before accepting the glass, although not lifting it to his lips.

"Recovering," Penguin said truthfully, perching on the edge of the bed and looking at the glass meaningfully. "Worried about you. I swear, you two are both idiots, blaming yourselves for the other's stupidity." Shachi managed a chuckle at that and finally tipped the water down his throat.

Penguin turned off the lights, drawing the thick fabric of a makeshift curtain across the porthole just in case they surfaced while Shachi was still resting, and heard the familiar sound of shades landing on the table by the bunk in the darkness.

The ginger said nothing else, but Penguin hung around until he heard his breathing slow into sleep and pulled the covers over him properly. Fondly ruffling his hair one last time, he left the room quietly, heading back to the responsibilities awaiting him in the control room.

Chapter End Notes

I hadn't originally planned to make this a three-parter, but I couldn't leave Shachi like that, and Penguin deserved his chance to scold Law as well, so it happened. That is it for this particular plot, though, unless someone specifically requests something else related.

Concerning one of the previous chapters, it's been pointed out to me that North Blue actually borders the New World, rather than Paradise as I'd thought, so chapter 70 (formerly *Bypass*, now *Crossing*) has now been rewritten because I specifically decided to make this a canon-compliant series so I couldn't leave such a large error in here. It still focuses on the Calm Belt, but no longer as their entrance to the Grand Line. I'll readdress their entrance to the Grand Line in a later chapter.
Curled up against a napping Bepo, Law watched Penguin and Shachi bickering with no venom in their voices and couldn't help but feel a bit left out. In the months since he'd gained his three followers, now the nakama he never thought he'd have, they had largely gelled together, but the odd moment highlighted a divide right down the middle of the crew.

While all four of them got on well, there was no doubt that Law and Bepo had become a pair, while Penguin and Shachi were so obviously joined at the hip Law swore they were telepathically connected at times (their silent conversations carried out within a single glance were both unnerving and enviable). It didn't help that he and Bepo were used to travelling and fighting to survive, while the other two blanched at the darker side of piracy. They were more than happy to get into brawls – more so than Law and Bepo – but they still hesitated at the final blow. It frustrated Law, but after the horrendous mess he'd made of trying to push them too far too soon he forced himself to be patient with them (often dealing the final blow himself if they hesitated too long).

Their innate understanding of each other definitely had a past. A shared opinion on survival did not bring two people that close together so quickly (see his relationship with Bepo – they still needed words to communicate more often than not, and although the Mink was surprisingly perceptive Law found it harder to read the Mink).

"How long have you two known each other?" he asked suddenly, fed up of trying to puzzle them out. Their bickering died away to nothing before they turned to face him, perfectly in unison with identical looks of confusion on their faces. It did nothing to convince Law they weren't somehow a hive mind.

Penguin shrugged a split second before Shachi, breaking the illusion.

"Forever, I guess," he said. Law bit back a retort about how they were barely older than he was so of course they hadn't been alive forever, let alone known each other that long, and instead turned his gaze onto Shachi, who shrugged again.

Beneath him, Bepo stirred and opened his eyes, clearly interested. Law hadn't realised he wasn't actually asleep.

"Define forever," he ground out after several seconds of silence, the older boys clearly not planning on elaborating without prompting.

Shachi sat down heavily on the deck with a huff, crossing his legs and reminding Law of rows of children sat on the floor, listening to the Sisters explain things avidly. Penguin was slower to sit, arranging his legs so that one knee was raised, his elbow resting on it and hand hanging limply.
"Penguin's been there as long as I can remember," Shachi began, turning his head slightly towards his friend. Law assumed his eyes had also flicked that way, but with the shades in the way he couldn't say for certain.

"Our mothers grew up together," Penguin picked up the story, his voice breaking almost imperceptivity on the word mothers. Law understood the feeling all too well and didn't comment. "They were inseparable, even when they grew up and got married. Right until-

"So we got designated playmates the moment Mama knew she was pregnant with me," Shachi cut across, almost but not quite hiding the way Penguin's voice had choked up. His voice remained steady, but a fourteen, almost fifteen, year old boy calling his mother by the childish mama felt out of place, especially when Law knew Shachi had long since grown out of every other childish mannerism (immature was another matter entirely and he didn't think he'd ever grow out of that).

"We never really got a say in whether or not we were going to be friends," Penguin chuckled. Law thought he saw something glisten in the shade of his hat, but let it slide without comment, realising that he'd dragged up memories the two usually didn't like to dwell on. "He got thrown at me just before my first birthday and we've been together ever since."

"Must be nice," Bepo mumbled. Law agreed, suddenly struck by how much he missed his classmates from Flevance. Lami was always there in the back of his mind, her smile pushing him forwards when he stumbled, but he rarely spared a thought for the ones that had once been, well, friends, as much as children who got creeped out by his obsession with dissecting frogs could be his friends.

Perhaps it was because he'd dredged up memories that Penguin and Shachi had pushed through with a smile that was more a mask than genuine, but Law found himself talking a little bit about his own 'friends' – the girl that squealed louder than anyone else when he brought yet another frog into their classroom, and the boy that declared it was 'cool' but always declined Law's invitation to take part in the dissection. The other girl he often spoke to even if she hated the frogs, the one that always asked after Lami and liked to join her for ice cream, and the boy that had confided in Law that he had a crush on his sister (a mistake on his behalf, but now Law wished there were still people like that, just so he could continue to play the protective big brother card and chase them away from Lami).

Bepo joined in with what little he remembered of his own brother; his thirst for knowledge and lust for adventure that drove him to set sail with a small group of his own friends – the very same group Bepo had tried to follow and got lost on the way.

It was the first time Law had been able to think of Flevance without wanting to kill something, surrounded by nakama that knew what it was like to lose someone and fight on through. It still hurt – would never not hurt – but he smiled through the tears, because his nakama did too.

The divide shrunk, just a little.

Chapter End Notes

So someone asked for the story of how Penguin and Shachi met, but that was a little hard to do because in my mind they knew each other from the day Shachi was born which is before their memories would begin. It morphed into this little bonding moment instead, because they've all lost someone and Law can't stay standoffish forever (his classmates are slightly easier to talk about than his family, I suspect). Not with these
three.
In every proper pirate crew, there was a hidden nakama. Even the crew themselves rarely knew the full depth of it – and if superstitions were to be believed, that was usually a good thing – although they did, of course, know there was something special there. If there was nothing special, she wouldn't exist.

She was lucky. Many never met the love and devotion she had – if she'd gone to her intended, then she probably would never have become what she was now – and when she saw others in that situation she pitied them. Never knowing pure love, never knowing the freedom it brought; to her, there was no worse fate.

Her nakama were crazy, coaxing her into situations anyone with any sanity would steer well clear of (outrunning ice and dodging light with the guidance of heavy yet gentle hands was something that would never be forgotten), but any damage she sustained was lovingly tended to. To date, she'd never had to repair herself (not that she would be able to do a good job of it, but she'd do everything she could because like her crew loved her, so she loved them with everything she had).

The crew had their own quirks, like how Bepo wouldn't let them stay underwater for too long, unable to withstand the heat, or how Law laughed the loudest when they were deepest. Shachi was a bundle of chaos, with Penguin acting as his brakes, but sometimes it was the other way around and no-one was sure how to act when Shachi was the more responsible of the two because that just never happened, except once in a blue moon when it did.

The others she learnt when they first boarded much later on, finally growing their family and adding to the love that sustained and bolstered her. By the time they entered the Grand Line, she was confident that should such an event ever come to pass, she would be able to take on enough of a corporeal form to communicate with them directly, thank them for their love and tell them just how much she loved them.

But for a being like her, such a conversation was a goodbye, and the Polar Tang had no intentions of bidding her crew farewell any time soon. The Grand Line was tough, and many ships succumbed to the cruel nature of the ocean, but she had been made to survive the worst things the world could throw at her, things her crew – her precious, precious, cargo – would never endure without her, and survive she would.

A pirate crew was nothing without a ship, and a ship was nothing without her crew. They gave her the love she fed on, and in return she loved and protected them. She couldn't reveal herself to them in her spiritual form, heralding doom to the very crew she would protect until her last bolts rusted and fell apart, but that didn't mean she couldn't sometimes extend her consciousness – if it could be called...
that – to wrap around a particularly desolate nakama and comfort them.

Whether they knew the loving presence they felt was their ship, or if they attributed it to any of the many other theories of ghosts and spirits (or even just their imagination), she didn't know, but it didn't matter.

A klabautermann was an ill omen if seen, but for as long as she remained unseen yet still so very there she was the blessing the crew bestowed upon themselves through love.

Chapter End Notes

I've been planning to do a Polar Tang PoV for ages. I love the idea of a klabautermann and the fact that One Piece ships (if loved enough) canonically have their own sentience, although it feels bittersweet to me that they can't really interact with their crew without being an ill omen. As for my choice of pronoun for the Polar Tang, ships are traditionally considered to be female so I've followed that tradition here (interestingly, I consider the Sunny to be male for reasons I can't explain, but both the Merry and the Tang I consider female).
The air was toxic, catching in Law's lungs every time he took a breath and leaving a burning
sensation behind. The purple fog clouded his vision, leaving him stumbling through the ruined city,
tripping over rubble and corpses alike. Some of the bodies hadn't lost the last of their life yet,
releasing pathetic moans as his toes stubbed against them. Their faces were blurred, unimportant in
the grand scheme of things as he pushed forwards, not knowing what he was hunting for but
knowing there was something in the wasteland that he needed to find.

Groans and moans were drowned by screams as he pushed forwards further, the sounds drawn from
hoarse throats as if they'd been screaming for hours. The stench of death and the metallic tang of
blood hung in the air, but still he forced himself forwards, towards the source. Somehow, he knew,
what he wanted, what he needed, would be there.

Shadowy figures emerged through the fog, tall and upright in contrast to the bodies crumpled at and
around his feet. Many were motionless, stuck in the approximate shape of an X, and Law knew he'd
found the centre of everything – the pain, the suffering, the screams. The less static figures flailed,
beating on their still counterparts to pained groans and screams, filling Law with a rage that bubbled
up inside him, rising from his stomach to his heart and then up his throat to his head, dying his vision
a violent red.

He tripped again, this time failing to catch himself before he crashed to the ground, and found
himself staring into the mostly-closed eyes of Ikkaku, the woman writhing in muted agony on the
bloodied ground. Her clothes were littered with gashes and gouges, dyed with the unmistakable
crimson of blood. Her hair had long since escaped its confines, tangling itself up like vines of ivy
clinging to a tree, securing her to the rubble surrounding her. Blood leaked from the corner of her
mouth. His vision cleared, showing him body after body dressed in the same clothes, bearing the
same yellow jolly roger as they writhed on the ground, unable to escape the clutches of whatever
was in the air.

Law's throat grew tight at the sight, reaching out to hold her, them, whoever he could reach, but it
was as if he had eaten the Sube-Sube no Mi as his fingers slipped from them no matter how hard he
tried. Those of them with their eyes open stared past him, unseeing and unresponsive as he frantically
waved a hand in front of them, or snapped his fingers by their ears. His Room was no more effective,
expanding out as he intended but equally unable to interact with any of his crew.

Stumbling forwards again, he moved from nakama to nakama, desperately trying to find anyone,
just one that he could touch, could help. With each failure he grew more frantic, moisture building in
his eyes and his breathing growing more and more uneven, until he tripped over Uni's leg, sprawling
out on the ground and sobbing into the churned-up earth. His fingers dug into the blood-soaked soil,
clawing at it until it forced its way up under his nails. Small stones chipped at them until cracks appeared, oozing muddied blood, but his grip didn't relent.

A large foot crashed to the ground in front of his fingers, narrowly missing them, and Law pulled his face from the dirt to see a giant of a man swing a blade. His mind supplied an identity – Jack the Calamity – as a choked scream sounded from above his head.

He froze. He'd never heard it in such a pitch before, but he knew that voice.

Turning his head away from Kaido's subordinate, he registered the wooden cross roughly impaled into the ground in front of his face and dragged his gaze up it reluctantly, already knowing what he would see.

Shachi hung limply, suspended by his wrists and his toes dangling a foot from the ground. His hat was long gone and his shades were shattered, the frames hanging from one ear, leaving his face exposed to the elements. A savage gash tore at his cheek, matted ginger hair clinging to it as if it were trying to seal it back up. The rest of him was in no better state, his boiler suit patched through with deep red and accompanying slashes, many of which still bleed sluggishly. Like the rest of his nakama, his breath was coming in ragged, pained gasps, uneven and broken as tremors wracked his body. His fingers quivered like leaves in a breeze, long since weakened beyond the point of the defiant fist he knew the ginger would have originally sported.

Besides him, as always, was Penguin, his state easily as sorry as Shachi's, if not worse. Likewise, his hat was gone, and his hair clung to wounds in matted clumps. He hung even limper, ragged breathing faint as even involuntary trembling slowly began to cease. If Shachi's clothes had been patched with blood, Penguin's was soaked, the once-yellow jolly roger on his breast tattered and oozing red. The sight made Law feel ill, his head going light for a moment before another scream from Shachi and an accompanying new gash opening up across his chest snapped him back to the sight in front of him.

Jack's sword dripped with blood – his nakama's blood – and Law dragged himself to his feet, forgetting that he'd been able to do nothing for the rest of his crew as he planted himself between the ginger and his aggressor. He saw a flash of orange, muted by the same red that painted everyone else, out of the corner of his eye and the nausea returned, knowing that Bepo was in the same state, his pure white fur matted and dyed with blood that would take forever to wash out. Occasional deep grunts from behind him told him where his last nakama was, Jean Bart's shadow reaching out to cover him, and Law's imagination was more than willing to conjure up visions of the former slave's current condition.

He didn't turn around, though. Not when Jack's jaw had stopped quivering, repeating whatever it was he was demanding of Law's nakama, and the sword was raised high again. Law groped for Kikoku's hilt blindly but failed to find it, his cursed sword having abandoned him when he needed her the most. Desperate, he charged as much armament haki into his arms as he could, crossing them into an x shape as the blade whistled through the air towards him – towards Shachi.

It passed straight through him as if he didn't exist, and another choked cry came from behind him. Whirling around, he saw the blade still buried in Shachi's abdomen, the ginger coughing up blood, too much blood. Jack pulled his weapon back with relish, and Shachi's body jerked forwards, morbidly trying to keep its hold on the blade. As the latest wound was exposed to the world it gushed more of the precious crimson life down onto Law's feet.

The blood was the only thing that touched him. He felt the warm spray on his hands as he lunged forwards, trying to stem the bleeding with his fingers because that was all he had, but like with everyone else his hands could find no purchase. They dyed themselves redder and redder, but
Shachi's blood was the only thing he could touch.

Another gurgle of blood from the wounds and Shachi's head lolled forwards until his chin was resting gently on his bloodied chest. His eyes, previously squinting in pain, relaxed slowly until they were half-open, exposing the colour so rarely seen. There was no recognition in them, not even a flicker.

No, that wasn't right.

There was nothing at all. No light, nothing but dull sightless eyes. His chest stuttered in its heaving before it didn't rise again.

Law screamed, but his voice made no sound. He could feel it though, the vibrations in his throat and the pain of a voice stretched too far. This couldn't be happening. His crew were supposed to be safe, hidden away on Zou, and yet-

His heart stuttered and failed for a split second as he caught sight of Penguin again. The older man's chest, too, was no longer moving. Lifeless eyes stared at the ground as the bloody jolly roger on his chest grinned at Law accusingly. *You weren't here. You abandoned us. You sent us to this fate.*

An involuntary step back, and he crashed backwards, falling, falling, falling, with the dead bodies of his nakama taunting him – blaming him – all the way down.

He landed in his bed, his sorely-missed and comfortable bed in the darkness of his bedroom in the Polar Tang. For several moments, there was nothing he could do except let his breathing run its course, as ragged and broken as his nakama's had been.

Logic told him it was a nightmare, induced by the previous day's revelation of what had really happened on Zou.

Irrationality crushed logic, reminding him of the sightless eyes and still chests, and he all but flew from his bed, stumbling in the darkened room with only half his senses intact before he wrenched his door open with his working arm and staggered into the dimly-lit hallways.

He had to find them. He would never know if it was real if he didn't.

Ikkaku's room was closest to his, and his haki found her breathing peacefully – normally and regularly without the torture of poison entering her body with every breath. He stayed there for several minutes, sensing her even breathing and syncing his own to it. He only moved on once his body relaxed at the familiar pace, repeating the same exercise outside each bunk door. Not once did he dare to open the door, the fear that his haki was lying to him and that inside he would only find a corpse too great to risk.

Near the end of his round, a door opened as he approached. Shachi stood there, a dim figure highlighted barely by the low lighting, and called to him, pulling his unresisting body into the room. His hands were warm, his breathing was regular, and his eyes – for once not covered by shades, and Law realised that he'd been woken by Law's own wanderings – were full of concern, love, *life*.

He hadn't finished his round. Bepo was in the next room, and he hadn't confirmed him to be still alive, but as his nakama pulled him into bed with them, surrounding him with their warm bodies and serenading him with the sound of their still beating, *alive*, hearts, he calmed until he didn't need to anymore.
I got asked what nightmare Law had back in *Silent* (chapter 40). Here's the answer. Of course, the nightmare isn't strictly accurate to what actually happened, but Law only knew some of the facts (they were tortured, poison was involved, Jack was involved, he saw the remains of the city). His subconsciousness filled in the rest for him.
The light clopping of hooves on the decking was the first clue Law had towards his fellow doctor's approach. He stayed still, glancing at the tanuki out of the corner of his eye to see him taking three steps forwards then two steps back, constantly looking back at someone. That someone, Law could just about tell from his peripheral vision, wore an obnoxiously bright red shirt undone, and the infamous Strawhat on his head. The hat bobbed up and down, and Law had seen enough of the other captain to suspect there was one of those impossibly wide grins on his face.

Trying to focus on his periphery, as well as attempting to decipher Mugiwara-ya's latest brand of insanity, was giving him a headache so he returned his attention to the quivering tanuki, noticing the large volume clutched awkwardly in too-dexterous hooves. The title wasn't visible from that angle, but there were very few reasons Law could think of for Tanuki-ya to approach him with a book, and he debated how he felt about it.

He disliked doctors. Blinded by their cushy positions as one of the most important professions in society, they turned away from anyone that didn't fit the nice, simple role of 'patient'. Medical research had long since faded away into obscurity in his experience. He'd seen none of it since Flevance, and while he had heard of a winter island in Paradise that boasted similar prowess, until he saw it with his own eyes he wouldn't permit himself to believe that a hub of research still existed.

Of course, there were the doctors on the other side of the law, working underground, or even pirate doctors like himself and Tanuki-ya, but he disliked their practices almost as much as the blind law-abiding ones. He'd never met an illegal doctor with a respectable work area, or ethic. Many of them were money-grabbing frauds, and while Law knew he could hardly talk about ethics he could at least say that on the rare occasion he chose to treat someone he didn't rob them blind in the process.

He wasn't sure where on his scale of legal scum to illegal scum the Strawhat doctor fell yet. On Punk Hazard he had seemed naïve, stupidly so (Law knew first hand how it was impossible to save everyone and that sometimes it was better to let nature run its course), yet the work he'd put into counteracting Caesar's drugs… Law hadn't seen anything like it outside of his own submarine for sixteen long years. The fact that there was no obvious niche to put the inhuman doctor in made him uneasy, if he was honest with himself.

"L-law." The tanuki had reached arms' length (if an arm was to be measured in Robo-ya's standards) and stopped, clearly setting himself an invisible barrier which was not to be crossed. Law had no objections, unwilling to get closer to any of the other crew than he had to. He'd been close enough, embarrassingly so, to the other doctor already and was unwilling to repeat the experience. He turned his head to face him silently, regarding the way he fidgeted as if he was on the verge of fleeing.
Dimly he recalled the reindeer form he'd seen the other take and wondered if it was his natural flight instinct kicking in.

"Tanuki-ya," he acknowledged after the silence stretched on too long. With Caesar nearby and Doflamingo ahead, any patience he might normally have exhibited had long since evaporated, and he was in no mood to deal with Tanuki-ya's skittishness.

"I-I-" the small doctor stuttered, pulling the book closer to his chest for a moment. "I'm not a tanuki, you bastard!" he exploded, honestly catching Law by surprise. The skittish creature had just shouted at him and insulted him? Was bipolarity a common disorder in the Strawhat crew? Certainly many of them, captain very obviously included, exhibited the symptoms. The creature took a deep breath, calming himself, before continuing. Clearly he'd realised that arguing over whether or not he was a tanuki was a waste of breath. Law appreciated it.

"Are you really a surgeon?" was the question that finally escaped his mouth, to Law's surprise. There were many things people often asked him if given the chance ("what's with the hat" and "what's with the tattoos" prominent), but that was a new one. He remained silent and the tanuki rushed on. "I mean, I know the Marines say you are, and I know you're a doctor, but the Marines don't necessarily know what the difference is so I was wondering if you were actually a surgeon," he garbled, to Law's raised eyebrow.

"I am," he said simply, and he swore the tanuki's eyes briefly turned into stars, disturbingly similar to the way his captain viewed meat (Law may not have been with the Strawhats for very long, but long-term exposure was hardly a requirement to learn of Mugiwara-ya's obsession with meat).

Their invisible boundary disappeared alongside all the wariness the tanuki had been exhibiting as he bounded the last couple of feet to settle in front of Law, placing the heavy tome down in front of him excitedly. As Law had surmised, it was medical in nature. More specifically, it appeared to be about the surgery of organs.

He was slightly taken aback at how easily the tanuki appeared to have him figured, until he remembered that he had been present to see him clutching more than one heart during their time on Punk Hazard. That was probably a large clue.

"I've never been very good at surgery," the tanuki confessed, to Law's complete unsurprise. Uncannily dextrous or not, he had yet to see the tanuki take a form with hooves appropriate for conventional surgery. "But I saw Luffy's scar, a-and I don't want to be useless. Not like I was with Mocha and the others." Law hardly thought that developing a temporary antidote on the fly was useless, but it wasn't his job to give self-depreciating tanukis pep talks. "So… I-I was wondering if you could explain some things?"

Law had no reason to explain anything to a rival crew member. He certainly had no obligation to, nor was there any incentive that he could see (he would only later find out about the Torino Island herbs and regret not demanding those as exchange, forgetting that with the tanuki as he was he'd probably gift them if Law showed any interest at all).

Perhaps it was the fur, or the simple anthropomorphology that he exhibited, but for just a moment Law thought he was looking at Bepo when the Mink really really wanted something (begging for the submarine to resurface because it's too hot, Captain top of the list), and before he'd even realised what he was doing, he'd reached for the book in question and flipped it open to a marked page.

It was on stomachs, and Law immediately recognised the interest as stemming from Mugiwara-ya's own Marineford injury, although he was more unpleasantly reminded of a more recent surgery he'd performed. Dutifully, he began to decipher some of the terms, delighted when the tanuki absorbed
his words like a sponge.

Outside of his crew, no-one ever listened to him. Even casual conversation was an exchange of words barely tailored to the situation at hand, and absolutely no-one wanted to discuss medical techniques with the Surgeon of Death. In all fairness, whoever he'd ever brought the subject up with had probably thought he'd intended on using them as the example (and in some cases they would have been right, but Law didn't always use it as a threat, just most of the time).

His crew, for all he loved them, struggled with the nuances of surgery. Few of them had minds geared in such a way that they could view the body as a puzzle, and usually their medical training stopped at basic scrapes and superficial wounds. Others had persevered further, and Law remembered Penguin and Shachi studiously pulling stitches through each other's arms (with Bepo around, mammals were a no-go and neither amphibians nor reptiles had skin close enough to a humans' for Law's satisfaction) as he supervised closely. Neither of them had much aptitude for healing at all, capable of patching up scrapes but nothing else, but the way that they had forced themselves to learn, because they thought that Law needed someone else that could treat wounds, had touched him. It could also have been because they thought Law was happiest when he was teaching, sharing his knowledge. Law liked to deny that idea, because if it was true that meant that even as a young teen, knowing them for less than a year at the time, he'd already been an open book to them.

Tanuki-ya was the most attentive student he'd had since those days, cowering under the sea for weeks at a time and teaching two ruffians who knew how to hurt but not to heal while they waited for Doflamingo to leave.

When he started asking questions back, debating techniques and showing a quick yet accurate comprehension of everything Law was saying, and the inquisitiveness required for research, Law wanted to cry. Finally, someone else who cared about technique enhancement, further research and studies to broaden the profession.

The fact that the one person with such pure desires wasn't even human spoke volumes.

Chapter End Notes

Someone requested some Law-Chopper doctor bonding, although I of course had to put in some Heart Pirate memories because, well, the Heart Pirates.

As anyone that has read my fic Succor may be aware, I have a headcanon that Law's afraid of doctors - although he's hardly going to channel it as fear when he can use disgust, disappointment and anger instead.
Cursed

Chapter Notes

Characters: Penguin, Law, Shachi, Bepo
Rating: Gen
Warnings: minor injury
Tags: Kikoku

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Law had assigned himself the shopping duty, leaving the other three sat on the upper deck of the Polar Tang with half an eye out for trouble, Penguin had expected him to come back with, well, shopping. Things they needed, like food, and of course the medical supplies because Law was more than happy to spend every last beri they had that didn't go towards basic necessities on anything and everything medical related.

He had not expected to see, alongside the bags laden on his skinny wrists, what appeared at first glance to be a very long, black stick. It was almost comical – the thing had to be twice as long as Law was tall – except what was it and why did Law have it (and how much had it cost, because they only had so much money on which to live and couldn't go on continuous pirate raids until Law decided they'd been in hiding long enough).

"Law, please tell me you haven't bought a sword that's too big for any of us except maybe Bepo to use," Shachi groaned, spotting the wrappings of the hilt and recognising the strange fluffy section as a peculiar guard.

"I didn't pay for it," Law said cryptically, clambering up the gangplank awkwardly before letting the bags slide from his wrists onto the ground with a thud. He kept the weapon in his arms, clinging to it as if it would disappear if he laxed his grip at all.

"I know you haven't finished growing yet, but that's impractical for anyone less than seven feet tall," Penguin said bluntly. "So unless it's for Bepo, which I'm doubting because he doesn't need one and you haven't handed it over yet, it's useless."

"She is mine, and I'll be using her," Law said stubbornly. For a moment, Penguin felt as if he was trying to tell a petulant child why he couldn't play with his new toy, before realising that that was, in fact, exactly what he was doing, if you considered a shrimp sixteen year old captain to be a petulant child, and a seven foot sword to be a new toy. All that was missing was the pout, but Law's stubborn glare was making an appropriate substitute.

"Once you're big enough," he retorted, reaching out and snatching the weapon from the shorter teen.

All at once, pain blossomed in his hand, and he almost dropped it with a yelp. That thing was heavy. Law had been carrying it as if it weighed no more than the shorter sword he'd picked up a year or so ago, but Penguin was certain it was at least triple the weight, if not more. More pressing than its weight, though, was the fact that his hand had been almost split in two by the suddenly exposed blade.

And the noise. There was an irritating crying in his ears, tinged with malice and anger that filled
Penguin with a sense of unease.

"The hell?" he gasped, letting Shachi take the weapon from him gingerly. The other teen cursed as his own finger was caught on the blade as well, despite the fact that he had very definitely made sure it was fully sheathed before taking it. The noise left Penguin's ears abruptly and Law rushed over to him, taking hold of his bleeding hand before rummaging around in one of the discarded bags for something. Unsurprisingly, he located antiseptic and Penguin gritted his teeth against the unpleasantness. Law finished up with a bandage, before turning to Shachi and holding his hand out expectantly for the weapon.

"This is cursed," Shachi stated blandly, looking down at the sword with a glower. "Likes to bite and won't shut up." Law's quirked eyebrow confused Penguin, but before he could comment Bepo swooped in, clearly tired of watching his human nakama make too much of a fuss over a single weapon, and took the sword from Shachi's hands.

"I don't get it," he said, confused, as Law quickly cleaned and wrapped Shachi's own small nick. "It's just a heavy sword."

"Bepo, it's screaming." Penguin frowned up at the Mink, wondering how the hell the Mink was missing the commotion. Bepo tilted his head to the side and pulled the sheathed blade to his ear, listening intently before shaking his head.

"No it isn't," he said.

"She likes to talk," Law interrupted, smoothly reclaiming the sword from Bepo as if it didn't weigh far more than any sword had a right to and seemingly unconcerned by the accompanying noises. "Her name is Kikoku."

Penguin knew a lost battle when he saw one, but he sent the sword a glower anyway.

"She's too big for you at the moment," he tried one last time, hoping that Law would see common sense and feeling stupid applying a pronoun to what was supposed to be an inanimate object. "At least wait until you've grown a bit before you start flailing her around, okay?" He cradled his bloody hand to his chest protectively, glad that Law had treated it before he'd got a good look at it. He had a horrid suspicion that if he'd been cut much deeper he'd have lost the use of a couple of fingers.

"You don't flail swords, Penguin," Law said disapprovingly, reverting back to the grip he'd originally had on the sword. "Now get those supplies away. I want to leave this island."

Deciding that the more distance there was between him and the cursed sword that seemed to have it in for him the better (why was he the only one that had nearly lost a hand? Shachi's injury was minor at best and the sword hadn't bitten Law or Bepo at all), Penguin obeyed, Shachi and Bepo right behind him.

To his relief, it was only a couple of days before Law finally admitted that Kikoku was too big for him and reverted back to his smaller sword for fighting. However, Kikoku was never thrown out, and Penguin dreaded the day the demonic sword would be picked up once again.

Law liked to talk to it (her?) sometimes, holding entire conversations as if she was replying, and if that wasn't freaky, Penguin wasn't entirely sure what was.

Chapter End Notes
People have been asking for a Kikoku chapter (and I've intended to do one since the very start but I could never find a scenario I was happy with), so here we are at last! I'd love to know more about her beyond the fact that she's a named and cursed blade but has no rank, but for now there are a couple of headcanons sneaking in. Law wields her way too easily for her size, so headcanon number one is that as she's his cursed sword, she feels light to him (and only him!).

Number two is based around her name "demon's wail" and what little we know of Sandai Kisetsu being seemingly sentient - she likes to scream. However, the volume of her screaming is dependant on the relative bloodlust/lust for vengeance exhibited by the person holding her, based on how much she needs to influence them to sate her own desires. Law just gets a quiet chatter, while Shachi and Penguin get a less bearable volume. Bepo, based on theories about Sulong, gets total silence. He's also strong enough not to be bothered by her weight, which we've seen in canon (likewise, neither Luffy or Zoro seem bothered by Kikoku in Dressrosa, but Zoro has a cursed sword of his own and Luffy's got a knack for shutting out irritating unnecessary things - I'm sure 'screaming swords' is one of them). Conversely, if someone pure and innocent (like Chopper) got hold of her, the screaming would be deafening and very quickly insanity-inducing.
Law blearily made his way through the darkened corridors of the Polar Tang. It was the dead of night, with only the night watch (Ikkaku, if memory served) not in bed, but Law had been woken by the insistence of his bladder. Half asleep, he pushed the door of the bathroom open, ignoring the light switch in favour of allowing his adjusted vision to guide him towards the nearest stall, only to be brought up short by the sight of a figure hunched over the far sink, clenching the ceramic with knuckles so whitened Law could see the difference even in the dark.

Surprised that someone else was up, Law hesitated for a moment, in which the figure broke away from the sink with a gasp – a horrible, wet, broken gasp – and darted into the stall closest to them (him – Law's sleep fogged brain had yet to identify the nakama, but the figure wasn't feminine enough to be Ikkaku).

The pained sounds of retching and spattering of vomit assaulted Law's ears, and the doctor in him woke up, striding towards the still open stall with purpose, ready to form a Room despite the sling still on his right arm and his crew's insistence that he wasn't healed enough yet. If someone was sick it needed treating before it spread throughout the rest of the crew.

He hadn't turned the lights on, and perhaps he'd subconsciously known who it was the whole time, because as he reached the stall door his night vision made out the shoulder length hair, more greyscale than ginger but still striking, of Shachi. He was in his sleepwear, hat missing, and more importantly without his shades. The sleeveless top highlighted the mass of bandaging around his arms, particularly his wrists, and it was those he was rubbing viciously as he bent over the toilet bowl with tears streaming down his cheeks, wringing his hands around and around his wrists desperately, dislodging and then unravelling the bandages to reveal the welts and rope burns from where he'd been tied to a cross back on Zou.

Law stopped short, suddenly glad that he hadn't been noticed as the meaning of Shachi's state sunk in. This was no simple illness – nothing contagious that threatened the health of the crew – but a side effect, a lingering result of the torture.

He'd known that Shachi (and Penguin, for that matter), weren't okay. They'd put up a front, but they still lacked the boundless energy Law had long since associated with them. He'd thought they'd found solace with each other, in the same way they always had done before, but as he watched Shachi frantically rub at his raw wrists as he gasped and retched tearfully, distinctly alone and away from the safety of the room he shared with Penguin, Law realised he'd been so, so wrong.

What was he supposed to do? He couldn't possibly leave and pretend he'd seen nothing, even though Shachi hadn't noticed him (and that was another massive red flag, because with Shachi's observation
haki sneaking up on the ginger was all but impossible – some of the crew liked to make a game of it, Law included as much as he pretended he wasn't actively trying to catch him off guard. There was no way he could leave his nakama in such a broken state, but when it came to offering comfort, or whatever it was Shachi needed at that moment, Law was completely clueless.

Should he get Penguin? Or Bepo? They were the usual go-tos when Shachi wasn't in the best mood, but Shachi was deliberately here without Penguin, when he could have easily dragged the other man with him. Then again, Penguin and Bepo had also suffered at the hands of Jack and his underlings, so maybe instead of helping them heal, commiserating together kept the wounds open? Law bit his lip, worrying at it as the thought crossed his mind that the others might well be in a similar state, hiding behind weak grins during the day only to break down at night.

A particularly loud, heart-wrenching sob from the form in front of him shoved the thought to the back of his mind; he'd deal with that later. They weren't in front of him right that second – Shachi was, and unless he could find a way to help Shachi, he'd be equally useless trying to help anyone else.

When it was him falling apart, Shachi would wrap his arms around him and pull him into a tight hug that would last until he pulled himself back together. Would that work? Was that what Law should do? He looked down at his own hands and realised they were trembling. He never initiated hugs. Would that make it weird? Would Shachi want a hug? Would a hug seem too much like pity? Shachi hated being pitied over anything.

His weight shifted, colliding with the door and nudging it against the wall. The noise did what Law's quiet footsteps had not and caught Shachi's attention, the ginger whirling around to see who the intruder was, his breath catching in his throat as he registered Law. His fingers tugged at the loose bandages around his wrists, trying to pull them back into place even as he gulped back tears, and something in Law snapped. Shachi should never have to hide his pain from him. Not now, and not ever.

His feet took him to the ginger's side, and a hand rested lightly on Shachi's back. Underneath the thin material, he felt the powerful muscles of his upper back tense, quivering for several long seconds, before the tension drained away and two fists clutched at the material of Law's own top, tugging him down to his knees. A tear-stained, vomit-stained face buried itself in his chest, but Law said nothing as his clothes were soiled, running his hand lightly up and down Shachi's back. His fingers could pick out the bumps of his spine as they travelled down, only to be rudely interrupted by the outline of the bandages underneath the clothes he wore. More reminders of the horrors Shachi had been through. Law fought to keep himself from tensing up in anger at Jack for what he'd done.

Shachi didn't need his anger. Shachi needed his support, and Law had no idea what he was doing, but as the wails started, muffled against his clothes but raw and full of pain nonetheless, he shifted his right arm until his hand rested lightly in amongst red strands of hair, hoping that it would help. He wasn't given a reaction either way, so he kept it there, staying silent as if making a single sound would snap Shachi back into the denial he'd been showing since Zou.

Law knew first hand the detriments to bottling everything up, and refused to let Shachi fall into that same trap (or maybe he already had, had been doing similar things for the past thirteen years and Law had never noticed but he prayed desperately that that wasn't the case, that he hadn't failed as a captain and nakama that badly).

He didn't know how long they stayed like that, long enough for the cool floor to chill his shins but the discomfort was easily ignored in the face of Shachi's pain, before the wails quietened to sniffles and hoarse sobs. The fists in his clothes tightened further, and Law read it as a cue to tighten his own
hold just a little, letting Shachi pull himself closer.

"It hurts," the ginger whimpered breathlessly between sobs. "It hurts, so, so much."

"I know," Law dared to whisper, his voice barely leaving his mouth. "I know. I'm sorry."

Shachi didn't respond, trembling like a leaf, but he didn't pull away, didn't try to retreat back into himself, and Law tightened his grip again, resting his cheek on the top of Shachi's head and listening to his hiccupping breaths fade into something slightly more regular.

It took him another minute to realise that Shachi had cried himself to sleep, and Law was faced with a fresh dilemma. He couldn't leave him there, on the cold hard floor of the bathroom, but could he take him back to his room? With his arm, there was no way he'd manage to get Shachi back onto the top bunk, but the bottom bunk was Penguin's, and there had to be a reason Shachi hadn't turned to him. Law couldn't in good conscience leave Shachi there when he didn't know why.

That left his own bed as the only option. It would hardly be the first time they'd shared a bed (as teens Law was certain the older boys had spent more time in his bed than their own, or vice-versa), but usually it was the three of them, four if Bepo joined in.

More pressingly, it was only ever when Law was the one depressed. Law had never been the comforter, the rock. Yet he'd just watched one of his rocks crumble away to nothing in his arms, and the other was nowhere to be seen.

Delaying it would do nothing, so Law adjusted his hold on Shachi, slipping his right arm out of its sling completely to pick him up before slipping out of the room, his original reason for leaving his room completely forgotten. Shachi didn't stir as Law quietly made his way back to his room, his nakama held close to his chest protectively. Nor did he react when Law laid him on his bed before stripping off his dirty top and using an unaffected patch to wipe Shachi's face clean.

Breaking the rules imposed by his crew – in this situation, he refused to leave Shachi by himself – he Shambled the fabric into the pile in the laundry room before swapping the shades settled on the dresser in the room currently solely occupied by Penguin with one of the special coins on his desk. At least, he reasoned, Penguin would be able to work out where Shachi was from that, if he worried.

Letting his Room drop, he picked up the shades and moved them closer to the bed, in arms' reach on the bedside table, before slipping under the covers beside the sleeping ginger. Spying the disturbed bandaging, he gently rewrapped them, feeling his anger at Jack for doing such things to his nakama burn as he did so, before settling down himself.

Usually, Law was left lying on his back, cocooned by Penguin and Shachi on either side as they slung their arms around him protectively. This time, it was Shachi on his back, and Law curled up around the shorter male as best he could, seeking a comfortable position as he rested an arm over the ginger. He'd never realised how difficult it was to find somewhere for his other arm, too awkward regardless of whether it was underneath him or Shachi and ending up bunched between his chest and Shachi's side. To think Penguin and Shachi went through that every single time they chose to keep him company through his nightmares.

No more, Law decided. No more was he going to always be the comforted one. Doflamingo was gone. Now, he would help his nakama face their own demons, thirteen years overdue.

Chapter End Notes
Oops? Well, torture leaves mental scars as well as the physical ones, and I thought I should probably give a nod to that. I'm sorry, Shachi. I love you really.
Flowers

Chapter Notes

- **Characters:** Shachi, Heart Pirates, Law
- **Rating:** Gen
- **Warnings:** None
- **Tags:** Nakamaship, Fluff

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hindsight, Shachi groaned as he tugged at his hair ineffectually, was twenty-twenty. Worse, this wasn't even a surprise. If he'd stopped to think for a moment, he'd have realised exactly what sort of hell he was setting himself up for and said 'no', tears be damned. But no, he'd naively forgotten how creative his nakama could get, and now he – or rather, his poor hair – was paying the price. He sent a look full of intent Bepo's way, but the Mink carefully avoided his gaze, busying himself by shifting his furry bulk into a better cushion for Law, whose smirk was not improving Shachi's mood any.

"You look so pretty," Ikkaku gushed, her tone completely and intentionally over the top as she clasped her hands together in the picture of classic delighted femininity that the sole woman in the Heart Pirates only used when she was teasing. Shachi glowered at her, but her grin never faltered.

"Take them out," he growled. "Now." There was laughter from behind him and someone pinched his cheek, their fingers darting back just in time to avoid a vicious bite as Shachi's teeth closed with an audible clack.

"But they suit you so well," Penguin, the total and utter traitor, grinned. He had Shachi's hat in his hands, preventing Shachi from stuffing it on his head and hiding his nakama's handywork.

The worst thing was that Shachi didn't even know which of his nakama was responsible. He'd made the major mistake of falling asleep on deck, and by the time he'd awoken, the damage was done. From Penguin's face, he suspected his best friend had played a major part in it. The fact that he seemed to be the designated 'keeper of Shachi's hat' was not helping any airs of innocence he was attempting to pull.

It had started with a girl. Didn't so many things start with a girl? A young girl with a too-bright grin and huge hopeful eyes calling "onii-san" so enthusiastically that Shachi just had to stop and see what the fuss was all about.

It had been a spring island, nature out in full bloom and beautiful for it. They'd kept their heads down, paying for everything they took instead of stealing it, up until the other crew arrived. The upstart punks began terrorising the village, which the Heart Pirates largely turned a blind eye to (despite the pasts of some of the crew, they weren't heroic enough to jump in and rescue every unhappy town – if they fell into that trap, they'd never escape it). What had caught their attention was when they'd also become targets, the rival captain jeering at them, their 'silly' jolly roger, 'ridiculous' ship and 'twig of a captain'.

Needless to say, there was now one less pirate crew on the Grand Line.

The unintended side effect was the gratitude of the villagers, who had insisted that they take gifts as a
reward (Law had tried to decline until he caught sight of a book on local medicine. Needless to say, the Polar Tang’s library had gained a new addition). Shachi’s reward, apparently, came in the form of a young girl clutching a flower crown and giving such big hopeful eyes that, in a moment of incredible stupidity he very quickly regretted, he squatted down to her level and let her take off his hat to place it on his head.

The moment his nakama saw, he became a laughing stock. Not cruelly so, but comments flew his way about how ‘adorable’ it was and how they’d never known he liked flowers so much.

And now… this.

His nakama had got creative. There was no flower crown perched delicately on top of his hair, like the little girl had done. Oh, no. Several small flowers had been braided into his hair – badly. His hair, usually free flowing when not confined by his hat, was snarled and knotted around the stems of what were probably once pretty flowers, but now looked incredibly sorry for themselves. Shachi’s ineffectual tugging only succeeded in tangling them up more, to his nakama’s amusement as he cursed at them.

"Shachi," Law’s voice cut through his ranting several minutes after it began, instantly catching everyone’s attention. Shachi, his fingers caught thoroughly in his hair, looked over to where he was still sat against Bepo. The smirk was still on his face, but it was fond, and a single tattooed finger gestured for him to sit in front of his captain.

Having nothing left to lose, he wrangled his fingers free of the restrictive ginger strands and obeyed, surprised when Law directed him to sit with his back to him. Confident fingers began to work at his hair with the surety of a surgeon’s hands as they carded through knots patiently. Every so often, Shachi felt another stem plucked free of his hair, and sent a satisfied grin at his pouting nakama, who complained about Captain’s ruining the fun.

Sometimes Law’s fingers took a break, but Shachi was willing to wait patiently if it meant he got the flowers out without pulling out his hair in the process. His nakama started sniggering again after a while, and he glowered at them. It wasn’t like any of them had offered to help, and they’d made enough to a mess of his hair that he couldn’t do it himself, so if his captain was the only one willing to have mercy on his poor hair then he’d take it. He spared a thought for just how gently Law’s fingers seemed to be handling the flowers, but maybe that was the only way to avoid damaging his hair, or something.

It took about ten minutes before he felt Law’s fingers carding through his hair smoothly, the locks apparently not just flower-free at last, but also knot free, and he shifted, ready to stand up.

"Wait," Law said, putting a hand on his shoulder. Shachi stilled, puzzled. "I'm not quite done."

He couldn't see it, but he could hear the smirk in the voice, and suddenly the sniggering of his nakama took on a whole other meaning.

"Hey-" he started to protest, moving to squirm away, but Law was faster and he felt something rest on top of his hair.

"There," Law told him, lifting the restraining hand from his shoulder and letting him wriggle away. "Finished."

Shachi scrambled over to the railings, looking into the still water below to see what, exactly, his captain had done under the guise of being helpful. A flower crown once again rested on his head, made up of the very same battered flowers that had been tangled in his hair, and the breaks Law had
been taking suddenly made sense.

He wondered where the hell Law learnt to make flower crowns as he sighed and turned to face his nakama, who were all sporting identical grins, Law now included.

"What the hell am I supposed to do with you lot?" he grumbled half-heartedly, before breaking into a grin himself and heading back towards the spot he'd been napping in before they attacked him.

The flower crown stayed put for the rest of the day.

Chapter End Notes

Law might be 24, but he's still a little brat sometimes.
The Grand Line's strange seasons bothered everyone. No-one was comfortable across the entire range, from a Winter island's winter to a Summer island's summer, but they could usually cope to some extent.

Being from North Blue, the Heart Pirates were as a general rule most at home in the winter islands and the colder seasons. Some, like Law, favoured the cooler seasons of an autumn island, not quite enough for snow, but a crisp temperature that could be enjoyed without bundling themselves up to the point that movement was restricted. Penguin and Shachi liked it even colder, the seasons of a winter island reminiscent of Swallow Island. They were used to the thick clothes required to survive such temperatures, and their movements remained fluid even as their nakama fumbled around. The rest of the crew varied, some going as far as enjoying the warmth of a spring island best.

Who ran chores on what island was often determined by the season in question and who fared best in those conditions. It was a practical choice, leaving those least comfortable in the environment back in the safety of the ship.

On Summer islands they drew lots. No-one wanted to go out and brave the scorching, sometimes arid, heat of a Summer island in summer, but if that was where the log pose took them then they had no choice but to land (and pray that the log pose wouldn't take too long to set so they could escape). The unfortunate victims who drew the short straw would huff and pant their way through the shopping, keeping their heads low to avoid unnecessary confrontations when no-one was at their peak.

Out of all the crew, there was only one exempt from the lots. The cold-loving Penguin and Shachi would grit their teeth and bear it no matter how much they felt like wilting, and even the captain allowed himself to be a potential victim to Lady Luck's whims. However, the poor Bepo would be found flopped on the coolest available surface, unable to muster the energy to move and forcing the rest of the crew to manage without him until they left the island in question.

Of course, every effort was made to reduce their navigator's suffering. The cook would keep up a steady supply of cool drinks, while other well-meaning nakama would hunt down blocks of ice (often stolen from their freezer) to surround him with. Bepo appreciated it only until the ice invariably melted, unimpressed with the wet fur he gained, even if it did help keep the temperature down a little. Law had offered to add a cryonics chamber to the infirmary, which Bepo would be allowed to use to remain cool, but the Mink had found the idea a little too disturbing, even if it was meant well. In the worst of the seasons, he occasionally regretted his refusal, but only until he remembered what, exactly, a cryonics chamber was actually for.
He knew Law too well to think that he wouldn't end up sharing it with dead bodies and preserved organs. The crew were generally tolerant of their captain’s curiosities, but there were lines, and dead body storage was one of them. No, he'd told Law when the topic was brought up. He didn't need to go quite so far for him. He'd survive – as long as they hurried up and got off the island (log pose, what log pose? He didn't need that to navigate just get him off this island already!).

Chapter End Notes

Summer islands in summer sound a bit like hell to me, so I can't even imagine how bad they must be for poor Bepo.

Regarding the temperature preferences, Flevance is never implied to be particularly prone to snow, but Minion Island and Swallow Island have both been shown to have quite a lot of snow and colder temperatures. We've also seen that the further north you get in East Blue, the colder it gets, so the same would be true for North Blue (conversely, West and South Blues would get colder the further south you get, and the existence of cold poles are implied by one of Buggy and Shanks’ arguments). Therefore, I think that Swallow Island and Minion Island are much further north than Flevance or Spider Miles, and colder.
The first time Penguin saw Law's arm turn black, he thought he'd been hallucinating. He knew the Ope Ope no Mi gave his captain some odd abilities, but he wasn't quite sure how limbs turning black helped in any way, shape or form. The main clue that he probably wasn't seeing things was the grin on Law's face – self-satisfied and smug, it was just like when he performed one of his new operations perfectly. Whatever had turned Law's arm black, that had been what he'd been trying to do.

"What are you up to?" he asked, watching the black recede back away to nothing as Law's attention snapped to him.

"Haki," the younger teen answered, as if it was obvious. Penguin had never heard of it before in his life.

"What's that?" Shachi asked, apparently drawn from his attempts to prod a sleeping Bepo into wakefulness for who-knew-what-reason by the conversation.

"Something useful," Law shrugged, before eyeing the pair of them with a glint in his eye, as if an idea had suddenly struck him. Penguin regretted speaking up, and saw Shachi falter next to him. "You two should learn it, too."

"What's it good for?" Penguin made the mistake of asking, prompting a full blown lecture from his captain on haki and its applications, as well as how there were three different types ("but you won't need to worry about conqueror's because you can't learn that") and how they were best utilised. He never explained how he knew as much as he did about the strange abilities, but Penguin didn't need to ask; it was obviously either something he'd come across in his reading, or something he'd learnt about as a Donquixote Pirate.

"So we just have to focus?" Shachi summed up once Law finished. "Doesn't sound so hard." Law's eyes flashed with annoyance before settling back to his cocky smirk.

"Then give it a go," he encouraged. Shachi did so, clenching his fist and pinching his lips together as he let out a quiet humming noise. His face twisted oddly, turning pink as he began to run out of air, and Law poked him in the stomach, forcing him to relax all at once. "Not like that. You need to concentrate, not hold your breath."

"I was concentrating!" Shachi protested with a whine and a pout before repeating the action. Penguin could have sworn he saw smoke coming out from his ears.

"Concentrate on creating a defensive layer for your skin, not on holding your breath," Law scolded
lightly, before frowning down at his own arm. Slowly, the black colour crept into existence to cover it again. Penguin mimicked him, focusing on his arm and trying to mentally order it to harden. He tried not to be discouraged when it didn't work, unlike Shachi, who whined and stomped off after several more minutes of red cheeks and panting. His patience didn't last forever, though, and after half an hour of watching Law's arm shift slowly from black to skin coloured while his own stayed stubbornly flesh-coloured he got up and left him to it.

Law brought the conversation up again over dinner, Bepo shovelling plates of fish in front of them before taking mouthfuls out of his own serving.

"It's taken me three years to get this far," their captain said out of the blue, black coating his arm slowly again to leave them in no doubts what he was referring to. "You won't manage it in a single session." Penguin nodded, understanding, but Shachi let out a harrumph of dissatisfaction and stuffed his face full of fish instead.

Penguin quietly joined Law in his training after that, encouraged by the admission that it wasn't an instant process. Shachi grumbled whenever he walked by, tugging at his cap as if to block the sight out as he carried on with life.

It would have been convincing, if Penguin hadn't seen him hiding in a corner of the large empty room on the Tang they'd designated the training room, trying in vain to get his arm to coat itself in black. He let him be, unwilling to provoke Shachi's temper as, like Penguin, he failed again and again.

It was a year before he finally succeeded, his arm sheathing itself in the ever-elusive black, and he cried out in excitement, drawing both Law and Shachi's attention. Bepo had long since grown used to his human nakama's noisy antics, as he called them, and simply raised his head from where he'd been pouring over maps and charts, shook his head and returned to his studies (although he did get a congratulatory hug from the Mink later, on the way to dinner).

Having felt success, it gradually became easier for Penguin, to Shachi's obvious irritation. His secret training sessions were secret to exactly no-one, although they all pretended they didn't know, and even several months after Penguin made his breakthrough, there was still no joy for him.

"It's not fair!" he finally broke, wailing into the air in frustration. "Why can't I do it?" They had no answer for him, and the ginger spent the rest of the day locked up in an empty room, refusing to come out for anything or anyone (all three of them tried to coax him out in their own ways, and all three failed miserably).

Their answer came, unexpectedly, in a fight two months later. The stubborn ginger had kept up his fruitless attempts, but his hope was failing and it wasn't uncommon to find him in a dejected lump on the floor that refused to acknowledge anyone that came near him. One such slump occurred out on deck as they sailed between islands, and a rival pirate group attacked them unprovoked.

The first hail of bullets caught them all off guard, Law, Penguin and Bepo all unable to evade them all and finding themselves quickly covered in small wounds from grazes, and the occasional larger wound as a bullet properly tore through flesh.

Shachi, initially curled up in a slump on desk, dodged the entire deluge, to the horror of their attackers. Clearly they had never experienced the insanity of someone evading every single bullet, and by the time Penguin had dragged himself back to his feet, clutching at his arm where a bullet had sliced clean through the muscle, the fight was over. Off balance, the other crew hadn't had a chance against an irate Shachi, especially not when Bepo joined in with his electro as the first to recover from the attack.
"That felt weird," Shachi confessed afterwards, as Law patched up the rest of them in the infirmary. "How the hell did I know exactly where to go?" Penguin had no answer, as confused as Shachi, but a grin painted itself across their captain's face.

"I think we need to change your training," he said, with a glint in his eye they'd long since learnt meant run. Shachi took a small step backwards and Penguin tried to make himself as unobtrusive as possible. "You've been trying to master the wrong haki."

The dawning comprehension, and associated grin, on Shachi's face was totally worth the past two years' of frustration, as far as Penguin was concerned. He hadn't even noticed how much confidence Shachi had leech until it all returned in one swoop as Law's words sunk in.

Shachi wasn't useless at haki after all.

Chapter End Notes

We know that haki isn't easy to learn, but I don't think it's something that pirates only learn once they enter the Grand Line. East Blue is the weakest of the Four Blues, so it makes sense that the Straw Hats may not have been exposed to it before, but that doesn't mean that none of the others have haki-using pirates. I can see Law first learning about or experiencing haki with the Donquixote Pirates, especially as we know Doflamingo could use it back then, but as a child I don't think he'd have the ability to manifest it until several years later, when he also teaches his nakama.

As for the first ones they awaken, which would also be the one they specialise in, while Law seems like he has the disposition for Observation, we've only seen him use Armament so far (outside of his Room, where it seems arguable to me that his latent Observation is slightly higher than when he's not in it). A bit like Zoro and Sanji, I feel like Penguin and Shachi's abilities would largely compliment (only without the huge rivalry), so one would specialise in Armament and the other in Observation. I don't really have any specific canon basis for why I've put it this way around (Penguin=Armament, Shachi=Observation), it's just how my headcanon developed.

As for Bepo, well, we haven't seen any Mink use haki up until this point, although they seem to have the ability to evade others' Observation somehow. Whether electro is their own version or if there's another reason why not even Pedro, Nekomamushi or Inuarashi have been seen using it yet, I guess we'll find out in Wano.
"What the hell are you doing?" Bepo looked up from his maps at Shachi's confused and rather concerned sounding voice. The ginger was wearing a look that clearly showed he was debating the pros and cons of fleeing as far away from Law as possible. The captain, bearing a triumphant grin, merely presented Shachi with a strange cube, a little larger than his fist. Shachi recoiled as if it was poisonous.

"It's still beating." Law gushed, thrusting it at him again, seemingly confused why the ginger was stumbling further and further back. "Look."

"I'm looking, I'm looking!" Shachi protested. "It's creepy! Get it away!"

"Just think of what this means!" Law continued as if he hadn't spoken. Bepo, tired of eavesdropping with no context, abandoned his studies to amble over. "The medical applications are amazing. I can do a heart surgery and they'll probably live!"

Closer now, Bepo could make out what, exactly, had Law so excited and Shachi so creeped out. The cube seemed to be made of some sort of gelatinous substance, inside which something red thrummed and pulsed. Looking at the poor unconscious Marine on the deck, Law's latest experiment subject, and the corresponding square gap in his chest, Bepo assumed it was a heart.

He understood Shachi's apprehension – a heart belonged firmly inside the body – but the joy on Law's face overrode any inclination he had to recoil like Shachi was. Penguin was conspicuously absent. If Bepo remembered correctly he'd gone to 'fix the sail' shortly after Law started playing with his new toy and hadn't returned since, although the sail had been adjusted several minutes ago.

"Are you going to give a Marine heart surgery, Captain?" he asked, not sure why Law would waste his energy on that. His captain shook his head.

"I just wanted to see if I could do it," Law shrugged, eyeing the retreating Shachi with undeniable interest. "I didn't want to kill one of you by accident, but I think I've got the hang of it."

"You're making me sick pushing that thing in and popping it back out again," Shachi groused, half-hiding himself behind Bepo's furry bulk. Law surveyed the cube in his hand for another few moments before inserting it back into the Marine's chest again. The unconscious body twitched.

"Then why don't you come here?" Law asked, a suggestive grin firmly etched on his face. Shachi hid behind Bepo completely.

"So you can take my heart out?" he mumbled, muffled by Bepo's fur. "What do you want to do that
for?" Bepo watched the way Law's face fell and stepped forwards, feeling fists tug at his fur as Shachi was forced to let go.

"You can take mine, if you want to, Captain," he offered. He understood Shachi's reluctance, but this was Law. He didn't know why Law thought being able to take hearts out was useful (although he clearly recalled making the suggestion himself back when they first named themselves so perhaps it was something to do with that), but if Law wanted to do it then he would trust his captain.

Law's face froze, startled, before he started to smile again – a smaller smile than his earlier grins and smirks, but more reassuring. The teen's hand came up, resting on the fabric above the mink's chest, and Bepo could feel his warmth even through his own fur and clothes. Unbidden, his own clawed paw moved to cover it as Law paused, and he squeezed his captain's hand lightly.

Golden eyes looked up at him and he nodded once, pulling his lips into a smile, and Law smiled back.

"Mes."

It felt like his heart had been punched out of his chest, but without the pain. Bepo felt his knees quake, and his vision darkened for a moment. He refused to let his legs buckle, and when his vision returned, he could see a larger cube resting on Law's hand. His captain was staring at it in wonder, his other hand gently coming up to caress it.

A breath forced its way past Bepo's lips at the sensation. It felt so wrong – his heart was exposed in a way it shouldn't be, outside of the safety of his body – yet so right. Law's fingers were cool against his heart, feather-light in their touches.

"Amazing," Law breathed, before glancing back at Bepo. "How does it feel?"

Bepo had no words to describe it the sensation, finally surrendering to his body's demands that it sit down. Concern flashed through Law's eyes and he stepped forwards, arresting his momentum at the recollection of the heart in his hands. Behind him he felt Shachi grip at his fur again.

"I'm okay," he told them both, focusing on Law but tilting his head back to nuzzle Shachi. "It's strange, but it doesn't hurt." Law offered him his own heart and in curiosity he took it, instantly feeling the difference in texture between Law's skin and his own pads.

"It's still creepy," Shachi commented, but as Bepo glanced up at him he saw that he'd moved so he wasn't hiding behind him anymore. "But I guess it's also kinda cool?" He flinched as Law reached out his hand and rested it on his chest. Nothing happened, Law's golden eyes searching Shachi's face for permission. Shachi let out a strange laugh, somewhere between despair and amusement, before he mimicked Bepo's gesture and covered Law's hand with his own.

"Shachi?"

"What the hell," he chuckled. "It's creepy, but I trust you." Law nodded and took another step closer before repeating the single word.

"Mes."

Bepo saw Shachi's heart burst out of his back, smaller than his own, and Law quickly summoned it into the safety of his palm. His other arm wrapped around Shachi as the ginger's knees buckled, pulling him towards him until he was slumped against his chest.

Penguin appeared to materialise out of mid-air, suddenly behind Shachi as he relieved Law of his
weight. He seemed thoroughly unsurprised, and Bepo realised he must have been watching what was going on from wherever he'd fled to. Law glanced up at him as Shachi was peeled off of him, and gave a thankful smile as he inspected the new heart cradled in his hands.

Shachi didn't stay limp for long, regaining consciousness after only a minute or so, and straightened with Penguin's help even as the older teen tried to convince him to follow Bepo's example in sitting down.

"Are you going to take mine, too?" Penguin asked, just before Shachi poked his own heart curiously and hissed, folding in half. "Oh, sit down, you idiot." A well-aimed shove later and the ginger was sprawled on the ground besides Bepo. The mink nudged him gently and Shachi pulled himself back into a sitting position.

"I'm okay," he muttered, patting his hat. Bepo felt him slump against him, contradicting himself. "That's quite a punch."

"If I'm taking yours out, you're sitting down first," Law told Penguin, who shrugged amicably and positioned himself on Shachi's other side.

"You too," he said as Law crouched in front of him and reached his hand out. Like both Bepo and Shachi before him, he rested his hand over Law's. Before Law could say the command, he picked up Law's other hand from where it had been rested on his knee and pressed it to Law's own chest. Bepo watched the youngest human look down and let out a small noise, not unlike Shachi's earlier strange laugh, before repositioning himself to lean against Bepo. Penguin rested his weight on Shachi, and two Mes in quick succession later saw both humans slumping almost simultaneously.

Penguin was first, Law delaying his own heart's extraction until he'd safely retrieved Penguin's from mid-air, before he pulled his own out. Unlike the other three, his came out of his front, to Bepo's relief as he caught it, admiring the difference in size between his own and his captain's.

The four of them remained in an unmoving pile for several minutes as first Penguin and then Law regained awareness, all too comfortable to want to move even after they were all awake once more.

"This is really creepy," Shachi repeated again as Penguin and Law regained their own hearts to hold.

"I suppose we really are the Heart Pirates," Penguin commented, pushing his own heart forwards to nudge against Shachi's. Both of them gasped, before looking to each other with identical grins crossing their faces.

Bepo didn't realise what it meant until too late, all four of their hearts nudging together gently. Law let out a hiss, but didn't retract his heart from the macabre cluster.

"The Heart Pirates," Bepo said solemnly, and the three humans echoed him, mirroring the day they first called themselves by that name, swearing this time not on their flag, but on their own hearts.

Bepo thought it fit.

Chapter End Notes

Originally I had a more angsty thing lined up for today, then I remembered it was Valentine's Day and thought that as these guys are the Heart Pirates I should probably
go with something loosely based on the theme... Very loosely, as it turned out. So have some sort of macabre bonding instead. I'll save the angst for another time.
Something was wrong. Stepping out onto the deck of the Polar Tang, feeling the wet wood beneath his feet as the water finished running off, the air was tense and loaded. There was no reason for it. It was just a supply stop at a small island that Bepo had somehow found with his uncanny sense for Grand Line navigation (not having to solidly rely on a log pose was a blessing at times). Nothing to get worked up about, yet as he looked around he could see the ramrod straight backs of Penguin and Shachi and pinpointed them as the cause.

"What is it?" he asked them, approaching to see their faces set in identical expressions of pure, unadulterated hate. They were clutching at the railings of the Polar Tang so fiercely Law feared they'd splinter, and he put his hands on their shoulders.

They were shaking.

Beneath his fingers he felt their bodies trembling like leaves before a storm, although he considered it more akin to the quivering of a predator itching to pounce. Frowning, he surveyed the island in front of them as the Tang glided elegantly towards the harbour, trying to discern the source of their uncharacteristic rage.

The island itself was relatively unassuming on first assessment. It was largely covered in trees, with a large mountain protruding from the centre. A well-trodden track from the harbour cut through the trees, and Law assumed it headed to the main settlement. All in all, there was nothing particularly unusual about it. If he squinted and looked at it from Penguin and Shachi's point of view, he supposed it could look a bit like his hazy memories of Swallow Island, minus the snow and with the mountain far less distinctively shaped, but this was hardly the first such island they'd landed at and his nakama hadn't reacted with such fury to any before.

There was another pirate ship in the harbour, but that, too, was nothing unusual. The New World was full of crews, and very few islands were pirate-free. Law noted the emblem of Kaido flying alongside what he assumed was the crew's own flag and made a mental note not to get involved with them. Kaido might not hold the reputation Whitebeard once had regarding his affiliated crews, but Law was not interested in testing it.

His nakama seemed to have other ideas as an audible snarl escaped Penguin, followed by a growl from Shachi, and Law tightened his grip on their shoulders. A closer inspection revealed that the pirate ship in question was the target of their ire, and Law was struck by an unwelcome thought. It couldn't possibly be…

"Do you know them?" he asked quietly, feeling the pair both stiffen under his hands.
"I'll never forget that flag," Penguin ground out, and Law felt the world disappear from beneath his feet as his grip tightened again. Neither commented, despite his fingers now digging into their shoulders like talons, too caught up in trying to destroy the other ship with their eyes.

If he was honest, Law had never expected to meet that particular crew. Any crew lasting twenty years was impressive, especially one so inclined to posing rather than practicality. The combination of logic and probability had meant that he'd believed the crew had likely met their unfortunate demise long ago, and yet that wasn't the case.

Kaido's mark probably contributed to their ongoing survival, but as far as Law was concerned it was just a complication. They couldn't afford to prematurely aggravate the Yonkou. There was only one decision he could make, although even as he reached that conclusion he could hear the protests of his nakama in his mind.

"Turn the Tang around," he ordered, turning his head to address Bepo. He kept his hands firmly still, holding Penguin and Shachi in place even as they simultaneously lunged for the sea at his words. In unison, they started to claw at his hands, fighting to get free. Law held on stubbornly. "We're not docking there. Kaido's men are there."

"Aye, Captain!" the ever-faithful Mink saluted, running back to the engine room as Penguin and Shachi started protesting vehemently. Wanting the pair of them out of sight of the other pirate crew, Law gritted his teeth against their attacks and Shambled them into his room, locking the door behind him so they couldn't escape.

"You can't do this!" Shachi hissed, lunging forwards. Law let him slam him against the door, the ginger's fingers on his shoulders like a vice. "You know who they are. We can't just run away. I'm sick of running from them!"

"They slaughtered our parents," Penguin added, his voice a low guttural sound Law had never heard it produce before. "And you want us to just run away?" Law felt the movement of the Tang as she turned, obeying his orders. From the way Penguin punched the door, less than an inch from Law's face, he wasn't the only one.

"I know," Law said calmly, gently but firmly removing Shachi's hands from his collar. "And you'll get your vengeance. I promise I won't take that from you."

"Then why-"

"They're flying under Kaido's protection," Law continued as if Penguin hadn't spoken. "We can't just attack them, or we'll bring his wrath down on our head. We need to plan carefully, so he can't trace it back to us. Otherwise we'll doom ourselves." He reached out, and in a rare display of affection wrapped his arms around his two nakama, pulling them in close.

"But they're right there," Shachi whined, although he didn't fight Law's arm as he was crushed against his captain's chest. "Right there. I want them dead, Law."

"I know," Law repeated, because he understood all too well. His burning rage against Doflamingo hadn't faded at all in thirteen years, and Doflamingo had only killed one person, not even someone Law was related to by blood. To Penguin and Shachi, who lost both their parents, their rage had to be reaching boiling point. "You found them, at last."

"And you want us to wait," Penguin complained, shoving at Law's chest and forcing the air out of his lungs as he collided once again with his own door.
"I want to separate them from Kaido's influence," Law agreed, despite knowing that nothing he said would get through to them. If Doflamingo stood in front of him, so close he could end it all, nothing would sway him. To have survived his brattish personality for so long, Penguin and Shachi had to be even more stubborn than Law himself.

The Polar Tang's sirens sounded, declaring the sealing of the external doors before she entered a dive and headed away from the island, and away from the pirates of Penguin and Shachi's nightmares.

The further they moved, the more energy drained from the duo, until they slid down to the floor in a tangled heap of limbs. Law crouched down besides them, feeling awful. If it wasn't for Kaido, if he didn't have a duty to keep the entire crew safe, Penguin and Shachi could have claimed the closure they'd been seeking ever since they left Swallow Island.

Doflamingo was his main concern, plans spiralling around in his head as he worked out the best way to claim his own revenge, but now he had a secondary target. The jolly roger of the other crew was securely added to his mental catalogue, and the quandary posed by Kaido became the second most important thing for him to solve.

Penguin and Shachi had waited twenty years. Law wouldn't add to that any more than he absolutely had to.

Chapter End Notes

Someone asked for an encounter with those pirates where Law had to stop Penguin and Shachi. Having the crew in question under a Yonkou was the only way, without making them one of the canonical crews, I could see them still being around twenty years later, and Kaido was an obvious choice. Law is too protective of his crew to let them willingly bring the wrath of Kaido down on themselves (even if he later ends up doing that anyway thanks to Luffy's influence).
Carry

Chapter Notes

Characters: Penguin, Bepo, Law, Shachi
Rating: Gen
Warnings: injury
Tags: Nakamaship

Penguin blearily opened his eyes, blinking twice before the unmistakable ceiling of the Polar Tang’s infirmary came into focus. Groaning, he pushed himself into a sitting position, rubbing at the back of his head, where he could feel a wonderful lump forming underneath the bandages.

"Damn it," he groused, his hand falling back to his side. Someone had got a lucky hit in and knocked him unconscious during their latest fight, apparently. He vaguely remembered it, the sharp crack of something hard and unyielding colliding with the back of his head. It had happened just after he took a bullet to the leg…

Glancing down, he discovered that he'd been stripped of his boiler suit and instead dressed in shorts and baggy top. His lower right leg was neatly wrapped in white bandages, and experimental movement was cut short by a sudden stab of pain.

"You won't be walking for several days," Law told him. He turned his head, startled. He hadn't even known his captain was in the room.

"You're kidding, right?" he asked, glancing back at the bandaged leg. "I'm not staying here that long!" Law sighed, before proceeding to tell him how much damage, exactly, that single bullet had done to his leg and consequently how it wouldn't even be able to bear his weight for days, let alone walk.

At the end of the tirade, Penguin sorely hoped one of his nakama had given the bastard that shot him absolute hell. Several days of forced bed rest just because of a bullet to the leg was not his idea of a good time. He knew he was being a bad and ungrateful patient, but he let Law know exactly how much he disliked the idea. To his credit, his captain took his complaints in his stride, sitting in silence as his rant derailed from how horrible the idea was to how much of a bastard the man with the gun was and how much he deserved to suffer.

Law did, however, claim he had somewhere else to be, although failing to reveal where, and bid Penguin farewell as soon as his rant was over. Dejected, and alone because apparently none of his other nakama had been in the room, he slumped back to lie down. If he couldn't move, he might as well sleep his life away, or so he mused.

Sleep, as was often the case when he wanted it at a time when the sun was still up, didn't come. Unable to even toss and turn in frustration because of his leg, he gritted his teeth and searched blindly for something to occupy his mind with until he could leave the bed again. Law, rather unusually for when he prescribed bedrest, hadn't provided any entertainment, not even the medical books just out of reach on the side, and Penguin wondered if he'd distracted him with his rant before he'd thought to move them.
"Penguin?" He turned his head to see Bepo cautiously approaching. Hopeful, he glanced at the mink's paws, but they were empty. He hadn't brought any entertainment then.

"Hey," he greeted, sitting up as best he could before his leg sent another loud protest at being shifted.

"Captain says it's dinner time," Bepo told him as he came to a stop by his bed, and Penguin moaned. "Are you hungry?" Honestly, Penguin's stomach had yet to inform him of hunger, but eating was something to do, so he nodded.

"I don't see you holding anything for me to eat," he commented with a frown.

"Should I be?" Bepo asked, looking puzzled. "Captain said to get you."

"Well that's funny," Penguin groused, thoroughly unimpressed with his captain's bedside manner. He was hardly empathetic at the best of times, but this was bordering on neglect and Penguin hadn't signed up for that-- "Woah! What are you doing?"

Bepo shifted his grip, jostling Penguin very slightly as the human found himself no longer on the bed, but rather wrapped up in warm white furry arms.

"Taking you to dinner," Bepo answered. "Stop squirming or I'll drop you." Penguin stopped, looking up at Bepo's friendly face in pleasant surprise. The mink was far bigger than him, meaning that Bepo had no difficulty walking around as if Penguin was little more than a doll in his arms. He was gentle, too. Beyond the initial settling, Penguin wasn't jostled at all, and let himself simply relax into his nakama's arms for the time being.

"Here he is!" Shachi cheered as they entered the mess hall, Penguin by that point very definitely snuggled up in the warm fur surrounding him. He couldn't help but let out a small grumble as he was deposited gently onto the bench between Law and Shachi. The rest of the crew surrounded him, resting hands on his shoulders before they took their own seats and began to devour their food.

"This is hardly bedrest," Penguin felt compelled to point out to Law even as his captain passed him a plate of food. Law raised a single eyebrow elegantly.

"I don't recall placing you on bedrest," he denied. Penguin opened his mouth, a retort ready on his tongue before he realised that Law had never actually said the word 'bedrest'. "I just said you won't be able to walk."

"So let us be your legs for a while," Clione butted in as Penguin gaped.

"It's no fun being stuck in the infirmary with nothing to do all day," Uni agreed.

"Unless, of course, you'd like to be on bedrest?" Law asked him innocently. Penguin scowled and shifted his weight until he was using Shachi as a headrest. The ginger simply chuckled and pulled him tighter.

"It'll be over before you know it," he reassured him. Penguin wasn't convinced, but if his ridiculous nakama were honestly considering carrying him everywhere, it was infinitely preferable to hours starting at the same patch of ceiling.

Besides, now he had an excuse to boss his nakama around. It would be remiss of him to ignore the opportunity.
Penguin and Shachi hung over the railing of the Polar Tang, staring at the looming shape with nervous anticipation. The rest of the crew left them alone, giving them some space as they bustled around, fidgeting with the sail to bring it to where they wanted it.

It had been Law's idea to come back. With Mugiwara finally the undisputed Pirate King (or as undisputed as the title could be), and their own position as his allies firmly cemented (Law had never been able to shake the rubber nuisance after Punk Hazard and had finally given up trying), there was nothing keeping them in the Grand Line. Oh, sure, technically, they were a Yonkou crew now, but as Law had reasoned, if Akagami no Shanks could make side stops all the way to East Blue, they could just as easily slip back into North Blue for a little while. Mugiwara would keep their territories and allies safe in the meantime.

Their captain had wanted to go back to Minion Island, he'd admitted. With Doflamingo a distant bad memory, the island was no longer a nightmare but a grave and he'd wanted to visit it again. The crew had no complaints, aside from the fact that it meant pushing through the Calm Belt and kairoseki hull or not that would always be hair raising, but for Penguin and Shachi it had meant so much more. They'd always wanted to go to Minion Island. Seeing it on the horizon their entire childhoods, it had been the target of their daydreams and desires. One day, they'd promised as young children, they'd go there. No longer would it be a distant sight, but solid ground beneath their feet. Law had denied them that, all those years ago, refusing to return to the island for reasons it took him years to admit. It seemed ironic that, despite being the neighbouring island to where they'd grown up, they had sailed the entirety of North Blue and the Grand Line before finally setting foot on it.

There had been no fanfare, no sudden celebration. All in all, after everything they'd seen and done it felt anticlimactic, but still, it had been their childhood dream. Fulfilling it had been special, traipsing through the snow with laughter and the energy of their child selves. Law had watched them with a smile on his face, and the entire crew had been drawn into the snowball fight that followed.

They hadn't stayed for long. There was nothing on the island, still largely uninhabited after the tragedy caused by Doflamingo all those years ago, so once Penguin and Shachi's childhood selves had been satisfied, and Law had paid his respects to the unmarked grave of his saviour, they'd bid the island farewell and settled back onto the Tang.

Bepo had been the one to mention Swallow Island, looming through the mist on the horizon. If they were visiting places of nostalgia, then he reasoned that Swallow Island was important. After all, it had been where the Heart Pirates had first formed, even if their name and flag had come later. The rest of the crew, of course, were ecstatic to visit their origins, and had begged Law to give the order.
He'd refused, instead looking to Penguin and Shachi for the decision. Faced with the eager expressions of the crew, they'd agreed, but as they watched the familiar swallow-shaped mountain loom in front of them, knots tightened in their stomachs.

"You didn't have to say yes," Law murmured, coming up between them. They sighed in unison, tearing their eyes from the mountain to look at their captain instead.

"They've probably forgotten us by now," Penguin shrugged. Shachi made a noise of agreement.

"They won't recognise us," he said confidently, before he slumped again. "I'd like to visit Mama and Papa again, though," he admitted quietly. Penguin nodded silently, and Law lightly squeezed their shoulders reassuringly as the Polar Tang effortlessly glided into the small port, completely dwarfing all of the small wooden fishing boats.

Cries, likely of alarm, rose from the shore and they watched the fishermen scrambling into the forest, following the well-trodden path back to the village.

"Well that was to be expected," Penguin muttered glumly, peeling himself away from the railing. "Coming here with our jolly roger on display like it is." Not that there was anything they could have done about it when the Polar Tang herself wore it proudly on her sides. Beside him, Shachi let out a sigh with an undertone that resembled a whine before pushing himself to his full height.

"We're here now," he said, in a tone that betrayed how uncertain he was that it was a good idea. "All hanging around on deck is going to do is delay it." Side by side, the two of them led the Heart Pirates off the ship and onto the shore. The crunch of snow beneath their boots, despite being identical to on Minion Island, was nostalgic and they paused at the sound.

"Stop where you are!" a man ordered, gripping a fishing rod tightly. Behind him a boy cowered, clearly the man's son. He didn't look any older than seven. The crew paused, eyeing him curiously. Penguin and Shachi let out a hiss, abruptly cut off. He was older now, twice as old as when they'd last seen him, but they recognised him nonetheless. He'd never beaten them in a fight, not for lack of trying.

"We're not here for trouble," Law said smoothly, stepping forwards to the head of the crew but no further. He even went as a far as holding his hands up placatingly. Kikoku had been left in his quarters.

"Then what are the Heart Pirates doing so far from the Grand Line?" a sharp female voice demanded. The owner was a plump mature woman, who forged a path through the snow towards them with a fearless purpose. Bundled up firmly against the harsh weather in a thick winter coat and furred hat it was difficult to discern much of her appearance, but Penguin and Shachi visibly recoiled.

"Surely it isn't because two little runaways finally realised they owed someone an apology."

"An apology?" Law asked, quirking his eyebrow. "I was not aware anyone in my crew needed to apologise to anyone here."

The woman came to a stop, hands firmly on her hips, right in front of Law. He towered over her, but she wasn't cowed as she met his gaze unflinchingly.

"Fifteen years," she said bluntly. "No word. Not even a note left on the door saying they were going out. We didn't even know they hadn't been killed until two years ago when their bounty posters made it this far. And you say we're not owed an apology?"

Law stiffened and turned to fix Penguin and Shachi with a glare.
"I was under the impression they had told someone they were coming with me," he said pointedly, watching them squirm for several seconds. "Although, considering how idiotic they can be, that was foolish of me."

"I... We... Oops?" Shachi offered, shifting until Bepo was between him and his captain. The mink promptly moved out of the way, wisely deciding that it was not a confrontation he wanted to be in the middle of.

"Oops?" the woman demanded, striding past Law to stand in front of the two men. While not as tall as Law, they both stood a head above her, but that counted for nothing in the face of her disapproval. Law turned to watch, but made no move to interfere, even when she reached up and simultaneously clipped the pair around the ears with enough force to make them wince.

"Boots and coats gone, no note, not even a goodbye!" she scolded. "Injured, with those Donquixote Pirates around. I thought you'd been killed! The entire village was out hunting for you two for weeks, and all you can say is oops?"

"Noona-" Penguin began, only to get his head clapped against Shachi's.

"Don't you Noona me young man!" she interrupted. "Fifteen years with nothing except a bounty poster to tell me you were still alive? You think you can Noona your way out of this like you did when you were children?" Her hands shot out and the two flinched as she grasped hold of their collars firmly.

"We-" Shachi was cut off as she violently tugged the pair forwards into an embrace, crushing them against her chest awkwardly.

"I'm so glad you're safe," she whispered hoarsely, clutching at them tightly as she sobbed, tears spilling down her cheeks. "I thought I'd lost you forever."

Slowly the two of them returned the hug, mindless of their nakama watching silently.

"We're sorry, Noona," Penguin apologised.

"We didn't think," Shachi added, falling to his knees to be at a better height despite the snow immediately soaking through his clothes. Penguin followed suit, the woman joining them last as she clutched at them.

Several minutes passed before she released her grip on them enough to let them stand again.

"Well, now that you're home, it's time for dinner," she said brusquely, the effect somewhat ruined by her smiling, tear-stained face. "And then you two owe your parents a visit."

Penguin and Shachi hesitated, looking back at Law and their nakama.

"Noona..." Shachi began awkwardly. "We're not-

"Of course you're not staying for long," the woman cut him off. "You think I can't see that? Adventurous spirits like your mothers, the pair of you. But as you're here, you may as well have dinner. Your friends too." She turned back and grabbed hold of Law's arm as if he were a lost child and not one of the most wanted men on the sea. "Come along now."

"Obaa-san," Law began, "I don't think-"

"None of that Obaa-san nonsense," she interrupted. "Call me Noona. And of course you're coming
to dinner. I haven't thanked you for looking after my little ice storms yet, young man."

Law looked at Penguin and Shachi for confirmation, and after a moment they nodded. He carefully extracted his arm from the woman's sleeve, and she slipped her arms through Penguin and Shachi's instead, leading the procession of Heart Pirates into the village, where they were greeted with gusto, more than one man clapping Penguin or Shachi on the back with a cheerful 'welcome home!'

Chapter End Notes

A follow up from chapter 11, Missing. I was asked for Penguin and Shachi finally meeting up with their foster mother again. It makes some sense to me that Law will one day head back to Minion Island (if he survives the story...), and Swallow Island is right nearby, so why not?

A note on their foster mother's name. 'Noona' is actually a nickname. Her name is actually Nousagi (Hare, according to google translate). 'Na' means 'what' (again, google translate), so Noona is derived from Nou-what, or Nou-na (inspired by Torao, or 'Traguy'). It's a nickname bestowed on her by Shachi's mother when they were children, and the boys picked it up. As an added bonus google says it's also used to refer to an older sister in Korean, which was unintentional but fits quite nicely.
Penguin watched the hustle and bustle of the port town with no small amount of trepidation. Experience was a cruel teacher, and he'd learnt the hard way that a place like this would have a dark underbelly that was all too ready to snap up the unwary pirate. Sadly, the island itself had a reasonably large Marine presence, so they didn't have the luxury of blending in with the traders, leaving the dark underbelly their only way to get supplies, and information.

Law was convinced that this town had connections to Doflamingo. While the man himself had long since left North Blue and settled smugly on some poor island in the Grand Line – Dressroba, or something – his influence and information network still held sway in much of North Blue. Shachi, with his disarming attitude and mostly-hidden face, was the one in charge of information gathering on this particular island and had long since disappeared into the darkest depths with nothing but a baby den den mushi for company.

Bepo, as the most recognisable, was left on guard duty on board the Polar Tang, leaving Penguin and Law to procure supplies and listen to the local gossip. Nothing was free, from the food they were gathering to the information they obtained, and as always when they separated, part of Penguin worried for Shachi – his job was the most risky, but subterfuge never worked well with more than one person. They had a rendezvous time and place. Shachi would meet up with them later.

His attention was pulled back to the present by Law, who loaded his arms with more supplies. Penguin half-wondered if his role was only to be the pack mule, as holding their acquisitions seemed to be all he was doing, aside from keeping an ear out for interesting information not said quietly enough. So far, all anyone had mentioned in his earshot was a major auction of a high-ticket item that was supposedly about to start.

What this item was, no-one appeared to know. Besides him, Law quietly inquired of one of the vendors, who laughed and told him it was a secret and that if he wanted to know then he should head to the venue. She did throw in the titbit that there was no way kids like them would be able to afford it, but that they should take a look because it was a rare item they'd likely never seen before, and would never see again.

Not one to leave a stone unturned, Law thanked her politely – Penguin was certain it was an act because there was no way his often-brat of a captain knew actual manners – before heading for the auction. It happened to be not far from their planned rendezvous with Shachi, and Penguin caught sight of his nakama chatting and laughing with a couple of older men, seemingly unaware of the predatory look in their eyes. Penguin had to look away, knowing that it wasn't time to meet up and that Shachi's obliviousness to the potential danger was an act. There was no point tormenting himself by watching Shachi pretend he didn't know he was prey (would be prey, if he put a toe wrong and
didn't get out of there at the right time).

He let the crowd press him forwards, surreptitiously gripping Law's sleeve so he didn't lose his small captain in the crush. A small hand gripped his own sleeve, and Penguin was reminded of the other reason for their current assignments – he could pass as Law's older brother far more convincingly than Shachi could, both in appearance and temperament.

Any sort of conversation would be impossible over the hubbub of excitement, so he didn't bother trying, although he did spare a thought for Shachi and his intelligence-gathering. Someone stepped up to the makeshift stage, an item concealed by cloth in his hands, and the crowd went wild. A raised hand commanded silence, and after several moments the noise dulled to a background murmur.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" the man proclaimed. "Today we have a rare specimen to present to you. Once prolific, many of these were destroyed in fear that they were cursed. Created in what was once the most beautiful city in the whole of North Blue, I present to you…" He paused for dramatic effect, but Penguin's attention had been stolen by the painfully tight grip on his arm. Glancing at his captain, he saw Law's face twisted in a horrified snarl.

"Too tight," Penguin complained quietly. He went unheard as the man unveiled the item in his hands with great flourish, proclaiming it to be some statue of some historical figure or other.

The word 'Flevance' caught his attention, even without Law's grip tightening even further – a feat Penguin hadn't thought possible as he reflexively dropped the supplies he'd been holding.

Penguin had heard of Flevance. The tales had made it even as far as the sleepy little Swallow Island of a city ravaged by an incurable, highly contagious disease.

"Something so beautiful always has a price," Noona had said sadly at the news. It had been so far away, so outside of his world, that he'd never paid another thought to it.

Now, with Law's grip on his arm painful and cutting off all blood circulation, leaving his fingers a tingling mess, little things fell into place. Things he'd barely registered at the time, and never paid much attention to.

Law's sickness. His medical prowess. The way he hated guns and bullets even more than Penguin and Shachi did. The aversion to the colour white. The fact that he had no-one left from his childhood.

Small things in the grand scheme of things. Minor facts that had had seemingly little bearing on anything suddenly fell together as pieces of a much larger puzzle.

"Law-" he began, only to be drowned out by the excited crowd as they cheered and jeered. They seemed excited to be in the presence of something that had destroyed an entire city, unaware of a survivor in their very midst.

"-Rich bastards!"

"-Gonna sell for so much money-"

"Good thing they all died. Makes the relics worth so much more!"

Law snapped so fast Penguin got whiplash. A Room expanded over everyone, unnoticed by the frenzied crowd until the knife was drawn. Greedy exclamations were replaced by screams as everyone present found their torsos separated from their legs. His hand clamped tightly on Law's arm, Penguin found his torso being pulled along as Law surged forwards, slashing indiscriminately at
anyone and everyone in his path. His legs stayed where they'd been standing, until he felt someone collide with them and push them to the ground, burying them under writhing body parts.

"Law!" he tried again, but it was as if his captain couldn't hear him as he diced up everyone in range on his quest to get to the statue, sitting innocently amongst the carnage. Penguin thought he'd break it – certainly, he seemed angry enough, but he simply swept it up into his arm before returning his attention to the crowd of human jigsaw puzzles in front of him and gesturing with his fingers. Everyone present was rearranged, jumbled up into creatures that could barely be called humanoid, before Law pushed through, heading back blindly to the Tang, and Bepo.

"My legs!" Penguin protested, feeling them shifting with Law's victims. "Law! Hey! Law!" His complaints fell on deaf ears, and shaking Law's arm did nothing to help as he was dragged back towards the Polar Tang. He felt his legs shifting, something tugging one way and the other, and winced.

They reached the ship and Law Shambled himself on board, almost losing Penguin in the process, and making poor Bepo jump out of his skin.

"Captain, what-" the mink started, but Law barged past him, provoking a 'sorry'. Penguin found himself dropped on the deck as his grip, weakened by the Shambles, finally failed. The white lead statue landed next to him and he glared at it, hating it for what it had caused. Law was suffering and he didn't know how to help. It was as if the younger boy had shut himself away from the world in his own private bubble. The fact that Penguin's legs seemed to be lost for good, even though he could feel them being shunted around still, did nothing to improve his mood.

Law reappeared a moment later and slashed down with Kikoku, the cursed blade still too big for him to use properly. Penguin failed to roll out of the way fast enough and found himself with a deep gash in his arm, which burned. Kikoku had bitten him before, but it was nothing like that and he cried out.

Bepo hurried to his side, helping him out of the nodachi's range and a paw pressing down on the wound automatically even as they both watched their captain mutilate the statue with Kikoku, the cursed sword somehow finding the ability to slice the lead up. Breathing heavily, Law dropped the blade after he was done, the sword landing on the deck with a loud clink, and grabbed at the remains of the statue, hurling it frantically overboard handful after handful. Only once he was done did he seem to calm, his chest heaving slowly and steadily as it slowly returned to a more regular rhythm.

"We're leaving," he said, turning to face them before freezing, eyes wide in horror. "Penguin!" he exclaimed, falling to his knees and gently yet firmly shifting Bepo's bloodstained paw out of the way to view the damage. "What did I-" he started, trembling, and Penguin had to force a grin onto his face despite the pain and uncertainty inside, his uninjured arm reaching out so he could grip Law's shoulder reassuringly.

"It's okay," he lied, hiding that his arm burned as if it was on fire and that his legs felt battered and bruised, wherever they were. "Nothing serious, right? Just a cut. It'll heal up in no time." Law had produced some sort of antiseptic and a roll of bandages from somewhere and was dabbing at the wound gently. Penguin fought to hide the wince, and thought he succeeded well enough as Law bandaged up the gash tenderly.

"I'm sorry," he managed. Penguin waved the apology away.

"I said it's okay," he reminded him. "Although I wouldn't mind getting my legs back," he admitted.

"You mean these?" Shachi asked, and Penguin turned his head to see the ginger huffing and puffing on the deck, a pair of legs clutched in his arms. "What happened to our rendezvous?" he demanded,
setting the legs down by Penguin, and from the sensations Penguin felt they were definitely his legs. That was a relief. "Do you know how hard it was to get away from those guys in all that commotion?"

"Sorry," Law repeated. "I... It brought up some unpleasant memories." He helped Penguin reattach his legs, and the older teen sighed in relief at the sensation of being put back together.

"I figured," the ginger huffed, but not unkindly, before pulling Law into a hug. Penguin realised that Shachi had made the same connections he had. Bepo looked confused, but if there was one thing the mink knew (aside from fighting), it was hugs and before long all three humans had been pulled into his embrace, Law firmly in the centre.

Law wasn't going to open up to them then and there. Penguin knew that, but he hoped that maybe, one day, he'd be able to talk about it. In the meantime, all they could do was show him they were there for him, no matter what happened.

Chapter End Notes

Someone asked for the Heart Pirates coming across something made of white lead from Flevance, and this happened.
Shachi blinked a couple of times, dislodging his shades to surreptitiously rub at his eyes. They were itching slightly, not uncommon when the lighting was a little too bright.

"You okay?" Penguin asked him, walking besides him on the way to the mess hall for dinner. Shachi nodded.

"Just the same old," he reassured him with a grin, readjusting his shades before letting his hands fall back to his sides. Penguin sighed heavily, and he knew his nakama was fighting the urge to try and convince him yet again to go to Law and get his eyes healed. Shachi hastened his pace slightly, enough to remind Penguin that he didn't want to hear it, and lazily slid onto the bench in the mess room, mouth watering at the sight of the food their cook was dutifully serving up.

Dinner was, as always, a raucous affair. Still slightly distracted by his eyes, Shachi didn't join in as much as he usually would, instead finding himself nursing a small headache as he munched his way through the fish on his plate. His lack of a contribution drew the attention of his captain, who approached him quietly between courses.

"Is something wrong?" Law inquired. Shachi just shrugged.

"Same old," he admitted. "My eyes are being too sensitive right now. I'll go hide in the dark for a while after dinner." Law sighed, and Shachi knew he was fighting the same urge as Penguin to point out that he could and would heal him, if Shachi would only say yes. Eventually, he nodded with a despairing sigh and returned to his seat, watching Clione and Bepo compete to see who could eat more clams with a fond smile on his face. Nobody was surprised when Bepo won, triumphantly munching on his latest serving while Clione groaned miserably from where he'd slumped over the table.

The headache wasn't getting any better – if anything it was getting worse – so Shachi slipped out of the room as soon as he finished his dessert to a gentle pat on the back from Penguin and headed to the infirmary, seeking something to dull the headache. A basic painkiller was all he needed, and after locating it he threw it back, drowning it with a glass of water.

The pain didn't dull immediately, unusually, but Shachi simply shrugged it off, no longer concerned after drinking the medicine as he staggered his way back to the room, gradually becoming less steady on his feet. He couldn't pinpoint a reason for his exhaustion, but as he stumbled through the threshold into the room he shared with Penguin he decided it didn't matter anymore. The room was dark but warm, and he scrambled up to his bunk, choosing to flop face down, burying his face in his arms as he waited for the medicine to kick in and kill his headache.
His bed was warm, much warmer than usual, but they had been submerged for quite some time, so Shachi just wriggled out of his boiler suit as best he could and chucked it onto the floor to deal with later, if Penguin didn't get there first. Penguin would probably get there first. He shifted, trying to get comfortable against the headache that was still worsening – had he got the dose wrong? – and biting out a groan as his shades slipped away and clattered to the floor.

That settled it. He'd move later. Penguin, blessed underappreciated Penguin, would pick them up for him. His eyes hurt too much, despite their now dark environment, for Shachi to want to move, and what had started off as a mild headache had morphed into something akin to a sledgehammer pounding at the inside of his brain. A whine of discomfort escaped him, and the idea that maybe this was serious vaguely occurred to him.

He considered the pros and cons of finding Law – or anyone who could then locate Law on his behalf – as best his pounding head was willing to manage. Pros: treatment. His head would stop feeling as though that blasted Apoo was having a party inside it. Cons: Law would get worried. The younger man didn't need that stress. Also that required moving, and Shachi got the distinct impression that moving would not be a good idea as faint traces of nausea decided to join the fun.

Letting out a whimper, which he regretted as the sound of it reverberated though his head, he surprised himself with a yawn. He didn't recall being tired before dinner, but sleeping would stop the pain so he didn't fight it, snuggling down against his bed, which felt harder than usual, and closing his eyes, sleepily taking his hat off and resting it by his head.

There was a soft thud, as if something had fallen, and Shachi shifted slightly, burying his face more solidly in his arms. Penguin could pick up whatever that had been, he decided as he yawned again, closing his eyes as sleep took him, whisking him away from the world of insistent headaches and mild nausea.

He didn't notice his body beginning to slide sideways, nor did the sudden impact with the floor wake him.

Instead, hushed voices woke him, and he opened his eyes to see nothing. Something lay firmly over his eyes – a bandage, questing fingers discovered – and he realised that the bed he was lying in was soft, far softer than the bed he had fallen asleep in. He still had a splitting headache, which was odd because the discomfort in his eyes had gone, probably due to the bandages firmly shielding them from any light at all.

The nausea hadn't gone either, an overpowering sensation crawling up his throat and he retched, reflexively trying to turn onto his side. His limbs didn't respond, weak and quivering but unmoving, and somewhere behind the headache panic set in, low and simmering but there. He retched again, and gentle hands turned him onto his side. His unresponsive limbs were shifted around, until his body remained on his side without support.

"What's wrong with him?" one of the voices asked, quiet but not enough to prevent his headache protesting.

"Captain's looking into it, but-" another replied, cut off as Shachi's body decided to expel his dinner, spasming outside of his control. "Shachi?"

He attempted to complain, both at the headache and his lack of ability to move, only for his tongue to flail uselessly in his mouth, producing a sound that was more syllables than words.

"He's getting worse," a third voice pointed out, too shrill for Shachi's liking, as someone wiped his mouth gently. "What is this?"
"Poison," a sharp voice cut across the room. Even in his state, Shachi recognised his captain's voice. A hand rested on Shachi's cheek gently. "Can you hear me, Shachi?"

"Ngrgh," was the closest Shachi's tongue would let him get to a confirmation, but as Law's thumb brushed his hair back gently he realised Law had understood regardless.

"I'm going to remove the poison now," Law told him quietly. "Hold on."

There was little else Shachi could do except wait, a pathetic whimper forcing its way past his lips as he felt Law's Room envelope him and the surgery begin. He wasn't aware enough, with his headache, trembling limbs and nausea, to tell how long it lasted before Law's hand returned to his cheek.

"Shachi," his captain said again, and he shifted, feeling no better than before his captain's treatment. "The poison's gone now, it's just some of the symptoms left. Bear with it." Shachi breathed out shakily, still thoroughly miserable but noticing somewhere that the nausea had gone. An improvement at least.

"Who did this?" he heard someone demand, wincing at the volume but now aware enough to recognise Penguin's furious voice.

"No-one," Law told them, his hand not moving from Shachi's cheek. Shachi was glad, drawing comfort from the simple touch as he listened as best he could to his captain's explanation of how he'd managed to get himself poisoned.

A plant.

If Shachi had felt better, he'd have laughed. He even remembered the stupid thing, brushing up against his hand on the island they'd just left. The idea that it had been poisonous had never crossed his mind, which was naïve when he thought about it. After all, it was the Grand Line.

"Sleep it off," Law told him gently. "I'd give you a dose of sleeping medicine, except you apparently helped yourself to it earlier, so you'll have to manage without."

Shachi had no recollection of touching the sleeping pills. All he'd taken was a painkiller… oh.

"That wasn't my bed, was it?" he murmured, closing his eyes (not that it made any difference with the bandages over his eyes) and relaxing into what he realised belatedly was an infirmary bed.

"No," Law said, sounding half exasperated, half amused as his hand disappeared from Shachi's cheek and a sheet was pulled over him. "That was one of the fuel tanks."

Chapter End Notes

So... how long did you take to realise Shachi wasn't where he thought he was? All symptoms taken from Deadly Nightshade poisoning, although I used Aconite's administered-through-skin-contact to inflict it upon him.
Penguin was dead. Well, he was pretty sure he was. Blood dripped steadily from the tips of his fingers, having run down his arm from a severe gash in his shoulder, severing the nerves and blood vessels alike. More blood pooled beneath his body, spreading out like spilt paint from his crumpled corpse. His left leg was bent at an impossible angle, giving off the impression that it had two knees, while his right was dyed crimson. The centrepiece of the grotesque display was his own spear, pinning him to the ground like some insect on display through the middle of his torso, right where his stomach should be.

Looking down on it in the most surreal out-of-body experience he had ever had, Penguin thought he looked a bit like a discarded doll with his strings all cut. The thought was less disturbing than he'd expected.

Surely you were supposed to feel something at the site of your own dead body. Fear? Repulsion? Regret?

Penguin felt light, as if all the weights tying him to the mortal realm had fallen away all at once, transforming into balloons that coaxed him up and away from the vision. Even the sight of people clad in the same style clothes as his body, crowding around the husk with their mouths moving as if they thought it would do something – bar one whose hands danced above him in some magic ritual – did nothing.

No longer interested in the sight of his mortal body, Penguin's attention turned skywards, where he was slowly floating towards. There, he saw two figures.

'Two figures' was a blinkered way to put it. Nothing was truly visible, mere impressions and suggestions in his mind, but there was a familiarity to their presence that reached around and drew him within them. The idea formed of an embrace, the long-forgotten warmth of a mother's hold and a father's support and Penguin sank into it.


Penguin, and it was almost a word, carrying the weight of a voice that hadn't been heard for many long years.

Son. It was a concept he hadn't had applied to himself in so long, and he allowed himself to sink deep into the emotions that swam around him, of everything that felt like belonging and completion.

I'm here. Everything was over. All the hurt, all the pain. The heart-wrenching loneliness and the
realisation, over and over again, that his family were gone forever. It was gone, because they were there, and he was being absorbed into them so he could never leave again. No more regrets, no more fear. The world set itself to rights again.

"PENGUIN!"

The cry, so sharp and crisp amongst the gentle waves, tore through him like a knife, sheering him away from the nirvana he had so nearly entered, and a well of fury loomed within him. How dare they tear him away, when he was so close. So, so close to being with them again, so tightly enveloped that he would never drift away again.

It sent ripples of unrest through the impressions, flickering them like a breeze would a candle, and Penguin reached out, desperate to continue where he’d left off, to find that place where he’d be with them forever more.

They rejected him, recoiling away as if he were a poison in their midst. Horror made itself known, and as all but the most prevalent shades disappeared back into the aether he caught sight of his broken puppet husk again. No longer was it pinned like an ugly butterfly to the blood-soaked ground. One of those figures from earlier, familiar yet nameless, had gathered it up, trying to piece the shattered doll back together in its embrace. The wails were loud enough to reach him, trembling the core of his being, and he tried to tear himself away from the bonds that reached up to ensnare him.

No. The protest echoed around him, the comforting presences wrapping around him without touching, not allowing him to dissolve away within them. Go back.

Rejection, all because of the one figure with the too-loud wail. He screamed, trying to force himself to integrate with the presences, desperate to stay with them, where he belonged. Not so easily. He would not be defied so easily.

The vines tangled around him, tugging him back, down down down towards his body, and he fought. He didn't want to re-enter that husk, imprisoned by a single static form. The more he struggled, the tighter they wound, and he was dragged back down, away from where he wanted, where he needed to be.

Pain started to return as the vines forcibly pinned him back against the husk he had vacated, and with it came definition. Where before he had seen nothing, just felt the concepts, now faces appeared. They were smiling, even as he writhed and hurled himself away from the snare of his own corpse.

You weren't really going to abandon him, were you? he heard his mother scold, and the idea that he'd forgotten something, someone, important crashed over him. He opened his mouth, trying to reply, but she wasn't there anymore. There was nothing up above him, no sign of the tempting nirvana he'd so nearly joined.

Just Shachi, his cheeks drenched with tears and his hair dishevelled against a backdrop of a shimmering pale blue, and it was the ginger's name that he attempted to exhale with questionable success before the pain exploded over him, sending him spiralling rapidly down into unconsciousness.
There was a request for either Law or Penguin to have a near-death experience, see their family, and be unable to decide what to do. I admit I was sorely tempted to do Law just so I could write Lami, but the close relationship I've built up between Penguin and Shachi lent itself to the idea very snugly.

For those that want the hows and whys of Penguin's survival, the short answer is Law and the long answer is that Law had done his 'removing vital organs' thing before the battle (see chapter 36, Doctor) so the only thing that was killing him was the potentially severe blood loss, which Law was doing something about in the background - not that Penguin really noticed in his state.
Law liked things tidy. As a child, his parents had impressed the importance of a tidy environment on him, and despite everything that had happened, it was something he never fell out of. Untidy environments meant hazards. A toy on the floor could result in a scraped knee, a scalpel not put away properly could mean a cut finger. Dirt could mean infection.

As a child, he had taken these lessons to heart, carefully putting everything away once he was finished with it, and sterilising the area before operating on his latest frog. The frogs never survived, of course, but it was good practice for when he was dealing with humans, whose tenacity was far greater than a frog's when faced with a scalpel.

Then Flevance had burnt, and with it all of his material possessions. Doflamingo offered him new things: toys, books, entertainment. Law accepted only the clothes on his back and the rare weapon he was gifted, too tied up in his world of vengeance to care for trivial pleasures. It had all been lost when Cora-san had kidnapped him that day, the man bringing only a change of clothes and his own weapons, unhappy at the sight of Law near them.

When he met Bepo, Penguin and Shachi, he had once more been reduced to owning nothing but the clothes on his back. The mink was like him, while the other two… Well, Law had thought they'd had a home on Swallow Island, but when they followed him onto a stolen ship with nothing more than their own clothes, he'd wondered if he'd been wrong.

The Polar Tang, when they obtained her, was beautifully stocked. It was clear that, while a military ship at the heart of her design, she had been outfitted to carry the official that was supposed to name her in extreme comfort. Law had thrown most of the ridiculous things out, as well as anything bearing the symbol of the World Government, but everything else had been kept.

Sadly, he discovered the hard way that while he had been brought up to clear up after himself, Penguin and Shachi had not. Bepo, the poor shy mink, seemed too nervous to even touch most of the things found in the various storage rooms without permission, but the older teens were total chaos.

Bedding, supposedly clean and pressed spare sheets, sprawled along corridors, now requiring laundry before they could be slept in. Pots and pans in the kitchen were left piled high in the sink until Law put them away, or made Bepo do it. Worst of all, the infirmary – reasonably well equipped, although still paling to Law's standards – frequently found its cupboard doors swinging open, medicine bottles rolling around in danger of smashing, or scalpels left carelessly on the side. Law didn't even know what the pair had been doing in the infirmary.

It came to a head when Bepo got hurt. The mink stumbled over a sheet, trailing off of the bed it was
supposed to be neatly covering and tripped in his haste to regain his balance. His legs entangled, he collapsed forwards, knocking glass containers to the floor and flinging a scalpel into the air, which landed firmly in a soft pad.

There to witness the accident, Law hurriedly treated his new nakama before helping him towards the control room where Penguin and Shachi were laughing and messing around instead of watching their course.

It was the first time he used his abilities on them, separating them into several pieces as their laughter became cries of fear and letting them fall to the floor in front of him and Bepo. To Law’s relief, they at least had the sense to sober up when they caught sight of Bepo's bandages, and wore identical faces of horror when they discovered it was entirely their own fault.

Law never found out which bit of the experience, exactly, sobered their carefree attitude towards keeping the submarine tidy, although he assumed it was the combination of guilt that they'd ended up hurting their nakama, and the residual fear from being left in pieces on the floor for hours until Law figured out how to put them back together again once he was satisfied with their grovelling apologies.

He didn't really care too much what, exactly, was the reason. It was just a pleasure to see the Polar Tang tidy the entire time.

Chapter End Notes

As someone whose bedroom is usually ridiculously messy, I see how neat the ships seem to be (obviously they're still very much lived in, but everything's still in its place) and wonder how the hell they manage to do it. I can think of a few motivating reasons why they should, though.
Law could be imaginative at times. Often, it was interesting, but Penguin was far from fond of his meddling captain's latest bout of creativity. His head hurt, although that wasn't Law's fault, but rather Shachi's, and he knew his shoulder and abdomen _should_ hurt, and would once the painkillers wore off.

The ginger had been totally unreasonable. Over the past few weeks, he'd come to take offense whenever Penguin told or asked him to do anything, getting more and more explosive at every occasion. There was no reason for it that Penguin could see, Shachi was just being awkward for the sake of awkward, and while he was mellower than the ginger, he still had his limits.

Shachi had hit them earlier, screaming at him after Penguin had asked him to help clear up the game they'd been playing. He'd acted as if Penguin had ordered him to, as if he thought Penguin was going to leave him to clear up all by himself, and when heaped on top of the insufferable attitude that had been mounting over the past few weeks, Penguin had snapped back.

He was still angry, lying in pieces strewn across the various infirmary beds. Law had firmly claimed that he had to go back to help Bepo in the control room, and get a fresh coffee, but refused to leave Penguin alone with Shachi for fear he tried to finish what he started. An hour later, Penguin liked to think that he wouldn't have gone that far, but at the same time had regained enough self-awareness to realised that perhaps he would have done. Law's solution had been to make both Penguin and Shachi incapable of moving by separating their limbs from their bodies and spacing them out across the infirmary, attached to the beds so that only his own abilities could remove them.

After his rage, and mild concussion, had subsided to a manageable level, Penguin dared to hope that maybe they'd be able to talk. While Shachi had been pushing his buttons constantly until he exploded, he wanted to know _why_. But an hour later, Shachi was still asleep. Penguin could see him in the neighbouring bed, his chest rising and falling slowly and steadily.

The more time passed, and the more his fury faded to let other emotions in, the worse he felt. The bandages around Shachi's abdomen were his fault. Shachi's unconscious state was his fault.

He'd told Shachi he wasn't his brother. That he was _glad_ he wasn't his brother.

Shachi had said it first, true, but Shachi had been upset for weeks. Penguin should have been the mature one, hunting for the crux of the issue before it reached breaking point. They might not share blood, and maybe they'd never exchanged a cup of sake, but Shachi had always felt like his brother. Were such details really necessary when they'd shared almost every waking moment of their lives together?
Not that he had a right to call Shachi that, not anymore. Not now the ginger was lying motionless in a bed with bandages betraying just how much Penguin had hurt him. Brothers didn't hurt brothers.

"Are you awake?"

He startled. Shachi had made no sign that he'd awoken, but it had been his lips that had moved, and his voice that sounded. With his shades still over his eyes, Penguin couldn't see if they were open or shut.

"Yes," he admitted, mentally preparing himself for another tirade. Shachi felt distant, in a way he had never quite felt before.

Silence stretched through the infirmary, heavy and pregnant with expectation. Penguin could think of nothing to say, nothing to try to rebuild their bond from where he'd shattered it with cruel words and a sharp blade. Shachi seemed no more eager to break the silence, still unmoving on the bed, and if it wasn't for the building tension in the room, Penguin would have thought he'd imagined him talking in the first place.

"I'm sorry," he said when the tension got too much to bear, and froze. Shachi had spoken at the same time, identical words with an identical tone and it reminded him of Law's occasional complaints that the two of them could be a hive mind. He opened his mouth to say it again, to try and mend the gap, but Shachi garbled out a repeat before he could form the first syllable.

"I'm sorry! I was stupid! I shouldn't have hit you, I'm sorry!"

Penguin wanted his arms back, wanted to wrap them around Shachi to show him that it was okay, that he'd been the fool.

"I hurt you," he said instead, because without his limbs all he had left was his voice. "Those... those things I said." He'd not only insulted Shachi and trampled all over their unspoken bond as if it didn't exist, but also extended the worst of his tirade to his parents, tarnishing their memories with false statements they didn't deserve. "I'm sorry."

"I said them, too," Shachi said, and Penguin could hear the lump in his throat. The ginger finally moved, letting his head loll sideways to face him, and he could see tear tracks running down his face. "I... I like you being my brother. If you'll still have me."

Penguin could hear the tentative hope quivering past the tears, fighting against the avalanche of probable rejection, and felt his heart break. He had done this to Shachi. He had been the one to reduce the proud, confident ginger to this nervous shadow. He could never forgive himself if he didn't rectify it then and there.

"If you'll still have me," he parroted. "Oh, Shachi. I should be the one saying that. I messed up. I messed up so, so bad."

He reached for Shachi, finding him suddenly in arms' reach, and pulled him close. Arms wrapped around him in turn, one hand gently touching at the lump on his head guiltily before Penguin pulled it away, only vaguely recognising the sound of a door shutting and the fact that neither of them were in pieces any more.

His fingers found the bandages on Shachi's stomach the same time Shachi's found their mirror counterpart on Penguin's own body.

"We weren't ready for those knives," he admitted into Shachi's shoulder. The ginger nodded against him.
"Law can keep them for a while," he muttered in agreement, and his arms tightened around Penguin.

They hadn't yet addressed the elephant in the room – the *why* Shachi had exploded in the first place – but for the moment Penguin was content to curl up with his precious nakama, his brother, and wait for them both to heal.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked for a companion piece to *Feud* (chapter 65). Hopefully this explains a bit about why they fought, as well as showing their reconciliation after they cooled down and realised they were being idiots.
One of the problems with setting sail with two other teenage boys and a polar bear-mink-thing was that simple things like cutting hair were suddenly not so simple, or easily taken for granted. Shachi had often enjoyed his hair cuts on Swallow Island, his hair fast growing and requiring frequent maintenance, but as it got longer and longer he realised that the days of sitting patiently on a stool in front of a raging fire while his hair was lovingly brushed and trimmed were behind him.

He took to tying it up, trying to keep it out of the way and for once cursing Penguin’s shorter, slower growing hair as the ties tangled themselves with the strands, leaving them almost impossible to extract without half his hair parting company with his scalp in the process. It reached the point where he gave up in frustration and the bands remain nestled in his hair. Hidden under his hat and the bundled layers of winter clothing, it wasn’t like his hair was visible anyway.

Penguin was the first to question it, unsurprisingly.

"You know you don't need to wear a hat inside the submarine all the time, right?" the older teen pointed out over dinner one night. True enough, Shachi was the only one whose hat was on his head – both Penguin and Law had forgone their hats that day, finding the rising temperature inside the Polar Tang too much to comfortably wear such thick hats.

"Yeah, I know," Shachi shrugged, trying to pass himself off as unbothered by the sudden attention on his hat's presence. "I just feel like it." He took an extra large bite out of his fish to avoid having to talk any more, only to choke on a stray bone. His nakama reacted instantly, Bepo thumping him on the back while Law's hand summoned one of his mysterious Rooms. Penguin just watched him, frowning lightly, until the other two successfully saved Shachi from an undignified death by fishbone.

As Law placed a glass of water in front of him firmly, which Shachi gulped down thankfully, Penguin's hand stretched out and briskly whipped the hat off of his head, exposing the matted mess that was once flowing ginger locks.

"Shachi." He sounded completely scandalised, as if it was his own hair that was in such a state. "Oh, you idiot." Shachi glowered at him over the rim of the glass he was still nursing, wanting his hat back but knowing Penguin well enough to recognise that he wouldn't be getting it back until the scolding was over.

"I agree with Penguin," Law said bluntly, reaching forwards and ineffectually tugging at one of the ensnared hair bands lightly. Shachi winced, then swatted Bepo's paw away as the mink tried to pat him on the head lightly.
"Leave it," he grumbled.

"Do you not know how to cut your own hair?" Law continued as if he'd said nothing, and Shachi scowled at him blackly. "Or perhaps I should be asking if you know what a brush is."

Shachi eyed the perpetual bedhead of his captain and thought that was a bit rich. Then Law produced a knife from somewhere, and he actively flinched backwards, Penguin's hand on his arm stopping him from overbalancing off the bench.

"What's that for?" he demanded, trying to scramble away as Law rounded the table to approach him, blade held confidently in one hand. "No."

"You can't leave your hair like that," Law said bluntly. "It's unhygienic."

"So you're going to cut it off?" Shachi shrieked, fighting Penguin's hold. "Don't you dare, Law!"

Law paused for a moment and Shachi saw him considering for a long, hopeful moment before he resumed his advance.

"Hold still!" Law snapped as Shachi shook his head vigorously, trying to present too much of a moving target. His heavily clumped hair didn't lend itself to the effort, and fingers clenched the mess, forcing Shachi's movements to reduce. "If you don't stop moving I really will cut all your hair off!" the younger teen threatened, and Shachi froze on impulse before the words registered.

"So… if you're not cutting all my hair off, what are you doing with that knife?" he asked, trying to track Law with his eyes while his head stayed totally still.

"Cutting out the hair ties," Law said bluntly, and moments later Shachi felt a slight tugging. "What did you even do to get it this bad?" Shachi chose not to dignify that with a response, and heard Penguin chuckle lightly beside him. "There, I think that's all of them." He moved back into Shachi's line of view, and the ginger was glad to see the knife disappearing back to wherever Law kept it.

"Thanks," he muttered, because while he could have done without the scare, the removal of the hair ties was hardly a bad thing. The look on Law's face, though. That was a bad thing.

"We're not done," the younger teen said bluntly. "Bathroom." Penguin and Bepo flanked him and Shachi could do little more than scramble to get his feet underneath him before he was frog-matched until he was stood in front of a sink. Law dumped a bottle of shampoo in front of him and eyed him firmly.

Shachi glanced down at it dubiously, as Penguin reached forwards to get the sink filling with warm water.

"Use it," Law said bluntly, ignoring or not noticing Shachi's concern at how he was supposed to wash his hair from a sink. He reached for his shades slowly, and realisation flashed across Law's face. Penguin was faster, gently claiming the shades before coaxing him to stumble back the last couple of steps to the sink. His eyes closed out of necessity, Shachi couldn't see what they were doing, but water splashed over his hair as he followed instructions to bend over, and he could definitely feel the fingers massaging his scalp to work in the shampoo.

There were more than two hands – three at least – and with the unmistakable furred body of Bepo keeping him supported Shachi realised that all of them had joined in trying to coax his hair into something that less resembled a woven mat.

Shachi hadn't been trying to count the seconds, but with nothing else to do but wait for his nakama to finish found himself doing it anyway. The procedure ended up taking the better part of half an hour,
and the water was frigid by the time Law decided he was satisfied.

"All done?" Shachi dared to ask as he accepted his shades from Penguin and settled them back on his face where they belonged.

"No," Law said bluntly, and Shachi paused, confused. "Next up we cut it."

"You said you wouldn't cut it!" Shachi protested. Law rolled his eyes, and Bepo started to drag him out of the room. "Bepo!"

"Your hair needs a trim," Law ground out through gritted teeth. "We can do this the easy way or the hard way."

The knife was out again, and Shachi recoiled, only to be caught by Bepo who easily pinned him with his bulk. Penguin helped manhandle him into a sitting position, and he froze as slender fingers carded through the wet hair, coaxing apart the strands that the solid washing hadn't separated. Damp, the longest strands reached the base of his shoulder blades. They were gentle and sure, and if it wasn't for the fact that he was pinned in place by Penguin and Bepo he'd have thought it was just like being back on Swallow Island.

The sound and sensation of his hair falling to the floor (or more likely, onto Bepo) almost lulled him to sleep, certainly placing him in a dozing state until Law finally announced that he was finished. Tentatively, Shachi ran fingers through his hair, surprised when they came back knot-free.

"Don't let it get that bad again," Law grumbled, and left before Shachi could say anything else. The ever-faithful Bepo followed right on his tail.

Penguin found Shachi a mirror, and he surveyed it critically. Law was by no means a perfect hairdresser. Parts of his hair were noticeably shorter than others, and the layers of hair were completely unkempt as Law had largely ignored them in his makeshift hairdressing. Regardless of the imperfections, his hair looked far better than it had for months, and Shachi wondered if he could persuade his captain to cut his hair again in a couple of months' time.

Chapter End Notes

Well, someone's got to cut their hair... Of course, we know nothing about Penguin's hair, and Law's looks rather like he just cuts it with the nearest sharp implement, so Shachi with his reasonably long hair it was.
There were many things Ikkaku liked about her new crew. They were friendly, boisterous and protective of their own, unafraid to play pranks and have a good time but unforgiving if anyone hurt their nakama. The captain was quiet, almost brooding, but it didn't take her long to realise that didn't mean he cared any less. If anything, Law probably cared the most.

The flag appealed to her, too. Simple and to the point (whatever the point was), there were none of the ridiculously complicated flourishes she'd seen many other crews sporting. The grin, despite its similarity to other, less pleasant crews, felt kind to her. She'd got a knowing smile from Penguin and Shachi when she mentioned that before they'd declared she definitely belonged.

The one thing that didn't quite make sense was the ship. A submarine was great – she had no objections to the submarine, nor did she have an issue with the underwater wonderland it gave them unique access to – but when she thought of spending long periods of time deep underwater, she associated it with hiding.

Why, then, was a ship so suited to hiding and concealment, painted an obnoxiously bright yellow? Not that the Polar Tang didn't suit the colour – Ikkaku couldn't actually imagine her another colour, although Bepo had told her the submarine used to be grey before they redecorated her – but it seemed rather counter-productive.

"Is yellow the captain's favourite colour?" she found herself asking Penguin one day. As well as the ship, a large proportion of their captain's wardrobe appeared to sport the colour, and the jolly roger decorating their boiler suits were also tinted yellow. Penguin chuckled.

"You mean, 'why is the Tang bright yellow?'," he corrected. Slightly abashed, Ikkaku nodded, and he shrugged. "I haven't a clue," he admitted. "When we repainted her, Law just turned up with barrels of yellow paint. He never told us why."

"You never asked," the aforementioned captain commented, making Ikkaku jump. She hadn't realised that Law was in earshot. Penguin didn't show any surprise at all, leaving her to wonder how long her captain had been there for.

"I'm fairly sure we did," Penguin countered. "You just ignored us." Ikkaku hadn't thought you could talk to your captain like that, but Law didn't seem offended at the accusation.

"Maybe I did," he allowed thoughtfully. "For the record, yellow is not my favourite colour. I don't actually like it that much."

Ikkaku gaped at him, and out of the corner of her eye she could see Penguin's face mirroring her
"Then why the hell did you pick it for the Tang?" he exclaimed, loudly enough to draw the attention of the rest of the nakama in earshot.

"Why did Law pick what?" Shachi asked, gravitating towards the trio of them as if he'd appeared out of nowhere. Ikkaku later learnt that Penguin and Shachi had a habit of randomly appearing wherever the other was.

"Law doesn't like yellow," Penguin explained, and Shachi joined them in gaping.

"The hell?" he flailed. "But everything is yellow. Because you picked it!" He pointed at his captain accusingly. "And don't you dare say 'just because' because I know you better than that."

Law avoided their stares for a moment, glancing down at the ground and then around at the rest of the eavesdropping crew before pulling himself up to his full height to stare them down. Ikkaku began to feel as if she'd opened a forbidden box with her innocent question and opened her mouth to apologise.

"It was my sister's favourite colour," he said, without fanfare, and Ikkaku's head swam with the implications of that sentence – Law had a sister, he used the past tense, Law no longer had a sister – as she vaguely noticed Penguin and Shachi stiffen besides her.

"Law-" Penguin started, but their captain waved him off.

"Don't worry about it," he said, before making his way past them in the direction of the kitchen. Ikkaku quivered, the aura Penguin and Shachi giving off making her feel like that was something Law never talked about and feeling horrendous for bringing it up, before a hand landed on her shoulder. "Don't worry about it," Law repeated quietly in her ear as he passed. There was a small smile on his face. "Care to join me for a coffee?"

She could find no reason to refuse, so trailed behind him as the rest of her crew dispersed. She could hear murmurs of 'captain had a sister?' before hissing noises from Penguin and Shachi muted them, but Law seemed unconcerned.

"There's no need to be scared," her captain told her as they entered the kitchen. "Asking questions is fine on this crew, although you won't always get an answer." Ikkaku nodded numbly, watching the water debate how quickly it wanted to boil. Not fast enough, apparently. "If you do get an answer, it's because they chose to share it, not because you pried." The water finally started to bubble and Law poured it into two mugs, passing one to her.

"I didn't know you had a sister," she admitted, wrapping her hands around the mug. "I know I'm just new, though."

"Until today, the only ones that knew were Bepo, Penguin and Shachi," Law told her, taking a gulp of his own drink. Ikkaku's stomach churned. "It hurts to think about her much." Ikkaku opened her mouth to apologise, but he cut her off. "But trivial facts like her favourite colour not so much anymore."

She shut her mouth with an audible clack, biting back more questions. She hadn't earned the right to ask Law any more painful questions, nor did she want to disturb the smile on his face as he stared off into space.

Smiling herself at the sight, even though her brain still insisted she needed to apologise, she returned her attention to the mug of cooling coffee in her hands and decided to appreciate the rare silence. In
the distance she could hear the boys laughing at something or other, and was reminded again why she loved her new crew.

Chapter End Notes

Yellow. Why a yellow submarine (aside from a Beatles reference)? Yellow is hardly subtle, even though I get the impression that the Heart Pirates generally like subtle as a thing (a Supernova crew with only two bounties between them at the end of Paradise, and one of them only 1000 beris?). So why yellow? Time for more Flevance/Lami influences :D
Shachi knew they were hunting for information on Doflamingo, although it had to be done slowly and carefully so the tyrant didn't get wind of it. Law was unwilling to tell them much, but he had impressed on them way back when they'd left Swallow Island the terror of the man he was hiding from. It had been an obvious ploy to try and stop them from getting on the boat with him, and to begin with neither he nor Penguin had taken the stories too seriously.

Landing on an island recently vacated by the pirates had wizened them up immediately. The carnage made him sick to his stomach, and he was glad he hadn't truly believed Law originally. If he had, he would never have stepped off of Swallow Island, no matter how interesting the kid was. Not if it meant being hunted by this.

The thing that none of them knew, not even Law, was why Doflamingo was hunting him so viciously. It had something to do with his devil fruit, but what use did the man have for the Ope Ope no Mi? Law had admitted that Doflamingo had intended for it to be eaten, so it wasn't for the money (he'd also implied that he knew how much his fruit was worth, but he hadn't given a number and Shachi was learning when not to ask questions).

Therefore, aside from information on Doflamingo – so they could stay well away from him at all times (and Shachi got the impression Law wanted to become the hunter one day but the idea of facing that monster was far from welcome) – Law expanded his research into anything concerning his fruit. He seemed convinced that there was some, somewhere, although he wouldn't say why he was so certain.

There were a lot of things Law wouldn't say. Shachi didn't like going in blind, but with Law it was quickly apparent that everything was on a strictly need to know basis – and that nothing was 'need to know' for the rest of them. Bepo, the odd creature, appeared to lack the curiosity of a human and settled down to follow orders blindly, but for Penguin and himself it was more of a stretch.

It took months of searching. More than once they'd had to divert themselves when last minute news of Doflamingo's latest location sprung up, hiding deep beneath the waves and quaking in terror as the unmistakable flamingo-shaped ship passed by on the horizon, hoping and praying they hadn't been noticed. It slowed them up, Law often demanding that they remain submerged as deep as the Tang could safely remain for up to a week after a possible sighting to no complaints from his crew.

Eventually, they struck gold, landing on the island a previous user of the fruit had occupied and finding a treasure trove of research. Predictably, the inhabitants were at loath to surrender the information, but when faced with the same ability they were trying to protect, Law had managed to obtain the precious papers.
He wouldn't let Shachi see. Nor did Penguin have any luck, while Bepo continued to play the part of a loyal follower and not even try, despite Law using him as a backrest while he scoured the papers desperately. The single-mindedness of his research left Penguin and Shachi to do almost everything on the ship by themselves, from steering to tending the engines to even the cooking and cleaning. Bepo, of course, remained in charge of navigating whenever he wasn't being used as the captain's backrest.

Even though Shachi knew Law's research was important, he couldn't help but gripe in the safety of his own mind. The Polar Tang was reasonably large – too large for two teenagers to handle competently, especially when they were still learning how to control her.

The sound of something falling caught his attention as he was making his way into the infirmary to fetch his captain for dinner, and he hastened his pace until he was almost running.

Law was on the floor, his chair on its side as if he'd just fallen off it, and Shachi hurried to his side.

"Law?" he asked, only for the younger team to look at him with his eyes wide. *Scared.* Shachi had seen him scared before, whether it be the brief waking period after a nightmare, or their near-misses with the Donquixote Pirates, but this was different. He crouched down in front of him slowly, waiting to be acknowledged.

"I… I don't want to die," Law rasped hoarsely, his voice small and frail.

Dumfounded, Shachi stared at him before wrapping his arms around him tightly, feeling his captain tense and half-heartedly attempt to push him away. Shachi refused to be so easily dislodged, clinging to him as if their lives depended on it.

One of the pages of research had fluttered to the ground beside Law and Shachi glanced over at it, wondering if that was the culprit for Law's fall. *Eternal Youth Operation* it declared loudly, drawing Shachi's attention almost completely.

'Eternal Youth' sounded… odd. It reminded Shachi of 'immortality' and he knew enough about the frailty of humans to know that they would all die eventually. Trying to change that would be perverse, not to mention impossible.

Except, he realised as he read the section, it *was* possible. There, right before his eyes, was instructions on how to obtain it, using the Ope Ope no Mi.

Using the *life* of the Ope Ope no Mi's user.

He had started to help Law up, into a better seating position, but with the realisation he pulled the younger teen closer again, his earlier words suddenly making sense.

"Never use it," he said firmly, his lips by Law's ear. "Never." Law still trembled and Shachi dislodged his hat to stroke his hair gently, the way his mother had always comforted him after a nightmare so many years ago. "Promise, Law. They can't make you use it."

Minutes passed in silence, before Law let out a shaky breath Shachi hadn't even realised he'd been holding.

"I promise," he said quietly. "Doflamingo doesn't deserve it."

"No matter what," Shachi pressed, because he'd seen the carnage the pirate could cause and knew he would do everything in his power to persuade Law if a chance ever arose.
"No matter what," Law repeated, his voice breaking in the middle. Shachi wondered if his thoughts had taken the same path, assessing the Donquixote Pirates' cruelty to identify the possible blackmail they might scrounge up. "No matter what."

Chapter End Notes

While Cora-san knew about the Eternal Youth Operation, I don't recall it ever being mentioned to Law himself (Doflamingo himself wasn't certain Law knew about it even in Dressrosa thirteen years later), so he most likely learnt about it later. I also don't think learning that you're being hunted so you can make your enemy immortal at the cost of your own life is something that can be easily shrugged off, no matter how much Law's already been through.

I also think this is one of the reasons Law didn't bring his crew with him to Dressrosa - if Doflamingo got hold of them and held them hostage, would he have still been able to refuse?
Shachi hadn't made the rendezvous. Penguin looked around fervently, desperately trying to catch a glimpse of familiar ginger hair. Besides him, Law frowned, arms crossed as his eyes bored holes in everyone that passed as if one of them would magically transform into Shachi if he stared hard enough. No-one did.

"Something's wrong," Penguin eventually voiced, when ten minutes had passed and no ginger hair had graced his vision. "He's late."

"There's no need to state the obvious," Law retorted, one of his fingers twitching against his arm. "We're going back." Penguin stared at him in disbelief.

"We're doing what?" he asked, voice strangled against the lump in his throat. "But Shachi-"

"If he hasn't made the rendezvous either something prevented him and he returned to the Tang instead, or something prevented him and he's gone," Law said bluntly. "Either way, there is nothing to be gained from remaining here, except unwanted attention."

Shachi wasn't at the Tang. Penguin's gut told him that. If something was stopping him from reaching them, he'd have got a message across somehow. But there had been nothing. Everything was as it should be, nowhere was there anything that seemed even slightly out of place.

"Screw that!" he snarled as Law began to walk away, clearly believing that he'd meekly follow orders when Shachi was in trouble. The other teen clearly overestimated his loyalty to him versus his relationship with Shachi, and Penguin tore off in the opposite direction, not knowing where Shachi was but determined to find him.

"Oi! Penguin!" he heard Law shout from behind him, but there was no sound of running feet, no sign that Law was changing his mind about returning to the Tang. He quashed the sense of betrayal ruthlessly; Law didn't understand, would never understand. Penguin had lost everyone else. He would not lose Shachi.

It was more luck than judgement that found him sprinting down that one dark alleyway, where most of the shops were boarded up and those that weren't clearly didn't find the law worth following. Behind a pile of wonky crates, some tumbled over completely and spilling their rotting contents onto the ground, was a splatter of blood. It dyed the crates nearest to it with splashes of crimson, matching streaks on the wall and an erratic pattern on the ground.

Lying in one of the larger bloodstains on the ground were a pair of familiar black shades, lenses cracked and frames bent beyond all practicality, and Penguin's heart stuttered. He knelt down slowly,
unwilling to believe his eyes, and gingerly picked up the shades, one of the lenses losing all of its glass at the movement.

"Shachi..." he rasped, feeling tears well. There was so much blood. Too much. But there was no body, so he had to be still alive, right? He swallowed back a sob, forcing it down past the lump in his throat, and looked around.

"They took the kid that way," a voice spoke from behind him and he whirled around to see an elderly man supporting himself on a rickety cane as his hand pointed shakily further into the alley. "Poor thing's probably dead by now." At the words, Penguin sprang to his feet and ran, narrowly avoiding knocking the man over in his haste. In his impatience, he missed the grin on the man's face, and the baby den den mushi he withdrew from his pocket.

With the initial guidance, the trail was clear to follow, blood leading the way with an uneven trail that had Penguin forcibly banishing all the memories of Law starting to teach them medicine – particularly the point at which blood loss became fatal – far from his mind. An ajar door greeted him at the end of the blood trail, and he burst through it with no thoughts for subtlety or reconnaissance.

The first thing he saw was Shachi's limp form, trussed up in the corner with his clothes torn and stained with far too much blood.

The second was the gang of men lined up and waiting for him, brandishing knives. Penguin drew his own, even though the odds were against him, and charged. They let him break through their line, putting him the same side of the room as Shachi, before turning to face him again. The door – the only exit – was behind them.

Penguin was trapped, but he'd found Shachi and nothing else mattered as he raised his knife again, positioning himself protectively in front of the ginger and waiting for the men to make their move. It was swift and brutal, the men clearly experienced with ganging up on a single opponent and not falling for any of Penguin's tricks aimed to make them hit each other.

They weren't using guns, maybe because the noise would bring unwanted attention, but they knew their way around knife-play as Penguin suffered gash after gash. His shoulder was the first thing to open, his forearm next and then his cheek in quick succession as he leaned back to avoid losing his eye. Each one opened with a fresh burst of pain but Penguin ignored them, because what else could he do. If he fell, Shachi would be in danger again and Penguin refused to let that happen as he scored a vicious hit on one of his assailants, gouging out an eye with his blade even as he kicked a knife out of another man's hand.

They were minor victories that meant nothing in the grand scheme of things as the blinded man lunged forwards violently, his knife still flailing wildly in his hand. It scored a direct hit on Penguin's shoulder, tearing through the muscle and forcing his fingers to drop his own weapon as the pain forced him to his knees. They converged on him, knives raised high, and he caught something that sounded like "another for Vergo-san" as his vision narrowed to just the knives, plummeting towards him, and Shachi, still limp behind him.

"Room," and suddenly the men went flying, their knives gone from their hands as an orange blur barrelled into them with a war cry. Penguin blinked, moving his less-injured arm to lift the peak of his hat out of his line of sight, to see half of them in pieces while the other half were being pummelled by an orange and white hurricane. Recognising what it meant – that they were saved – Penguin shifted towards Shachi, reaching for him.

The ginger hadn't moved the entire time, although his chest rose and fell in deep wet gasps. His hat was nowhere to be seen, leaving his hair to splay across his face and conceal his closed eyes from
view. Needing to know he was okay, that all the blood wasn't actually his, Penguin's hand landed on his sleeve.

"Don't touch him!" Law barked suddenly, making him jump, and he turned to face him with a snarl on his face. Law hadn't helped him look, Law hadn't stormed the room with him, now Law didn't want him to check Shachi, Law-

Looked as white as a sheet, golden eyes flicking frantically towards Shachi's unmoving body as he finished off the men caught in his Amputate.

Law cared and Penguin realised that he had never even considered abandoning Shachi, had been thinking of plans and rescue missions ever since Shachi hadn't appeared at their rendezvous. He blinked and suddenly Law was there, kneeling by Shachi and oh so gently pressing two fingers to his neck to measure his pulse. Whatever he found wasn't bad news, as some of the tension eased from him.

"Shachi?" he asked, barely audible above Bepo's cries as he overpowered the remaining gang members with a crackle of electricity. "Can you hear me?"

"I hear you," Shachi replied, his voice tight with pain and breathy, to Penguin's surprised delight. He had thought Shachi unconscious with how still he'd been lying. "Sorry… I me- messed up."

"What hurts the most?" Law continued, not responding to Shachi's apology.

"Chest… burns…" Shachi managed, and from Law's curse that wasn't the answer he wanted to hear. Nor had he wanted to see the blood leaking from Shachi's mouth, Penguin realised as his captain shifted ginger hair to get a better look at his face.

"Shattered ribs," he diagnosed, his words clipped short. "And a punctured lung."

"What," Penguin choked. That was serious, right? A punctured lung could kill someone by drowning them in their own blood… If he'd carelessly moved Shachi, he might have killed him. He balled his trembling hands into a fist as a blood-splattered Bepo sat beside him, his fur a comforting presence.

Law's Room expanded again, enveloping Shachi in the light blue sheen Penguin had become familiar with. Their location was hardly the place for surgeries, but Penguin wasn't going to argue with Law. Certainly not when Shachi's punctured lung appeared in Law's hand, complete with the rib fragment responsible, to be cautiously separated and somehow patched up.

"It's not perfect," Law said once he'd finished, leaning forwards with a knife and working Shachi free from his bonds. "I need to finish on the Tang, but you're stable enough to be moved." Shachi smiled, the blood still trailing from his mouth, as Law turned to Bepo and gestured him closer. The mink obeyed, and between the pair of them they had Shachi manoeuvred into Bepo's arms for the journey back.

Penguin stumbled to his feet with a lot of help from Law, who took most of his weight to half-drag him along, past what were unmistakably corpses of the gang (and other people from the alley Penguin had seen, including the elderly man that had pointed him in the right direction although in hindsight that had been just a little too convenient).

"You're an idiot," Law grumbled as they headed for the Tang, Bepo following close behind with Shachi sheltered protectively in his arms, but there was no bite to his words, merely an exasperated fondness. His leg buckling as one of his injuries gave a particularly loud complaint, Penguin couldn't
really argue with that.

Chapter End Notes

I've had a couple of requests for a captured Heart Pirate, and apparently I really have it in for Shachi at the moment (I'm so sorry, Shachi!)
It was difficult not to stagger under Penguin's weight as the older teen sagged more and more against him on their journey back to the Tang, but Law had no choice but to persevere. Shachi, while somehow still conscious, was in no state to attempt to even support his own weight, let alone anyone else's, and Bepo's arms were full with his precious burden of the aforementioned ginger. Penguin's stupid suicidal mission (not that Law blamed him, when Shachi was so clearly in trouble, but there were better ways to go about rescuing him than walking into an obvious trap and getting himself half-killed in the process) had left him unable to walk without help, leaving Law to act as his crutch even as he glanced back at Shachi every other second.

The emergency surgery he'd done would theoretically let him survive their walk back to the Tang, especially with Bepo carrying him so carefully, but Law couldn't help but panic that it wasn't enough, that his makeshift sealing of the injured lung would split apart, or another rib fragment would puncture through as Bepo walked. Maybe the lung was still full of blood, Shachi too weak to cough it up – he hadn't heard any coughing at all – and he added draining his lung of blood to the top of the mental to-do list for their return to the Tang.

They made it without further incident, despite gaining far more attention at the docks than Law cared for, and Penguin was finally allowed to slump onto one of the beds in the infirmary, loosely arranging himself in what was clearly supposed to be a sitting position but ended up as more of a drained slouch against the headboard with pillows scruffily stuffed behind him for support. Once Law was satisfied that he was safely on the bed, he joined Bepo and helped the mink offload his own cargo gently onto a bed. Just as when they'd manoeuvred him into Bepo's arms initially, Shachi remained largely silent with only a couple of pained hisses through gritted teeth to betray his pain. Law was impressed at his tolerance, knowing how much broken ribs hurt, let alone the rest of the injuries Shachi had sustained.

"Get us away from this island," he ordered Bepo, wishing he could keep him around as an assistant – at least to deal with Penguin's worse wounds – but they were nowhere near safe. He had heard one of the gang members mention Vergo, and if they had contact with him it would only be so long before Doflamingo's spy came sniffing around. Law wanted, needed, to be far far away before that eventually occurred. Shachi's capture had brought them too much attention from the general populace (he had killed everyone in the gang, but he couldn't massacre the entire island), and Law knew that Doflamingo would learn of it, somehow. Bepo's anonymity was gone – no-one would forget a polar bear walking on hind legs and wearing an orange boiler suit any time soon – and Law could only hope that with Penguin intentionally hatless, for better disguise purposes, and Shachi so injured and cradled in Bepo's arms, accurate descriptions of the pair of them in their usual appearances wouldn't make it back to his former captain.
He handed Penguin a compress to hold to his shoulder as best he could in order to help stem the bleeding before his attention had to turn to Shachi, who was lying very still on the other bed. His eyes were still closed, and Law wished he'd thought to grab a spare pair of shades so the ginger could open his eyes if he wanted to. Turning the lights down low in the infirmary wasn't possible right then if he wanted to accurately treat his two nakama. He wondered if there was a way to hone his abilities enough to no longer need light to operate, something derived from Observation Haki, perhaps, if he ever awoke it.

As he'd already agreed with himself, removing Shachi's injured lung to drain it of whatever blood was building inside was his first priority, before he moved on to locating the other injuries. Tentative exploration with his fingers located a broken forearm, fractured fingers and a sprained ankle alongside the shattered ribs, a bruised abdomen (and the boot-like shape of the bruises gave Law no doubts what had happened there) and numerous gashes of varying depth.

Lacking the patience to do it the standard way, and conscious of his second patient behind him, Law murmured a quick warning to Shachi before calling his Room and separating him out into sections so he could see exactly what he was doing with each bone as he used Tact to set them again. To his immense concern, Shachi's body went limp as he did so, and he paused just long enough to call his name before continuing to work.

"Mmhmm," the ginger hummed lightly, increasing Law's concern. He hadn't observed any signs of head trauma, but it was possible he had missed something. Mild concussion was more difficult to diagnose with Shachi, with his pupils permanently blown and sensitive to light, but Law could see no other reason for his sudden relaxation when he should, by all rights, be in extensive pain.

"Shachi?" he asked, even as he was arm-deep in his nakama's chest realigning the rib fragments and persuading them to remain where he put them.

"I'm okay," the ginger sighed, sounding perfectly coherent. "Whatever you're doing don't stop." Law froze, dumbfounded.

"I've got you in pieces on the bed as I physically force your body back together," he said bluntly, wondering why Shachi wasn't complaining about the creepiness and unable to curb his tongue of the retort.

"Huh," Shachi said, sounding surprised. "Interesting." Law's concussion theory was looking more and more likely, but he continued working. Blood loss was mainly a concern for Shachi (yet another one in the pile), but if he didn't get to Penguin soon the other teen would be reaching the threshold himself.

"What is?" he asked as he finished with the final rib and sealed Shachi's chest back together before turning his attention to the broken arm, wanting Shachi's focus on their conversation. Shachi hummed thoughtfully, and Law frowned. "Shachi."

"Feels… nice," the ginger eventually replied. "I like it."

Probably the concussion talking, Law figured as he finally pieced Shachi's body back together. It didn't escape his notice that the ginger's body tensed again as his Room dropped, and consented to putting him on a mild painkiller to dull the worst of it.

"After I treat Penguin I'll turn the light down," he promised before turning to face the now almost unconscious older teen. Curiously, like Shachi he relaxed as the Room washed over him, and Law began to wonder if it was a side effect of his fruit, despite never observing it before. If that was the case it certainly had useful applications.
"Law?" Shachi said questioningly, still conscious despite his body's best attempts. Law made a noise of interest. "Thanks. For saving me."

"Penguin did most of it," Law deflected, because it was true. Penguin had been the one to find him, the one to fight with everything he had to save him. Compared to that, Law had done very little.

"Penguin nearly got himself killed," Shachi pointed out, and Law wondered how, exactly, he knew that when he hadn't opened his eyes once. "You saved us both." Arguing with Shachi was usually futile, so Law saved his breath, securely wrapping one of Penguin's arms and letting the comment go with a small smile on his face.

Somehow, at some point, these two idiots (and the far less idiotic mink currently guiding the Tang out of the harbour) had carved a place for themselves into his heart, making themselves so much at home he knew they were there to stay. And somehow, Law was okay with that.

Chapter End Notes

One of the captured Heart Pirate requests also specified Law's reaction, so have a part 2 to yesterday's Taken from his PoV. At this point, he hasn't developed his Scan ability, hence doing the initial diagnoses by touch. Scan seems to be quite interesting, and I'm hoping we see it again because there's so much it could theoretically do, and simply locating a load of den den mushis seems like it's only just brushing the surface.
Intruder

Chapter Notes

Characters: Unnamed Heart Pirate, Law, Penguin, Shachi, Bepo
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Nakamaship

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being the fifth member of the Heart Pirates was hard, far harder than he’d thought it would be. When the captain, now his captain, had extended a hand of invitation, he’d accepted without a second thought, mesmerised by their strength. Of course, he’d known that they were already a cohesive group and that he wouldn’t be instantly one of them, even if he now bore the jolly roger on his clothes with pride.

What he hadn’t realised was just how cohesive a group they were. It was most obvious with Penguin and Shachi, the pair inseparable and more often than not conversing without a single word passing their lips, but Bepo had the uncanny knack of knowing exactly when to serve as a back rest and when to take charge as navigator without Law saying a single word.

The captain himself did the smallest things, like ordering the submarine to resurface at random times for no apparent reason, turning the lights down in the rooms (but only sometimes), or sliding a cut of fish to the edge of his plate whenever he claimed he was ‘full’. It took longer to realise that the submarine resurfaced just as Bepo reached his heat tolerance, that the lights turned down when Shachi was tired, and that the fish was swiped by Penguin when his mood was sour.

He couldn’t do that. He couldn’t read the minute clues from his new nakama to tell exactly what they needed and when, and they couldn’t read him. If he wanted it, he had to ask. On the nights when he lay alone in his room, unable to sleep (conscious that Penguin and Shachi were together, as always, in the room next to his) and wishing the empty space didn’t feel so large, he had to endure it until morning. No-one came to see what was wrong, no-one even implied they knew anything was wrong, yet on other nights he heard a door creak open as the others comungled in Penguin and Shachi’s room.

That wasn’t to say he was excluded from everything. Bepo would ambush him with hugs in the corridors for no reason, and Penguin and Shachi had no qualms about one or the other of them slinging an arm across his shoulders as they asked how he was doing, or dragged him along to play games with them. The captain had him in for health checks what felt like every other day, even if nothing of concern had been flagged up at the previous one.

It felt forced, like the four of them hadn’t really thought through gaining a new nakama properly. He wondered why he’d been invited when clearly the quartet had managed just fine for however long they’d been together before he came along (ten years, Shachi admitted when he asked) and if they really needed him when they already ran smoothly, like clockwork. They were disrupting their own rhythm to include him – more than once Penguin or Shachi had cursed and suddenly disappeared, recalling a chore they hadn’t yet done and never considering that he would he happy to help with the chores too, if only they’d ask.
He was a glorified guest. In name, one of them, but in spirit – in heart – he was the odd one out, the one that didn't quite belong. The others could see it, too. It became clearer and clearer as time went on, when Bepo's hugs weren't quite so sure, Penguin and Shachi's casual hugs and games became stiff, when the captain's small smile became painted on porcelain. It wasn't working, whatever it was they had.

He pondered the quandary as he brewed a coffee, alone as he so often found himself in the kitchen. Should he quit? What use was he as a nakama if he wasn't really a nakama? He saw it in their eyes, in their movements – they didn't know what to do any more than he did. It wasn't like he really had anything to add to their well-oiled machine, either. He couldn't navigate the waves and currents like Bepo, nor could he heal like the captain. He didn't understand the engine room like Penguin did, nor could he cook better than Shachi.

The door slid open, and Law strode in, his step faltering slightly when he realised the room wasn't empty before he continued forwards, to the counter. With nothing to lose, the fifth member poured him a cup and passed it over, to the captain's surprise. He lifted it to his lips, however, and the porcelain shattered to reveal the same genuine smile that had been on his face when he'd extended the hand of invitation. The coffee had been perfect, just as he liked it.

The final piece of the puzzle slotted into place, the missing element that had kept him so separate from the other four despite their attempts to be welcoming and inclusive.

He hadn't reciprocated. They'd been trying so hard that he'd taken and taken everything they'd offered without thinking to return it in kind. It was no wonder he'd been nothing more than a guest when that was all he'd acted like, waiting for permission to do anything and letting the others do all the hard work.

The next time Bepo hugged him, wooden and stiff but stubbornly determined nonetheless, he returned it, squeezing tightly until it became a competition to see which one of them could best imitate a constrictor snake. The answer was Bepo, but despite his bruised ribs he felt far lighter, and Bepo's next hug was full of warmth and life.

He startled Shachi by slinging an arm over his shoulders as he walked past and asking him how his day had been, leaving the ginger's mouth opening and closing soundlessly for a second before he launched into a full account of everything he'd done so far that day. When he volunteered to help Penguin with his chores the man had frozen in much the same way, before dragging him along by his collar with a large grin on his face towards the engine room, where he'd had his first lesson of many on the inner workings of their ship.

The next night he spent staring at the ceiling, feeling the large emptiness of his room, when he heard the door next to his open he pushed himself out of his too-big bed and padded across the floor, cracking his door open just enough to slip out of the room before knocking on Penguin and Shachi's door. Shachi had been the one to open it, wincing against the glare of a light he hadn't turned off before pulling him inside. Law and Bepo were there too, Law bundled up alongside Penguin against the mink in a blanket nest in the middle of the floor, and Shachi pulled him to join, sandwiching him next to Law and latching onto him on his other side. Bepo became his pillow too, the mink making a contented noise.

Lying on his back, Shachi curled up with his face firmly nestled in his shoulder and Law's shoulder pressed to his own on the other side, he reached out to wrap his arms around Shachi in return. They were all new to this, unsure of how to add another nakama to the tight-knit crew of ten years, but really, all it took was a little effort from both parties – the crew and the newcomer – to pave the way.
Chapter End Notes

With the original four being so tightly-knit (in this series, at least, Oda more canon info please?), I can't see adding the rest of the crew went too smoothly the first time.
Jean Bart had been with the Heart Pirates for several months before his captain asked the question in the middle of his regular health check.

"Do you want me to do something about this?" his captain asked from behind him, and if Jean Bart wasn't already fairly certain what he was referring to, the feather-light touch to the centre of his back dispelled any doubts. The Tenryubito brand, marking him a slave forever more. Thanks to his captain, he was no longer a slave, but the mark that claimed he was remained stark against his skin.

"Can you?" he asked, looking straight ahead at the wall and listening to his captain move around behind him, continuing with his checks.

"It's nothing I've done before," Law admitted, "but I know how to do a skin graft." Jean Bart frowned. While pain and medical treatment were nothing new to him – he'd been a pirate far too long for that – the idea of willingly subjecting himself to either having some stranger's skin fused to him forever, or losing more of his own skin from elsewhere to patch himself up like some human quilt didn't exactly appeal to him.

Law must have noticed his reluctance, because he didn't say anything else on the matter, working in silence for several minutes before making a seemingly idle comment on the fact that Bepo appeared to have convinced Penguin and Shachi to bring the Tang back to the surface again. It was a clear change in topic, and if Law was another man Jean Bart might have felt insulted at the obviousness of it, but he'd already learnt that while his captain had many strengths, intentional emotional support was not one of them, and if he wanted that he needed to go find another nakama. The silence before the topic change was the best Law knew how to do.

The conversation never cycled back around towards the mark on his back, but once it had been brought up, the idea was never far from his mind. He didn't want to be marked forever, but a skin graft was too crude, and almost too easy. He thought of the other slaves, other escaped slaves, who had to live with the brand for the rest of their lives, and even though he didn't know them, had never spoken to the other slaves, there was a sense of camaraderie there. Returning his back to a blank slate would make it as though his experiences were worth nothing, and to a sceptic, someone who had never been a slave, maybe they were. But to Jean Bart, they had been a significant part of his life.

If he didn't want to remove it, but didn't want to keep it either, what choice was there?

It was his captain, the one who had first posed the question, that gave him his answer. It was unintentional; Law had clearly seeking to put his question far behind him after the lack of a response – and in hindsight maybe it had been a bit rude to dismiss his captain's offer without even a single
He’d caught sight of his captain's own back, slender and lithe like the rest of him, but the deceptively slim figure didn't catch his attention even though it was the first time he'd seen Law in such a state of undress. Instead, his eyes were drawn to the unapologetic back lines splayed all across it, rippling slightly as the muscles beneath the skin tensed and relaxed with his movements. The now-familiar sight of their jolly roger grinned back at them from his skin and the epiphany hit.

He knew what he wanted.

"Captain," he said as he entered the infirmary weeks later, knowing that was where he'd find Law and sure enough the younger man was flicking through a medical book. He immediately gained his attention, golden eyes snapping up to survey him. Jean Bart knew his left hand was a single twitch away from forming a Room as he searched for a sign of injury.

"Jean Bart," he greeted, a tone of inquisitiveness in his voice implying that his initial impression had shown nothing out of the ordinary. "Is something wrong?"

"I'm fine," he said, sitting himself down on a bed in front of his captain so he didn't tower over him quite so much. "I've been thinking about what to do about my back." Instincts honed as a slave to detect when his owner was displeased picked up on the almost imperceptible tensing of Law's back, even as his face simply slid into an expression of intrigue.

"Is it something I can help with?"

Jean Bart heard the desperation behind the carefully interested tone, his captain seeking reassurance that he could do something for his crew. The larger man had joined the crew out of gratitude, but it was that very quality of the captain – the uncertain need to help, to protect, hidden behind wary layers of nonchalance – that had led him to his current decision.

"I want a tattoo," he said simply, reaching into a pocket with one large hand to withdraw a piece of paper. "I'd like to ask your permission to use this design," he continued, offering it to Law. The shorter man leaned forwards to accept it, unfolding the paper slowly and carefully. Jean Bart watched his face carefully, unsurprised when his eyes widened.

After a long minute, those golden eyes left the paper to scrutinise Jean Bart in kind. He kept his countenance calmly confident, even though it felt as if his stomach was churning with nerves he hadn't felt for so many long years. He didn't know what Law was looking for, but whatever it was his captain found it, because his lips twitched into a small, slightly sad smile and he gave the paper back.

"Permission granted," he said. "Although tattooing is outside of my skillset."

They found someone on the next island, on the wrong side of the law because there was no way any law-abiding citizen would dare touch a Tenryubito Brand, and after several hours in a parlour that seemed a little too seedy for pleasant company accompanied by his captain, he walked out with a burning back and a lighter step.

"Show, show!" his nakama chanted when he finally returned to the Tang several hours later (Law had predicted the reaction and had stayed with him in the small town until the bandaging could be safely removed). He complied, Law helping him unwrap the bandaging, and there was a moment of silence as they took in the mark and everything it symbolised.

Then the cheers began, hands clapping him wherever they could reach (although never near the
tattoo itself because with Law as a captain they knew better) before announcing that a party was in order. Unwilling to deprive them of the excuse, Jean Bart shrugged and let them do as they wished.

After the party, where the youngsters drank too much alcohol and knocked themselves out flat on the floor on the recreation room, leaving a disgruntled captain to the clean-up, Jean Bart found himself in the bathroom, looking over his shoulder at his new back.

The Heart Pirates jolly roger grinned back at him, as bold and black as could be found on Law’s own back. Unlike Law’s, however, there was a shadow of another insignia behind it, picked out in a grey dark enough to hide what was beneath it but not enough to overpower his current flag. His old crew were gone, yes, but not forgotten.

Chapter End Notes

While I love the Heart Pirate jolly roger, it's not really conducive to covering things up like the Sun Pirates' one was, so Jean Bart wouldn't be able to simply slap the same tattoo Law has over it and call it a day.

I have to say, my internet history after the research for this chapter probably looks quite interesting...
The Grand Line was unforgiving and unpredictable. Law had known it in theory, absorbing all the stories he could find while still in the safety of North Blue in order to prepare. In practice he had been careful, but of course, it only took a single mistake and suddenly the Pirates' Graveyard had the Heart Pirates totally at its mercy.

Law's mistake? Trusting Bepo.

That wasn't to say their current situation was Bepo's fault. No, the mistake had been Law's and Law's alone. There was no way for Bepo to have known that he would fall ill, the mink's fortitude making such an event a rarity, and much less that he would fall ill less than five minutes before one of the Grand Line's infamous cyclones formed directly above them.

Bepo always sensed such things forming long enough for them to seal the Tang and dive, escaping all but the worst storms from the safety far below the surface, but ill as he had been taken just before the unnoticeable warning signs he always detected would have revealed themselves, he hadn't warned them. Now, the Polar Tang was being thrown around like a toy by the vicious waves, Penguin and Shachi halfway up the mast hurriedly furling and taking down their sail to reduce the target area for the wind to hit. Many of the crew were clinging to the railings, caught out on the exposed deck and unable to retreat to the safety of inside for fear of being swept overboard by a crashing wave the moment they released their grips.

Law was among that number, shuddering unpleasantly as the water doused him over and over again. The closest of his crew had pressed themselves against him, helping to pin him to the relative safety of the railings as his grip periodically failed. He had his Room active, spluttering and failing over and over again as the water briefly got too much but as present as he could force it to be. If anyone fell into the sea, that would be their death, and seeing Penguin and Shachi halfway up the mast with nothing but each other holding themselves on as they battled the wind and waves to tuck the sail away did nothing for his nerves. With the water dousing him as frequently as it was, it was unlikely that Law's Room would stay up long enough for him to catch them if they fell, but it was a comfort for him regardless.

Somehow, they didn't lose their grips – Law had no idea how but was not about to look a gift horse in the mouth – and after several long tedious minutes that felt like an eternity they slid back down, along with the now-furled sail, to deck level, where they continued to clutch at the mast, wisely not tempting fate further.

When the cycle finally spat them out, bored of playing with them and disappearing as quickly as it had appeared, Law's first instinct was a headcount. No-one was missing, a miracle in itself, and he
slumped down onto the sopping wet deck weakly, coughing up the water that had forced itself into his mouth during the storm. His nakama were in similar conditions, expelling the water from their own bodies as they crowded around him.

The storm was gone, and they'd survived, but there was another problem gnawing away at Law. The true mistake he'd made, which he now had to face but groggy with sea water really didn't want to.

"What now, Captain?" Penguin asked, crossing his arms and firmly refusing to allow Law to put it off any longer.

They'd set sail without waiting for their Log Pose to set on the last island. Bepo had never led them wrong, so Law's trust in his navigation skills was absolute, and the year wait time had been far too long to remain a sitting duck. Doflamingo might be in the New World, but the same could not be said for all his informants, and if he discovered Law was stuck on an island for that long, it would be a tempting target indeed. Of course, the Grand Line punished such complacency, and the combination of the cyclone and their navigator's sudden illness had left them completely disorientated with no way to find their way back on track.

Law didn't know what to do. No-one else in the crew had even a hint of the uncanny ability Bepo displayed, and their Log Pose was spinning in lazy, aimless circles, as if to taunt them.

'I don't know' was not an acceptable answer for him to give the hopeful faces watching him, waiting for some miraculous wisdom to save them from whatever fate befell a lost ship on the Grand Line, no matter how true it was, and he heaved a large sigh.

"Check the Tang for damage," he ordered, before turning his attention to the cook. "How many days' of provisions do we have?"

"Two weeks," the man said. "I can stretch it to four if we can catch anything, or we go to half rations."

Law despised the idea of half rations. The human body required a certain amount of nourishment each day to perform at optimum levels. Cutting rations would weaken the crew, leaving them at a disadvantage if a combat situation arose. But as they had no idea how long it would be before they could restock… a decision had to be made, and as captain, it had to come from his own mouth.

"Full rations for today," he said, glancing around at their tired faces. "We need it after the cyclone." They broke into relieved grins, and he pulled himself to his feet, unsurprised when Penguin and Shachi grabbed his elbows to support him. "I need to return to Bepo."

Their survival hinged on Bepo's recovery and navigation skills, so Law trudged towards the infirmary, well aware he was trailing water behind him. Putting such pressure on Bepo's shoulders was not something Law was keen on, nor was it something he ever wanted to do again. As captain, he was the only one that should be responsible for the lives of the entire crew.

The next time they found themselves on an island with a ridiculous setting time, they'd have to steal other log poses until they found one that had almost reset, or an Eternal Pose if luck was on their side.

Chapter End Notes
Why you should always have a back up, and why you should never get complacent on the Grand Line...
Price

Chapter Notes

Characters: Shachi, Law, Penguin, Bepo, Heart Pirates, Kuzan
Rating: Teen
Warnings: none
Tags: Protective!Heart Pirates

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were many perks to their captain being a Shichibukai. The frozen bounties were one although, with so few members of the crew with a price on their heads at all thanks to their preference to work in the shadows where Doflamingo's strings didn't reach (the lack of Marine presence was just an added bonus), it largely made no difference to their lives. Civilians still fled at the sight of their grinning Jolly Roger, and other pirates still wanted them dead. Unlike most of the Shichibukai, Law had not laid claim to an island as a base, and the Polar Tang was still undeniably home.

Another perk was access to information. While he in no way had full clearance, Law could get at some files unavailable to the general public (and certainly unavailable to pirates). That was how the crew came to learn of the existence of Punk Hazard, and Law quickly put together the puzzle to realise that it was a keystone to Doflamingo's influence. Clearly, they needed to get there to investigate the links properly, but therein lay an issue. While Law had clearance to learn of the island's existence, there was absolutely nothing about where the island was located.

Asking anyone in the Marines would have been stupid. Neither Marines or pirates were permitted onto the poisoned, half frozen and half molten island, and an inquiry in the wrong place could have disastrous consequences. The kindest would likely be an expulsion from the Shichibukai, but with Akainu in charge, the kindest option was rarely the one taken. A trip to Impel Down was not high on their list of things to do.

There was one man that might be convinced to tell them. Aokiji, now known solely as Kuzan, was no longer bound by any code of conduct the Marines were, and indeed if the rumours were to be true had affiliated himself with a pirate (and not just any pirate, but the new Yonkou). It was a long shot, but it was also their only avenue and Law – they – needed the information. Tracking the man had been no easy feat. After his defeat and defection from the Marines he had obviously gained an impressive bounty of his own and like any sensible individual with a high bounty (a rare group of people, all things considered) had chosen to lie low.

However, months of determination had paid off, and they had finally caught up with the man. In a gesture of peace, Law had declared that he would go to speak to the man alone, leaving his anxious crew to wait on board the Tang, praying that Kuzan wasn't interested in a confrontation and would give the knowledge away without much of a fuss.

"I don't like this," Shachi said, not for the first, or even fifth time since Law had firmly ordered them to stay put and disembarked with only Kikoku for company as he went to find the elusive man on the island. Reports implied that he'd be found on the beachy coast, so of course Law had chosen to dock the Tang on the opposite side of the island. He'd been gone half an hour by that point, and tempers were wearing thin.
"None of us like it," Penguin snapped, vigorously cleaning his spear and cursing as his hand slipped, earning itself a shallow gash from the bladed edge. "Stop whining."

"Captain will be fine," Bepo said firmly, his pinned back ears and excessive fidgeting betraying his own reservations. Shachi pushed himself off of the railing he'd been slouching over, his momentum first leading him to fall heavily into a sitting position on the deck, and then toppling him over backwards to stare at the sky forlornly.

"That's not what my gut says," the ginger grumbled, earning himself a vicious whack with the butt of Penguin's spear.

"Shut. Up," the older growled. Whatever retort Shachi started was drowned out by a pained howl from inside the submarine, and the crew's heads all turned simultaneously as Clione burst out of the door, from where he'd been on communications duty, waiting by their den den mushi in case Law made contact.

His frantic countenance prompted everyone to start speaking at the same time, demanding answers and overlapping everyone else's voices until there was nothing but a single cacophony of sound.

"Enough!" Jean Bart rumbled, his voice carrying clearly over the noise. His tone expected total obedience and received it, a throw back to his days as a captain himself. "Clione, talk."

Clione didn't say a word, instead mutely holding up a burning piece of paper. No-one needed to be told what it was as shock descended over the crew, freezing them all in place.

Shachi was the first to speak, shattering the stillness as he hefted his katana onto his shoulder, letting the sheath clatter to the deck.

"What are we waiting for?" he demanded, words clipped short. "Let's go."

With a war cry, he launched himself off of the Tang, landing on the ground lightly before sprinting for the beach. The others followed him, their booted feet thumping against the ground and producing a quiet rumble. Getting closer, Shachi's observation haki confirmed their captain's location, and that his companion was indeed the former Marine Admiral.

"It's nothing personal," Kuzan's unmistakable laid-back voice drawled as they entered earshot. "Although your escape from my Ice Age at Marineford was a nuisance. But I'm afraid I have no interest in aiding you in your search." Law made no reply, and as they crossed the final ridge between them and their captain, it was clear to see why.

Law resembled an ice sculpture far more than he did a living breathing human. His limbs were frozen in place, left hand extended in the familiar position he used when summoning a Room and right preparing to draw Kikoku from her sheath while his legs were secured to the sandy beach below. His chest rose and fell heavily, not yet encased in ice, and only the lower part of his face was frozen, rendering him unable to talk but still conscious as his golden eyes bored into Kuzan with thinly veiled frustration. No fear, because Trafalgar Law never showed fear, even as the former admiral gestured with a hand, ice streaming towards the Shichibukai to complete the job.

Jean Bart got there first, planting his body firmly between the attack and his captain, unflinching as the ice collided with his back and the impact forced blood from his lips, crimson drops landing on Law's hat. The shorter man's eyes widened, and the previously-absent fear blossomed at the sight of his crew charging Kuzan, only for another wave of the man's hand to freeze half of them in their tracks. Barring Penguin and Bepo, who had diverted towards their captain's side and therefore fell under the protection of Jean Bart's bulk, only those of the crew with awakened observation haki
managed to avoid their feet being frozen to the ground.

Shachi's katana swung out as the ginger landed from his evasive manoeuvre, slashing straight through the ice man. Unsurprisingly, it passed straight through him, the ginger's armament haki too weak to negate the logia powers. It worked to catch Kuzan's attention, however, and those of the crew still able to move crowded around their captain as Penguin and Bepo carefully detached him from the ground.

"Retreat!" Shachi ordered, briefly disappearing as ice crashed over where he'd been standing before reappearing next to it. The command was repeated by Penguin as the crew hesitated, seeing their captain now safe in Bepo's arms but Shachi now the target of the former admiral's attacks instead as he dodged, ducked and rolled away from ice, occasionally managing to bring his sword up in time to make another ineffectual slash.

A third rumble of the word from Jean Bart, who managed to shift himself with a gargantuan effort – none of the attacks that had hit him had been tailored for him, so where a smaller, weaker man may have been subdued he was only hindered – got them moving, picking up those of their nakama who couldn't move and bolting for the Tang.

"You're not going too?" Kuzan asked Shachi as the others fled. The ginger grinned humourlessly, slipping sideways in the blink of an eye and slashing apart the ice as it hurtled towards him.

"If I go too, who's going to stop you following?" he asked, panting lightly. His stamina was hardly poor, but the constant high-speed evasion was tiring, and despite himself he couldn't stop the trickle of cold sweat down his back.

This was not a fight he could win. He'd known it before he'd jumped in. If Law had been neutralised so quickly, then it was only a matter of time he succumbed to either exhaustion or the ice – or both – and became little more than melting icy rubble on the beach. To save his nakama, his captain, it was a price he'd gladly pay. That didn't make the prospect any less terrifying.

"Your observation haki is impressive," Kuzan commented as Shachi once again evaded, although he felt himself already slowing down; the ice had barely missed him that time. The ginger's only response was a pained chuckle, sorely regretting his incompetence with armament haki, before he pressed in for another attack. In the back of his mind he wondered why Kuzan hadn't just slammed him with a large-scale attack he couldn't dodge before going after his retreating nakama, but the thought only lasted a split second. He couldn't afford any distractions if he wanted to buy as much time as he could.

Every second he bought them they used to get further and further away, hobbling along as best they could. With ice cubes for feet, more than half of the crew needed supporting by their nakama. Jean Bart, his back frozen with icy tendrils reaching down his legs and up his neck, needed three people to help keep him upright, even as he charged along with the rest of them. In Bepo's arms, Law's eyes had slipped closed as tears slowly gathered in the corners before starting to trickle down his face. He wasn't the only one; Penguin's cap was pulled low over his face and his mouth was set in a stony line as he stumbled along, despite being uninjured, and the general air hanging over the crew was a solemn one.

They made it back to the Tang without further incident, Kuzan yet to follow them. How well that boded for Shachi was questionable, but the crew forced it from their minds for the moment. Many of them, and especially their captain, needed defrosting and so they made their way en mass to the bathroom where Law was given pride of place directly under a lukewarm shower. Jean Bart stood by him awkwardly, unable to sit until the ice retreated, so that the water caught his back on the way down. The other afflicted members of the crew situated themselves as near as possible, crammed
together in the too-small area.

Those who had escaped the ice gathered on the deck in a nervous huddle, continuously glancing back at the direction they'd come as they debated what to do next.

They should set sail. It was a miracle Kuzan hadn't pursued them yet, and there was a very likely possibility that he was freezing the sea so they couldn't leave the island, but setting sail meant admitting they'd lost Shachi. Penguin's hat was in his hands, wrung so tightly it was a wonder the stitches weren't breaking, as he stared at the horizon, unblinking.

"Penguin?" Ikkaku asked, because he was the most senior member of the crew active. He dashed glistening tears from his eyes with his sleeve, only for them to return almost instantly. They had to set sail. He knew that. He knew that if they didn't, they'd lose more than just Shachi. But it was Shachi, his best friend, his brother, and he slowly sank to his knees, quivering as he clutched his hat to his chest.

"I'm sorry," he gulped, the tears beginning to fall freely. "I-I can't."

A large paw landed on his shoulder, Bepo tugging him against his side.

"Why do we have to leave him?" the mink asked. "Let's go."

Penguin looked up at him, eyes wet.

"But-" he started, torn between his responsibility to the crew, to get them all out alive, and the childish belief that somehow Shachi was okay, because he had to be, never mind that he'd been facing down a former admiral that had taken down their captain in seconds. Shachi had to be okay, because he was all had Penguin had left, and it felt so cruel to think that when several of his nakama were surrounding him.

"Go get him," Uni said, clapping Penguin on the back hard enough that he rocked forwards. "We'll get the Tang ready to leave." Bepo slipped his paws underneath his arms and hauled him to his feet before dragging him off of the ship, and back the way they'd come.

"You should stay with the ship," Penguin protested when he found his voice past the lump in his throat. "I... I should do this myself." The mink shook his head as they ran.

"You're not doing this by yourself," he said firmly, and secretly Penguin was grateful, selfishly so. The mink should be helping to get the ship ready to go. As the navigator, they couldn't set sail without him. The log poses in the New World weren't as simple to use as in Paradise. But they were probably running towards a corpse, and Penguin didn't think he had the strength to face that alone.

The silence that persisted, beyond their own frantic breathing, as they headed for the final ridge once again, did nothing to dispel his fears. The added uncertainty of Kuzan's location forced him to slow and look around, Bepo doing the same beside him.

"He's gone," the mink said after a moment, puzzled. Penguin didn't ask after Shachi and Bepo didn't volunteer the information as they picked up their pace again, cresting the ridge to see what was in store for them.

Shachi was still in one piece. Sadly, that was where the good news ended. Penguin slipped in his haste to reach him, sliding down the slight incline to the beach on his backside before clumsily floundering to his feet and stumbling over himself as he approached the beautiful ice statue that was once his best friend.
The ginger's face held a triumphant expression, that cocky grin Penguin knew all too well, and he wondered how much of it had been an act to throw off Kuzan, and how much of it had been pride at holding out however long he had. The rest of his body held no hesitation, frozen in a headlong charge with his katana slashing through the air. If it was just a copy of him, it would have been perfect. As it was...

"Shachi," Penguin said, his voice cracking as he laid a gentle hand on his cheek. There was no warmth at all under his palm. If he didn't know this was Kuzan's power, the ability to turn flesh to ice, he would never have thought it was a real body. "Shachi." The tears came back, Penguin once again falling to his knees. His hand dragged down, from cheek to neck to shoulder to chest.

"Penguin!" Bepo said, and it sounded urgent, but he couldn't tear his eyes away from Shachi. "Penguin, look." A paw thrust a piece of paper in front of his face, and he blinked a few times to readjust his focus.

It was a map. A crudely drawn map clearly scribbled as an afterthought, depicting several islands. Penguin knew the names of one or two. Raijin Island. That was that lightning fuelled one that had tried to fry the Tang. And then, another name.

Punk Hazard.

This… this was what they'd come for. This was why Law had met with Kuzan in the first place. Anger surged through Penguin. If Kuzan was willing to give them the information, why didn't he do it earlier, before he turned Shachi into a fleeting work of art? Why did they have to lose Shachi to gain it?

"Why...?" he asked, his voice thick with grief. "Why would he do this? Wasn't he a Marine? Why did he have to ki-" He couldn't say the word, and flinched when Bepo tapped his shoulder insistently.

"Look at the bottom," the mink said, and Penguin didn't want to, didn't know what else they'd had to sacrifice Shachi for to get out of the former admiral. But he did, because Bepo sounded almost keen, which sounded so wrong in their current situation.

*Ice Time does not kill immediately. If you found him in time he can be defrosted. He's an interesting one.*

Penguin stared at the words, uncomprehending their meaning for several long seconds, before it struck and he leapt back to his feet, reaching for Shachi. If there was a chance, any chance at all...

Like he had done with Law, Bepo picked him up, cradling him in his arms as if the ice could shatter at any time – and maybe it could – before the two of them set a fast but steady pace back to the Tang. The crew on deck, multiplied from when they'd left as some of those with only minor freezing had seemingly finished defrosting in the shower, made noises of fear and sadness as they got on board, Bepo careful not to jostle his burden at all. They made a beeline for the bathroom, pushing everyone except Law further from the centre so Shachi could rest there.

They were going to be totally out of water by the time their last nakama defrosted, but it was a small price to pay. Most of the crew had graduated to massaging their feet, the ice all but gone, leaving just Jean Bart, Law, and now Shachi, under the running water.

"Shachi," Law said quietly, the same break in his voice that Penguin had had. "You idiot. You total, utter, idiot." He didn't move anything except his head, which rested on Shachi's frozen shoulder lightly.
"Kuzan's gone," Penguin reported, seeing that his captain was at least in a condition to respond, even if he was still mostly immobile. Law sighed.

"I see," he said. "I'm sorry, this didn't work." Penguin shook his head.

"It worked," he said, and Law's eyes snapped to him. "Kuzan left a map to Punk Hazard behind." It was still stowed in his pocket, but he didn't dare bring it out in such a humid room. The price had almost been too high.

He refused to consider the idea that they'd been too late to save Shachi.

The tension seemed to drain from Law as he slumped under the running water. Bepo slipped in to support him, beginning to rub at the thawed limbs gently.

"We did it," their captain breathed, sounding torn between regret and excitement. From the way his eyes flickered to Shachi again, the source of regret wasn't hard to identify.

Penguin left the room only long enough to place the precious map safely with Bepo's other things, before returning to the bathroom to wait out Shachi's fate. Law had just finished defrosting when the colour returned to Shachi's cheeks, and Penguin lunged for him, almost knocking his captain over in the process, to feel for a pulse.

He cried when he found one.

Chapter End Notes

100 chapters. Originally I never even thought this would reach 10. Thank you so much for all your support so far, and I still have ideas and half-written things so this isn't the end just yet! This chapter's length is a celebration of sorts, they'll go back to their regular 500-2000 words again from tomorrow.

Someone mentioned that I've never had Shachi or Penguin saving Law in a fight, and when I thought about it I realised that if something like that did happen it would end up rather like Thriller Bark, because they're weaker than Law so if someone can take him down, they can take them down too. Aokiji seemed like he would be a fun target, especially as we know he can let people go if he feels like it, and he's also no longer a Marine at this point.

Finally, for those that may have noticed, yes Shachi was using a version of Soru to dodge. It's not a mastered version, like CP9, or even like Sanji's, but there are several characters in One Piece that do seem to use something like Soru, and as I suspect it requires a decent grasp of observation haki to pull off properly (Kuro, for example, while capable of reaching the speeds, can't see where he's going, while a known observation haki user - Sanji - has no issues with that), it fits in well with the Shachi I'm writing.
Shachi was unusually subdued, Law noticed when he woke up that morning. His shoulders were tense and his face was looking towards his feet rather than straight ahead. Adding in the absence of his usual cocky grin and Law got the impression that something was wrong. Penguin wasn't much better, he also observed, although the oldest of them still held his head high.

"Did something happen?" he eventually asked, hours later when neither showed any sign of improving their moods. He'd been unable to identify anything different about their situation to yesterday – the Polar Tang was exactly as she had been and from the way they were also staying glued to each other's side, they hadn't had a falling out. Bepo was similarly at a loss.

He didn't receive an answer. The two older boys blanked him out completely, to his frustration, although he didn't ask again. He had secrets of his own, and until he spilt them all to his nakama – they might have been together several months now, but he still couldn't believe he'd gained his own crew – he had no right to expect them to tell him their life stories, either.

They were making port that day. Their supplies were running low, and the island had just the seedy sort of underworld Law expected Doflamingo to have strings in, making it a perfect to spend some time. Penguin and Shachi's current moods weren't the best for information gathering, but Law refused to let something like that hinder him.

The gunshot changed everything.

Law would never like the sound of a gunshot, but he quelled the bile in his throat. Doflamingo used a gun as well as his strings. If he was ever to avenge Cora-san, he had to be able to ignore the unpleasant memories. It took a deep breath or several, but he got himself back under control and unclenched his fists from around the Tang's railings. Pained gasping continued, and he feared he'd disassociated, tricking his mind into thinking he was fine when he wasn't.

"Shachi?"

Bepo's worried voice cut through his thoughts clearly, and Law whirled around to see the ginger on his knees, one hand clutching at the fabric above his heart frantically while the other was gripping onto the railing with white knuckles. It was Shachi whose breath was coming in irregular gasps, not Law, his body wracked with tremors.

Penguin was at his side, kneeling in front of him and gently cupping his face in his hands as he murmured words to him. Law was too far away to hear what he was saying, and found his feet unwilling to carry him closer to the pair. Whatever was happening, and Law's own experience as well as his years of studies diagnosed a panic attack, he didn't know enough to interfere. Not when
Penguin was talking quietly and calmly as if it wasn't the first time.

He caught Bepo's arm as the young mink tried to approach the pair, shaking his head.

"Captain?" Bepo asked, confused, and Law grit his teeth briefly.

"Penguin's got it under control," he said, hoping that he was reading the situation correctly as Shachi's gasps began to form words, broken and unintelligible at Law's distance but clearly full of meaning to Penguin as he responded to each and every one.

The first sign of improvement was when Shachi's hand released the fabric over his heart and fell limply into his lap. Penguin brought one hand from where it had been resting on his cheek to cover it gently, lightly squeezing it. Law's feet let him move closer, two steps bringing him in hearing range.

"Breathe," Penguin was saying. "That's it, like that." There were tear streaks down Shachi's face, and Law admired Penguin's patience, knowing that he himself was hopeless the moment tears entered the equation.

Eventually, the ginger's breathing stopped stuttering and returned to a normal pattern. The final sign was when the fingers clenching the Tang's railings finally loosened, jerking like puppets suddenly reconnected to their strings, and relocated themselves in the front of Penguin's clothes. Penguin wrapped his arms around him with a smile that stayed only until Shachi's face was buried in his shoulder.

Bepo was there, wrapping them both into as much of a bear hug as he could manage, and Law finally crossed the remaining distance to sit in front of the pair of them. There were tears in Penguin's eyes, and Law couldn't hold back any longer.

"Was it the gun?" he asked. He could understand that a gunshot could cause negative reactions – he himself was fighting his instinct to flee whenever he heard one – but he wanted to know for sure. Marines had shot at them before, and Shachi hadn't flinched, so something didn't add up.

"Yes," Penguin said slowly, looking Law straight in the eye as if daring him to comment. He didn't, and silence stretched over the deck. Shachi began to pull away from Penguin, but the older boy tightened his grip and refused to let go. "Eight years," he continued, his voice cutting off. Shachi stopped trying to escape. "Today, eight years ago, was the day Swallow Island was attacked by pirates."

Law didn't need to hear any more, pieces slotting together with ease. Their willingness to leave the island they'd grown up on, Shachi's reaction to the gunshot (and the way he could see Penguin was holding himself together because Shachi couldn't), even Shachi's comment that time he'd forced them to make their first kills.

He didn't interrupt Penguin, though, even as the older boy described a massacre that paled in comparison to the horrors of Flevance, but was still cruel enough to leave permanent mental scars on the survivors. It didn't take much imagination for Law to comprehend their experience; trapped under a warm body as the life seeped from it, watching their mothers' eyes lose their shine to death as they used their own bodies to shield their sons.

Law knew what it was like to lose everything. He knew what it was like to shake your parents' corpses, begging them to wake up. He knew what it was like to hide under a dead body to survive. He knew what it was like to hear someone die to save him. And while the events had been slightly different, so did they.
"We'll disembark tomorrow," he decided once Penguin's story was finished, ignoring the tears streaming down his face. Shachi's shoulders were tense and Law suspected that he, too, was crying again. Neither of them were fit to face the underbelly of society in their current states. "Rest today."

Chapter End Notes

Another request, because apparently some of you like torturing Shachi as much as I do. Shachi having a panic attack on the anniversary of his parents' death leading to Law learning about their past.
Having half of the Straw Hats invading their precious home was not, in reality, as fun as Bepo had thought it would be. Not only were all the fun ones he'd got to know not among their current guests, but he also realised that, barring their captain, the advance party to Zou had been made up of the saner members.

Pirate Hunter was a good a place as any to start. He kept himself to himself, or so it seemed, but Bepo was getting fed up of the sensation of that single eye boring into his back whenever he did anything. Being watched was uncomfortable at the best of times, and being observed in the safety of his own ship was downright horrendous.

On the other end of the spectrum was Iron Man Franky, who seemed to have no concept of volume or the way his high-pitched exclamations reverberated within the confines of an enclosed metal ship. Bepo had taken to stealing his nakama's hats when he could, even though they barely fit on his head and some of them got upset (especially Penguin, who flew into what Bepo could only describe as a temper tantrum when he found his hat on the mink's head), to try and defend his ears from the worst of it.

Sogeking, now called God Usopp according to his latest bounty poster but Bepo thought that was far too egotistical, especially when he wasn't even a captain, was the most bearable of the group. He wasn't too loud, didn't stare too hard, and liked to join in their games. But he was also a tinkerer, and told the most outrageous lies. Bepo was a fan of stories, but the egotistical nature of Sogeking's tall tale often got too much even for him. On second thoughts, maybe being called God reflected the self-centred nature of his stories perfectly.

Worst of all was Nico Robin. Despite her similarities to his own captain – Bepo didn't need anyone to tell him that Ohara was innocent after what he knew of Flevance and the World Government – she'd been a terror in the underworld for many years, far longer than Bepo had ever spent dipping his paws into the smaller shadows in Law's pursuit of Doflamingo and Bepo didn't trust her at all, even if she was Mugiwara's nakama and Law kinda trusted him (as much as Law trusted anyone not a Heart Pirate). Law seemed to have some sort of mutual respect for the woman, but Bepo had long since given up attempting to decipher Law's reactions to people (he still wasn't sure that trusting Mugiwara was a good idea, even if he had helped take down Doflamingo; surely Law hadn't forgotten the damage the rubberman had done to the Tang two years ago?).

Nico Robin also asked questions. They weren't simple questions, either, like 'how long have you been a pirate' or 'how long until we reach Wano?' No, the woman asked awkward things, with a smile on her face as if she already knew the answer and was just confirming things for her own amusement (she'd asked him how his wrists felt and if Penguin, Shachi or Jean Bart had shared any
tips with him, and that was almost worse than her outright saying she knew what had happened on Zou).

The current target of her curiosity was his origins. She'd seen Zou, but she'd also met him in Sabaody and knew he'd been with Law for a long time (ten years, she'd said, and Bepo wondered where she'd got that incorrect number from when all her other information was scarily accurate) and had surmised that he'd joined in North Blue. Naturally, that led to questions like why he left Zou, how he got to the Grand Line, and how did he meet his captain.

None of those things were particularly private – anyone in the crew could answer those with ease and he was surprised she hadn't gone snooping the way she seemed to do with everything else – but Bepo didn't like her curiosity. It felt as if she was trying to lay him bare so she could pull him apart until she knew exactly how he ticked, and he hated it. His own nakama were of little help, most of them far too interested in her chest for reasons that Bepo still didn't understand, even after watching Penguin and Shachi go through puberty and everything that had entailed. Ikkaku had struck up a firm friendship with the woman, and Bepo had caught the pair of them giggling at something more than once. Ikkaku giggling never boded well, and Nico Robin was not a reassuring addition.

He wanted Chopper back, he grumbled to himself. The reindeer was intelligent conversation. While not a mink, he understood many mink principles on a far better level than the humans. Not to mention he'd caught Law – currently banned from his abilities – once muttering about how he'd have preferred 'Tony-ya' to not go on a stupid suicide mission. Bepo had surmised that the tiny doctor was also intelligent conversation for his captain, and watching him attempt to keep his sanity as he ran around after the nosey Strawhats poking around where they shouldn't only cemented his opinion that Chopper would have been a better guest.

For Bepo, the true intelligent conversation had been Nami. While bound by the human limitations of navigation, she had that sixth sense of a true navigator and Bepo wanted to see her in action. But as it was, she'd ended up on that stupid suicide mission along with Chopper and why were all the decent Strawhats off to die? Soul King's music would have reverberated so much more sweetly than Iron Man Franky's toneless attempts to sing, and Black Leg was an amazing cook.

Well, at least Mugiwara himself wasn't with them. Bepo didn't want something that volatile in the Polar Tang while she was submerged. Just because he could swim didn't mean he was at all interested in suddenly having to when another hole got punched in the Tang.

Chapter End Notes

Luffy has not been forgiven for blasting a hole in the Polar Tang on Amazon Lily... I got a request for interaction between Bepo and Robin, but it evolved into a sort of character study of the Straw Hats from Bepo's PoV instead.

Robin's 'incorrect number' regarding the number of years Law and Bepo have been together comes from what could be an inconsistency between the manga and the SBS; in the manga Law states that he's known Bepo for ten years, while the SBS states that he's known him since he was 13 (making it 13 years ago as he's currently 26). It could be an inconsistency, or it could be Law twisting the truth a little because the Straw Hats don't need to know everything about him and his crew, especially as Law seems rather determined to keep his crew away from them.
As Law sat under the water cascading down on him from the shower above, many of his nakama crowded in the room alongside him, he felt like a failure. It wasn't because he'd needed to be saved by his crew – he'd saved them all several times himself so the role reversal was fair game – but because of the cost it had accrued. Luckily, being from North Blue most of them knew how best to defrost a living thing, so Law had no comments on the decisions they were making as they slowly coaxed feeling back into their feet. However, a certain ginger was absent and from the sombre atmosphere, Law wasn't the only one that thought he'd seen the last of Shachi.

He hadn't asked Shachi to sacrifice himself for him. After the events on Minion Island, and Corasan's last moments, Law didn't want anyone sacrificing themselves for him. His life wasn't worth that much, certainly not the life of a ginger who had once helped pull him away from the precipice of depression he'd teetered on. Law didn't even want to think what it had done to Penguin.

Frantic footsteps pulled his thoughts away from the mourning preparations, and when Penguin and Bepo had burst into the room, carrying an ice sculpture that was unmistakably Shachi, hope began to bloom in his heart. He quelled it, not prepared for the soul crushing revelation that Shachi was already beyond saving even though Penguin seemed to have convinced himself that everything was fine. He hadn't defrosted enough to move freely, but he managed to shift so his head was awkwardly resting on top of Shachi's icy shoulder.

Predictably there was no response, and Law pushed back the tears that threatened as his mind told him that he was using a frozen corpse as a pillow. The map that Penguin claimed Kuzan had left behind… was it worth this? On the one hand, his nakama was dying, or already dead. On the other, it was a valuable clue to defeating Doflamingo, which was the entire reason he'd created the Heart Pirates in the first place. Could Law really weigh those two facts against each other and be expected to find one more important that the other?

When Penguin almost bowled him over to suddenly reach for Shachi and burst into tears, Law feared the worst had come to pass, until he saw the large smile on his face, despite the tears. His own body finally regaining sensation, largely thanks to Bepo's unerring massages, Law reached out himself, pressing two fingers against Shachi's jugular and feeling a slow but steady thump thump thump signifying his life was in no danger. Not from injuries, at least, and despite still feeling slightly chilled himself, Law pressed himself up against Shachi as best he could, trying to provide him with as much warmth as possible.

By the time the ice had gone, and Shachi appeared to be regaining some sort of sentience, although agonisingly slowly, Law had plastered himself against the ginger's side, Penguin on the other and Bepo and Jean Bart providing the support.
"I'm not dead?" were the ginger's first words, lips returning to their usual pale pink as his eyes blinked slowly behind his shades. Penguin confirmed it for him with a tight hug and Law couldn't help but tighten his hold. Shachi was shivering, a side effect of his brief stint as an ice statue, and Law couldn't allow him to contract hypothermia, not after everything he'd done.

"You can let go now," Shachi commented several minutes later, even though his own fingers had buried themselves in Law's dripping wet hoodie and were stubbornly refusing to let go. His shivering had reduced and his body temperature had warmed up, but there were still residual trembles. Law knew Shachi well enough to know he'd expected to die when he took on Kuzan single-handedly. What was it like, facing someone down knowing that you were trading your life so that someone else could live?

He didn't dare ask. Nor did he release his grip on the ginger.

"You'll do something stupid if I let you out of my sight," he eventually said, and Shachi let out a quiet bark of laughter although he didn't dispute it.

From the way Shachi slowly let himself relax and almost fall asleep in Law's tight embrace, even though the water had long since passed from lukewarm to frigid, Law assumed he was doing something right.

"You're an idiot," Law repeated quietly. "Never do anything like that again."

He didn't think the muffled noise he got in response was an affirmative, somehow. More of an 'I will if I have to'. Law swore to himself never to get into a situation where Shachi thought he had to jump in like he had against Kuzan. He'd lost his family, and he'd lost Cora-san. He wouldn't lose his crew. Not even one of them.

Even if it meant leaving them behind when he finally confronted Doflamingo, too far away to do as they had done this time and jump in when their concern got the better of them.

Chapter End Notes

Law's reaction to chapter 100, because we all know he's had someone die to save him once already and he didn't react too well to that, to put it mildly.
It started off as just a dull ache. Dull aches were easily ignored, so ignore it Penguin did. Compared to a life of piracy and the injuries that came as part of the package, a mild ache barely registered, let alone seemed any reason for real concern. He briefly entertained the notion of mentioning it to Law purely because he wasn't sure why, exactly, a tooth would ache, but in the end discarded the idea. Aches usually passed in a day or two without issue, surely this would be no different.

Two days later the ache had not subsided away to nothing the way Penguin had expected it to. Instead, it had got more insistent, no longer appearing in intermittent stages but as a constant companion. Rather unsurprisingly, it was worst when he was eating, and almost subconsciously he began to chew only with the left side of his mouth, keeping any and all food away from the epicentre.

Not using the right side of his mouth was merely a delaying tactic, not a cure, and before long the ache had graduated into pain, and it was then that Penguin swallowed his pride and approached his captain. What was the point of having a doctor as a captain if he didn't take advantage of that fact? Never mind the fact that Law had started to shoot him suspicious looks and Penguin had already learnt that it was far better to approach Law with a problem than to be approached. Law had very strong opinions on actively concealing pain or injury.

Law's face was, well, not reassuring when he finally took a look inside Penguin's mouth. He looked concerned, and also rather lost. Lost, on the face of a medical genius with the Ope Ope no Mi, was not a comforting sight.

"Law..?" he asked tentatively, trying and failing not to wince slightly as a spike of pain shot through his jaw at the movement. His captain shook his head despondently.

"Your third molar's infected," he told him, not that Penguin really understood what that meant beyond the fact that it wasn't a good thing. "I'm sorry, I don't understand teeth. You'll need to bear with it a little longer." Law rummaged through the cabinets to pull out a selection of painkillers, which he surveyed critically before handing one over to him. "This should help for a while."

Penguin took them, because medicine was better than the pain. He noticed the high potency of the drugs in his hand and couldn't help a painful gulp. Law didn't usually let them anywhere near this particular strength unless they were hurt really bad and even then it was only if Law himself was too tired to treat them immediately.

"Isn't this a bit of an overreaction?" he dared to ask, hoping Law had picked up the wrong ones otherwise this was implying far too much agony and Penguin was not prepared for that from his
teeth, of all things. These particular ones also didn't really help them keep a grip on reality, and Penguin wasn't sure he wanted to willingly condemn himself to those side effects.

Law just disappeared from the room, leaving Penguin to stare at the medication in his hands with a sinking stomach.

If it was that bad, why didn't Law just pull it out with his abilities? Surely that was simple enough? Marines and other pirates had no qualms about trying to remove peoples' teeth by brute strength alone. He put the painkillers in his pocket, hoping it wouldn't reach that point.

A week later and Law had become a permanent fixture in the Tang's library, scouring book after book with bags under his eyes so deep he looked like he hadn't slept at all. Penguin feared he hadn't, and he'd caught both Bepo and Shachi trying to convince Law to take a break. Penguin would have joined in, except he'd lost the ability to talk halfway through the week. He'd caved and gone onto the painkillers two days after Law had given them to him, following a sleepless night spent tossing and turning (and keeping Shachi awake) as agony radiated out from his tooth and spread across half his jaw. Now, even with the painkillers doing their job (and leaving him disoriented more often than he cared to admit), Penguin's jaw had stiffened and wouldn't open and close properly. He'd been relegated to liquid foodstuffs, which was practical but also mildly embarrassing.

To begin with Shachi had been a tease, deliberately eating delicious crunchy food in front of him, but as time wore on and Penguin was becoming more and more reliant on the painkillers, the teasing had slackened until Shachi had turned his own diet into a liquid one in a form of solidarity. Even with an often hazy mind, Penguin didn't miss the worried glances during the day, despite being hidden behind his shades, and it was impossible not to notice that the ginger had taken to sleeping on the bottom bunk, with him, rather than his own bunk. Having him right there when the painkillers wore off in the middle of the night, jerking him awake with a sudden surge of pain, was a blessing.

Finally, Law re-emerged from the library, looking practically dead on his feet, and ordered Penguin to the infirmary. Penguin attempted to protest that Law needed sleep before he did anything, but his stiff jaw wouldn't budge at all. He obeyed the order to lie on a bed without fuss purely because Law would just force him if he didn't do as he was told.

He hadn't anticipated Law putting him under, but a quick sentence was all the warning he received before there was a prick in his arm and the darkness slowly invaded.

His awakening was accompanied by the odd sensation of something soft stuffed in his mouth. It felt a bit like cotton candy, except it was solid and didn't give when his tongue pushed at it clumsily. It also tasted like blood, and Penguin forced his tongue away from the metallic tang. There was also the background throb of pain, buried below layers of painkillers but still present, and Penguin frowned.

"Take it easy," Law's voice said, and Penguin opened his eyes to see his captain sat besides him, scrutinising something closely. "I can accelerate the healing, but the pain doesn't go away immediately." Penguin let out a grunt of discontent, fed up with the entire situation and wanting to be able to eat solid food again already. "Do you want to look?" Law added, and Penguin didn't get a chance to respond before a small item he vaguely recognised as supposedly a tooth was brandished in his face. It was misshapen and full of dents and the occasional hole, and Penguin closed his eyes. The idea that that had been in his mouth for so long was rather nauseous. Luckily, Law spotted his discomfort and put the tooth remnants away before he regained use of his voice to complain.

As Law had said, the pain took days to fade away to nothing, not helped by the fact that Law reclaimed all of the medication the moment he felt it was no longer required. Penguin's nerves disagreed, but Law cited the risks of dependency and addiction to him until Penguin decided that a little bit of pain was perhaps the lesser evil.
The best thing was when he could eat solid foods again, tearing into the poor fish on his plate like a starving man to fond smiles from the rest of his nakama. Penguin was never going to take fresh fish for granted again.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked whether Law's medical knowledge expanded to dentistry. The answer is not until it had to. For those that may not know, the third molar is more commonly referred to as the wisdom tooth, and is the tooth that gives the most problems. You also wouldn't be able to see it in pictures, so while we know Penguin has his front teeth there's nothing to say he has his *entire* dentition.
To survive on the Grand Line, you needed luck. Skill was of course important, and strength imperative, but sometimes it didn't matter how skilled you were, or how strong you were. A single lucky break for your opponent could spell the end for you.

This was the situation the Heart Pirates found themselves in at the end of a gruelling battle with the Marines. They had been more skilled, stronger, and emerged bloody yet victorious and ready to celebrate, if only their captain hadn't stumbled to his knees after the last Marine fell.

"Captain!" Bepo was the first one to his side, crouching down to support him as Law swayed alarmingly, one hand pressed to his abdomen. Blood oozed from between his fingers as the crew gathered around him worriedly, each voicing their own concern. Penguin was the one to reach out and coax the fingers away so they could see the wound, tearing at Law's hoodie when it refused to give access. Law made a small noise of complaint which went entirely ignored.

It appeared as though a Marine had got lucky. A deep gash from a swipe of a blade ran for a couple of inches along his abdomen, bleeding profusely.

"Infirmary," Penguin decreed sharply, biting back a curse because there wasn't time for that. Law didn't argue, attempting to return his hand to its position over the wound and scramble to his feet. Bepo swept him into his arms, carrying him gently as Shachi bustled through the crowd to press his own hands to the wound. The procession headed awkwardly to the infirmary, where their captain was laid gently on a bed.

"Stitches?" Clione suggested, but Penguin and Shachi both shook their heads as they gestured for their nakama to prop Law up so that he wasn't lying flat on his back but slightly angled so the wound was above the level of the heart. Law echoed their movement, raising his left hand to try and summon a Room. It petered out almost instantly, the fight and the wound sapping too much of his energy.

"Too deep," Penguin ground out, finding a knife and ruthlessly cutting away the rest of Law's hoodie.

"Can anyone except Captain do anything else, though?" Clione continued, stepping forwards to help wash the blood away to clean the area around the injury.

"We don't have a choice," Shachi said bluntly, heading for the cabinets to locate anaesthetic.

"I can… talk you through it," Law gasped, gritting his teeth. "Local anaesthetic, Shachi." The ginger put back the equipment for general anaesthetic he'd been gathering and obeyed without question.
"Ikkaku, blood. S (RH+)." She scrambled to obey as Shachi administered the anaesthetic. Law noticeably relaxed as the pain eased.

Pulling on gloves, Penguin began to disinfect the area around the wound without waiting for orders and the rest of the crew present followed suit, barring Bepo who positioned himself by his captain's head and gently removed the hat. Law acknowledged him with a smile before his attention returned to his crew.

As far as surgeries went, it was a simple one for a professional like Law, and he managed to guide his crew through the steps to locate and repair the severed artery responsible for the major blood loss. The steady-handed Uni handled the intricate work, supported by Penguin, while Shachi stayed back with the anaesthetic, judging whether or not Law required a higher dose as the surgery continued. Ikkaku remained with the blood bags, setting up a transfusion line when Law's skin got too white and his breathing too laboured. Clione was utilised as a secondary assistant, and Bepo remained steadfastly by his captain, gentle paws on his shoulders.

Once the surgery was completed, the blood cleared from where it had been pooling inside Law's abdomen and the external wound sewn shut by Penguin, the crew slipped back into the more familiar post-operation routine. Law left them to it, exhausted by the surgery and the mental focus required to instruct them whilst dealing with symptoms of blood loss. Once Ikkaku reported that his blood levels had returned to a safe threshold, he let himself fall asleep.

The crew double-checked he was in no danger of further complications before leaving him be, a blanket pulled up snugly to his chin with a limited selection of wires connecting him to machines that could monitor what they could not.

"We need to learn more," Shachi commented, finally turning his attention to the minor cuts he and his nakama had also accrued in the fight. "We can't rely on Law every time someone gets hurt." Everyone nodded in agreement, well aware that if Law had been slightly worse off and unable to give them instructions they wouldn't have been able to save him.

The Heart Pirates refused to lose their captain to something so simple.

Chapter End Notes

Law gets injured too, and sometimes his abilities aren't enough (we see this in Dressrosa, of course), so his crew get to try to perform surgeries every so often.

As for his blood type, it's complete guesswork. I basically went with the idea that different Blues have different predominant blood types, and all the North Blue characters (that I recall) have S bloodtype. Sanji and his siblings are RH- but that's specified to be really rare, so I went with RH+ instead for Law. Admittedly, from the Straw Hats' blood types there doesn't seem to be much of a pattern, but the Straw Hats also have medical miracles like growing back teeth by drinking milk, which is abnormal even in-universe.
Perfect

Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Jean Bart, Law, Shachi, Penguin  
**Rating:** Gen  
**Warnings:** none  
**Tags:** Nakamaship, Post-Zou, Protective!Law

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Law knew. Jean Bart watched his captain enter the mess hall for breakfast, followed by an openly subdued Shachi who slumped at the nearest table as Law retrieved two plates of food and set one down in front of him before slipping into the seat beside him and draining a steaming mug of coffee in one go. Shachi picked at his own food with little appetite. It was the first time the ginger had been so open about his mental state since Jack, and Jean Bart was glad he'd managed to come to terms with it enough that he could.

Law's reaction was predictable – he was hovering, even if he was clearly trying to give Shachi the space the ginger wanted. His lower lip was red and sore-looking, as if he'd been nibbling on it, and the bags under his eyes were dark, betraying his lack of sleep.

That was why they'd decided not to tell him, although Jean Bart couldn't blame Shachi for surrendering in the end.

"Meet me in the infirmary," Law told him quietly as he passed them to wash up his dirty crockery. Jean Bart simply nodded, understanding that now he knew, from the looks of it after a breakdown from Shachi, he wanted to reassess their mental states. He would have done the same thing, back with his own crew long ago.

Penguin entered the room as he left, looking almost as tired as Law as he grabbed his own serving and flopped the other side of Shachi, promptly using the ginger's shoulder as a headrest as he lazily scooped up the food to dump it in his mouth with all the inelegance of a half-asleep man. It coaxed a small chuckle from Shachi, before Law reached around to rest a hand lightly on Penguin's back, just for a moment before it retreated.

Jean Bart headed straight for the infirmary, not wanting to add to Law's stress by not being where he was expected, even though his captain hadn't specified a time. Settling himself to sit on one of the beds, he regarded the spotless ceiling as he waited patiently.

It took Law ten minutes to arrive, looking pleasantly surprised to see him waiting as he headed straight for him. Jean Bart surrendered an arm to his captain for him to survey critically, noticing that Law had discarded the sling he'd been coerced into wearing a few days previously.

"How do you feel?" Law eventually asked, adjusting the bandages fussily. Jean Bart could see his uncertainty warring with his conscience and quickly realised that his captain was at a loss how to check mental states.

"I'm fine, Captain," he said bluntly, unsurprised at the disbelieving look he got in return.
"Don't bother trying to convince me nothing happened," Law said sharply. His shoulders were shaking slightly. "I know now." The guilt he felt for not recognising it immediately was palatable. Jean Bart reached forwards with the hand not in his captain's grasp to rest it on a quivering shoulder.

"It isn't your fault," he rumbled quietly, feeling the smaller man tense under his hand. "You had no way of knowing Kaido had other business with Zou. None of us knew, until it happened." Law bit his lower lip, nibbling it as it turned an even deeper shade of red.

"I should have-

"No-one asked you to be perfect," Jean Bart cut him off, seeing the younger captain beginning to spiral into the same mental state he'd once held, a captain responsible for his crew. "There's no such thing as a perfect captain. You can't know everything that's going to happen, and you can't do everything."

Golden eyes focused on him, intent, and he knew Law remembered exactly who it was he was with, who Jean Bart had once been, before the tenryubito.

"I-"

"You think you should," he continued, not allowing Law to start to fight his corner. "You're responsible for the crew, so you think you should be able to defend us from everything. One of your decisions had unforeseen consequences and now you're shaken because you think that, somehow, it's your fault."

"If I hadn't-"

"If I hadn't chosen to leave that island the moment the log pose set, my crew wouldn't be dead," Jean Bart overrode him, shocking Law into silence. "If I hadn't decided the incoming marines were a threat worth fleeing from, we won't have ended up crossing the bows of a tenryubito ship." Law's mouth opened and closed a couple of times, failing to find words. It made him seem younger than usual. "Marines, the threat I knew was there. Tenryubito, the threat I didn't. I chose wrong and all my former nakama are dead." He removed his hand from his captain's shoulder, crossing his arms in front of his body firmly. "Doflamingo, the threat you knew was there. Jack, the threat you didn't. The difference is that we're still alive. Battered, bruised, but alive."

"I'm sorry," Law said, his yellow eyes never leaving Jean Bart's. "I hadn't intended to bring up the past for you." Jean Bart shook his head.

"I've had years to come to terms with it," he reminded him. "These last two years, as a member of your crew, have taught me a lot. The mentality of a crew, the fact that the captain doesn't have to be perfect at everything to be a good captain."

"I'm not a good captain," Law sighed, finally sitting down on a chair and propping his face up on his uninjured arm. "I couldn't even see how hurt my oldest nakama are."

"Because they chose not to show you," Jean Bart corrected, realising they had finally brought their conversation to the crux of the matter. "They chose not to show anyone. You think it was some sort of crew-wide secret, but none of us know how badly hurt they are." Law's eyes widened in surprise. "Physically, we know. We all saw it happen, but once it was over they pushed it down and took command of the crew again, rallying us all in preparation for your arrival."

"Idiots," Law grumbled fondly. "Stupid, self-sacrificing idiots." Jean Bart shook his head, even though he could see the smile tugging at the corner of Law's lips.
"They did what needed to be done in your absence," he said. "Now, they can heal."

"I don't know how to help them," Law admitted. Jean Bart leant down so he was properly at his captain's eye level again.

"You don't have to know how," he said firmly. "Just be the same you always are. I guarantee that's better than trying to twist yourself into something you're not."

Law didn't reply, and Jean Bart sat patiently as he waited for his captain to draw his own conclusions. He knew it was a difficult thing to face; as captain there was nothing worse than watching your crew suffer and be helpless to stop it. It was a belief he'd held himself for years, until joining the Heart Pirates himself.

Now he knew better; the captain was never useless, even if he felt it. The crew would always draw strength from their captain, no matter what.

Hours later, as the crew settled back into the mess hall for dinner, Jean Bart saw Law once again sat by Shachi's side. The ginger leant against him, head on his shoulder, and Law let him. On his other side, Penguin mirrored Shachi's gesture after several moments, utilising Law's other shoulder as a pillow, and Jean Bart watched the pair of them fall asleep where they sat, reassured by their captain's presence.

Chapter End Notes

Like Brook, Jean Bart has the interesting distinction of having been both a captain and a crew member, which lends itself very nicely to being a liaison between the two points of view when Law's particularly lost.
There were times, Law thought, when some pirates could be really dense. So much so, in fact, that he wished at times that he could gain another title just so he didn't have to have any association at all with the imbeciles he had the misfortune to occasionally cross paths with. Some – most, in fact – were merely glory hunters single-mindedly pursuing the aim of the legendary One Piece with little care for anything else on the way. Simpletons, to be sure, but predictable and required minimal effort to deal with.

But then there were the dumb ones. The ones who, Law was sure, if he sliced their heads open he would find barely had two braincells to rub together, despite the medical improbability of such an occurrence. He was facing one such crew now.

To give them some form of credit, just so Law didn't have to feel so horrid about being classified as the same social class as them, they had decent combat abilities, somehow using techniques to render them difficult to spot, although as best as Law could figure there was no Devil Fruit involved. They were simply very skilled in camouflage.

What they were not so skilled in was keeping their heads when their plans went awry. Law's observation haki was stubbornly refusing to manifest outside of his Rooms yet, and Penguin was still having no luck at all, so they had rather embarrassingly not realised one of said camouflaged pirates was coming up behind him while he conversed with the captain (read: antagonised). But he could always count on Shachi to have his back (and Bepo, but Bepo was on Tang guard duty as per usual while the three humans had gone to gather supplies and information).

While tactfully camouflaged, rendering them for all intents and purposes invisible to the naked eye, clearly observation haki could pick them out just fine, as Shachi suddenly appeared at his back and with a gurgle of blood the man that had been intending to stab Law in the back fell to his knees, a knife wound straight through his throat. Law forced himself not to react, which paid off as he watched the captain's face drain of all colour.

"Y-y-you!" the man blustered, taking a nervous step back as he pointed at Shachi, who was shaking the blood off of his knife and consequently splattering himself with small droplets of crimson.
"How… how did you see him?"

"Huh?" Shachi asked, turning just his head towards the man. "What are you talking about? I didn't see anyone." He nonchalantly slid the now clean knife back into its hidden sheath.

"Didn't see?" the man spluttered, taking another step back. Shachi turned around a little more and the sun glinted off of his shades, drawing attention to them. "Wait, you- you're blind?" Shachi hummed noncommittedly, to Law's amusement. To a medical practitoner like Law, Shachi technically
counted as blind, but he still had capable vision through his shades.

"Are you crazy?" the man continued, his attention snapping back to Law, and he had to wonder what was the reason for the sudden shift. "You've got a blind man on your crew?" Law merely smirked at him, becoming slightly confused when the man's face took on a smirk of his own. "What captain willingly lets a liability like that on the crew?" He snapped his fingers and the rest of the concealed pirates revealed themselves, descending on Shachi, who instantly drew his katana.

Law's blood boiled. How dare this insolent man call Shachi a liability? Kikoku was drawn in his hand but he had no recollection of unsheathing her as he pressed her against the man's neck, his face twisted into a dangerous grin. His left hand gripped the man by his shoulder so he couldn't retreat.

"I suggest you watch carefully," he said, his voice low as he forced the man's gaze to where Shachi was fighting, and winning, against the crew. "Do you see a liability there? Your men are being taken down by that liability. What would you say that makes them?" The man's face had lost all of the cocky smirk it had had moments before as he watched his crew fall one by one to Shachi's katana.

The only thing the crew had had going for them were their sneak attacks. In straight out combat, they were weak and unsure of themselves. Shachi spent most of the fight diverting their attacks to simply hit each other.

"Captain." Law glanced sideways to see Penguin standing rigidly besides him, one hand curled into a blackened fist.

"Go ahead," he said, watching as Shachi brought down the next pair that charged him, leaving him with only a single opponent left. "But leave some for me." He released the captain and stepped back. The man barely had time to register his newfound freedom before a haki-encased fist slammed into his face, sending him flying backwards. Law heard the satisfying crunch of shattering cartilage and smirked approvingly.

It took a Room and Tact to get the man back in front of him, the majority of his face caved in spectacularly. Not quite dead, though, although it wouldn't be long before internal bleeding overcame him even if Law did nothing. He didn't bother to use any more of his powers – the man wasn't worth that and there were no survivors to show off to anyway – simply severing his neck with a slash from Kikoku.

"Aww," Shachi said from behind them, looping an arm over their shoulders. Law and Penguin both turned to look at him. He was covered in blood, but Law was confident that most of it wasn't his. "If you two keep that up, I might just start crying." He faked at wiping tears from behind his shades before grinning and tightening his hold on them. "Thank you."
Shachi was the hot headed one of the crew. As far as Law was concerned, that was fact. His vibrant ginger hair aside, if one of the four of them was going to blow up at something, it was going to be Shachi. Bepo was mellow, extraordinarily so considering he had grown into an incredibly intimidating size. Then again, it was fortunate that the mink didn't fly into rampages, as he would be far harder to stop than Shachi was. Complimenting Shachi perfectly, as per usual (Law still wasn't quite certain he believed they weren't blood brothers), Penguin was the voice of reason.

That didn't mean he was as mellow as Bepo, however. Law would not be forgetting his first meeting with them in a hurry, when neither Penguin nor Shachi had been inclined to listen to anything except fists. They'd come a long way since then, he thought fondly, watching them bickering playfully over who had caught the larger fish. Bepo solved the argument by placing his own catch in front of them, which was far larger than both fish.

Law suppressed a chuckle as they turned on him simultaneously, competition forgotten in the face of the interruption. Bepo slunk away with his head hanging low, mumbling apologies, and Law beckoned him over to act as his backrest as Penguin and Shachi changed their complaints to how weak willed Bepo was instead. Law was honestly glad he wasn't as stubborn as the rest of them, otherwise the dynamic of the crew would never work. Three stubborn streaks was enough.

Settling back against his soft backrest and feeling Bepo shift into a more comfortable position, he returned to observing the other humans. While he had no issues with labelling Shachi as the hot head, he had seen Penguin flare up on occasion.

Well, flaring up was probably the wrong word to use. Shachi flared up, explosive and chaotic when something didn't go as it should. Penguin's rage was slower to build, and harder to douse. If he had to compare the two of them to something, he would say Shachi was like a firecracker, bright and sharp, but quickly burnt out. Penguin was more like an avalanche, difficult to trigger, but once it began nothing was stopping its momentum until it ran its course.

Nothing except Shachi, as Law later discovered the first time Penguin's rage reached the tipping point for a reason other than the ginger getting into trouble. As always, the aim had been to remain undercover and unnoticed. Sometimes Law wondered why he bothered anymore, then he remembered strings and a pink coat and renewed his determination once again.

"I suggest you take that back." Penguin's voice was eerily calm, instantly catching Law's attention. He wasn't the only one; half the square had fallen silent at the words. The merchant, however, had merely laughed, oblivious to the impending avalanche heading his way.
"Careful, kiddo. Someone might think you're serious there." Law saw Penguin's jaw tighten and wondered what had been said. More importantly, could he get Penguin out of there before he was pushed too far? The answer was no, as the older teen knocked over the stall with a well-aimed kick.

"I am serious," he growled as the laughter abruptly stopped. He took a step forwards, crunching over the spilled wares with no regard for their value, and gripped hold of the man's collar.

"Hey, hey, now," the man gulped. Law could see the sudden perspiration from where he was, striding across the square towards his nakama. "It was… just a joke! Just a harmless little joke… it didn't mean anything!" Law found the defence unconvincing, and Penguin clearly felt the same way as the first blow caught the man's blabbering mouth, cutting him off sharply and forcing a handful of teeth out.

"Penguin!" Law said sharply as the teen drew back his arm for another punch. He was ignored, and Law reached out to grab his arm. Muscles flexed and bulged beneath his grip before Penguin broke free to continue his assault. "Penguin, stop."

"Hey!" Shachi interrupted, appearing from nowhere. He must have been drawn by the commotion, Law initially assumed. "He's not worth it, Penguin." The older teen glanced at him – more of a reaction than Law had got and he tried and failed not to feel resentful about that – before returning his attention to the sobbing man in his grip.

"He said-"

"I know," Shachi interrupted, and Law revised his initial assessment. Shachi must have already been in the area, likely behind the row of stalls somewhere, if he'd heard the conversation. "I heard, Penguin. This bastard's not worth it." Penguin remained tense, and Law feared for a moment that even the ginger hadn't got through, before he threw the man away from him, into the neighbouring stall, and turned around. He stalked away, past Law and heading straight for the Tang – Law didn't miss the way that he carefully and deliberately crushed more wares beneath his feet on his way.

Glancing back, he saw Shachi offer a hand to the fallen merchant, who accepted it and hauled himself to his feet. Before Law could blink, the man had been slammed back against a wall, Shachi's hand clenched around his throat.

"Never say that again," he growled, before hurling him back to the ground and following Penguin. Knowing that their time on the island was officially over, Law trailed behind them, watching Shachi sling an arm over Penguin's shoulders and lean closer to talk to him. He stayed back, respecting that Shachi didn't want him to overhear even if his curiosity was burning.

Penguin remained sullen for much of the rest of the day, his fists periodically clenching and unclenching. Law didn't dare ask what had triggered it while he was still wound up, and neither Penguin nor Shachi volunteered the information.

Eventually the tension drained away, and Law voiced the question. Penguin's jaw tensed again briefly, before he spoke.

"They insulted you." Law didn't believe him. There was something in the way he kept his hat pulled low over his eyes that implied there was more to it than that, but he respected that it wasn't something Penguin wanted to talk about (nor was he overly keen on Penguin lashing out again, especially without a clear target). Arms suddenly wrapped around him as he turned to leave and found himself pulled back against the taller boy's chest.

"I'm sorry," Penguin mumbled into his hair, but didn't elaborate.
For what, Law wanted to ask, but Shachi and Bepo joined the hug, silencing him before he could.

Chapter End Notes

I commented a while ago that while Shachi is usually the one to flare up and Penguin calms him down, sometimes it does happen the other way around, and some people wanted to see it in action, so here it is.

For the curious, the merchant had made a comment related to Flevance. This is set after *History*, so Penguin and Shachi know at least a little about Law's past.
Guard

Chapter Notes

Characters: Bepo, Law, Penguin, Shachi
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Nakamaship

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bepo understood the need for secrecy. He also understood that as a rapidly growing polar bear mink, he was not the definition of subtle, regardless where he was or who he was with. Law was afraid of something, of someone spotting them, so there was only so much Bepo could do while they were on shore.

Primarily, his task was guarding the Tang as she was the sort of ship that anyone would take if they thought they could get away with it. Having a large bear mink lounging around on deck discouraged all but the most foolhardy, and Bepo had no problems dealing with those trespassers. They were never prepared for electro, so all it took was a small crackle to clear the Tang's deck of any intruders.

Part of him wished that Law would let him go onto the shore more often. His captain always made a point to bring back anything he thought might be of interest, particularly books on navigation, but there was something about finding them himself that drew Bepo.

"One day," Law would promise him every time. "One day we won't have to hide, and you can spend all the time you want on shore." Bepo understood, but he wished these mysterious pursuers would leave them alone. He didn't like how scared they made Law; his captain hid it well, but fear had a distinctive scent and the mink could detect it easily.

The worst thing about being left behind was when things went wrong. More than once, he'd leapt from the deck when he'd spotted one of his humans in trouble, but he could only see the area around the docks. The one time Shachi had been captured had been one of the rare occasions he'd been asked by Law to disembark. Bepo wished he didn't need his nakama to be in trouble before he could leave the Tang, when subtlety was completely abandoned and Law just wanted to get away.

When Bepo looked at whichever nakama had ended up injured this time, cradled safely in his warm arms, he didn't disagree with the sentiment. Those were also the times he really wished he'd been the one to go ashore. Penguin and Shachi, and yes, Law too, were far too frail, too breakable. Bepo was the sturdy one. Bepo could take the punches and kicks and whatever else the islands' current population threw at his nakama without flinching.

"If something happens to you, there's nothing we can do," Law had admitted when Bepo had brought the topic up once. "We need your strength, Bepo. You're our trump card; it's foolish to reveal it too soon, so bear with it a while longer."

Bepo could never win against Law, and this was no different. He didn't mind the loss too much, however, as Penguin and Shachi always made sure to curl up with him on deck for a while as they sailed away, especially if he'd had to rescue one of them again.
Between their actions and Law's words, it was easy for Bepo to understand even though the shore was so inviting. They trusted him to have their backs, whatever happened. Every time, once they were back and any injuries treated, Bepo would pull them into a tight hug – yes, even Law if his captain was in reach and didn't escape in time – and nuzzled them enthusiastically. They protested, but never tried to escape, because they were safe in Bepo's arms, and Bepo was determined that they would *always* be safe with him around.

They trusted him to keep them safe – yes, the Tang included – and he wouldn't let them down.

Chapter End Notes

A lot of my early Heart Pirates stories have Bepo on guard duty on the Tang, so I thought I'd show *why* that's the case (it's not just because he's the hardest one for me to write, I promise). A mink is hardly subtle, and they're trying to keep a low profile because of the threat of Doflamingo.
"You need weapons," Law said bluntly. Penguin looked at Shachi, who was pulling himself back to his feet after losing a spar against Bepo, and then at his captain. Law was stood in the doorway of the room they'd repurposed as a training room, arms crossed and looking decidedly unimpressed.

"We have knives," Shachi argued, reaching for the hidden sheath beneath the breast flap of his boiler suit. Penguin felt the solid press of his own in the same place. Law raised an eyebrow as if he thought Shachi was being ridiculous.

"Why do you two insist on hand to hand combat?" he asked. "You only took the knives because I made you." And you're both useless with them hung in the air, unsaid but very much felt. Penguin wore it because Law said so, but he hadn't drawn it since he'd almost killed Shachi with it, and he knew Shachi was of a similar frame of mind. He shrugged, and saw the ginger do the same. "You used a club on Swallow Island, Shachi," Law continued, and the other teen fidgeted uncomfortably.

The club – if it could be called that, more like a carved lump of wood more suited to hitting balls than heads – had been for intimidation purposes. It drove most of their would-be challengers away without a fight, and a solid swing took out several of those that still thought they had a chance. It hadn't really been a weapon, not like the short sword Law had procured and wielded as if it was a simple extension of his arm. When neither of them said anything, Law sighed.

"You need to be competent in several disciplines," he told them, striding towards them with purpose. Penguin could barely shift his weight before he was flat on his back, staring up at the ceiling. Law was still far too fast for him. "That knife of yours isn't for decoration," he heard his captain scold, before Shachi let out a muffled yelp and a thud signified his own acquaintance with the floor.

Penguin rolled onto his front before pushing himself up to his knees in time to see Bepo successfully defend himself from his own attack. He wanted to grouse that that was hardly fair when Bepo had seen it happen to both himself and Shachi and knew what was coming, but it was also the truth that the mink was far superior to the rest of them – Law included – at hand to hand combat.

"With your electro, you're fine," Law told him, to be caught in a pleased bear hug. "Oof!" Penguin finished his clamber to his feet and moved to stand besides Shachi, who was also back on his feet, rubbing the back of his head ruefully. "You two, on the other hand," their captain continued, not even bothering to try escaping from the mink's embrace. "We've got enough savings now. Next island, you're getting weapons."

Penguin hadn't known they had any savings at all, convinced that Law had spent every spare beri on their now impressive infirmary. Law looked at them expectantly, and they shrugged. There was no
helping things when Law got an idea into his head, and honestly, getting a weapon or two probably wasn't a bad idea.

True to his word, the next island they landed on found Penguin and Shachi being herded into a weapons shop, where Law promptly began arguing with the owner over weapons. The two Swallow Island natives looked at each other and shrugged helplessly.

"So, we just pick the one we like?" Shachi asked, and both Law and the shop owner made scandalised noises before launching into a unified lecture on how weapons had to be suitable and blah blah blah. Penguin wasn't interested in swords – never had been, never would be – so being in a shop surrounded by the things wasn't as awesome as Law made it out to be.

Shachi seemed happier, then again Penguin had seen him playing around with Law's short sword a couple of times when he'd thought he was alone. While Law and the shop owner found something else to disagree about and returned to their argument, the ginger headed over to a katana with a red hilt and oval shaped tsuba. He gave it a few swings, almost knocking over a display stand in the process, before grinning.

"I'll take this one," he proclaimed, drawing Law's attention as the younger teen immediately began to fuss over the size and weight and length and-

Okay, that was all way over Penguin's head. Shachi was nodding along vigorously, half-comprehending what their captain was talking about, but Penguin was lost after the first sentence and returned his attention to the racks and racks of weapons in front of him. He figured he was supposed to pick up a sword, like Shachi had, but all he saw when he looked at them were big clunky knives.

"You're no swordsman," the shop owner said, appearing by his elbow and making him jump. Penguin glanced over at Law, who was still distracted by Shachi and the sword in his hand. "Not like your friend." He shrugged and sent the man an unimpressed look, which was ignored. Either the man was used to that sort of thing, or Penguin's hat had ruined the effect. It was probably a bit of both.

"What gave it away?" he asked, voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Swords aren't my only trade," the owner continued, as if he hadn't spoken. Oh yes, this man was definitely used to customers like Penguin and clearly stopped caring a long time ago. "You might find something more to your liking over there." He gestured to a shadowed alcove, out of sight of the front of the shop, and Penguin sent him a suspicious look before heading towards the area.

The man was right, swords weren't his only trade. The only thing he could say about all the weapons was that they were all bladed. Penguin didn't even know the names of most of them, from the beautifully elegant longstaffs with a curved blade to the circles of nothing but raw steel. All the fanciness was lost on him. Penguin had simple roots, and liked to keep things simple.

His hands closed around a mid-brown haft, the wood smooth under his fingers. There was a grip, two thirds of the way down, comprised of red twine, and a matching wrapping circled the top of the haft, where the long and razor-sharp double-edged blade met the wood. The weapon was far, far longer than he was tall, but it was well balanced and Penguin twirled it in his hands, ignoring the crash of several probably expensive items being knocked off of their displays. It reminded him of the branches he would pick up back on Swallow Island to show off with.

"Ah, the yagi," the shop owner said, seemingly unconcerned with the carnage Penguin had just unleashed in the corner of his shop. "A solid choice."
"Are you trying to compensate for something?" Penguin turned around to see Shachi's grinning face. The katana he'd selected earlier was resting against his shoulder, now in a matching sheath, and Law was reaching for a bag of beri with a resigned look on his face.

"You're not practising with that inside," his captain told him before he could compose a retort, then turning to the shop owner. "So how much?"

Either weapons were really expensive, or they were being charged for the breakages as well, but Law forked over the thousands of beris without complaint (leaving Penguin to once again wonder where the hell all the money had come from), before they walked out the door with their new weapons.

"Penguin," Law said as they headed back to the Tang – the pace was unusually brisk, and Penguin started to get a suspicion of how, exactly, they'd afforded the weapons so easily – and he made a noise of acknowledgement. "You do realise you'll have to teach yourself, I hope. The *yagi* is not a weapon I've learnt." Penguin shrugged and looked up at his new acquisition fondly.

"I think I'll manage, Captain," he said, before they heard an outraged yell from behind them and Law lost all pretence of walking, breaking into a sprint back towards their ship. Penguin and Shachi shared an amused look before following.

Yeah, they definitely hadn't had that much money in their savings.

---

Chapter End Notes

The *yagi* is a Japanese spear, and from what little we've seen of Penguin's weapon, it's the type of pole weapon that seems to fit the best. I'm honestly a little disappointed it isn't a *naginata*, because I adore those, but the blade's the wrong shape.

Is Shachi's katana a named blade? Is it a ranked blade? Who knows. Maybe I'll poke into that some other time, or maybe Oda will tell us... I can live in hope.
His new companions – and Law still was not over the fact that they refused to leave him alone despite his best efforts – had their quirks. None of them smoked (and subsequently set themselves on fire), nor did they manage to make air tangible enough to trip over it. They weren't needy and overly clingy, nor were they easily bribable with something simple like food. Honestly, Law was glad they showed none of those traits, otherwise they'd be too painful to be around.

Bepo had no willpower. If Law was feeling particularly kind, he would amend the statement to 'Bepo had no willpower when faced with himself, Penguin or Shachi'. He wondered if it had something to do with the way Penguin and Shachi had been beating him up when he first met them, but while Bepo apologised every time they complained about anything, he wasn't afraid of them, so the whole thing made no sense.

Penguin clung to his hat in much the same way that Law clung to his own. He hadn't asked why, yet, but he wouldn't have been surprised if it was given to him by someone special, too. He also seemed down-right addicted to swimming, and while Law could and would admit he occasionally missed the ability, there was a line between recreational and ridiculous.

And then there was Shachi. Loud, cheerful, always grinning Shachi, who never took those ridiculous shades off. Ever. In the sunlight, Law got it. The sun could glint off the waves quite sharply, and it was never a good idea to look into the sun. When they were deep underwater in the safety of the Polar Tang, where the only lighting was the artificial strips, there was no such excuse.

The nonsensicalness of the whole thing finally got to Law one gloomy morning, when the Tang was sailing rather than submerged but dark clouds had gathered to blot out the sun. It made him uneasy, but they'd needed to surface because Bepo had begun to dangerously overheat (the mink was laying out on the deck, panting like a dying man and making frequent moans that could be agony or bliss), and his latest intel had put Doflamingo as being several islands away. To distract himself from the thoughts of paranoia he could do nothing about, Law turned his attention to Shachi's quirk.

The ginger was lounging around on deck, seemingly doing nothing. Law spared a moment to think about how Penguin was being far more useful as he set up a fishing line to make the most of their brief moment on the surface as he approached him.

"What's with those things?" he asked, squatting down next to Shachi and watching as he tensed up. A hand swatted his away as he reached out to prod at the shades, and Law scowled. "The sun's not coming out from behind these clouds any time soon," he said confidently, and Shachi shrugged.

"So what?" he asked, and Law got the distinct impression that something was being hidden from him. The last time someone had hidden something from him, they'd died.
"Take them off," Law ordered, and heard the sound of something hitting the deck from where Penguin had been standing.

"No," Shachi said, his entire body taut as a wire. It was the first time he'd challenged him, and Law was having none of it, reaching out and swiping the shades from the ginger's face too fast for him to stop him.

Instantly, he knew something was wrong. Even as he took in the unnaturally large pupils, blown so wide the coloured iris was all but invisible, there was a cry of pain and Shachi screwed his eyes shut, his hands flying up to cover them. Before Law could comprehend what any of that meant, there was pain in his jaw and he crashed into the exterior of the main cabin.

Picking himself up, he looked back at Shachi to find Penguin crouching beside him, one hand still in a tight fist and what little of his face was visible like thunder. His other hand was pulling Shachi close to him protectively, the ginger burying his face in his chest.

"Did no-one ever teach you that no means no?" the oldest of the group demanded furiously. Law attempted to match his glare, only to be distracted by how Shachi was shaking. Like that horrific day not so long ago, when he'd forced them to become murderers, he suddenly felt like he'd been doused in cold water. Shachi was in pain, because of him. His mind flashed back to Doflamingo, and how willing he'd been to hurt his own brother at the end. No. He couldn't let himself fall down that path.

He swore, pulling himself to his feet then locating the shades from where they'd fallen. In the commotion, they'd fallen to the deck and one of the lenses had cracked. Law stared at it numbly for a moment before discarding them again. Broken shades were no good. He approached the pair uncertainly, watching Penguin pull Shachi closer to him.

"Shachi," he said nervously, reaching out a trembling hand to touch the ginger's shoulder. Something about the situation made him feel like a helpless child again, and Penguin's glare wasn't helping.

"What?" Shachi snapped, his voice muffled against Penguin's top but still full of pain and tears. Law's hand stopped, just short of his shoulder, before falling back to his side. It felt like he was back on Swallow Island, facing down two older, taller teens again – enemies – and this time he was the aggressor.

"I'm sorry," he said, and he knew that wasn't enough even before Penguin bared his teeth in a snarl, so he drew his knife and slashed off the bottom of his top. "I didn't realise." He reached up again, cloth strip in his hands, and while Penguin snarled at him again he didn't stop him from touching Shachi's face, wrapping the cloth around his eyes gently.

"Maybe you should learn to listen," Shachi snapped, but he let Law blindfold him and take hold of his hand.

"Let's go inside," Law suggested, and Shachi didn't fight him as he led him into the Tang's dark corridors. He headed straight for the infirmary, noticing the way Shachi first returned the grip on his hand, then increased it until he was all but clinging by the time they reached the large room. "What happened to your eyes?" he asked, guiding Shachi to sit down before walking around the room to dim the lights until he could barely see. Penguin stood protectively by the ginger, and Law noticed that Bepo had dragged himself back inside to curl up by Shachi's knee.

"I'm snow blind," Shachi said sulkily as Law headed back towards him in the now-darkened infirmary. Law had seen cases of snow blindness before, but they'd only been temporary. He hadn't known it was possible to get it permanently. He didn't ask how.
"I'm sorry," he said instead, because he was. It was the second time he'd really hurt Shachi and Law really hadn't planned on getting so attached to his limpets, but at some point he had and now he was facing the consequences. "I turned the lights down," he added, because he didn't know how well Shachi could make out his surroundings through the remains of Law's top. "Can I?" He let his hands rest on the blindfold, waiting for one of them to give permission. Snow blindness in particular hadn't been common in Flevance, but its close relation photokeratitis hadn't been unheard of, thanks to the way everything had been white. If he could help Shachi even just a bit…

Penguin squeezed Shachi's shoulder lightly, and the ginger opened his mouth.

"Sure," he nodded, and Law gently undid the knot keeping it in place, letting the material flutter down to the ground. Shachi kept his eyes closed for several long seconds before he let them open, blinking away moisture in the dark.

Law could barely see anything more than movement. He explored with his fingers, gentle but firm, and wiped away the tears.

"Regular treatments stopped working a long time ago," Penguin said, his voice still clipped but less hostile than it had been originally. "You can't do anything to heal it." Law thought of his abilities, the supposed medical miracles, and wondered about that. But he couldn't do anything yet, he didn't know enough about the eye. One day. One day he'd learn enough and be able to heal Shachi.

"Your shades broke," he admitted out loud.

"I have spares," Shachi told him, and Law felt him turn his head beneath his fingertips. "Hey, Penguin, could you?"

"I'll be back in a minute," the older boy said, and Law heard him head for the door. As he opened it, light from the corridor spilled in and Law positioned himself between Shachi and the light. In what light there was, he saw Shachi's mouth pull itself into a grin.

"Don't mind him," the ginger said once the door was shut again. "He worries way too much. I should have told you before you got this curious." Law got pulled into a hug. "Don't do that again, yeah?"

"I won't," Law promised, astounded at how quickly Shachi had calmed down. It was the same way he'd once forgiven Lami for drawing all over his homework when she'd been bored and too young to know better.

It felt like family, and that was the first time Law realised that maybe his tagalongs were there to stay.
Memory

Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Penguin, Shachi  
**Rating:** Gen  
**Warnings:** None  
**Tags:** Family

Over time, the walls of Penguin and Shachi's room found themselves gradually covered. When they'd chosen it, it had been plain, with the insignia of the World Government the only decoration on the wall. That hadn't lasted long.

Many people who kinda but not really knew the pair would have probably expected to see pictures of pin-ups all over the walls. Admittedly, they had had a phase like that, in their late teens when their hormones were at their peak, but in time they'd shifted to a box under the bed, out of sight (but still fully accessible).

The first thing that had graced their bedroom wall was, predictably, their jolly roger. It was plastered directly over where the World Government's insignia had once been, and there was nothing unintentional about it at all. Later, when he finally got one, Law's bounty poster joined it (and then Bepo's, and finally the rest of the crew's as they gained them). Scraps from the newspaper made a montage in one corner of the wall, their best moments portrayed proudly. There were reports on Rocky Port, their captain's victory at Dressrosa, and even their minor mention from Marineford, to name but a few.

The rest of it was hand-drawn. Finding a den den mushi that could take still images, and develop them, was too much effort. Besides, some of the things they wanted they would never be able to take a picture of anyway. They wouldn't say they were amazing artists (Usopp of the Strawhats was far superior and Shachi couldn't draw in colour at all), but they were passable and the sketched figures on the wall were easily recognisable.

There was Law, of course, alongside Bepo and the pair of them. The quartet featured various times, at various ages ranging from their teen selves when they first met, to the one they drew the previous week. The rest of the crew were there as well, from drawings of them when they first joined, to group sketches where the newest member had become well assimilated into the group.

And then there were the memories.

Faces faded with time. They knew it, all too well. The panic when they realised their mothers' smiles weren't so clear in their mind anymore, that they couldn't recall the exact tone of their fathers' laughs. The pictures probably weren't accurate – it was almost guaranteed they'd forgotten something to the depths of time they'd never get back – but they were better than nothing.

Their mothers smiled down at them, beautiful women with mischievous smiles. Penguin's kept her hair tied up brusquely, hidden beneath her thick winter cap, while Shachi's mother's hair had been left to flow freely, a vibrant ginger that had always cut through the white of winter. Their fathers were more reserved, holding the tools of their trades like they always had done with smiles that
matched their wives'. While Shachi had taken after his mother, Penguin was undeniably his father's son. Noona was there, her smile tired as she looked old beyond her years, widowed with two new charges to look after.

For them, it was important to remember their roots. They had lost everything except each other to pirates, so they kept themselves grounded with probably-inaccurate pictures of their past pinned to their wall. They couldn't become pirates like that crew, and their parents' memories would make sure of it.
Bet

Chapter Notes

Characters: Heart Pirates, Ikkaku, Law
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Poker, Spin the Bottle, Nakamaship

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Heart Pirates didn't get to relax all that much, not with the ever-present threat of Doflamingo hanging over them like a dark shadow no matter how deep they dived, but it was impossible for them to remain wound up the entire time. Card games was, and would always be, their favourite crew-wide downtime activity, so with the exception of Jean Bart, who opted to sit out to stay in the control room, and Bepo, who struggled to hold cards anyway, the entire crew found themselves piling into the recreation room to play a round, or several, of poker.

Poker was hardly poker without bets, and they didn't play for money but there were always other things. A night watch, which ended up Uni's after a particularly bad hand for the tall man; laundry duty, which their main engineer gained when his bluff didn't work. The game was long, and after an hour or so they began to run out of things to bet, but they were reluctant to stop the game.

"Change to strip poker?" was suggested, and several hands shot out to grab hold of their captain's hoodie as he attempted to beat a hasty retreat.

The suggestion was vetoed by Ikkaku, who crossed her arms firmly.

"Some things are better left unseen," she pointed out, and Law settled back into the circle. He regretted it a moment later when, with a grin that could only be described as evil, she produced an empty rum bottle from... somewhere. No-one was quite sure where. "Loser has to play spin the bottle," she smirked, placing it in the centre of the circle. "Objections, boys?"

If there were any, no-one voiced them and the next hand was dealt. In some sort of twisted karma, Ikkaku was the loser and she reached for the bottle with a laugh. One spin, fast and furious, and it finally drew to a halt pointing to the cook. The man blinked, staring at the bottle and then at the advancing Ikkaku in bemused disbelief as the rest of the crew started to chant, drumming on the floor with their fists. The kiss landed on the corner of his mouth, and he chuckled as she moved back to the sound of pleased cheers.

The next round had Shachi the undisputed loser, and with a sigh he reached out to spin the bottle himself, only to laugh as it landed on Penguin. The two looked at each other for a moment as the background chanting started up again, before they shrugged helplessly and Shachi lurched forward to press his lips firmly on the other man's, to jovial wolf whistles and laughter from the rest of the crew.

For many rounds, Law was spared the bottle, playing well enough (and with enough luck on his side) to not lose, and never finding himself at the receiving end of the bottle. It didn't last forever, and as the captain stared down the neck of the bottle, which was pointing at him accusingly, he half-
heartedly attempted to hide his cards and pretend he wasn't part of the game. It failed miserably, and his nakama leaned over to give him a quick kiss on the cheek. The rest of the crew released 'awwing' noises before dealing the next round.

Bepo watched them all from his place behind Law, serving his captain's backrest as he was wont to do whenever the pair of them had downtime, before deciding he'd had enough of being left out. He couldn't really hold the cards, nor was he particularly interested in the game itself, so he forwent all of the stages and extracted himself from behind Law before pouncing on the crew to a cacophony of startled noises.

No-one escaped the sudden cuddle prison until everyone had been well and truly licked and nuzzled by the mink. And of course, they all had to nuzzle him back. The cards were scattered by the movement, but no-one bothered to pick them up as the game was forgotten.

Chapter End Notes

It's been a while since I did a crew-wide one, so have a happy poker night with the crew being lovable idiots.
The island appeared to be largely deserted. Law was unsurprised by the fact, as it was far north, even more so than Swallow Island, and the icebergs guarding the land were ferocious – too much so for a ship that relied on its sails. Uninhabited islands were a wealth of opportunity to both gather supplies and lay low away from Doflamingo's ever-expanding sphere of influence, so Law had decided to split up in order to investigate the area.

The snow was thick beneath his boots, giving easily under his feet but reluctant to let them rise again, resulting in an exhausting trudge through the barren landscape. If anything lived in these conditions, they were well-hidden. His fist was clutched around the fabric of Bepo's jump suit, the mink's white fur making him difficult to spot against the white background. The snow falling steadily from the sky did nothing to help.

Deciding that he was getting too cold to continue the trek, Law made the decision to return to the Tang. Bepo didn't argue, instead wrapping a warm furry arm around Law's shoulders. The mink had grown a lot since they'd met, now standing head and shoulders above even Penguin, and Law accepted the offered warmth. He hoped that Penguin and Shachi were managing alright on their own expedition. They had grown up in conditions like these, making them far more experienced than either Law or Bepo, but ever since Law had finally realised that they had no plans on leaving him any time soon, he'd discovered it didn't take much for him to worry.

He and Bepo were maybe halfway back to where the Tang was moored when there was a distant thump and they froze, looking around cautiously. They could see no change in the horizon, and after a moment resumed their journey, although with more purpose. Something wasn't right, and Law didn't like it, mentally praying that Penguin and Shachi were back at the Tang already so they could leave straight away.

Perhaps half a minute after the initial thump, the rumbling began. Law looked around again, Bepo clinging to him tightly, and finally spotted movement. Raising a hand against the falling snow, he squinted to try and identify the source before his blood froze.

The snow was moving.

Law had never seen an avalanche before, but he'd heard of them, read about them in books and listened to tales from the Donquixote Pirates about the devastating force of nature snow could become. They were deadly, his books had said. Too fast to outrun, Diamante had recounted.

The avalanche roared as it powered down the slope. It was a little way away from Law and Bepo, and they were still high enough that even if its course changed it wouldn't catch them. They were safe where they were, they just needed to wait it out until it had run its course then continue back to
the Tang.

Bepo’s grip on Law tightened suddenly, and he looked up at the mink to see his ears pressed back, eyes wide with horror. Law started to reassure him, pointing out that they weren’t in its path, before he realised that wasn’t what Bepo was afraid of.

The avalanche was in the same direction Penguin and Shachi had gone.

"They'll be okay, Bepo," he said, trying to believe his own words. They'd grown up on a snow-covered island with a giant mountain, they had to know how to avoid an avalanche. Ergo, they were safe and would be heading back to the Tang as soon as they could, if they weren't there already.

Bepo's grip increased again, and he gasped involuntarily.

"Captain," the mink said mournfully, and Law's knees went weak at the sound. "Penguin screamed."

Law's world shattered and Bepo's grip was the only thing stopping him from collapsing into the snow.

"No," he denied weakly. "They're fine. Penguin was just a bit startled."

"Captain," Bepo said again, burying his face in Law's hat. Law clung to the arms embracing him tightly as he watched the snow hurtling down.

"We have to help them," he realised, using Bepo's grip to pull himself back to his feet. Bepo stared at the avalanche, his ears still pinned back, and Law began to fight to get out of his grip. "We have to help," he insisted, and the mink blinked suddenly, his ears righting themselves.

"I heard Penguin this way," he said, before picking Law up and sprinting forwards. Law would have protested at the action, except Bepo darted across the snow with a sure-footedness he'd never be able to replicate. The snow was slowing, its damage done, and Law clung to Bepo as the mink followed signs he couldn't begin to identify towards the disturbed snow. Now closer to the carnage, Law could see that the snow had not been alone in its cascade. Littered through the fresh layer were broken fragments of trees, and even occasionally a boulder.

"Penguin!" he shouted as Bepo slowed, casting around for something to guide him the rest of the way. "Shachi!" He waited, looking around for any sign of them, as Bepo continued to pace the area. A flash of colour caught his eye and he wriggled free of Bepo's grip to run towards it. It was Penguin's hat, mostly buried in the snow. He stared at it for a moment, numb, before panic set in. "PENGUIN!" he screamed, clutching the hat to his chest with one hand as his other began to scramble in the snow. "SHACHI!"

"Penguin!" Bepo shouted, before pouncing on a spot up the slope from where Law was clutching the hat. "Captain, I heard him!" He was digging viciously at a spot by a tree that was missing half its branches, and Law scrambled to join him, falling to his knees and clawing at the snow desperately. His hands met something soft and moving, and he grabbed hold of it. The hand clutched at him in return.

It took Bepo less than a minute to uncover Penguin's face, the older teen gasping and squinting his eyes against the snow.

"Are you hurt?" Law asked him. "Where's Shachi?"

"One thing… at a time…" Penguin complained. From the tightness of his face and his laboured breathing, Law realised he was injured. "Shachi's… here." He made to move only to let out a pained
"Don't move," Law ordered. "Where?" He'd heard that survival dropped drastically after fifteen minutes. He hadn't been counting how long he'd been looking, but suddenly he wished he had.

"My arm," Penguin said. "Held… on…" Law shot Bepo a look but the mink was already there, burrowing down beside where Penguin lay. When the arm in question was uncovered, Law winced. It was clearly broken – at least two breaks, at first glance. A pale hand was clutched around it, and it in turn was clenched around another arm.

Law wanted to help as Bepo followed the arm, wanted to dig Shachi out, but Bepo had it under control and Penguin needed help. He pulled at some more of the snow still covering Penguin's torso and legs, determined to get him out. It took too long to shift all of the snow, Law panting heavily by the time his nakama was uncovered, and the sight that greeted him was not a pleasant one. As well as from the broken arm, one of Penguin's legs was twisted unnaturally beneath his body. Moving him would be difficult.

A sharp cry caught his attention and he looked up to see that Bepo had finally uncovered Shachi. His hat and shades were missing, but more crucial was the way his torso was twisted. Bepo's gentle paws were resting on his shoulders, and Law's heart sank.

"Don't move him, Bepo," he said, making his way over to the ginger's side and tentatively exploring with feather-light touches. Like Penguin, his arm was broken – it was a miracle they'd managed to cling to each other – but Law's greatest fear was realised when his exploration reached Shachi's spine.

Broken.

Law formed a Room immediately, sending Bepo to attend to Penguin, who was starting to shiver from spending so long in the snow. He'd read up on spinal surgery, but he'd never performed it, or even seen an operation. Their surroundings couldn't be much worse, but it was what it was and Law refused to let something like that stop him as he got to work.

The damage hadn't been as severe as he'd feared, to Law's relief. Once they returned to the Tang, all Shachi would need would be rest and gradual rehabilitation. The problem, he mused as he looked at the pair of them, Shachi floating somewhere on the edge of unconsciousness and Penguin not much better, was getting them back to the Tang.

He knelt between them and began to coax their hands into releasing each other. Penguin let out a strangled hiss as his arm was shifted, and Shachi let out another sharp cry.

"Bear with it," Law reassured them, his own voice tight. "Try to relax. I need you two to let go."

"I don't… think I can walk… Captain," Penguin admitted as Law worked. "Take… Shachi first…" Law hushed him. He couldn't leave either of them behind. Both were becoming hypothermic on top of their injuries, and he feared that if he left one, they'd be beyond saving by the time he got back. And that was if they weren't buried by a second avalanche in the meantime. The snow around them was unstable, although the tree the pair of them were immediately downhill from was providing some sort of basic shelter.

"Bepo," he said once he finally disentangled the two from each other. "Carry Shachi back." The mink nodded and crouched beside the ginger.

"How do I pick him up?" the mink asked, clearly unsure of where to place his paws. Law eyed the
pair of them, before flexing his fingers.

"Hold your arms out like you're already holding him," he ordered, and Bepo obeyed instantly.
"Takt." Lifting Shachi wasn't easy. Takt required an immense amount of concentration, and Law had never tried to move anything as big as a person before. Gritting his teeth, he tried to manoeuvre Shachi into Bepo's arms. The mink intervened – instead of waiting for Law to gently deposit Shachi in his arms like he'd initially planned, he moved forwards as soon as the ginger was clear of the snow and plucked him out of the air with all the gentleness Law had come to associate with the mink.

Breathing heavily, exhausted by the action, Law returned his attention to Penguin.

"Law…" the older boy began, cut off when Law snapped off two more small branches from the sheltering tree and tore away the bottom of his top.

"This is just until we get back," he explained, splinting the leg as gently as he could and wincing as Penguin cried out. "I'm sorry." The older boy was too tall for him to carry properly, but Law pulled him over his shoulder, staggering under the weight. "Let's go," he said to Bepo, and the mink looked at him with his awkward burden in concern before he led the way back to the Tang. Law followed along close behind, stumbling at Penguin's weight but determined to get him back safely.

The walk was thankfully uneventful, aside from Law needing to take a break and put Penguin down every so often to catch his breath, and Law had never been so pleased to see their ship. He headed straight for the infirmary, Bepo now trailing behind, and rested both his older nakama on the beds.

It hurt to see them in such a sorry state, but they were alive and for that, Law was thankful. It wouldn't be fast, but they would heal.
He could breathe. Upon his return to consciousness, that was Penguin's first thought. His lungs no longer burnt as his body involuntarily took in searing poison, but rather sweet, fresh air rushed in as he inhaled. He took a moment to appreciate that fact before forcing his eyes open. Where was he? There was something soft beneath his head, and much of his body was wrapped in what he instantly recognised as bandages.

He'd been rescued. Vision still hazy, he looked to his side and saw Shachi's unmistakable ginger hair in close proximity. Not just him, then, but with Shachi in a similar state to himself, it clearly wasn't by him. That begged the question of who. With a groan he pushed himself into a pseudo sitting position, bringing a hand to his forehead as it throbbed in protest.

"You shouldn't be moving!" It sounded like a young boy, but the hands that rested on his arm were not hands at all. Penguin wasn't quite sure what the creature was – a mink, perhaps – but he recognised it from both bounty posters and their previous encounter two years previously. Cotton Candy Lover Tony Tony Chopper, of the Straw Hats. Why was he on Zou?

"I'm fine," he told the creature, pushing himself the rest of the way into a proper sitting position.

"No, you're not!" the... tanuki? Penguin was going with tanuki – said, and before Penguin could blink he found himself pressed back against the floor by a large hand. The tanuki had grown dramatically, which Penguin vaguely recalled from the auction house, and in his current state he couldn't fight back. "Your nakama are all safe but you need to rest!"

"Chopper!" a woman's voice called, sounding urgent, and the tanuki shrunk back to its previous form.

"Coming!" he called, before fixing Penguin with what could only be described as a doctor's glare. Penguin was well acquainted with that look from his own captain. "Stay resting!" Penguin waited long enough for him to disappear before sitting up again. There was only one doctor he obeyed.

"Shachi?" he asked, turning towards the ginger. There was no response and he rested a hand on his shoulder. Like himself, Shachi was wrapped in bandages, and he sighed. The ginger was also missing both his hat and shades. Leaving him to rest, he put his hand inside the remains of his boiler suit, reaching for his captain's vivre card.

It wasn't there.

"Looking for this?" a man asked, and Penguin looked up to see Black Leg Sanji crouching down in front of him, holding out the precious paper. "You were holding it when Chopper treated you."
Penguin had vague recollections of taking it out and watching it reconstruct. Taking it from the Straw Hat's hand, he was relieved to see it looked perfectly fine. Whatever Law had faced, he'd survived. "Chopper told you to rest," the other man continued, sounding resignedly disapproving.

"I have no reason to follow your tanuki's orders," he replied, pleasantly surprised to find that, while slightly hoarse, his voice was working.

"Chopper's a reindeer," Black Leg corrected, before sighing. "At least drink this." He handed over a warm bowl of something and Penguin stared at it. It looked like simple soup. "It's just soup," Black Leg confirmed, as if reading his mind. "You need to get your strength back. It's Penguin, isn't it?"

Dubious, but becoming aware that his stomach was considering protesting its emptiness one way or the other, Penguin took the bowl in fingers that weren't quite steady and lifted it to his face, sniffing at it. Nothing smelt wrong with it, and he knew that with his injuries he did need to get his strength back up. He put it to his lips and took a sip.

To say it was delicious was a gross understatement. Penguin had never tasted a simple soup that tasted as exquisite as the one the Straw Hat had passed to him. He drained the bowl before he realised it.

"Did you like it?" Black Leg asked, and Penguin realised he was the Straw Hat's cook. He nodded, and the blond gave a relieved grin. "I'm glad," he said. "Let me know when you're hungry again." Penguin nodded again and the blond left, presumably to give more soup to whoever else he thought needed it.

There was a pained groan next to him, and he saw Shachi roll over, resting an arm across his eyes with a disgruntled noise.

"You okay?" he asked, and Shachi let out a tired chuckle.

"Somehow," he admitted. "Why are the Straw Hats here?"

"I don't know," Penguin sighed. "They seem to be helping us, but…" he trailed off, unsure how to put his misgivings into words. There was something that didn't add up. Why were they there? How did they get to Zou? Why did they help them? Why hadn't Black Leg stolen Law's vivre card when he had the chance? Why hadn't he seen or heard Mugiwara himself? He had very clear recollections of the Straw Hat's captain being loud.

There was something he was missing. Something big.

Shachi lurched upright next to him, fumbling around blindly by his side before putting on his shades. They were cracked and offered minimal protection, but it was better than nothing at all.

"Let's go," the ginger said, and Penguin nodded. They pulled themselves to their feet and looked around. They were in a clearing in the forest that appeared to have been repurposed into some sort of hospital. He counted the rest of the Heart Pirates as present with some relief. Most of them were sitting up, checking their own bandaging. Bepo was in the arms of what appeared to be Cat Burglar Nami, although her hair was much longer than her poster, and they made their way over to check what was happening. She was changing the bandages on his head, and Shachi grinned in clear relief.

"Are you two fit to be moving around?" the woman asked them, and Penguin scowled.

"Perfectly," he retorted. Not strictly true, but he was capable and in Law's absence they needed to keep the crew together. She looked unconvinced, but before she could say any more, they moved on, towards the main group of the crew.
"How is everyone?" Shachi asked them and received varying answers between 'okay' and 'hurts but I'll live'.

"How about you two?" Uni asked. "You were asleep quite a while."

"Well enough," Penguin replied, not really wanting to dwell on his injuries more than he had to. Shachi echoed the sentiment. They consented to sit, however, facing the crew and feeling the weight of their responsibility more so than ever before.

They were responsible for the lives of all their nakama. Up until Jack's attack, that hadn't meant much, but now they had to pull everyone back together. There was a rival crew seemingly helping them and they didn't know what cost they'd demand in retribute. There was no way they were doing it for free.

Penguin missed Law. He'd never fully appreciated the weight the younger man carried on his shoulders before, and now that it was on his own it was too heavy. But he had no choice; the Heart Pirates had to survive until their captain returned, and it was his and Shachi's job to make sure they did.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked for Penguin and Shachi waking up after Alive (chapter 21). At this point, they don't know about the alliance with the Straw Hats, so they're suspicious of everything.
Unsteady

Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Shachi, Penguin, Law  
**Rating:** Teen  
**Warnings:** blood, injury  
**Tags:** Nakamaship, Hurt/Comfort

See the end of the chapter for more notes

No-one was invincible. It was a simple fact of life, but sometimes it was easy to forget. Unbeaten on Swallow Island for years (until a too-small teenager came along), they'd become complacent. Once they'd teamed up with Law and Bepo, and created the Heart Pirates, their emphasis was on running and hiding; avoiding battles and skirmishes wherever possible and fighting with the sole aim of escaping as fast as possible if they found themselves in combat. Injuries happened, of course, some of them painful and bloody, but that was just how life worked. Rarely was anyone injured enough that some quick patchwork courtesy of Law wouldn't fix it within the hour.

If something of greater magnitude did happen, it was always Shachi. The ginger didn't know what he was doing wrong, or why he was the weakest in the crew, but it was fact that he spent more time in Law's care than the other two. It stung his pride, especially with Penguin, his long-time partner in crime, coming out of all their skirmishes with little more than scratches, but when it wasn't true anymore – when he wasn't the one semi-conscious and bleeding sluggishly in the infirmary – all he could think was why isn't that me?

Penguin's eyes were open, but they were clouded with pain and Shachi knew he couldn't see properly. There were streaks of crimson decorating his clothes, but the centrepiece of the spectacle was the deep gash to his side which he was busy pressing a wad of gauze against to stem the bleeding. The blood oozed over his fingers and he grimaced at the sensation of the warm liquid.

"Stay with me," he tried to order the older teen as Penguin's eyes fluttered closed for a moment. It came out less like an imperative and more like a frightened plea. "Penguin." The effort Penguin put into forcing his eyes open was palpable, and he rewarded him with a grin, watery from tears he hadn't bothered to try and curb. "That's right," he encouraged weakly. "You gotta stay awake, Penguin."

Where was Law? The younger boy had ordered them back to the Tang while he finished off their attackers, and it felt like hours had passed in the infirmary while he waited, desperately trying to keep Penguin conscious as the older boy slipped further and further away.

Penguin wasn't supposed to be hurt. Penguin was the strong one, the one who always carried Shachi back when he got a scrape, or more recently when he got something a bit worse than a scrape. Penguin helped patch up his wounds and stayed with him until he recovered. It had always been that way, for as long as Shachi could remember. From accidents playing in the snow as children, like that one time he'd twisted his ankle, to bloody gashes from a blade in their new life of piracy, Penguin had always been there for him.

Now he was bleeding heavily, sweating and chest heaving with pained gasps, and Shachi couldn't
stop the tears. This was wrong. Strong, steady, reliable Penguin didn’t suit pale skin and eyes closing yet again as he fought to remain conscious. Shachi was the one with pale skin and half-closed eyes, Penguin had no claim to that.

"Hey," he said weakly, for something to focus on other than the feeling of blood between his fingers. "Do you remember when I twisted my ankle when we were kids?"

For several long seconds he thought he’d lost Penguin, the other's eyes once again closed and showing no signs of opening again. Silence reigned as Shachi shifted awkwardly, briefly moving one bloody hand from the gauze wad to brush some hair back from Penguin's forehead, feeling the mild burn of a fever and biting his lip in dismay.

"I remember," Penguin finally replied, his voice breathy and faint. Shachi had to lean in to hear him properly. "You stuck your foot in a rabbit hole when you tried to catch a bird."

"Yeah," Shachi chuckled, his cheeks pulling awkwardly into something that was supposed to be a smile. It didn't last long. "You carried me all the way home."

"You didn't weigh much," Penguin replied, gasping as Shachi inadvertently applied more pressure to his wound. "Still don't." Shachi’s laugh was more genuine that time, too relieved to be holding a conversation to remain depressed, even if the salty taste of tears had reached his lips.

"Mama laughed too," he recalled, briefly losing himself in the memory of being scolded for his carelessness while his ankle was wrapped before she'd joined in with Penguin seeing the funny side of things. Shachi hadn't liked being laughed at back then. Now, if Penguin was laughing it meant he was conscious, so he welcomed it.

Except Penguin wasn't laughing anymore, nor was he responding.

"Penguin?" he tried, patting his cheek roughly and trying to ignore the bloody handprints he was leaving. "Hey, wake up!" The older boy didn't move and the tears restarted their race down his face. "Penguin!"

The door to the infirmary opened and Law finally, finally, arrived. He was covered in blood too, and Shachi hoped it was the enemies'.

"How is he?" his captain asked, heading straight for the sink to wash his hands.

"He stopped replying." Shachi’s voice shook, and when he looked down at his hands, both back on the bloody wad and staining crimson, he could just about make out a matching tremble. "Law..." He sounded like a lost child, voice small and uncertain. "Help."

The sound of latex gloves snapping against bare skin echoed through the room, almost immediately followed by the blue sheen of Law's Room enveloping the three of them. Sure, steady hands replaced his on the gauze and Law coaxed him to relinquish the pressure as he took over.

"You don't have to ask."

Chapter End Notes

A request for injured Penguin and fretting Shachi.
Blood had a sharp, unmistakable smell. It smelt of life, but also death, with an underlying tang of something metallic, and the combination offended Bepo's nose. It was not so overpowering he couldn't function at the scent (he'd be a pretty poor warrior if the mere smell of blood shut him down), but it was not pleasant and he didn't like it.

He liked it even less when it belonged to his nakama. Smelling their individual, friendly scent intertwined with the sharp tang of blood could only have one conclusion, and it wasn't one Bepo cared for very much. Usually, it was Shachi who ended up bleeding, but while he hadn't escaped their battle unscathed, he wasn't the one who'd had a sword driven into his flank. A sharp command from Law had had Bepo guarding Shachi's back as he pulled Penguin's too-limp form back towards the Tang.

The battle hadn't taken long to finish up after then, both Law and Bepo's ferocity raising dramatically at the idea that someone had dared hurt their nakama. The rival group – some land-bound gang with bloated egos and just enough battle prowess to back it up – never had a chance to realise what had hit them, and Law and Bepo lingered just long enough to check they wouldn't be coming after them again before hurrying back to the Tang.

"Get us out of here," Law ordered, and Bepo obeyed, peeling off towards the control room as Law followed the trail of tangy metallic blood to the infirmary where Penguin and Shachi were waiting for him. Setting the Tang moving was second nature to the mink by that point, and he paid only enough attention to the displays to check for anomalies as he guided her out of the port and out into the open ocean.

As he sat at the controls, watching the radar flicker away, Bepo felt so very alone. The room seemed huge, too empty and too quiet. Even the rumble of the engines seemed fainter than usual, and he got the sense that the Tang herself was waiting for the news that Penguin was going to be okay.

The uncertainty got too much for him, and he looked around at the controls once more. All was calm, so he lurched to his feet.

"I'm going to the infirmary," he told the empty room, as if there was someone else in there to take over while he was gone. "Don't hit anything." He didn't know if the Tang could hear him, or if she could control herself like that, but the sailors on the Grand Line had spoken about klubautermanns with such conviction that Bepo was willing to trust, just for a little while.

Or maybe he was clutching at straws, searching for any justification to desert his post as he barrelled through the corridors, following the sickening stench of blood to the infirmary, and creeping in
through the door carefully, in case Law was still working.

He was, his Room active and his hands covered in blood as he did medical-stuff Bepo didn't understand, putting Penguin back together again. Bepo wanted to help him, wanted to feel useful rather than a dead weight abandoning his duties, but his paws were not made for the delicate work of healing, and he didn't understand anywhere near enough of the human body to be anything more than a hinderance.

The salty smell of tears hung in the air, and he turned his head away from Law's work to focus on Shachi. The ginger was hanging back awkwardly, face sticky with tears. His shades were askew, and Bepo could see one eye, squinted shut against the light. His hat was bundled up harshly in his hands, seams straining with one or two snapped pieces of thread.

Bepo couldn't do anything for Penguin, but Shachi was another story. He walked up behind him, not trying to be sneaky but still catching the ginger by surprise as he wrapped his arms around him tightly, pressing his face into the bright hair. He felt the jolt of surprise and nuzzled him gently, ears pinned back as he waited for a response, hoping that he was helping Shachi, even if it was just a little.

There was no response for several long moments, but just before Bepo gave up a small, scared hand bunched painfully in his fur. It was quivering fiercely, a tremble that spread throughout the human's body until his entire body was shaking. Bepo held him tighter as he twisted in his hold, burying his face in Bepo's shoulder and clinging on tightly to his fur.

Words didn't come to Bepo – even if they had, would they have been the right ones to say? – so he remained silent, repetitively nuzzling Shachi comfortingly instead. His shoulder was growing damp, but he ignored it as he watched Law work steadily. He didn't look concerned, to Bepo's relief, and sure enough, several minutes later the blue Room faded away to nothing.

The sound of latex stretching and clinging to skin to the best of its ability as it was peeled away assaulted his ears, and he met his captain's eyes as Law bunched the blooded gloves up and discarded them. Law looked first shocked, then understanding and finally relieved at his presence.

"He'll be okay, Shachi," he said, and the fingers released their bruising grip on Bepo's fur as the ginger awkwardly turned around in his embrace. Bepo loosened it to make it easier for him.

"He will?" Shachi asked, his voice somehow simultaneously thick with tears and thin with uncertainty.

"He will," Law repeated, and Bepo was forced to release his hold on Shachi suddenly as the ginger ran to the bedside, running fingers across the bandaging lightly, and then through Penguin's hair as though reassuring himself he was still there.

"I'll be in the control room," Law said quietly. Bepo jerked, reminded of his job and where he should be, and began to move to the door. Law's raised hand stopped him. "Stay here with them," his captain told him, his voice too low for Shachi – now talking to Penguin as if he was conscious even though he wasn't – to hear.

"Aye," Bepo agreed, and watched his captain walk out of the door before walking up behind Shachi again, wrapping an arm around him. Shachi didn't jump like had the first time, and Bepo was glad.

"He's going to be okay," the ginger said, leaning into his embrace. "He's gonna be okay, Bepo." Bepo nodded, looking at Penguin's still form on the bed curiously. There was colour in his cheeks again, and he wasn't hooked up to any machines the way Law sometimes did to Shachi if he got hurt
too badly.

He wasn't awake, but aside from the smears of blood, he looked like he was just sleeping. His chest rose and fell steadily, and his face wasn't pinched in pain.

"He'll be okay," Bepo agreed.

Chapter End Notes

Sequel to yesterday's *Unsteady*. Bepo doesn't seem to be capable of much in the infirmary (he didn't do anything with Luffy or Jinbei that I recall), but his presence is still invaluable!
Penguin wasn't entirely certain when he first realised that people with the initial 'D.' in their name were different. Some, like Monkey D. Garp, had always been figures of some prominence in the news, so he'd heard of it for sure, but it had just seemed like just part of his name.

Then at some point, Gold Roger was turned into Gol D. Roger – a correction of Bepo's, who appeared to know a lot about the pirate king for someone who was born the same year the man was executed – and the idea was planted that maybe 'D.' wasn't as simple as he'd thought. After all, there was no way that the Hero of the Marines and the Pirate King would be related (Penguin realised how naïve that thought was years later, after he met Monkey D. Luffy).

Law seemed particularly interested in the initial, too. There was a folder, small but growing, in his room of all the known individuals with it.

"D. will bring about a storm," was all he would say on the matter for the longest time. Personally, Penguin thought that a D. had brought about enough of a storm already, a sentiment shared by Shachi. If Gol D. Roger hadn't made that proclamation at his funeral, triggering the Great Age of Pirates they currently lived in, then the pirate crew would never have attacked Swallow Island. Maybe it was petty to blame the slaughter of his parents on a man from East Blue who'd never stepped foot in their home, but Penguin firmly believed the man to be indirectly responsible.

He mentioned it in front of Law, once, after they'd met yet another crew inspired by those words, jeering and boasting about how they would be the ones to find the One Piece and claim the title. Irate, he'd said that people called D. were nothing but trouble-makers and he hated them all (if the so-called 'Hero' of the Marines couldn't even save one small island what good was he).

Law hadn't been quite fast enough to hide the pained look on his face, although Penguin had no idea what reason he had for it.

His young captain had never been the most open of people, but there was the distinct notion that he'd retreated back into his shell like a scared den den mushi for several days. He began to avoid them – both Penguin and Shachi, who had agreed with Penguin's frustrated outburst – as best the confines of the Polar Tang allowed. Meal times, once fun and loud, were eaten in uncomfortable silence; Law would flee the moment he finished his food, leaving Bepo to do the washing up by himself.

It persisted for a week before Penguin had had enough. Enlisting the assistance of both Shachi and Bepo, who were equally worried about Law's sudden change in attitude, they cornered him in his bedroom, which he'd taken to haunting the entire time basic needs didn't force him out.

"Are you sick?" was Penguin's first assumption, approaching his captain and gripping his shoulder.
Law flinched backwards, and Penguin's hand fell limply to his side. "Law?"

"I…” the younger teen said, looking everywhere except the three nakama, before the hidden steel in his spine straightened it and he looked Penguin straight in the eyes. "I haven't been completely honest with you." Beside him, Shachi made an inquisitive noise. "Trafalgar Law isn't my full name."

Well, 'Penguin' was hardly Penguin's name, either, but he'd had no reason to go into a week-long hibernation just because he hadn't told his nakama his unused real name. If he didn't use it, did it really matter? He crossed his arms and quirked an eyebrow at the shorter boy, waiting for an explanation.

"My full name is Trafalgar D. Water Law," he continued after a pause. "I'm not supposed to tell anyone, but you're my nakama."

There was a moment while Penguin digested the information, wondering why half the name was secret and if it really warranted Law's skittish behaviour before it hit him like a punch to the gut.

"D."

His captain had the same name as the Pirate King, who had inspired a group of men to pillage his home and slaughter the inhabitants just to make a point. The same name as the so-called 'Hero' of the Marines, an organisation who hadn't bothered to help a small island in its hour of need.

As he stared into golden eyes, the challenge not quite obscuring the fear in their depths, Penguin realised that it didn't matter. At least, not as much as the fact that this kid who'd somehow wormed his way into his heart and earned similar rights of protection to Shachi, was afraid of him, was hurting because of his words.

Law couldn't undo all the pain that his fellow Ds had caused Penguin, but he wasn't accountable for it, either. Penguin couldn't simply brush it away, though. Seven years was nowhere near long enough to bury the pain. But Law was hurting too.

"Did you choose it?" he asked. Law shook his head, and Penguin sighed.

"I guess it can't be helped," he said, shaking his head slowly. Law seemed to shrink away, and he reached out to grab him again, pulling him into a tight hug because at some point he'd become too protective of his little sharp-tongued captain to let him wallow alone in misery. Law wriggled to get away, but he didn't relinquish his grip. "D. will bring about a storm, huh? How about this time it's on my side?"

"Our side," Shachi corrected, joining in. Law let out an involuntary oof but they just reacted by squeezing him tighter.

"You two…” Law whined, surrendering to the pressure and gradually bringing his hands up to clutch at them in turn. "You're ridiculous."

Before Penguin could answer, it was his turn to lose all the air from his lungs as Bepo joined the hug.

"What does a name matter?" the mink asked, crushing all three humans together. Penguin couldn't agree with that, and nor could Shachi or Law by the looks on their faces, but there were things more important than a name.

Like nakama.
This story now has fanart! Thank you so much to mathemayjicks for surprising me with this.
Dabbling in information as they did, the defection of one Rear Admiral X Drake from the Marines was quick to reach the ears of the Heart Pirates as they geared up for their entry to the Grand Line.

"Doesn't say much for the Marines if their own Rear Admirals are turning their backs on them," Penguin said scornfully when he heard the news. Shachi agreed with a whole-hearted vehemence that had many of their new nakama staring at the pair of them in surprise.

"You don't like the Marines very much," Clione observed needlessly.

"Pirates tend not to," Shachi pointed out, skirting around the real reason because it still hurt to think about it too much, let alone talk about it. Between them he and Penguin had talked about it exactly once since it happened, to Law and Bepo, and they were in no hurry to recount it again. Clione backed off.

"It would be interesting to meet him," Law observed, peering over their shoulders at the fresh bounty poster. It completely overshadowed his own at almost double the amount. Shachi supposed that was because of his defection as much as his actual strength. "I'm interested in what made him leave."

"Because Marines are selfish, greedy imbeciles who would rather rest on their laurels and deal with the big-ticket guys for the glory than actually help the people they're supposed to be protecting?" Penguin muttered darkly, and Shachi fought back a flinch.

"He would have known that for years," Law disagreed. "If that was going to drive him out, it would have done so long ago."

Shachi tuned out the rest of the conversation as Penguin came out with more and more examples of why the Marines were corrupt to the core and that there was no honour in there. He wasn't strong like Penguin; he couldn't stay in that trail of conversation for any length of time before getting overwhelmed. Instead, he swiped the poster while Penguin held everyone's attention, staring at it intently.

There was something about it that nagged him. A sense of familiarity niggled at him, as if he'd seen the face before. Well, he had – a Rear Admiral was a high rank in the Blues, so Drake's name and face had been reasonably well-known even as a goodie-two-shoes Marine – but only ever in photos. This felt more like trying to recall someone he'd met, maybe once or twice. But when would he have ever met the man?

The answer didn't come to him, and eventually he let the poster fall to the deck in disgust before slipping back inside the Tang, away from the Marine-based conversation – debate – and all the
memories it brought up and into his bed. He could hide away there for a few hours; all it would take would be a white lie about his eyes playing up and everyone would leave him in blissful peace.

Everyone except Penguin, who saw straight through the falsehood and climbed up to join him on his bunk, arms wrapped around him as he locked away the memories one by one back in the little mental box that housed them.

The mystery of X Drake's familiarity was pushed to the back of his mind until Law got his wish, two months later at the start of the Grand Line, and the two crews met. True to form, his captain promptly began attempting to wind the former Marine up. The man's crew grew more agitated than the man himself, who seemed almost preoccupied with something.

Penguin, well, Penguin's hat, seemed to draw his gaze every few seconds, a fact that clearly bothered Law as he attempted to draw Drake's attention back onto him. Shachi, stood beside Penguin as always, saw the blue eyes flick to himself a couple of times, which cemented the sensation of familiarity.

Drake recognised them from somewhere, and they sure as hell weren't plastered all over the latest paper like the former Rear Admiral was. He gave no indication of how, though, and Shachi watched him finally leave after Law decided he'd had enough of the other captain eyeing his nakama and unleashed a full barrage of offense at him.

"Do we know him?" Penguin asked Shachi under his breath. The ginger shrugged.

"He's familiar," he admitted, voice at the same volume. "I'm sure we've met him before." Those blue eyes, that x-shaped scar-

He froze. He'd definitely seen that scar before, a long time ago. Way back, when they were still angry grieving children on Swallow Island faced with a second pirate crew. The Barrels Pirates, settling themselves on the neighbouring Minion Island, had been less interested in plunder and more interested in trade, which Swallow Island's inhabitants had gladly offered in a desperate bid to escape a second massacre.

The scared kid that had wandered away from the crew and found himself face-to-face with the full wrath of the teenage Shachi and Penguin had had the very same scar. That was the first fight they'd won against a pirate, although now that Shachi looked back it was very clear that they'd won because the boy hadn't fought back, instead choosing to cower and then flee.

He started to snigger, watching the retreating back of the other pirate in the distance, and both Penguin and Law looked at him in askance.

"I don't believe it," he laughed, throwing a casual arm around Penguin's shoulders. "That was little Dory-chan." Law's confused look was ignored as Penguin stared at him in thinly-veiled horror.

"You realise if he decides he wants revenge we're toast, right?" he asked, and Shachi nodded, tears beginning to form in his eyes from laughing so hard.

"Revenge for what?" Law asked sharply. "How do you two know Drake-ya?"

Shachi was too hysterical to answer, leaving Penguin to recount the tale of a pirate child without a backbone to their horrified captain.
I find it likely that the Barrels Pirates would have had some sort of presence on Swallow Island due to their sheer proximity, which means that Penguin and Shachi may well have met Drake as children. It was noted that 'Dory' was strong but too much of a coward to ever stand and fight, so while he obviously would be stronger than the pair of them, if he's less willing to fight then they are they can still count it as a victory.
As many of the crew's quirks seemed to, it began with Bepo. The mink was far more open with his body language than his human nakama, likely stemming from an attempt to compensate for the complex facial expressions of humans that his bear-like face was incapable of replicating. Where Penguin or Shachi might give a bemused smirk, Bepo would turn it into a whole-body action, with his shoulders and arms raised. It was almost comical; Penguin and Shachi had quickly learnt that laughing at Bepo was never a good idea.

What the pair of them hadn't counted on was the osmosis of Bepo's little quirk. The first time Shachi had raised his arms with more vigour than strictly required, Law had raised an eyebrow and he'd faltered, realising what he'd done and unsure what to do about it. He settled for ploughing on with his point, pretending it hadn't happened and keeping his hands firmly fist in his pockets.

Penguin slowly began to fall victim to the subtle influence as well, leading to him joining Shachi in keeping his hands stuffed inside his pockets at all times and blushing furiously when the subconscious impulse snuck up on him. Bepo didn't see the problem but apologised profusely when he realised that to his nakama such open displays were embarrassing.

It took one small event, seemingly insignificant to an observer, to change that.

The day had not been a good one. To begin with, it was the day before the anniversary of their first meeting – or to put it another way, it was the anniversary of the mysterious Cora-san's death. Law had been subdued, in a way they all understood and respected, but he hadn't taken the day off from information gathering, in the way he allowed Penguin and Shachi when it was their day of grief. The island was busy, with a thriving underworld that Law was utterly convinced held strong connections to Doflamingo himself.

Maybe it was because it was That day, and Law had so utterly convinced himself that he'd find something big in that city, that when nightfall came and there was nothing to show for it at all – not even a mention of the man's name, or his Joker alias – he became frustrated and eventually lost his temper. Law lashing out, while not common, was not overly unusual, either. Doflamingo had a way of igniting a fire within him like nothing else could. The problem with this particular occurrence was that Law did not lash out, per say, but rather turned inwards, releasing his bursting frustration on himself.

Watching their captain bloody his knuckles on a wall, Room active and keeping them physically away, the trio were at a loss of what to do as Law hurt himself more and more.

"Stop!" they begged him, because words were all they had left. In their distress, Penguin and Shachi
failed to notice that their hands were not imprisoned inside their pockets, and three pairs of arms shot into the air, crossed above their hands in an unmistakable 'x' shape. Whether it was the sound or the sight that caught Law's attention was unclear, but he froze and stared at them. They stayed in the deadlock for several long seconds, Law's eyes wide and their arms positioned obviously above their heads.

Then a strange noise began, starting off quietly – so quietly it could almost have been imagined – and gradually gaining volume until Law was bent over, clutching at his stomach in mirth.

"Law?" Penguin asked, concerned, and the teen shook his head.

"You two look ridiculous," he gasped, tears beading in the corner of his eye. They glanced at each other, spotting their arms, and blushed, beginning to retract them. Then they paused, meeting each other's eyes and getting the flash of silent comprehension Law called their 'hive mind mode'. Leaving a confused Bepo in their dust, they pounced on their laughing captain, frog-marching him back to the Tang, and then the infirmary to wrap his bleeding knuckles.

Law's mood stayed passably positive for what little time was left of the day, and a silent decision was made between Penguin and Shachi.

It was embarrassing, but it made Law laugh. Law never laughed. Their pride was a small price to pay for such a reward.

Over time, the embarrassment faded until it was just another part of life. Law didn't laugh every time, but a fond smile was never far away. When they eventually gained more nakama, the osmosis spread to them as well, and to Law's fond exasperation, their posing became a characteristic of the crew.

People might laugh at them, but as long as it put a smile on Law’s face every once in a while, they couldn't care less.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked quite some time ago what I thought about the crazy, over-the-top poses we've seen the Heart Pirates do on occasion, and I finally came up with an answer.
Lost

Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Shachi, Penguin  
**Rating:** Teen  
**Warnings:** blood, major character injury  
**Tags:** Angst, Hurt/Comfort, Nakamaship

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Another battle, long and bloody.

It was to be expected, really. The New World took no prisoners and peace was a foreign concept to the sea – especially now, with the Marines closing in under their new bloodhound of a Fleet Admiral and settling their own den in what had long been Pirate territory. They'd taken precautions before making landfall; rather, Law had taken precautions, painstakingly withdrawing all their vital organs from their bodies to safely nestle them away in what had become a vault in the Polar Tang.

Precautions could only do so much, as Shachi realised with a face as white as fresh snow when he couldn't see Penguin any more, at the end of the battle when the Marines were all dead or fled and the only ones still standing were the Heart Pirates, bloodied but triumphant. Penguin wasn't among them.

Shachi wasn't certain who had been the one to send up the cry, the task of identifying the voice of secondary importance to the reason for it, bloodied and battered and not moving.

Not moving.

He forced his tired limbs to move, ignoring the trickle of blood seeping from somewhere under his hat and down to be caught in the upper lashes of his right eye. It couldn't be true; his eyes were playing tricks on him. They did that sometimes. It didn't matter that they'd never given him a hallucination like this before. It had to be a trick. There was no way it could be real.

There was no way that was Penguin, sprawled out in the dirt like a ragdoll without its stuffing. Not covered in so much blood his beige clothes, or what was left of them, were a muddy red. Not pinned to the ground with his own spear through the heart.

Shachi was one of the last to make it to his side, the numbness of disbelief making him slow, as if the air around him had coalesced into sucrose, sticky and clingy. When he finally arrived, Law's Room was already up, his captain kneeling by the body with his hands flying around. He was doing… doing *something*. Shachi didn't have the mental capacity to decipher what, not when his crowded nakama parted wordlessly for his stumbling form and he got close enough to see that Penguin's eyes were open.

Hope kindled for an instant, before he fell to his knees besides Penguin's body to see that they were glassy and lifeless. He'd seen those eyes before, so many years ago, in the aftermath of the pirate attack and under the protective shield of his mother. His mother had had those eyes, and she'd never moved again.
Now Penguin had those eyes.

He screamed, the noise raw and harsh even to his own numb ears as his voice clawed its way out of his throat in a wordless grief, lunging forwards to throw his body over Penguin's too-still one and pulling it into his arms.

The spear was gone – the rational part of his brain would later realise Law had removed it in his treatment – and the body lolled limply as Shachi clutched it to his chest. His mother had been too heavy for him to shift, leaving him trapped under her cooling body until Noona had pulled him out. He was stronger now, capable of shifting a fully-grown man's dead weight by himself.

But not strong enough, because if he was strong enough he wouldn't be in that situation again, losing the last of his family.

Another scream tore itself from his throat, this time recognisable as Penguin's name as Shachi clutched him closer, heedless of the injuries they had both sustained. His vision was blurred, tears falling without waiting for permission to coat his cheeks in salty water that would dry uncomfortably later.

A soft hand rested on his back, barely noticed and unacknowledged. Others followed suit, their warmth a nauseating contrast to the cooler body in his arms. Another pair floated on the edge of his vision, dancing blurrily through the air in patterns Shachi could never hope to follow, flashes of black ink betraying their identity if he cared enough to expand his mental capacity beyond Penguin.

A broken gasp, the kind punched out by a sudden avalanche of pain, cut through the fog in his mind in a way nothing else had managed and Shachi blinked involuntarily. The action was enough to briefly clear his vision from the waterfall of tears, just in time to see Penguin's eyelids shift, closing for a split second before snapping wide open.

Penguin's eyes were still glassy, but now it was the glassiness of the ocean at dawn, shining bright and damp. It was the look of life, of a fresh beginning, and Shachi stared numbly into them, losing himself in the rejuvenated pools.

The illusion was broken by a barely-there rasp, forced past dry, unmoving lips. The rasp of his name.

It wasn't really his name, the hoarse 'Sha' interrupted by the 'i', but it was close enough to be recognisable, and no matter how broken, how faint, Shachi would know Penguin's voice anywhere.

"Peng...uin..." he choked out in return, watching eyes bright with pain close and renewing his tears as something swelled inside him. Closed eyes were good. Closed eyes were alive. The swelling avalanche – or was it a tsunami; Shachi couldn't tell – crashed over him, burying him in relief and draining all the tension from his body until he was a limp boneless mess.

The last thing he saw was the bloodied lips, pulled into what could almost be called a smile, of his brother before he sank into the swirling darkness, too drained of everything to face the world right then.

Chapter End Notes

I've lost count of how many of you requested Shachi's PoV for Inseparable (chapter 89) - there were a lot! I hope it lived up to your expectations. Will I do a final piece when
they wake up again? Who knows. Probably.
Penguin opened his eyes into darkness. There was the sound of a quiet, methodical beep in the background, slow and steady, and somewhere a soft echoing thumping rhythm that sounded familiar. Most obvious, however, was the warm air on his left cheek, fluctuating almost regularly. It was accompanied by a familiar sound, a light inhale and exhale of air, informing Penguin that he wasn't alone. In the darkness he couldn't see who it was, but even if he didn't recognise the breathing, there was only ever one person who shared his bed uninvited.

Usually, knowing that Shachi was there was enough for Penguin, and he'd contentedly leave the younger to sleep. But his breathing wasn't quite steady, the smallest hint of panic detectable in the offset breaths. Penguin thought he knew why, and after his too-close brush with death, he didn't want to be alone, either.

"Shachi?" he called, his voice small and weak in the darkness. He tried to move his arm, hand questing for Shachi's shoulder, but sharp pain reminded him why he was in the infirmary and his fingers jerked to a halt, just lightly brushing against part of a body that wasn't his.

He'd almost died.

Gods, he'd almost died. He'd been there, right there, with his parents, looking down on his own body. His breathing stuttered, chest lurching as reality set in. He'd almost died, he'd died, he had been dead-

"Penguin!"

There was a hand on his cheek, warm, solid and grounding. He blinked, looking around for Shachi but in the darkness unable to see him even though he could hear him, could feel him.

"Are you with me, Penguin?" Shachi asked, and he sounded pained, scared, even as another hand rested over his own, the one with warm skin just barely underneath its fingertips. It was pressed more firmly against the other body, and Penguin felt the bony protrusion of the pelvic bone. "Penguin?"

"Shachi," he breathed, blinking again. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness he could make out the vague silhouette of the younger man.

"I'm here," Shachi said, sounding calmer now that he'd replied. "I'm here; you're here." He sounded like he was reassuring both of them, and as Penguin focused on him he could feel the slight trembling of his hands.
"I'm here," he repeated, using Shachi's pressure on his hand to give him the strength to grip the ginger's hip. He remembered the scream that dragged him back, his mother's disapproval that he'd abandoned Shachi. "I'm sorry, it's okay now. I'm here." Shachi said nothing else for several long seconds. Instead, Penguin felt him shifting, the mattress jostling slightly, before a gentle weight rested on his shoulder. The hand on his cheek slipped away, but Penguin didn't mind the loss as he felt Shachi's hair tickle his neck.

"I thought I'd lost you," the ginger murmured, clenching Penguin's hand against his hip tightly as if he was afraid Penguin would disappear if he let go. "It… it was just like Mama." Penguin tilted his head as best he could, pressing his cheek against what he assumed was the top of Shachi's head.

The echoing thumps were still there, and with his awareness steadily gaining clarity Penguin finally identified it. It was the sound of a heartbeat, bizarrely amplified by the odd gelatinous substance Law's abilities enclosed it inside when he removed it from the body. Penguin suspected it was his own, likely cradled in Shachi's hold somehow, if the faint sensations it was reporting were to be believed.

The sound was another reminder that he was alive, that he'd survived.

"Kaa-chan was there," he admitted, feeling Shachi go rigid against him. "Tou-chan too."

"You…" Shachi's voice was suddenly thick, and Penguin wished he could move so he could wipe away the tears he knew were there.

"I heard you," he continued, because there was nothing else he could do except keep talking. Shachi fell silent, his breath hiccupping. "You needed me more."

The sound Shachi let out could only be likened to a wail, which rapidly devolved into sobs.

"Damn right… I needed you more!" he gasped. An arm wrapped around him tightly, clinging to him like a limpet. "And I'm… always… going to need you… more! So don't… don't you dare… do that again!"

Penguin squeezed his hip again, hoping it came across as reassuringly as he intended. Shachi's tight grip was bruising, but he said nothing about the discomfort.

"I'm here," he said instead, reciting the same reassurance again, listening to his own heart thudding away between them, proclaiming loudly to anyone in earshot that he was still alive. "I'm here."

He couldn't promise anything for the future. The New World was anything but kind, and cared little for brazen promises of safety. But for now, he was still alive, him and Shachi both.

He was never going to take that fact for granted again.

Chapter End Notes

I should learn by now that the moment I consider a sequel, it's going to happen.
Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Law, Penguin, Shachi  
**Rating:** Gen  
**Warnings:** None  
**Tags:** Family, Nakamaship, Humour, Enies Lobby (mentioned)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Law was a highly individualistic and proud individual. He controlled the crew in a way that expected to be obeyed on the occasions he gave orders and was well respected for it. Few of the crew were inclined to challenge his orders, and even fewer would even dream of patronising him. He was their captain, and was therefore deserving of their complete and utter respect.

Unsurprisingly, Penguin and Shachi were the exception. Not that they didn't respect him – they did, perhaps more than anyone else (save Bepo) because they knew so much more about what he'd been through, what he was still fighting – but there were times when a bit of light-hearted levity was required.

Teasing was not unusual between Heart Pirates. All of it was good-natured, of course; no-one had any intention of deliberately upsetting their nakama. Penguin and Shachi were two of the worst offenders, tag-teaming their victims with matching grins and raucous laughter. While not a common target, not even Law could escape them when they set their minds to it (often, it coincided with a low point, the pair dragging him out of his funks whether he liked it or not using whatever method appealed to them).

One day in particular stood out in the memories of those who had been there to witness it.

It was the day Mugiwara no Luffy first caught their attention for real, his bounty tripling overnight after something about Enies Lobby, Nico Robin and burning a World Government flag. Whether that had anything to do with Penguin and Shachi's behaviour that day, the crew didn't know, but the event made the day easier to recall.

Law poured over the article with an obsession usually reserved for anything involving Doflamingo. If he found what he was looking for, no-one knew, because that was when Penguin and Shachi elected to begin their day's playful teasing.

"Careful," Shachi warned, a mock-severe expression on his face, looking over Law's shoulder at the bounty poster his captain was scrutinising, a tattooed finger tracing over the $D$. on the poster absently. "Someone might think you've got a crush on the guy if you don't stop staring." Law's head snapped up, golden eyes glaring at him.

"Don't be ridiculous," he retorted, setting it down on the table. Penguin, appearing on his other side, reached forwards and picked it up.

"Strong, crazy, big grin… kid's pretty cute.. Wouldn't blame you," he added, solemn look melting into a grin as Law snatched the poster back with a glare.
"Keep your immaturity to yourself," the younger man snapped, moving to stand up. "I'm going to my room. Don't disturb me." His attempt to get to his feet was thwarted by both men, who leaned their arms on his shoulders casually, pinning him to the chair in the process.

"Now, you know we can't let you off that easily," Shachi told him seriously. "What sort of big brothers would we be if we did that?"

Law spluttered in shock.

"Big-"

"Our little brother's growing up so fast," Penguin mourned, leaning more heavily on Law. Shachi mimicked the movement on the other side. "Why, it feels like only yesterday he was a little brat and now look at him with his first crush!"

"Little-?" Law demanded. "I'm your captain!" They ploughed on as if he hadn't said anything.

"A delicate situation, for sure," Shachi agreed solemnly. "The boy will need careful vetting."

"We can't have our little brother falling for some careless ruffian," Penguin nodded, and Law pushed at the pair of them indignantly.

"Would you two stop talking nonsense?" he complained sharply.

"Nonsense?" Shachi repeated indignantly. "How is having your best interests at heart nonsense?"

Law opened his mouth to retaliate, before sighing and giving up.

"You two are idiots," he muttered under his breath. "I'm not your brother, I'm your captain-"

"So?" Penguin interrupted before he could finish his sentence.

"Who says you can't be both?" Shachi asked, his voice low. They were teasing – they had to be, the grins from earlier couldn't have screamed it much louder if they'd tried – but there was something about the words that sounded almost genuine.

Caught off guard, Law couldn't find a retort before the pair disappeared, leaving the room with matching grins on their faces.

"Idiots," Law repeated after a minute, pulling himself back together. The observing crew laughed, the subtle tension from Law's obsession with the article and new bounty poster draining away after Penguin and Shachi's performance. Law joined in a moment later, a quiet chuckle at his nakama's antics, before he reached for the article again.

It was gone, as were all of the Straw Hat posters. In its place was Eustass Kid's latest exploits instead, and Law's fingers trembled. He clenched them into a fist to still them.

"Idiots," he repeated in a whisper. "You didn't need to do that."

Chapter End Notes

To clarify, no, there is no actual crush. I have nothing against LawLu, but I prefer it
platonic. Someone requested Penguin and Shachi calling Law their little brother, so teasing it was!
Mugiwara no Luffy had declared war on the World Government. There was no way for the newspapers to cover that up, even with the destruction of Enies Lobby being blamed on them to try and distract from the burning flag.

Penguin and Shachi read the article upside down from the other side of the room as Law scrutinised the paper, and their faces took on identical frowns, hidden from view from the rest of their nakama by their hats and the shadows. There were two problems they could see, one called the World Government, and the other called the Will of D.

To Law, defeating Doflamingo was the goal. He needed his vengeance on the pirate, the powerful Shichibukai, for injustices of his early teens. Neither Penguin nor Shachi could judge him for that, not when they'd been following him loyally, gathering information and helping him work towards the inevitable confrontation for the past eleven years. Not when they too were driven by forces of vengeance, even if they didn't know as much about their targets.

However, Doflamingo wasn't the only one to have wronged Law in his childhood. That was something the rest of the crew had no idea about – indeed, they barely knew about the story behind Doflamingo and Cora-san. Law didn't advertise his past, the horrors he'd gone through even before he joined the Donquixote Pirates. The massacre of Flevance, ordered by the World Government itself, was another sore spot with their captain, and seeing that article, Penguin and Shachi feared that he'd lose sight of himself.

Vengeance was all very well and good to their biased minds, but one at a time. Trying to split himself between multiple revenges would do Law no good, and Doflamingo was the clear focus. The World Government had been a background noise, there but unimportant and easily ignored. They'd even dared to venture the thought that Law realised it was too much to attempt; the World Government was the most powerful organisation in the world and not so easily undermined.

But now, that wasn't the case. A crew, smaller than their own if the newspaper was to be believed, had stood up to the flag, setting it on fire and declaring war for the world to see. Normally such rebellions failed to reach publicity, the perpetrators crushed before they could do any damage. The logical conclusion was that a similar fate would befall the Straw Hat crew, except for the other thing.

Monkey D. Luffy.

"D will bring around another storm." It was one of Law's most-recited phrases. The two of them weren't fond of the clan of D., their captain the obvious exception, but it was fact that when someone bearing that initial attempted something, they didn't give up until they got it.
A member of the clan of D., versus the World Government. There was no way Law would let that slide by unnoticed, and sure enough he had become fixated on the article in the same way he obsessed over any and all information about Doflamingo. That wasn't a good sign. Law couldn't start focusing on both scenarios, or he'd overload himself. Doflamingo or the World Government, and they'd spent the last eleven years working to take Doflamingo down so they weren't letting all that time go to waste.

Breaking Law's single-minded concentration required a special touch. Simply hiding the newspapers would do no good, as Law would simply Scan and then Shambles them back into his hands. No, a more creative intervention was required.

It was time to distract him, in the most outrageous method possible. But even that wouldn't suffice. Law would recall his obsession in time and then they'd be back to square one. They needed to dissuade him from pursuing vengeance against the World Government, but Law was one of those people who would gain encouragement from being told not to do something. Saying "leave the World Government alone for now, they're not worth it" would spur Law into action.

Sharing a look, a plan was silently and swiftly formed as their captain started tracing the D. on the other captain's poster.

Step 1: a distraction. Make it as outrageous as possible so there was no way Law could ignore it. Accusing their captain of having a crush on the younger, quite possibly insane, man worked wonders.

Step 2: the dissuasion. Remind Law that he wasn't alone, that while his blood family were dead, he had another family now – one that would stick with him through thick or thin. Simply stating the facts would make their intentions too obvious; subtlety was required. Casually calling him their brother several times in their forced conversation would have a psychological effect on their captain. As planned, Law immediately zeroed in on the claims, desperately trying to cling to the self-imposed boundary between captain and crew in his protests.

With steps 1 and 2 successfully implemented, the final step was almost insultingly easy. Step 3: remove the article and posters. If he couldn't simply return to his obsessing after Penguin and Shachi's distraction and subtle hints, he would be forced to dwell on the hints a while longer.

The well-constructed, if short-notice, plan went perfectly. Law was sufficiently embarrassed, distracted, and forced to stop and think about what he was doing. No-one, maybe not even Law himself, cottoned on to the intention between the seemingly-random teasing, but when dealing with Law's stubbornness, that was best.

In the safety of their own room, they read the article properly for themselves. It was, of course, full of Marine propaganda and lies, but there were enough things not adding up in the official recount for a different, less Marine-friendly, story to be gleaned.

"Another bloody D.," Penguin complained, glaring at the photograph of a young man with a vibrant smile that completely contrasted with the 300 million bounty loudly proclaimed below. "We're going to need to keep Law away from him." Shachi had no arguments.

(They despaired, later when they ended up not just seeing, but briefly fighting alongside, the young D., which then changed into the most insane rescue mission ever. The Will of D. was not so easily thwarted).

Chapter End Notes
With a similar childhood tragedy to Robin, Luffy declaring war on the World Government probably had an effect on Law, too. I explored it more in one of my other fics, *Costras del Corazon*, but Doflamingo is, of course, not the only one to ruin Law's life.

Also just showing what Penguin and Shachi were thinking in their rather out of the blue teasing last chapter :D
Promise

Chapter Notes

Characters: Penguin, Shachi, Bepo
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Family, Nakamaship, Protective!Penguin

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Something wasn't right. Penguin couldn't put his finger on it, but there was just something niggling in the back of his mind – a foreboding sense that something was about to go wrong. It was not a comfortable sensation when they were hidden hundreds of feet beneath the waves, theoretically as safe as it was possible to be at sea. There were no Sea Kings in the area, according to the map Law had found for Bepo that had included details of areas with known activity levels, and there was nothing else that should pose a threat so deep underwater.

Unable to sleep, Penguin threw off his covers and slinked out of his bed, taking care not to bump his head on the bottom of Shachi's bunk in the process. Lying awake in his bed fretting would do him no good, so he carefully made his way to the door for a walk around the ship. Bepo should be in the control room, his turn for night watch, and Penguin headed to join him. He could do with the mink's calming presence (and maybe a hug, but he wasn't going to admit it).

"You should be asleep," Bepo yawned as he entered, sitting himself down next to the mink perhaps slightly closer than was strictly necessary. Bepo looked at him curiously.

"Nightmares?" the mink guessed, and Penguin shook head. "Oh…"

"Nah, just a bit restless," he assured him. "Didn't want to wake Shachi." The ginger needed his rest; Penguin hadn't missed the mild exhaustion of the younger teen, who'd been spending a lot of time alone in the training room.

Bepo made a noise of comprehension and returned his attention to the monitors, his arm still around Penguin. The warmth of the mink did what his blankets could not and set his mind at ease, and it was only minutes later that he slipped into sleep.

When he woke up, now apparently curled up in Bepo's lap completely and no recollection of being moved, the sense of foreboding was still there. Extracting himself from the mink's hold was a challenge, Bepo apparently convinced he was suffering from nightmares after all and therefore was in need of constant mink-hugs, but eventually he escaped, and with a ruffle of Bepo's fur headed back to his room. It was still early, but sleep was once again eluding him so he decided he might as well get dressed for the day.

Shachi was descending from his bunk when he entered, and Penguin frowned. It was early for Shachi to be making any movements, especially considering how exhausted he'd been the day before. Most concerning was the way he was clinging to each rung of the ladder like a lifeline, his limbs trembling. Shachi always shimmied up and down the ladder at the speed of light – Penguin had
never seen him climb normally, let alone so slowly.

"You okay?" he asked, stepping forwards. There was no verbal answer. Instead, Shachi's clenched fists lost their grip on the ladder and he fell backwards. Penguin lunged the last strides, letting out an oof as Shachi crashed into him and sent them both to the floor. "Shachi?"

There was no answer from the ginger, and Penguin extracted himself from the awkward position the pair of them had fallen in before turning his attention to the other teen. His eyes were closed and his cheeks heavily flushed as his chest rose and fell rapidly.

"Shachi?" he repeated, shaking him lightly. Still no response, and he pressed the back of his hand to the ginger's forehead. Too hot. With a start, Penguin realised that his apparent exhaustion the previous night was simply a more contained version of the fever currently wracking his body. He hadn't been tired from training, but illness. Penguin let out a sigh, pulling Shachi into a tight hug while he waited for him to open his eyes again. He didn't, and Penguin buried his face in ginger hair.

"Why didn't you say something?" he asked the limp form despairingly. "You idiot. How am I supposed to protect you if you don't tell me when something's wrong? Don't make me break my promise."

"Penguin-chan." Seven year old Penguin looked up at his mother's best friend, who had crouched down to be at the same level as him. "Can you do something for me?"

"Anything, nee-chan!" he agreed with a huge smile, pushing his too-big hat back so he could see her past the peak. She smiled back at him, glancing back at where her son was laughing from his perch on his father's shoulders.

"Could you look after Shachi for me?" she asked. Penguin followed her gaze to the ginger boy's ankle, which was securely wrapped after he'd hurt it earlier in the day. Twisted, their parents had said. Penguin wasn't certain what that meant, except that Shachi wasn't allowed to walk for a while and they couldn't play many of their games until he was better. He agreed eagerly, happy to be of any help, and she'd smiled at him. "Thank you, Penguin-chan." Her embrace had been warm and full of love.

A year later, everything went wrong and Nee-chan wasn't there anymore. Nor were Kaa-chan, Tou-chan or Nii-chan. Noona was still there, but Noona cried a lot. Penguin and Shachi's lives had crumbled around them, and Penguin clutched at the younger boy while the villagers talked about who was going to look after them.

Penguin remembered Nee-chan's request. Look after Shachi for me. He nodded firmly to the empty air in front of him. He would look after Shachi for Nee-chan. More, he would protect him, like Nee-chan had done.

Shachi didn't wake at Penguin's words, so he gathered him into his arms as best as he could, half carrying half dragging him to Law's room because their resident captain-doctor would be able to help where Penguin couldn't. Protecting Shachi from himself was always the greatest challenge, but Penguin had a promise to keep, and would do whatever it took.
promise to protect him, so here we are!
Warmth

Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Law, Shachi, Penguin, Bepo  
**Rating:** Teen  
**Warnings:** None  
**Tags:** Nakamaship

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was cold.

Law wasn't a stranger to the cold, but there was cold and there was *cold*. Winters in Flevance had never reached such low temperatures, and even in the years since then, he had rarely ventured north for any long period of time, and certainly not in winter.

Bepo appeared to be coping, his fur thick enough to keep the unwelcome chill away, but he was a mink. Law wasn't at all surprised that his fur could insulate him. More irritating was Penguin and Shachi. Logically, it made sense. He'd met them on Swallow Island, which had been covered in snow. Of course they were more used to it than him, and it wasn't like they too weren't wrapped up in several layers of clothes.

But they didn't look cold. Even bundled in so many layers Law felt unable to move, the chill of the air still sank through to his bones, his icy breath a constant reminder. Penguin and Shachi didn't seem cold at all as they watched their breath fog up in front of them with laughter, pretending to smoke invisible cigarettes.

Law's heart panged at the sight.

"Stop messing around," he snapped, his teeth chattering. The pair looked at him, mouths open as if they were about to complain at his 'no fun allowed' (it wouldn't be the first time), before they shut them with an audible *clack* and approached him.

"You're cold," Shachi said, unnecessarily. Law glowered at him then yelped as Penguin picked him up.

"Put me down!" he ordered, kicking at the taller teen as he carried him inside. Penguin gritted his teeth and continued walking until they reached the kitchen. Shachi was somehow already there, banging around with a saucepan and some strange brown powder that looked far too fine to be coffee. Penguin put him down at a table near the hob, sliding into the seat next to him and putting an arm around his shoulder. Bepo settled down the other side, snuggling up to Law.

Law appreciated the warmth, belatedly realising that his fingers inside their gloves had been starting to shake.

A mug was placed heavily in front of him, the contents sloshing around with the movement. It looked completely unappetising, the liquid a brown too pale to be anything more than weak coffee, and Law eyed it disdainfully.
"What?" Shachi demanded, hands on his hips (Law was reminded of an angry mother and wasn't sure if he wanted to laugh or cry). "Drink up." Well, the liquid was steaming, so it had to be hot. At the very least, it should warm him up. Law wrapped his gloved hands around the mug, appreciating the heat soaking through the fabric.

"Before it gets cold," Penguin added, wrapping his own hands around the mug Shachi had placed in front of him – Law noticed he'd taken his gloves off and felt a faint flash of jealousy that his hands weren't visible ice blocks – before taking a large gulp of the liquid.

"What is this?" Law asked, unwilling to touch anything he didn't recognise. "Some Swallow Island recipe?"

Penguin and Shachi looked downright scandalised.

"You've never had hot chocolate before?" the ginger exclaimed. "How?"

Hot chocolate? Chocolate was a solid foodstuff, not a drink. Sometimes it could be drunk, if it was chocolate ice cream and melted before they finished it, but hot?

"Nothing better on a cold day," Penguin informed him, taking another large sip of his drink.

"It's good!" Law turned his head to see Bepo nursing his own mug, the fur around his mouth dyed brown from the liquid.

Feeling outnumbered, and recalling the other humans' cold homeland, Law caved, lifting the mug to his lips.

It was sweet. There was a subtle tang of something more bitter in the drink, but the main thing Law could taste was the unmistakable influence of sugar. He hadn't had anything so sweet since the festivals back in Flevance and was surprised to find his taste buds still appreciated it.

There was only so much he could let himself reminisce on those days, so he took a large gulp of the drink, scalding the tender insides of his mouth to pull himself back into the present. It was just in time to notice the way the sudden warmth spread through his body, not following the route of the liquid down his oesophagus but rather making its own path across his nerves as he shuddered involuntarily.

"Good?" Shachi asked, drinking from his own mug. Law hummed noncommittedly but took another gulp. Then another, and another, until his mug was empty. Feeling warmer, and less like a human icicle, he wordlessly pushed the empty mug towards Shachi expectantly.

The older boy laughed.

"I'll take that as a yes," he said, a large grin on his face. "But seconds wait until after I've finished my firsts."

Chapter End Notes

Hot chocolate is the best thing ever. I don't know if Flevance would or wouldn't have had it, so I went for not to give it another cultural difference compared to Swallow Island. As for Law liking it even though it's sweet, we see him eating ice cream as a kid, so at least as a kid he was happy to eat sweet things.
Landing on an apparently uninhabited island always posed its own challenges. They were usually in need of fresh supplies, so chief among them was finding something safe to eat (and preferably something they could keep for a while in the freezer). Most of the crew was put on foraging and hunting duty once the island was confirmed to be safe.

Confirming it to be safe required a scouting party of two or three people (one was too dangerous and more than three could draw unwanted attention). They wouldn't venture far from where the Tang was moored, just in case something came up that they couldn't handle, just far enough to make sure there was enough of a safe area to forage in.

This time, on a humid spring island, Penguin and Shachi had volunteered to be the initial scouts, cautiously setting out with a baby den den mushi in Penguin's pocket, a section of Law's vivre card in Shachi's, and knives concealed under both their tops. In the humidity, the boiler suits had been discarded for something lighter.

The island may as well have been a tropical jungle, if slightly cool, covered in large lush vegetation. Trees reached for the sky, large leaves and intertwining branches creating a thick canopy above their heads. They made note of the plentiful berries around, not recognising many but confident that when it came to gathering, their nakama would be able to collectively discern whether they were edible.

Bountiful crop aside, the island felt somewhat eerie. There was no birdsong. Nor were there calls of other animals, leaving the only noise to be the whisper of wind in the trees. Perhaps there was nothing edible on the island, but even if it wasn't fit for human consumption there was usually some animal or other that had evolved to eat anything. The absence of anything at all was unnerving.

On the edge of their agreed area was the mouth of a cave, set into a small hill. Caves could contain anything. With a shared nod, the pair edged forwards, crossing the threshold slowly and casting around with all of their senses for anything at all.

"Hey-" Shachi started, tensing, only to be drowned out by a loud rumble. It came from above and behind them, and they whirled around in time to see the first rocks fall.

They swore and tried to duck out through the entrance before they were blocked in, but the rockfall was too fast and violent, large boulders slamming down to the ground as they stacked together.

Shachi heard Penguin give out a yelp and reached out for him in the disappearing light, catching hold of his arm as the older man fell to the cave floor.

"Penguin!" he shouted, swearing as a trickle of large stones cascaded down the inside of the cave
mouth towards them. Penguin didn't get up, so he dragged him backwards by the arm he'd caught, away from the rockfall. "Hey, Penguin!"

"Nnrgh," the other pirate groaned as the last of the stones fell, well and truly blocking them in. With minimal light to see with – weak rays of daylight tried to force their way past the rocks but failed to do more than keep the cave from being total pitch darkness – Shachi yanked his shades off, taking advantage of his sensitivity to light and subsequent semi-night vision.

It didn't do much, and he knew the moment any real light filtered into the cave he was going to regret it, but for the time being it permitted him to see the outline of his nakama, who was still lying on the floor of the cave where he'd dragged him. Kneeling besides him, he reached for his head to find a sticky lump – he must have lost his hat in the rockfall – and cursed. A rock must have caught him as it fell, and while Shachi was no Law, he knew enough to know instantly that Penguin had concussion, and probably quite a bad one.

Releasing even more profanities, he rummaged through Penguin's pockets for their baby den den mushi, finding the small creature and waking it with some urgent pokes. It gave him a reproachful look even as it dialled the Polar Tang, Shachi fidgeting on the spot.

Gatcha.

"Law!" he said hurriedly, before whoever was on the other end had a chance to say a greeting.

"What's wrong?" his captain asked, and he saw the baby den den morph itself to resemble his captain.

"We got caught in a rockfall," he said, forcing himself not to garble the words in his rush to get them out. "There was a cave, and now we're trapped inside."

"Are you hurt?" Law demanded and Shachi shook his head.

"I'm unhurt," he began, "but I think Penguin got hit by a rock. His head's bleeding and he's not responding to much."

"I'm on my way," Law said, "keep-"

Shachi's attention was snatched away from the den den mushi by a slithering sound, immediately accompanied by a clacking of something hard on rock. He turned around slowly and paled.

"Uh, Law?" he said, cutting off whatever his captain had been saying. "Could you hurry? Only… I don't think the cave's owner is too happy with us shutting its front door."

Two glowing cyan eyes glowered at him out of the darkness, easily at a level above his head. At least Bepo's height, Shachi catalogued absently. There was a strange sound, like a mixture between a snarl and a hiss, and he moved to put himself between Penguin and the creature.

He'd never seen anything like it before. Rows and rows of teeth revealed themselves in a maw most closely resembling a snake's. A matching tail slithered along the ground behind it. The rest of the creature more closely resembled what Shachi could only consider to be a bald lion, all muscle and claws bunched up, ready to pounce.

All he had was his knife, which he quickly palmed.

"-old on," he heard the baby den den garbling in his ear, the creature having crawled up to his shoulder at some point. "Shachi, we're on our way now." The growl-hiss sounded again, and Shachi
tensed, watching it preparing to pounce with the certainty that he could not stop anything with that much mass single-handedly, and if he dodged he'd be leaving the vulnerable Penguin directly in the thing's warpath.

"Hurry," he repeated, voice somehow staying steady even though there was a quake to his knees he was attempting to deny the existence of. "There's no way I'm gonna beat this thing alone."

There was a hitch of breath from the den den mushi on his shoulder, and he faintly heard Law barking orders to the rest of the crew frantically. He couldn't listen, however, as the creature chose that moment to lunge. Bracing himself and pulling all the pathetic armament haki he could, he slashed out with the knife, trying to use the thing's momentum against it.

The frantic action worked, deflecting the charge so that it missed both him and Penguin, but as the creature pulled itself back together and regarded him with those cold cyan eyes again, Shachi's heart sank in his chest.

Those were intelligent, calculating eyes. It wouldn't be falling for the same trick twice. That made it smarter than most marines, Shachi noted idly but with a no small amount of trepidation. He didn't need a smart opponent.

The stalemate lasted maybe five seconds, before the eyes left Shachi to focus on something on the ground near his feet. Shachi followed its gaze instinctively to see Penguin's unmoving form.

The beast didn't need to be smart to know which was the easier prey. Its mouth opened in what Shachi could only call a victorious grin before it lunged.

"Oh no you don't," Shachi growled, meeting the beast head on with his knife, heading straight for one of the glowing eyes. He felt the hit, the unmistakable sensation of the blade sinking into something squishy, and the creature screamed, whipping its head side to side frantically.

There was a sharp pain in Shachi's left arm as a stray fang snagged it, and he bit back a yelp. The action itself was nothing outside of his pain tolerance, years of piracy raising it by necessity, but the fire that erupted from the injury was instantaneous and agonising.

He fell to the ground heavily, the impact forcing a pained grunt from him, losing his grip on his knife as he did so. The blade was still embedded in one eye, now red rather than cyan, and the other regarded him with an angered slit. Moving his left arm did nothing other than intensify the burn, and Shachi choked back the noise of pain.

"Shachi?" Law's breathless voice called from the baby den den mushi somehow still on his shoulder, and he realised dimly that at some point the call had been transferred to another baby den den mushi for Law to carry as he ran.

"I think I made it mad," he replied through gritted teeth, glaring back at the sole cyan eye. "And it doesn't play fair. Seems like its fangs are venomous."

He heard Law curse, but it was at that moment the creature decided to launch another offensive. Weaponless but all too aware of Penguin's limp form behind him, Shachi forced what armament haki he could into his arms, holding them up defensively.

He'd thought the thing would muscle him aside and head for Penguin – certainly, it had the strength for that – but its head twisted sideways at the last second, teeth clamping around Shachi's right arm unforgivingly. He couldn't bite back the scream, and faintly heard Law desperately calling his name.

"-chi! I can see the cave now, hol-"
The line went dead as Shachi felt the tail of the creature crash down on his shoulder. Looking up at the cyan eye, he saw a look of smug satisfaction and a realisation chilled him to the bones.

It was playing with him. It could have gone for Penguin whenever it wanted and there was really nothing Shachi could have done about it, but it hadn't. Instead it had targeted Shachi himself, even going so far as to use Penguin as bait, and now it had cut off his only communication. The teeth retracted from his arm and he stumbled backwards, but not fast enough as it snapped again, this time its fangs sinking into his abdomen. Shachi screamed, collapsing backwards and narrowly missing Penguin as he crashed to the ground, the creature not relinquishing its bite and instead letting Shachi's momentum pull it forwards until it was pinning him with one huge claw.

A translucent blue passed over them, and then Penguin was gone. In his place stood Law, Kikoku unsheathed and free hand poised to manipulate everything inside his Room.

Whether the creature saw a new toy or a threat, Shachi didn't know, but he was dragged to his feet by the bite still encompassing most of his abdomen and shaken around like a chew toy.

Law wasted no time, an Amputate and Takt combination finding Shachi laid on the cave floor behind his captain. Any efforts to find his feet were a lost cause as his limbs refused to respond, so he could do nothing other than watch Law dice the creature and scatter the parts thoroughly before kneeling down next to him.

"Sorry I took so long," he apologised, and Shachi gave him a toothy grin.

"You came in the end," he pointed out, voice slightly hoarse. Law shook his head fondly before there was a hand gripping his and the world shifted.

They materialised just outside the cave. Shachi winced at the sudden light – he knew he'd regret taking his shades off – and shut his eyes hurriedly, but he could sense several of his nakama surrounding him.

"Back to the Tang," Law ordered, and Shachi felt someone pick him up. His haki said it was Clione.

"Bepo already took Penguin back," Uni reported, probably to Law although Shachi appreciated the information.

"Good," Law said, sounding pleased. "No-one is going out in less than a group of five," he added. "We don't know how many of those things are lurking."

Even if he wasn't destined for a spell in the infirmary, what felt like his entire musculature screaming at him non-stop, Shachi would not have been volunteering to leave the security of the Tang again on that island. He didn't scare easily, but there was just something about the uncanny intelligence of that creature that rubbed him the wrong way.

Despite knowing that Law had incapacitated the creature, Shachi couldn't even begin to relax until he was back in the safety of the Polar Tang, lying on the bed next to Penguin's in the infirmary and listening to Bepo trying to persuade the other not to fall asleep.

Chapter End Notes

I got a request for an injured Penguin and Shachi trapped in a cave... I may have
decided that wasn't mean enough and threw in some random venomous snake-lion hybrid monster thing just to spice things up a bit.
Bepo was weak-willed. To the Heart Pirates, that was simply how things were. Excepting anything to do with navigation, because the mink was the undisputed authority when it came to that, even over their captain, Bepo's suggestions were often quickly overruled. This was particularly true when it came to Penguin and Shachi – while Bepo declared authority over the many newer nakama, he still submitted quietly to the pair on most things. Law, too, of course, but their captain rarely chose to execute any sort of authority over him.

"Sorry," was a common word out of the mink's mouth, often immediately countered by a complaint from Penguin or Shachi (or, commonly, both of them in unison) about his inability to stand up for himself. It was a point of fond amusement with the crew that they did that even when it was them he had caved to.

When it was the crew, it was okay. Whatever they said, Bepo's opinions were highly valued and respected, even outside of his navigation specialism, and while they might poke fun at him for his frequent apologies, it was entirely in jest and Bepo showed no signs of taking it to heart.

Outside of the crew, however, was an entirely different story. Aside from two notable exceptions, no-one had ever got away with sending Bepo into his apologetic state. Penguin and Shachi, despite appearing to be the worst culprits within the crew, forgave no-one for upsetting Bepo. The rest of the crew would assist, of course, but it was those two that would make sure they dealt the final blow.

No-one upset their navigator and got away with it. There were only two exceptions to the rule, times where they'd been unable to teach the offender a lesson.

First had been at Sabaody. Marines picking on Bepo for being a 'talking bear' was hardly unusual (you'd have thought that by now the message would have got through that picking on the mink was a first-class ticket to pain but apparently not). That upset Bepo not because he was being ridiculed, but because not one Marine ever took the time to identify him as a Mink.

Usually, the offending Marine learnt their lesson quickly and harshly, courtesy of Penguin and Shachi, but at Sabaody they had had no choice but to let it slide. With an Admiral bearing down at them and none of them, not even Law, capable of going toe to toe with one even if Eustass and Mugiwara hung around to fight too, they had to grit their teeth and flee, listening to Bepo cheer himself up by declaring his superiority over an accepting Jean Bart.

The second occasion came hot on the heels of the first, a week later on their frantic escape from Marineford with Mugiwara's semi-dead body and Jinbei's not much better form in the security of the Polar Tang's infirmary. Boa Hancock's uninvited presence on their deck when they finally resurfaced
was already a cause for concern, but then she went and called Bepo a beast, sending him into one of his depressed episodes. With the woman on their own ship, and showing absolutely no intention of leaving, a conflict would have been suicide.

And of course, there was the fact that she was the Pirate Empress and while the whole 'Pirate' title still didn't impress them all that much, the stories about her beauty had not been exaggerated and they found themselves switching between apprehension of her presence and something a little too close to fanboying for Law's liking, judging by the swat he gave the pair of them once they were out of sight of the Empress.

Regardless, those two exceptions aside, the Heart Pirates, Penguin and Shachi in particular, never let anyone escape after insulting and upsetting Bepo. It was one thing as nakama, friendly banter that Bepo brushed off in a matter of seconds (sometimes accompanied by his famous bear-hugs).

It was a completely different matter when it wasn't nakama.

Chapter End Notes

The only people allowed to tease Bepo are the Heart Pirates.
Law was quite suddenly wrenched from sleep by a god-awful wailing sound originating from the tannoy from the control room. Shaking his head against the ringing in his ears before surrendering and plugging his fingers in his ears angrily, he glared at the innocent speaker for several long moments. He was certain he'd turned it off before he went to bed, to prevent that exact sort of unwelcome awakening, but as it continued to wail at him until he stood up and reluctantly moved a hand away from his ear to turn it back off, he couldn't deny that for some reason the communication channel had been open.

How, exactly, had that happened, and more importantly why did it sound like someone was strangling a cat in the control room? A glance at the clock told him that it was the dead of night, when everyone except the night watch (Ikkaku, tonight), was supposed to be well and truly asleep. Reluctantly, he dragged himself out of bed and made the trek to the room in question, pushing the door open with a disgruntled yawn to see Ikkaku quietly humming to herself as she played a game of patience with herself.

"Everything okay, Captain?" she asked when she noticed his presence, looking up at him in surprise. Law frowned, looking around the room. Nothing was out of place.

"What was that noise?" he asked her, only to get a quizzical look in return.

"A noise?" she asked. "Everything's been silent, Captain." Law looked at her in disbelief. True, he'd have expected more of the crew to react to such a loud sound – the tannoy to his room should have been off, but by the same token that meant that Penguin and Shachi's should have been open. Maybe it had been the tail end of a nightmare he couldn't now recall?

He sighed and slumped into a seat.

"I'll take the rest of the watch," he told her. "Fetch me a coffee, then get some sleep." Ikkaku stiffened, and Law's suspicions reared their head again. "Is something the matter?"

"Are you sure, Captain?" she asked. "It's still five hours until morning." He waved her off with a hand.

"I'm awake now," he said. "Coffee. Then bed." She nodded and left.

Immediately, Law threw up a Room, performing a Scan. Ikkaku's reactions had been almost natural. *Almost.* There was something going on and he was determined to find-
He flicked his fingers and the thing—an old decrepit violin from the looks of it, and Law had no idea where that had come from because no-one in his crew could play one—shifted from its hiding place to his hands. He regarded it with a scowl. So that was the source of the wailing, but why would Ikkaku do that? It was the sort of prank he'd associate with Penguin or Shachi.

Penguin and Shachi were the ones who were supposed to have the open tannoy, yet they were clearly undisturbed by the noise, which made them immediately implicit in the prank—what else could this be except some prank pulled for who-knew-what reason?

Well, Law thought with equal measures irritation and dark amusement. Two could play at that game. He expanded his Room until the pair's bedroom was inside it, and switched them with a pair of stray blankets on the floor. They landed with a jolt, waking instantly and looking up at Law with sleep-glazed eyes. Blinking the sleep from their eyes, Shachi wincing slightly at the gentle lighting as he did so—looks of twin comprehension spread across their faces and they grinned, completely unrepentant.

Law glared at them, then sighed.

"Well," he said. "As you two think it's so funny to get up this early, you get to keep me company on the night watch." They just shrugged amicably, and Law let a smirk slip out. "Amputate."

A handful of swipes from a dagger and his two nakama were scattered in pieces.

"Enjoy," he said with a yawn—where was Ikkaku with his coffee—and with a flick of his fingers distributed the parts across the ship. Their heads, now perched on the control desk, looked miffed.

"How are we supposed to get back together?" Penguin grumbled. Law simply grinned at them.

"Should have thought of that before you decided to wake me in the middle of the night," he pointed out to a chorus of muted groans.

Ikkaku chose that moment to reappear with his requested coffee. To her credit, she didn't so much as blink at the sight of the disembodied heads on the desk.

"Bed," Law ordered as he took the hot mug and sipped at the drink. She nodded and headed for the door, letting out a yawn. "And Ikkaku?" She paused, looking over her shoulder. "Make sure no-one helps these two, or they'll be joining them."

Penguin and Shachi complained again, loudly, but Ikkaku nodded in understanding before leaving with a wave.

Apparently, being just a head was incredibly boring, according to Penguin and Shachi's endless chatter throughout the rest of the night. They'd attempted to sleep, but it transpired that sleeping when you were a human jigsaw puzzle was neither easy nor comfortable, or so the pair claimed. Law neither knew nor had any intentions of experiencing the phenomenon for himself.

When the morning finally came, Shachi's shades summoned and placed because no matter what, Law wouldn't risk his eyes worsening, he consented to summon and reattach their torsos and a single leg so they could at least begin the task of finding and reattaching the rest of their bodies.

Law watched them with a smile, their nakama banding together to help despite his words, but he let it slide in favour of curling up in a chair—Bepo's favourite chair because it was the only one his entire bulk could fit into—and closing his eyes. He was asleep in seconds.
I had another chapter written, then I remembered it's April Fools and I had a plotline for something more prankish, so you got this instead!
The rumours were a disappointment, Law decided as he looked at the sight in front of him. A country devil fruit users couldn't reach, it had been advertised as, and he'd thought that it might be an interesting place to see. Maybe some of its fortifications could be added to the Tang somehow to give them an extra defence against Doflamingo, because there was no such thing as too many when that monster was involved, he'd thought.

It was, he thought in disdain, completely hyped up. The country – more like a small town or large village – had no huge defences, no solid kairoseki walls or some other, unknown, way to keep a devil fruit user out. All it had was a moat. That might keep some out – it was, admittedly, too far to jump – but Law knew of several devil fruit users that would merely find it a minor inconvenience, himself included.

Forming a Room large enough to span the moat, and then teleporting himself and Shachi – who had accompanied him in case it truly had been devil fruit user proof – would be exhausting, that was true, but it was possible. He flexed his hand, readying himself to use his powers and prove how ridiculous the claim had been, when Shachi grabbed hold of his arm and stopped him.

"Wait a minute," the ginger said, and Law stilled, because maybe there was something he'd missed after all. Shachi walked to the water's edge and studied it intently, before grinning and jumping straight in. "I thought so!" he crowed triumphantly.

The water only came up to his thighs, and as he waded around, heading forwards several paces through the water, it didn't get any deeper.

"So that's how the inhabitants get in," Law observed, unimpressed and not sure why Shachi was so pleased. "That doesn't help."

"What, because you're going to be draining all your stamina teleporting across?" Shachi demanded, arms crossed in front of his chest firmly and scowling. "I think not."

"And you have another idea?" Law asked sarcastically, before taking a cautionary step back as a grin spread over Shachi's face, suddenly regretting the question.

"Yes," the ginger said. "Yes, I do." He pulled himself back out of the moat, his trousers sopping wet, and grabbed hold of Law. "Get on my back."

"You can't be serious!" Law protested. "I'm taller than you!" He eyed the water dubiously, not keen on the idea at all.
"I won't drop you," Shachi grumbled. "Stop complaining and get on or I'll just throw you over my shoulder."

The problem was that the ginger would do exactly that, and the hold he had on Law was perfect for doing it. Law still didn't like the idea one bit, and flexed his hand again, determined to Room away before Shachi carried through with his threat.

Shachi's grip tightened and Law's attention was brought back to him. His head was bowed slightly, his hat now casting his face in shadow and rendering it completely unreadable. Worse, his hand was shaking almost imperceptively, and Law felt a sudden chill.

He was acting like he didn't trust Shachi. While it was true he was taller than the ginger, Shachi had picked him up on occasion and had never dropped him. Why was this so different? Was the water so intimidating to his subconsciousness that it overrode his trust in his nakama?

With a sigh he dropped his hand and manoeuvred himself around Shachi's grip to stand behind the other, arms draped over his shoulders.

"If you drop me you'll be playing hide and seek with your limbs once we get back," he threatened. Shachi laughed, suddenly bright and open again.

"Whatever you say, Captain," he grinned, shifting his weight before extending his arms behind him. "Hup." Law jumped, wrapping his long legs around Shachi's waist and feeling the ginger's hands catch his weight securely. He clung on as Shachi shifted, bouncing him up and down slightly to balance him properly. "Ready?"

"No," Law said bluntly, resting his head against Shachi's hat – no he was not burying his face to try and pretend they weren't about to jump into a moat – and Shachi laughed again before he jumped.

Law heard the water splash around below him and tensed, clutching tighter as some stray droplets reached his feet and ankles. There was a harsh rasping sound.

"Breathe!" Shachi gasped and Law released his grip suddenly, realising he'd been throttling him. "Thanks." Law repositioned his arms around Shachi's shoulders, hands locking together at the ginger's sternum, rather than his throat. "I got you, it's okay." There was a pregnant pause as Shachi waded further through the moat, the liquid sloshing around his legs. "Honestly you could stand to gain a little more weight. I'm sure you're too light."

Having no reply to that, Law let out a noncommittal grunt before slowly raising his head to look at their surroundings. Shachi moved fast, even through water, and they were already more than half way across. He'd felt no weakening in his nakama's grip, and gradually began to relax as the residual paranoia faded away.

When they got closer there was someone on the shoreline, watching them. Law's muscles tensed again, one hand flexing in anticipation of a fight. If these people were so against devil fruit users getting onto their island, what would they try to do to Shachi, who was blatantly helping one through their defences? From the flexing of the muscles in his back, Shachi was also preparing himself for a confrontation, even as he reached the edge of the moat and turned around so Law could slide off his back and onto solid ground.

As Shachi clambered out, Law turned to face their audience, hand extended and ready to form a Room in the blink of an eye.

The man was smiling.
"Welcome!" he said cheerfully. "Come on in!"

Law eyed him dubiously. Surely the man wasn't so dense that he hadn't realised Law was a devil fruit user. In what other situation would a shorter man be carrying a perfectly healthy, taller, man through their moat?

Shachi came up next to him, crossing his arms and deciding to clear the air, judging by the way he jerked a thumb towards Law's chest.

"The rumours say you guys don't like devil fruit users," he said bluntly. "What's with the friendly welcome?" The man laughed.

"Rumours are rumours," he replied, still with a smile on his face. "What we hate is the pride of a devil fruit user. You'd be surprised how many would never let anyone carry them through water." Thinking of the sound of the water immediately below him, with nothing except Shachi's arms between him and it, Law wasn't surprised at all. "Your companion there is the first one in a long time that didn't try to cross on his own powers."

"What would you have done if I did?" Law wanted to know. Rumours usually had their basis in fact, and if this settlement was truly defensible against devil fruit users then. The man laughed again and kept walking, through the large gates that opened at their approach. As he passed through them, Law felt ill and stumbled, Shachi catching his elbow to support him.

"Do you still want to come in?" the man asked, gesturing at their surroundings. "This is a kairoseki mine. Your powers won't work in here."

Law narrowed his eyes. His question had been answered – how did the settlement keep devil fruit users out – and it was nothing he could utilise to increase his defences against Doflamingo. In that sense, his mission was complete and it was time to leave. However, he couldn't shake the feeling that he was being tested in some way, and his pride rebelled at getting so far only to be bested by a man with a permanent smile.

"It would be a shame not to go sightseeing while we're here," he said out loud, matching the man's smile with a smirk of his own. Shachi's grip on his elbow tightened, although whether it was in emotional support or in preparation to drag him out, he wasn't sure. "Are you going to arrange a guide or should we find our own way around?" The man laughed again, and behind his smirk Law wanted nothing more than to take the man apart and watch him lose the aggravating know-it-all sense of superiority he was oozing, but regrettably that wasn't possible.

"I'll give you a tour!" the man promised them, and turned to lead them around the place.

Law followed, keeping the nausea of the kairoseki away from his expression to keep up appearances. Pride of a devil fruit user indeed. Shachi walked by his side, one hand still gripping his elbow in silent support, and Law's smirk briefly slipped into a genuine smile.

What was a kairoseki mine when he had his nakama with him.

Chapter End Notes

I saw a picture of Shachi carrying Law through a lake and couldn't resist. As for a kairoseki mine, well, according to my recollections, One Piece wikia and google, Oda
hasn't yet revealed *where* kairoseki comes from so... random areas of high concentration of the stuff? Seems legit, right?
When the den den mushi rang, Law's gut twisted. It could have been nothing – an SOS, a Marine trap (those were often one and the same), or maybe Penguin and Shachi had found something they deemed 'fun and interesting' on their scouting. It could have been, it probably was, but he hadn't been expecting a call, and the unexpected rarely went his way.

When he heard his name, the den den mushi materialising Shachi's hat and shades and looking so desperate, even before Clione could say a greeting, he knew that once again it wasn't going to go his way.

A rockfall, or a cave-in? Shachi wasn't entirely clear but Law gathered after a moment that it was both, a cascade of rocks trapping them inside, and his first thought was the exasperated why did you two both go inside without checking its stability. He loved and respected the pair of them, but just sometimes they did make the most bizarre calls, or just plain forgot to think.

When he heard that Penguin had concussion (Shachi didn't say so exactly, but the description was pretty clear and Law knew he'd already diagnosed it himself), Law shifted around the mental list of nakama he was going to bring to dig them out. Shachi was competent, but the faster he could get treatment to the older man the less chance of permanent damage. Unable to help himself, he rattled off a list of instructions, despite knowing Shachi knew it all already, and had probably already done most of them before making the call. As he spoke he gestured to the nakama crowded around, indicating who would come with him and who would double-check the infirmary was ready for Penguin.

He was in the middle of signing to Clione that he should link up another baby den den mushi to the call so he could stay on the line as he left when Shachi dropped the bomb.

The cave was inhabited.

Of course it was, Law groused mentally as he scooped up the new baby den den mushi and claimed Shachi's vivre card from Bepo before hurrying out of the room, his selected 'rescue party' hot on his heels. When something went wrong, everything went wrong. He couldn't just have one problem at a time, no, life was never that kind. Fear bloomed when Shachi repeated the call for him to hurry, a different tone of desperation sneaking into his voice.

"There's no way I'm gonna beat this thing alone."

While not at Law's own level, Shachi was hardly weak. Questions flitted though his head as he picked up the pace into as much of a sprint as he dared over unfamiliar terrain. If Shachi had his sword, would he still say that? If Penguin was capable of moving, would the pair of them be able to
defeat whatever the inhabitant was? Was Shachi only saying that because he had to defend Penguin too?

None of those questions were helpful, Law scolded himself, listening intently to the den den mushi in his hand for any signs of how Shachi was faring, and following the vivre card closely. It hadn't lit up yet, Shachi wasn't dying. Yet, his traitorous mind whispered and he slammed a mental door on the pessimistic part of his brain. No, he refused to lose them, especially to something that hid away in a cave.

Small gasps escaped the den den mushi, accompanied by the occasional defiant remark, and Law wondered if the creature was intelligent or if Shachi was just talking to himself. Maybe he was just ordering Penguin not to fall asleep and had actually won without a problem... There was no point kidding himself, Law scolded firmly. Shachi would never had said he couldn't win if it had been something that quick to subdue.

Then the word *venomous* filtered through the den den mushi and Law prayed they weren't too far away, that it was a slow-acting venom and he'd get there in time. Hot on its heels were screams, and Law realised that Shachi had been right – that Shachi was losing – and found a burst of speed from somewhere as a cave finally came into view, an impressive cascade of rocks blocking in the entrance.

Originally, Law had planned on digging them out, at loath to use Shambles on the concussed Penguin, but with something so dangerous trapped in there with them they didn't have time for that.

The connection dropped as he was reassuring Shachi that they were there, that he only had to hold on another few seconds and Law would be there. The rational part of his brain mused that it had merely been dropped as Shachi fought. It was overridden at the sight of the vivre card bursting into flames, and Law realised the fight was as good as lost for Shachi.

He had to get them out of there now.

His Room expanded, and at long last he could tell what was happening inside. There was Penguin, lying motionless on the cave floor, not far from the entrance – too close, Law's mind scolded, although with the creature also in there it wasn't like Shachi had much of a choice. And then there was Shachi, pinned to the ground by some chimera-type creature Law had never heard of before.

The time for thinking was over. With a twist of his fingers he was inside the cave, Penguin safely out, and facing the creature that was causing Shachi so much pain.

It was dark inside the cave, the only sources of light a faint glow where daylight persisted though the block and his own Room, but it was enough to see the creature shaking a boneless Shachi around like a limp rag doll and he feared he was too late even as he sliced the creature up to reclaim his nakama and prevent it from trying to follow them when they left.

Shachi was still conscious and capable of talking when he was finally, finally, finished with the growling and hissing creature, which Law could only take as a good sign. Less of a good sign, when he teleported the pair of them (plus Penguin's hat and Shachi's dagger, which his Room had picked up on) out of the cave, was the way Shachi's right half was covered in blood. Both his arms were swollen and while the venom hadn't killed him yet, it would if Law didn't treat him fast enough.

The closest, Clione carefully picked up Shachi and the entire group headed back, following Bepo who had reportedly taken Penguin back already.

Sure enough, the man was lying in a bed in the infirmary when Clione stumbled across the threshold
of the infirmary, Bepo coaxing him to stay awake with what looked like limited success. Law sent half of the rescue team over to help as he hurriedly cut away what remained of Shachi's top to see the damage properly. It wasn't pretty: the skin was cold and clammy to the touch and had turned a mottled pasty colour. Aware of possible permanent nerve damage, Law had Clione check Shachi's reactions to touch as he started to drain the venom from his body.

Shachi's reactions were to loudly curse as various parts of his arm and right side were pinched, which Law considered to be the first positive sign of the day. He didn't let himself relax until not only had he purged as much of the venom as he could (leaving a grouching Shachi to vomit up the rest as and when his body located more to evict), but Penguin had begun to recognise his surroundings again and was capable of coherent words.

Law decided that, while they needed to find more food if there was anything to forage, they would not be spending much time on the island. The moment Bepo declared their log pose set, they would be leaving. He might have dealt with one such creature, but he didn't believe for a moment it was the only one, and he wouldn't expose his crew to them if he had a choice.

Chapter End Notes

What it was like on the other end of the den den mushi in *Trapped* (chapter 127).

Unrelated to the chapter, but I'm starting to find that the tag list is getting rather excessive on this fic, so in the next day or so I'll be doing some tag culling - just a heads' up.
Law had done many difficult things in his life. He'd learnt more about the human body than almost anyone else alive, he'd performed surgeries on patients with zero chance of survival and they'd lived. Emotionally, he'd survived a massacre, survived a sudden life of piracy, survived the White Lead Poisoning. Never would he call any of those things easy.

But there was one choice he'd made that stood out in his mind even against those, competing with staying hidden under dead bodies, or in a treasure chest, knowing that everyone he cared about was dying, fighting the urge to help because he wasn't strong enough, would only get killed too, and they – Cora-san – wouldn't want that.

He chose to leave his crew.

His nakama were everything to him. For thirteen years he'd been inseparable from them, clinging to them like the lifeline they were through his teenage years and into adulthood. They'd always been there for him, from his highest points to his lows – and some of them had been truly low – and he could admit that, somewhere along the way, he'd become dependent on them.

It was for that very reason that, as they neared Punk Hazard, he made the decision to go the rest of the way alone. Zou, a perfect safe haven, was nearby. His crew would be safe there, hidden away from the world – from Doflamingo and his far-reaching strings – and that was what Law needed.

If he lost his crew, he didn't think he'd be able to put himself back together again. After Flevance it had been difficult. After Minion Island it had bordered on impossible. Each time had left him a little more twisted, a little more bent out of shape with cracks showing where the pieces didn't quite fit seamlessly any more. There wouldn't be anything left if he shattered a third time.

They almost won the argument when he told them, refusing to stay quiet even though he was their captain and they weren't supposed to talk back. Law had to keep the harsh images in his head – of that time, not so long ago, when Shachi had faced Kuzan alone to save him; of other times, when his nakama had jumped in to pull him out of danger at the risk of their own lives – to stand his ground. He couldn't let them near Doflamingo, couldn't let Doflamingo learn anything about them. His old captain had already killed one person as precious as life itself, and that was one too many. He would give him no more chances, even though it felt like he'd ripped his heart out of his chest (without the handy pain-numbing of his devil fruit) as he watched the Polar Tang disappear from sight.

He shouldn't be openly watching. He needed to infiltrate, to build the façade that he didn't need his crew, and if anyone caught him staring at the retreating yellow of his ship, with all the precious people in his life still alive (and Cora-san's smile and Lami's favourite colour because he'd once heard
that the dead never truly leave so maybe their souls were still carried in the Tang) safely tucked inside, the mask would be destroyed before he'd even had a chance to craft it.

He wondered if his crew knew what he was doing, that he was watching them leave even though he shouldn't, because oh so slowly the Tang began to ride lower and lower in the waves, slipping further from his reach as she glided underwater until he could no longer see her, barely a ripple in the ocean to show where she'd been.

Law wanted to be with them, safe in their underwater kingdom surrounded by everything with any positive connotations in his life, but he couldn't hide forever; nor could he leave Cora-san's legacy unfulfilled, the sole reason he'd survived long enough to reach Swallow Island and find the first of his nakama, and the driving force behind everything he did. Doflamingo had to be defeated, and finally Law had found a chink in his armour, a weak thread in the web. It was the best opportunity he had to end it all.

Once it was over, he could go back to his nakama. He wouldn't need to live in fear anymore, Bepo wouldn't need to complain about overheating when they'd been submerged for too long because they were hiding. Penguin and Shachi wouldn't have to take over when they thought he wasn't paying attention because his demons had reared their heads again. They'd be free, truly free, and he'd never have to leave them again.

Thirteen years ago, alone on Minion Island, all Law had wanted was vengeance for Cora-san, a trio of tagalongs more in the way than not. Now, alone on Punk Hazard, all Law wanted was for it to be over, for Cora-san's ambition to be realised and Doflamingo utterly destroyed, so he could be with his nakama again.

With one last look at the empty ocean, he turned and headed for the factory. It was time for the beginning of the end.

Chapter End Notes

Hard partings go both ways. Technically this could be considered an accompaniment to *Loyalty* (chapter 25). It may appear to contradict *Yearn* (chapter 48) slightly, but that's set later on, after Law's been playing the role on Punk Hazard long enough he had to forcibly repress his 'homesickness' for fear Caesar might notice.
Bepo didn't really remember Zepo anymore. He remembered his name, remembered that he was his brother, but the little things were fading with time. How he looked – that flop of fur over his forehead (had it been brown? Or black? No, maybe white?), his eye colour (black, like Bepo's? Or blue? Brown, perhaps?) – and his mannerisms. He didn't remember his favourite food, or colour. He couldn't recall any habits, bad or otherwise, nor the sound of his voice.

But there were other little things, things that felt familiar. The way Penguin would scratch behind his ears for him when he wasn't feeling so good, or how he'd watch over them all as they lounged around on deck in a brief respite from being trapped underwater – even if he wasn't obvious about it, he always found high points like the next deck up or even just the railing to perch while he supposedly did some task or other. It would have been convincing if Bepo didn't get that prickly feeling at the base of his spine when he was being watched.

Penguin felt like Bepo thought Zepo had. Maybe he was still hunting for his brother and had just found a kindred spirit in the way Penguin was always there for Shachi (and Law and Bepo, after not all that long even if he took longer to openly admit it). It was entirely possible he was… what was that word Law used once? Superimpose. Maybe he was superimposing Zepo on Penguin, projecting imaginary feelings onto the oldest human because he was homesick. He didn't dare ask, too comforted by the familiarity to risk breaking it.

Besides, if Shachi could be Penguin's little brother (and Bepo saw the way Law slowly, slowly, fell into place in their little 'family' too), then surely, Bepo thought, it wouldn't be too much bother if he joined as well. Penguin never rejected him, anyway, letting him curl up on his lap as a cub, then later mimicking the gesture when Bepo out-grew him.

No-one ever said it out loud, but Penguin was always there, the solid support in the background whenever they needed it. In some ways, Bepo thought he was the one that kept them together (although Shachi thought that Law's charisma had much the same effect, while Law had once mumbled that Bepo's mellow nature stopped friction and Penguin seemed to believe that Shachi's ability to find anything funny was the breath of fresh air they all needed).

There was only one time Bepo had feared the Heart Pirates wouldn't survive, and that was the day they lost Penguin.

While generally good at keeping themselves hidden, something did come up from time to time that made Law despair that they were hopeless at subtlety (Bepo wished he didn't panic so easily whenever something didn't go exactly to plan). Most of the time it wasn't even their fault, barring one memorable occasion where Shachi had been caught investigating Doflamingo; they'd just been in the
wrong place at the wrong time and caught up in something unrelated to them.

This time was no different. The fire hadn't had anything to do with them – they hadn't lit it, and they hadn't been the target. It had simply blazed across the market they were perusing, catching half the stalls alight in an instant and throwing up a divide that couldn't be crossed. They'd been on the port side, the Polar Tang at their backs and a really good idea.

Except Penguin hadn't. A short way behind them, caught up in some conversation with an elderly woman who was showing him a little sewing kit, he'd been trapped the other side of the inferno, unable to get through.

"Penguin!" It was Shachi who screamed, but Law's skin matched Bepo's own fur as he froze in place.

"Stop!" Penguin shouted back as Shachi tried to brave the flames, flinching back from the heat for a moment before lunging forwards again. "You idiot, stop!" He was up against the flames himself, stumbling backwards every other second as the flames roared higher, but still being the strong one even as he was driven further and further away.

Bepo was like Law, frozen in place in horror as the flames seemingly licked at Penguin (was he actually close enough to be burnt, or was the fire playing tricks on their mind, distorting his figure and morphing his face into winces?). Behind them there was the background sound of screams, the other visitors to the market in hysteria and pushing each other over in their panic to escape.

"Get back to the Tang!" Penguin was shouting, difficult to hear over the pandemonium. Shachi got a hand into the flames and cried out but kept going until Law snapped out of his shock and pulled him back, out of the fire.

"Penguin!" Shachi screamed again, and Bepo obeyed Law's silent command to help restrain him. His paws were shaking.

"-the Tang!" Bepo heard again, the flames forcing both parties back until they couldn't see Penguin anymore, just a sheet of roaring, untameable fire. ":o!"

Even with the fire in their faces, none of the three wanted to move. Realistically, they were in just as much danger as Penguin was, but Penguin was alone. They didn't know how he was faring – were there more streaks of flame elsewhere?

"We need to move," Law eventually croaked, the smoke starting to fill their lungs. Shachi fell limp and boneless in their grip and Bepo wondered if he'd breathed in too much smoke already.

"Penguin…" he rasped as Law started to pull him back, away from the raging fire and towards the Tang. Bepo helped, despite his paws' inability to remain still and the cloying feeling in his gut that he was failing Penguin.

"He'll find us," he tried to say firmly, but it quivered as much as his paws did. Neither human replied, stumbling along in silence until they collapsed onto the deck of the Tang. There they stayed, the three of them numbly staring at the fire even as the other ships in the port hastily left, fleeing the flames.

Most of the island had been engulfed, faint explosions as the fire found something particularly flammable to swallow. But there was no sign of Penguin. Beside him he heard crying, the first time Bepo had ever known one of his nakama to cry. The other side of Shachi, Law was once again silent and immobile. The fire was getting closer and closer, a ship at the other end of the dock the first boat
casualty as flames licked at it greedily, its crew forced overboard into the water. If they stayed where they were the same fate would soon befall the Tang, but still none of them moved.

They couldn't. Leaving meant abandoning Penguin, and Law might be the captain but without Penguin they weren't a crew anymore, just a trio of scared children.

"What the hell are you lot doing?" a voice demanded from below. Shachi was the first to run to the side of the deck, staring down at the water in silent shock. "I told you to go!" Bepo dragged himself to join Shachi and there was Penguin, treading water in the docks below.

Shachi found his voice again, hanging over the side with his arm outstretched as he called Penguin's name again.

"What's that for?" Penguin shouted up. "Get out of the dock!"

"But-" Shachi protested. He was still crying behind his shades – Bepo could smell the salty tang of tears.

"Bepo!" The mink turned around to see his captain once again on his feet, skin no longer ashen. "Get us moving!" Bepo didn't want to leave Penguin in the water, but the flames were getting too close, starting to lick at the Tang. He ran to the control room, setting the engines going and quickly putting the ship into forward throttle, hoping they hadn't hesitated too long and that the flames wouldn't be too close to the engines.

At no immediate explosion, Bepo scrambled back to the deck, knowing that he should be watching their course but needing to see Penguin back with them again.

He returned in time to see Shachi helping the older teen over the railings, a trailing rope thrown over the side of the Tang. Penguin didn't seem too hurt, patches of redder skin and singed clothes the only signs he'd escaped what had become a raging inferno. Shachi clutched him in a vice-like grip, an oof escaping Penguin before he embraced him in return, a fond look on his face.

Never one to initiate anything, Law was hanging back awkwardly, watching like a hawk and regarding the small burns with a frown on his face. Shachi still attached to him like a limpet, Penguin turned to face him and held out his arms with a reassuring smile. For several moments, Law didn't move, but Penguin's arms never faltered and the youngest human caved, stepping forwards into reach so Penguin could hold him reassuringly.

Bepo couldn't resist any longer and surged forwards himself, trapping Penguin in his arms (subsequently Shachi and Law, too) and nuzzling his cheek affectionately. Then there was that hand, gently scratching behind his ear again, and Bepo couldn't help but smile.

Everything was right again.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked for a time when they had to leave Penguin behind and how they'd react.
Penguin sat by the bed in the infirmary, not taking his eyes off the occupant for a moment. Law had appeared largely unconcerned by the time he'd finished checking Shachi over.

"It's just a fever," he'd said bluntly, pulling the blankets up snugly around the ginger's sleeping form. "Nothing to worry about. He just needs to sleep it off." He'd placed a cool cloth on his head to help with the discomfort. "Call me if he gets worse." Penguin had nodded and Law had left the room, leaving him alone with his sleeping nakama.

"You're an idiot," he informed the ginger. "It would have been way easier if you'd just said you weren't feeling great last night." He wasn't expecting an answer, so he didn't panic when none came. His hand rested on Shachi's hair, carding through the strands gently just so they had something to do.

"Mama…" Shachi whimpered quietly, and Penguin's attention snapped back to him. He was still fast sleep, but his head rolled to the side, dislodging the damp cloth. Penguin scooped it up and returned it to its rightful place, as awkward as that was with Shachi's current position. "Papa…"

Should he call Law? Was sleep-talking a sign that he was getting worse?

"No… Mama…" Shachi protested. "Papa!"

"No, Shachi," Penguin whispered, thoughts of fetching Law fleeing from his mind as comprehension struck. This was too private to get the others involved.

"Say something, Mama!" Shachi insisted. Penguin leant forwards and wrapped his arms around him. "Mama!"

"It's okay," Penguin tried to reassure him, wanting to break through the nightmare. It had been a long time since that one had raised its head and he wanted to shut it away again, to stop it hurting. "Shachi, it's okay." It wasn't okay, not at all, but Penguin couldn't let him stay caught up in it.

"Penguin…" Shachi whined instead, and he held his breath, wondering if he'd woken up. "Help…"

"I'm right here," Penguin told him, brushing the ginger hair back from his face. "It's okay, Shachi. It's just a fever. Law said it'll pass soon."

"Help… Penguin…" Shachi tried again, and Penguin faltered because he didn't need any help. "Mustn't… be a… nuisance…"

He was still firmly asleep, Penguin realised with a sinking heart. Asleep, and now apparently
convinced he was causing Penguin problems.

Penguin might have written it off as mere hallucinations, except he'd recognised Shachi's previous words, recalling them from the day they'd lost their parents. If that was based in truth, then maybe this one was too.

"You're never a nuisance," he told him, hoping he could hear him but knowing better than to expect it. "Never. So just tell me when you need me, okay?" Shachi didn't answer, unsurprisingly, and Penguin sighed. He'd have to tell him again later, when the fever had broken and he was aware of his surroundings.

It was several hours later when that finally happened, an earlier visit from Law firmly telling Penguin to let go and put Shachi back in bed so he could heal faster ("he doesn't need your body heat as well").

"Why am I here?" the ginger asked blearily, squinting. Penguin quickly retrieved his shades for him and gently slid them onto his face so he could see properly. Shachi looked down, biting his lip, and Penguin decided their conversation couldn't wait.

"Why didn't you tell me you didn't feel well?" he asked. Shachi froze.

"It wasn't important," he claimed, but Penguin was already shaking his head, pulling Shachi in for another tight hug now that he was awake and the fever was gone.

"Of course it was, you idiot," he scolded. "Do you know how scared I was when you fell?"

"I fell?" Shachi asked, confused, and Penguin nodded.

"Straight out of your bunk," he told him. "Not what I wanted to see first thing in the morning so from now on you're going to tell me, got it?" Shachi didn't reply, and Penguin sighed. "You're not a nuisance," he said, feeling Shachi stiffen in his hold. "You're important. Remember that, okay?"

Shachi mumbled something unintelligible into his shoulder, but the tone sounded like a resigned agreement, so that was good enough for Penguin.

Chapter End Notes

Two requests in one go here - a follow on from Promise (chapter 125) and Shachi having fever dreams about his family.
Law wasn't the only one with a special hat in the crew. Not that many people outside of the Heart Pirates knew that their captain's hat had a special meaning, as it kept changing slightly over the years, but the crew knew and that was all that mattered.

What the crew also knew was that Penguin's hat wasn't some joke present from Shachi just because it said 'penguin'. In fact, it wasn't a present from Shachi at all, nor was it a joke. Many years ago, long before Law had stumbled onto Swallow Island to find a pair of angry teens and scared mink, a woman had spent her evenings sat in front of a blazing fire with a needle in hand.

By her feet, her son would doze, tired out from a day running through the forests with his best friend but too stubborn to go to bed. She would wait for his dozing to turn to sleep as she worked, setting aside her project when he finally passed out for the night and carrying him to his room where he could sleep in comfort.

Sometimes she had both boys, her best friend's little tyke left in her care for a night so the pair of them could make mischief for even longer into the evening while she sat and sewed. A fiery redhead like his mother, and with seemingly limitless energy, the nights Shachi was around Penguin stayed up far later, forgoing his evening routine of curling up by her feet in favour of hyperactive games until the pair dropped where they were.

Other nights Penguin would be gone, the duo fostered onto either Shachi's family or Noona and her husband for the night. Those were the nights she got the most work done, undistracted by a young child edging too close to the fire in his dozing or a hyperactive tag team running all through the house even though it was well past their bedroom.

Eventually, months after she began her project, the hat was finished. That evening, she finalised it by neatly stitching his name across the front – an anti-theft measure, as Shachi did so like to lay claim to Penguin's things and while her son usually let him have them at least for a time it was harder for the ginger to claim something that already had Penguin's name on it.

When she put it on his head the next morning, eyes still full of sleep where he and Shachi had clearly spent more time playing than sleeping at Noona's last night, it slipped down over his eyes, a little too big for him. That was okay; he had plenty of growing left to do, and she'd made it a true winter's hat, one that would stand the elements for several years to come.

Bullets would do what the elements could not, capable of slicing through the fabric. She'd given her child protection from nature, not pirates. It was no helmet, and at the sight of it on what had become a massacre she threw herself forwards, because she hadn't given him anything that could protect him
from *this*, so she'd protect him the only way she could.

Twenty years later, Penguin hummed as he patched the very same hat up again after another patch had started to wear thin. It was more patched-up repairs than original now – the once-vibrant red pompom had turned to a faded pink before eventually disintegrating away into nothing – but it was still the very same hat his mother had spent so many months pouring all her love into.

Chapter End Notes

Would you believe me if I said I intended on light-hearted fluff when I started writing this chapter? Penguin's hat gets its own special history at last - I've been throwing in the very occasional offhand comment about it since chapter 5 (*Hat*), so it was about time I actually wrote it out fully.

As a general note: 
I'm slowly going through and adding in individual tags per story now that I've culled the main tag bulk. A couple of minor continuity errors are being patched up along the way, too.
"It's the full moon tonight!" Carrot chirped, bursting in even as the Heart Pirates groggily pulled themselves from slumber to face the day – technically night.

"Wha-?" Penguin asked blurrily, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "Oh, Carrot."

"Couldn't it wait five minutes?" Shachi groused, frantically scrambling for his shades and pulling them on as she lit the lamps in the room. "Oi!"

They were both ignored as the rabbit mink made a beeline for Bepo.

"Hey, Bepo!" she greeted, bounding across the room in less leaps than common sense dictated was required. "Wake up, wake up!"

"'M 'wake," the navigator mumbled, rolling over onto his front sluggishly just in time to be garchu'd by a small furry ball of energy. He nuzzled back for a moment before pulling himself to his feet, yawning as they did so. Around him, his nakama were in various stages of wakefulness and dress as they stuffed themselves into whatever clothes were closest to hand.

Shachi pointedly lowered the brightness of the lamps before burrowing himself back under the blankets, grumbling about stupid lights and stupid rabbits.

"Aw," Carrot pouted, before grabbing hold of Bepo's paw and tugging him towards the doorway. "Come on!" Still not fully awake, he stumbled his way across the room behind her, apologising as he tripped over nakama too sleepy to move in time.

"What is it?" he asked as they left the guesthouse, only to almost walk straight into Pedro. The older mink eyed him with thinly veiled amusement for a moment before his face regained its usual serious countenance.

"Garchu, Bepo," he said with a short cheek rub, gesturing for him and Carrot to follow into the woods, away from the Whale Tree.

"Garchu," Bepo replied, returning the brief greeting before obeying the request. "What's going on? Don't you normally go to sleep now, Carrot?"

"Hey, I'm a guardian too!" she whined. Bepo was quick to apologise, his ears flattening against his head. "Bepo? Hey, no, you- teia don't need to apologise!" she rushed, pouncing on him for another garchu which he returned tentatively. "I'm in training tonight!"
"Tonight..?" he asked, finally noticing the tingle of his electro. "But isn't tonight-?"

"Have you ever looked at the full moon, Bepo?" Pedro interrupted, and he shook his head hurriedly, before pausing.

"I did once," he recalled with a shudder, although it may have just been his electro dancing to the lunar influence.

"Oh?" Pedro asked, his voice full of intrigue. Bepo looked up at him and saw something that looked distinctly like approval in his one visible eye. "So you-gara survived your first Sulong? Impressive."

"Sulong?" Bepo asked, the word odd yet at the same time familiar on his tongue as if he'd heard it before, a lifetime ago. Maybe he had.

"Our true form," Pedro explained, seating himself down on a tree root and gesturing for Bepo to join him. The Heart Pirate obeyed, and found himself with a lap full of Carrot. "Although it's not something we all master. To retain your senses requires incredible force of will and concentration. I assume I'm correct in that you-gara don't remember what you did while you were transformed?"

Bepo had to take a moment to think back to that one fight, years ago, when he'd disobeyed his memories to save his nakama.

"Nothing," he confirmed. "Just rage, and then it was over and everyone was dead. It scared me."

"As well it should," Pedro agreed. "Untrained, transforming into your Sulong state puts both yourself and your companions in danger. It's good that you didn't try it again. If you-gara can't pull out of it, you rampage until you die."

Bepo shivered again, and this time couldn't entirely blame it on his electro.

"Pedro said he'll teach you," Carrot piped up from his lap and he looked down at her, startled.

"If you want to learn," the older mink reassured him. "It isn't something every mink learns, but if you-gara intend on remaining a pirate in the New World, you'll need it."

"I have no intention of leaving my nakama," Bepo said firmly, without even having to stop to think about it. A life without Law silently requesting somewhere soft to sit, or Penguin and Shachi teasing both each other and him? A life where he wasn't the one they relied on to keep them on course? Absolutely not. He threw himself into a bow, dislodging Carrot. "Please, teach me!"

The grin on Pedro's face was one of satisfaction, as if he'd already known Bepo was going to say that.

"The night is young," he said, standing up. "Carrot will go through her paces now, and then we'll go have breakfast while she goes to bed." The grin stretched into one Bepo classified as dangerous (like when Law found a new test subject for his latest technique). "Then, we'll get started on your training."

Chapter End Notes

While I think it's highly unlikely that Bepo spent enough time on Zou to master Sulong, that doesn't mean they didn't start training him.
I still want more information on Sulong.
The Grand Line was full of interesting individuals. They'd heard as such, before crossing Reverse Mountain and entering it for themselves, but the reputation hardly did the people justice.

Listing off all the insane people the Heart Pirates encountered by the time Sabaody Archipelago appeared on the horizon would take days to accurately recount (and that was before they landed and met the remaining Supernova crews, among others), but there was one encounter that stuck in their minds more than most.

The second division commander of the Whitebeard Pirates, Portgas D. Ace himself.

Admittedly, they'd been aware that they'd run into some of the true bigshots at some point in the journey, but to meet such a high ranking member of a Yonkou crew so early on had been outside of even Law's expectations. The Yonkou's admittedly impressive influence was largely contained to the New World, so that was where they had been prepared for the encounter. A small, homely village on an island in the middle of a route that wasn't really a route, due to that one time they'd been blown off course in a storm and the poor ill Bepo had had to find them the nearest land without a log pose, was hardly the place to meet what was effectively a pirate celebrity.

And yet, in a tavern with a plate full of food and face, was a man with the unmistakable tattoo on his back. The patrons had been running around in a flap, screaming something about him being dead, and Law's curiosity got the better of him.

He was once again disappointed by the general lack of medical prowess when he got close enough to the man to determine he was still breathing (he didn't even need his Room, how blind could these people be?) and made sure to keep his distance after determining that the man wasn't even unconscious, merely in the middle of what appeared to be a narcoleptic fit.

How boring, except for the fact that this was a member of Whitebeard's crew. His exact identity wasn't revealed until he woke with a gasp, his head jerking upright and bleary eyes looking around lazily before he ate the morsel of food threatening to drop off his fork as if nothing was wrong.

"Fire Fist-ya," Law drawled, unable to resist testing the man after he associated the man with half his dinner on his face (and didn't that make his skin crawl) with the correct bounty poster.

"Huh?" the man asked, with none of the elegance or presence expected of a man of his theoretical calibre. "Do I know you?" He squinted and Law smirked with all the confidence required when dealing with such a pirate legend (the Heart Pirates cared little for the dead legends, but the living
ones were still relevant). "Nope," Fire Fist decided after a moment, turning back to his food. Despite himself, Law's demeanour turned slightly icy, his pride not quite able to accept that his bounty posters hadn't registered at all with the man. "Hey, have you seen Strawhat Luffy? I'm looking for him."

The name was vaguely familiar – some rookie from East Blue with a record bounty, or something. It sounded impressive, but Law's bounty was higher and the fact that some East Blue rookie with a lower bounty was worth more of Fire Fist's attention than his definitely did nothing to soothe his bruised pride.

"Who?" he couldn't help but ask, with a shrug. "I can't say that's a familiar name." Lies, but Fire Fist didn't need to know that. Law didn't really care about bounties all that much, but he needed a reputation and if he was being overshadowed by some kid with a straw hat and a lower bounty then clearly he wasn't doing well enough.

For his part, Fire Fist seemed horrified for a split second before producing a bounty poster from a pocket and unfolding it carefully to show it to Law as if he thought that would prod his memory. All it did was increase Law's derision towards the stupid smiling face of a monkey – what an appropriate name, if familiar (wasn't that the same family name as that Vice Admiral?).

"Aww, drat," Fire Fist sulked as Law's face gave nothing away, carefully folding the paper and placing it back in his pocket. "If you do see him, tell him I'm looking for him, would you?" He flipped Law a coin – a measly ten beri and not even one with an unusual design, how disappointing – before standing and sauntering out of the room, an inhumane pile of empty plates and bowls marking where he'd sat.

"Hey!" the bar tender yelled after a moment. "Oi! You haven't paid for that!" Sensing trouble, and not in the mood for it after the encounter (if trouble started, Law wouldn't be able to stop himself until everyone in the room was in pieces to try and prove that he was worth the higher bounty than the straw hat kid even though Fire Fist had fled like the Admirals themselves were behind him), he surreptitiously signalled for his crew to vacate the tavern as well. They'd find somewhere else to eat.

After a moment of futile shouting, the bar tender turned his attention to the departing Law.

"You! You were talking to him. Pay up!"

Law turned and regarded him with a smirk, mentally calculating the cost of the food implied by the empty crockery and deciding that, no matter how much he wanted to not cause a scene, there was no way he was draining what funds he had on him (and then some – it would take the back-up supply in Penguin's pocket too) in the process. Those funds were for medical books and equipment, if any were to be found on the island, and his own crew's meals, not Fire Fist's single-person feast.

He flipped the ten beri coin Fire Fist had tried to pay him with onto the counter before walking out of the door, his crew hot on his heels.

Chapter End Notes

I was asked for a meeting between the Heart Pirates and the Whitebeard Pirates, but keeping with canon timelines, the only Whitebeard Pirate we know is in Paradise is Ace, so Ace it was. This is set before Alabaster and Luffy's bounty increase, so it's still the 30 million, while Law's is likely higher at that point (Luffy's bounty has a habit of
leaping up in huge chunks, while I suspect other pirates like Law had more of a steady increase at least to begin with).
A pirate crew had no set structure, regardless of what many people believed. Of course, the Marine's habit to portraying them all as murdering, heartless marauders hardly helped, but even members of a pirate crew were often unaware how unique each crew was.

Having been in two crews, and part of a Tenryubito's collection of pirate captain slaves, Jean Bart was more aware than most of the differences in a crew. To be sure, there was the captain. Then there was the first mate, and the navigator. All were of vital importance, and generally outranked the rest of the crew. At the other end of the spectrum, occasionally a crew would take on cabin boys, who were undisputedly the bottom of the pecking order.

When he joined the Heart Pirates, it was clear that their structure was not the same as his own crew in the past, nor did it match up with the stereotype or other stories he'd heard.

For starters, the captain was also the doctor. Both tasks were incredibly time consuming, and there was no way Trafalgar could split his time between the roles. He didn't. Somehow, the crazy pirate managed to remain in both roles simultaneously, barking out orders when required while elbow-deep in a bloodied chest, trying to save a life.

Still, with the captain taking on so much responsibility, Jean Bart expected to find a fully capable first mate backing him up at every turn. He was puzzled when, during the crew introductions – an unofficial affair where Penguin pointed while Shachi named and the pirate in question waved – no-one was named as such. Recalling Bepo's words as they fled on Sabaody, he reached the conclusion that, like the captain, the navigator was likely also juggling another role. It wasn't strictly unusual to find the navigator in such a position, so he didn't question it further.

His first real clue was after their escape from Marineford, while he guided the Polar Tang through an underwater volcanic field. Trafalgar was still in doctor mode, after his initial order that Bepo and Jean Bart "do something" about the attacks, and the life systems on the Tang reported calmly that they had days before the air filtering systems would need to recharge. Jean Bart had expected that they would remain submerged for as long as possible, until an argument filtered through the still-open tannoy.

After the high stress levels of Marineford, and with their captain busy, Jean Bart was unsurprised that tempers would fray. An enclosed space like the submarine did little to allow people to isolate themselves and cool off, and without their captain there was no-one to place peacemaker.

The argument appeared to be Bepo against Penguin and Shachi, although the longer it went on the more Jean Bart began to suspect it was less malicious and more a well-rehearsed dance. Even more
interesting than that (with stress levels so high, how could they know laughing at each other wouldn't make one of them snap?) however, was the words.

At no point did Bepo give an order. He whined, complained and sulked, but not once did he demand the Tang resurface despite his desire being clear. When the order did come, it came from Penguin and Shachi, who strode into the control room with straight backs and a presence that, in another crew, Jean Bart would consider captain-worthy. He'd obeyed before he'd had time to really think about it, directing the Tang into a slow ascent towards the waves above. It was only once they were rising that his mind caught up with his actions and he asked the question he should have asked far earlier on (in his defence the Admiral, human jigsaw and Marineford had been a credible series of distractions).

"Who's the first mate?"

He hadn't expected the laughter, the pair clutching at each other in their mirth. Jean Bart waited patiently for them to get it out of their system (vaguely recalling days when he'd have snapped at nakama who couldn't stay serious in dire situations, and their current one was certainly part of that category), but he wasn't prepared for the answer.

"We don't have one," Penguin admitted after a minute, wiping his eyes before jostling Shachi with an elbow when the ginger didn't stop his chuckles. "Don't need one." With their captain devoting himself to two roles, Jean Bart found that claim highly questionable and more than a little concerning.

"But," Shachi continued, gulping back the last of the laughter and standing up straight once again. "You're right. Sometimes Law isn't around to make the calls." Law. It was the first time Jean Bart had heard anyone on the crew call Trafalgar anything other than 'Captain' and he suddenly recalled who, exactly, had been the ones to introduce him to the crew. "When that happens, it's me and Penguin people listen to."

"So you're the first mates?" Jean Bart asked for clarification, only for them to shake their heads in unison.

"Didn't you listen?" Penguin asked, crossing his arms harshly. "There is no first mate in this crew. We might have been in the crew the longest, but Law's never given us seniority."

"We're almost at the surface," Shachi broke in, surveying one of the surrounding panels. "Bepo's going to jump straight out." Jean Bart blinked and the pair were suddenly halfway out the room, clearly headed straight for the mink again.

Law's never given us seniority. Jean Bart smiled, recalling the way he'd unthinkingly obeyed them without question, as he returned his attention to the controls. Trafalgar Law struck him as a man who didn't like to waste time on frivolous things. What was the point of announcing something the crew already knew?

Chapter End Notes

Jean Bart is such a useful character for giving the outside pov while still being privy to everything!

Like the Straw Hats (where Zoro is never named as the first mate but, well...) I don't
think there's anything strictly official in the Heart Pirates. Also, while it's probably obvious by this point in time, I don't think either Penguin or Shachi outranks the other - Oda's never shown them apart, and in the scene in the anime where Bepo beg to resurface, the pair of them both give out the order for the Tang to do so. Besides, if we can have co-captains (e.g. Decalvan Brothers and Caribou/Coribou), then why not co-first mates?
There were many things Law hated – Doflamingo, being told what to do and stupidity, to name but a few – but when it came to his crew there was one thing in particular he downright despised. Poison.

His nakama getting injured was not a preferred scenario, and nor was illness, but poison was its own brand of trouble. Law was a world-class surgeon; injuries were largely little trouble for him. Illnesses were likewise manageable, although irritating, particularly when they were serious. But then there was poison. Oh, Law could deal with it, but it was never something simple (either that, or his nakama couldn’t just fall afoul of the simple stuff, no, it had to be the multi-layered potent stuff that would kill in all sorts of creative ways if given a chance).

The problem with poison was that he could remove it, but the effects would still be there, lurking whenever he performed another Scan yet too intertwined in their physical state for even his abilities to prematurely evict. In a way, it resembled Law’s own White Lead poisoning, which always liked to rear its head every so often just to remind him that while it was no longer killing him (unless he fed it with enough gluten) it was still there – although in that case it would never be completely gone.

Unlike his childhood disease, the poison’s effects would eventually disappear, vanishing on its own terms until it was gone for good. Unfortunately, depending on the poison, the process could be quite slow.

That was why Law was currently sat on the edge of his own bed, which was currently occupied by the mostly asleep Penguin and Shachi. Penguin’s concussion had finally cleared, and Shachi’s injuries were healed enough that the pair were adamant about not spending another night in the infirmary under Law’s careful supervision. However, while the vomiting was finally over and he could mostly wander around as if he was perfectly fine, there remained a tremor in Shachi’s right arm that bothered Law.

There was no way the ginger was attempting to climb up into his bunk with that, not on Law’s watch, and while he knew Penguin would happily share, Law intended on keeping the ginger under his supervision until the last of the symptoms had gone. There was nowhere for Law to stay in their room (they might offer for the three of them to all cram into one bed, but it was a tough squeeze and Law wasn’t think that was particularly useful in this situation), nor did he like to enter uninvited, so he’d told Shachi that returning to sleep in his own room was not happening.

He hadn’t even pretended to be surprised when both Penguin and Shachi took that as an invitation to invade his own room, with its larger bed (captaincy had its perks). They’d flopped onto it
inelegantly, sprawling out as if they owned the place, and promptly fallen asleep. Law didn’t miss the captain-sized gap between the pair of them, although he’d chosen to perch on the edge for several minutes, watching them both breathe and remembering how easily that could have no longer been the case.

They were both strong, but Law knew well that ‘strong’ meant nothing in the face of ‘stronger’. And there was always something stronger.

The door opened, almost silently, and he looked up to see Bepo entering, silent on unclad feet. The mink said nothing, but there was a blanket in his paws and without ceremony he settled on the floor, beneath where Shachi’s trembling right arm was dangling out from the covers. He nuzzled against it gently for a moment before looking up at Law expectantly, sending pointed glances at the space between Penguin and Shachi.

Law knew his navigator was telling him to stop fussing and go to sleep already, but he wanted to watch his nakama sleep – alive when they could so easily have been otherwise if he’d taken just a little longer to reach the cave – a while longer.

“I can hear you thinking from over here,” Penguin mumbled, apparently not as asleep as Law thought. “Turn that brain of yours off for a while and get some sleep.” At a lack of supporting echoes from Shachi, Law inferred that the ginger was actually asleep. Bepo nudged his leg firmly, and while Law hated being told what to do, he conceded enough to carefully clamber over Shachi to settle in the gap. Penguin promptly clung to him like a limpet, a gesture that was as much restraining as it was supportive (even though they both knew Law could simply Room away if he wanted to) and Law heard his breathing even out.

Incappable of surrendering to sleep so easily, Law reached out with one hand for Shachi, his fingers threading through ginger hair – it was getting long again, Shachi would probably be asking him to cut it in the not too distant future – to rest on his pulse point. A Scan would have been just as effective at recording the ginger’s life signs, but it would also have highlighted everything that was wrong, everything Law hadn’t been able to completely fix, and Law needed to feel the positives, not the negatives.

Shachi was strong. Shachi was beating the poison – it was taking time, but he was winning – and Law wasn’t going to let him out of his sight until he’d won.

Judging by Penguin and Bepo’s presences, he wasn’t the only one.

Chapter End Notes

A loose follow-on from *Trapped* and *Rescue* (Chapters 127 and 131).

In Punk Hazard, even though Law removes all traces of the drug from the children they still need to go for further treatment with Vegapunk, so as amazing as the Ope Ope no Mi is, I don’t think Law’s yet at the level where he can entirely remove everything without the aid of more conventional treatment.
"If you don't dry your hair you'll catch a cold," Law grumbled as he caught sight of Shachi entering the room. The ginger had clearly just taken a shower, skin tinged red from the warmth (Law was not going to be pleased if he'd used up all their hot water) and his long hair was dripping water steadily, only to be absorbed by the baggy top he'd pulled on. Shachi just shrugged, approaching until he was close enough for Law to see the water droplets on his shades, leaving him to wonder if Shachi didn't even take them off to shower.

He was drawn out of his musing by a knife, which the taller boy had just thrust towards him, the blade unsheathed but perpendicular between their bodies. It was an offering, if rather crude, and Law frowned at him, making no move to accept the weapon.

"My hair's getting too long," Shachi said bluntly, as if that explained anything.

"Then cut it," Law replied. "Or ask Penguin if you're that helpless."

The hand holding the knife shook, and Law snatched the weapon before he hurt himself without thinking. He stared at the weapon for a moment before attempting to give it back. Shachi's hand had fallen to his side and he didn't accept it.

"You cut it last time." Was Shachi sulking? Law frowned and crossed his arms.

"Last time is not now," he pointed out. "Ask Penguin." Honestly, it was just a hair cut; did Shachi have to make such a fuss about the whole thing?

"Buyrgenleraguin," was the ginger's entirely unintelligible response. He was looking at the floor – even with the shades hiding his eyes it was obvious where his attention was focused.

"Speak clearly or not at all," Law complained. Shachi's head jerked up to face him and Law noticed colour creeping up his cheeks before he lost his nerve and fled the room. Law sighed and returned his attention to the research he'd been doing before Shachi interrupted him, only to realise he still had the ginger's blade in his hand.

Well that was hardly a problem, he figured, setting it aside. Penguin had his own knife. He'd find Shachi and return it later, once the ginger had got his sought-after haircut. And dried his hair, Law added as he remembered how dripping wet it had been. If Shachi kept running around like that, he really would catch a cold.

He couldn't see Shachi drying it of his own volition, nor was he entirely confident that Penguin would think to make him. With a sigh, he picked up the knife again and headed for the door,
deciding that at the very least he should ensure Shachi did dry his hair afterwards.

He did not expect to find Shachi sat on the floor, knees drawn up to his chest as he leaned against the pipes that lined the corridor. The older teen looked thoroughly despondent, and Law wondered if Penguin, too, had refused.

"Just cut it yourself," he sighed, crouching down in front of him and offering him the knife back. "It isn't difficult." Besides, he could still see the uneven edges of the last time he'd cut the ginger's hair; he was hardly good at it.

Shachi shook his head, wet strands lashing his face as he did so. Law noted that his hair really had started to get long again and sighed.

"Why?" he asked. It was just a hair cut, what was the need for all these useless theatrics?

"Please?" Shachi asked, and Law realised he wasn't going to get a reason out of him. Nor was Shachi going to dry his hair until he got his way. Law could just force him dry his hair and be done with it, but then Shachi would just let his hair reach the desperate state it had entered the last time and Law would end up forced to cut his hair anyway.

Forcing back another sigh, he turned and walked back into the room.

"Come on then," he said when he wasn't followed, and there was a stunned silence before he heard the scramble of Shachi finding his way to his feet and hurriedly following. Guiding the ginger to sit in front of him, Law ran his fingers through the wet hair a couple of times to make sure there weren't any knots before starting to work with the knife.

A knife was hardly the most elegant of tools to use for the task, but Shachi didn't voice any complaints at his treatment of his hair so Law continued despite knowing the ginger's hair was going to be awkwardly styled – if styled was even an applicable word in the situation.

There was something therapeutic surrounding the action, his fingers running through damp hair that wasn't silky smooth, but equally wasn't coarse and unpleasant to the touch. At some point, Shachi had taken off his shades (a useful action, as the arms were getting in the way a little), and when Law finally finished he saw a content smile on the other boy's face.

"I'm done," he said bluntly, and Shachi replaced his shades before turning around. He was still smiling, and Law realised that having someone cutting his hair for him meant something to the ginger. "Now go dry your hair properly or you will catch a cold."

"Going now!" Shachi chirped cheerfully, reclaiming his knife and disappearing out the room.

"Thanks!"

Law was never going to understand what went through his head, but he supposed if Shachi really wanted him to be the one to cut his hair so badly it wasn't exactly a major inconvenience.

He changed his mind when he looked at the floor and realised he'd been left to clear up the mess by himself.

Chapter End Notes

A sequel to Hair (chapter 92). Law will get better with practice... probably.
Sometimes, life just wasn't fair.

Everyone had their off days, for sure, but as Ikkaku groaned and cursed, she swore that no-one had had a worse day than this (tragic pasts notwithstanding).

The first thing was her own fault, she could admit that. Leaving clothes tossed carelessly on the floor when she went to bed the previous evening because she was too lazy to hang them up out of the way had been an accident waiting to happen, and happen it did as they tangled around her feet when she got up, leaving her to crash to the ground in a tangle of clothes.

She couldn’t just keep her embarrassment to herself, of course. Summoned by the sound, it was mere seconds before someone was knocking on her door, asking if she was okay. One was joined by another, and then another, and she threw her hairbrush at the door, followed by whatever else she could get her hands on, in an attempt to shoo them away. Apparently several things hitting her door did nothing to reassure her nakama, and after a moment the handle turned hesitantly, Uni’s voice asking if he could come in.

"No!" she shrieked, disentangling herself from the chaos and reaching for her hairbrush to tame her hair only to recall using it as a projectile seconds earlier. "I'm fine!" The handle thankfully stopped turning and returned to its previous position, but any pleasure Ikkaku felt at being left alone was quickly dashed when she realised her hairbrush – her only hairbrush – hadn't survived the collision with the heavy door. Her scream of frustration was quickly followed by the sound of running feet and her door burst open.

"Are you okay? What happened?" Shachi asked, his hand leaning heavily on the doorframe as he looked around the room frantically. He realised her state of undress a split second before she did, his cheeks colouring as he hurriedly tried to backpedal out of the room. She lunged for him, grabbing him by the neck of his boiler suit.

"Shachi," she growled, ignoring the fact that she was wearing nothing but the underwear she’d slept in as he babbled apologies. "Fetch me a hairbrush. Now." His babbling stopped and he stared at her for a few seconds in shock before she shoved him out of the room. Caught off balance, he stumbled, and she slammed the door behind him. "I'm waiting!" Footsteps receded hurriedly and she turned her attention to her clothes, picking out something clean to wear and shoving the dirty laundry into a shame pile into the corner to be dealt with later.

There was a tentative knock on the door, and she yanked it open long enough to snatch the hairbrush from Shachi’s hand before slamming it in his face again. The brush still had strands of ginger hair
ensnarled around the bases of the prongs, but Ikkaku ignored them as she used it to yank her bushy hair into some form of submission. Shachi had wisely fled in the meantime, so she left the brush on her table and headed to the kitchen for some sorely-needed coffee.

She knew Bepo didn't mean to stumble and knock her drink over, but with an already-atrocious morning it took everything she had not to scream at the cowering mink, instead turning her back and swiping another mug of coffee which she drained before making a face. Too sweet for her liking. A tattooed hand grasped at air where the drink had stood and she looked up to see her captain regarding her with an expression somewhere between annoyed and apprehensive.

"Is something wrong, Ikkaku?" he asked, reclaiming his mug and looking somewhat forlorn at the realisation it was empty. The only thing stopping Ikkaku snapping at him like she'd snapped at Uni and Shachi earlier was that he was her captain and she'd already stolen his coffee.

"The concern is appreciated but I'm fine, Captain." Somehow she managed to make it sound a little less like her teeth were grinding together than she'd expected. He looked disbelieving but didn't press, heading back to the coffee pot and leaving her to tear into her breakfast in peace.

She had a stint in the engine room scheduled for that day, and after the way her morning had gone she really should have just cut her losses, traded shifts with someone else and gone to hide in bed for the rest of the day.

"You have got to be kidding me!" she screamed when the Tang's engines decided her hair would make a wonderful addition. Apparently the submarine didn't care that it was still attached to her head as it tangled it around the various components, trapping Ikkaku against the machinery. Of course, in all the chaos that morning she'd forgotten to pick up her knife, which was probably still buried firmly in her door from where she'd thrown it, and she let out another scream of frustration.

Again there was the sound of booted feet running, and for the first time that day Ikkaku found it in her to be thankful that her nakama would always flock to the sound of her screams (or anyone's, really).

Penguin was first to find her, grease splattering his own boiler suit from where he'd been working nearby, and his sticky fingers deftly began to coax her hair to escape from the submarine's grip.

"Just cut it!" she snapped, reaching for where she knew he kept his knife under the breastflap of the boiler suit. A hand grabbed her wrist, leading it back down to her side before Clione joined in with working her hair loose. The gathering didn't stop there and soon half the crew was crowding her, their fingers deft from years working the submarine and all stubbornly refusing to cut her hair.

It took them several minutes, but with a triumphant "ah hah!" from Shachi her hair was free. The boys didn't disperse immediately, and after a moment Clione stepped forwards and gave her a hug.

She didn't react straight away, standing wooden in his hold for several long seconds before caving and wrapping her arms around him in response. Seemingly taking that as a cue, the other boys joined in until there was one huge mass of arms and bodies in the engine room with Ikkaku at the centre.

For the first time that day, Ikkaku found herself smiling. It didn't matter how many stupid things went wrong when she had her nakama.
It's Friday the 13th (or was - it's gone midnight here now). I couldn't resist.
Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Penguin  
**Rating:** Teen  
**Warnings:** Implied/referenced torture  
**Tags:** Angst

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shachi was gone. Penguin didn't know why he'd left in the middle of the night, shades abandoned on the table, but that wasn't a concern. The ginger would be back when he was back, and Penguin suspected it would be a while.

He rolled over, unable to see anything in the darkness, and buried his face in his pillow. Underneath his body, his right hand was pressed against his sternum, clenched into a fist. It was uncomfortable, aggravating the wounds on his wrist, to say nothing of those on his arm and torso, but pain was fine, even good.

Pain meant that he was still alive. He wrenched his fingers from their fist into a clawed position, awkward in their makeshift prison beneath his body, and they dug in to his chest, the sensation easily bypassing the thin top he wore to ignite his nerves. Still alive. Awake and alive, in the Polar Tang. Safe.

Alone. Shachi had left the room, mumbling something about the bathroom although Penguin had heard the tears muffling his voice and felt when he'd knocked against the bed in an uncharacteristic act of clumsiness. No, Shachi wouldn't be back for a while, if at all that night, and Penguin felt the tears come.

There was no-one around to watch him, no-one he needed to hold together even as he fractured more and more under the strain. He didn't have to be strong anymore, so he screamed, biting the pillow as a gag and clutching tighter at his heart. His left hand clawed its way up the blankets until it found the pillow, clenching it like a lifeline and tearing the fabric.

He hurt, his nerves burning where his fingernails dug in, burning where the fabric rested over healing wounds, burning. In the morning, maybe he should procure more painkillers, but for the moment he let the pain bloom, because he was alive.

They were all alive, by some miracle. The poison that had seared his throat had tortured yet failed to kill. Jack's men, the blades, had failed to sever their connection to the world. Law, his vivre card little more than regenerating ash, had survived and come back to them. They were all alive.

But that didn't stop the pain. It didn't stop Penguin screaming his anguish into his pillow, tears streaming down his face and soaking into the fabric, because the pain meant they were alive, but it would have been so much kinder not to be. They hadn't asked to be drawn into a war, they hadn't asked to be told about Raido, forcing them into being guardians of a secret that wasn't theirs to protect but they didn't have a choice, because the minks trusted them and for Bepo's sake, they could never betray that trust.
The poison, the blades, *Law’s vivre card*. The pain, unimaginable yet *real*. His body was shaking, the pillow now soaking wet with tears held back for too long. They were alive, they had *survived*, but it was a hollow victory when he couldn’t stop his limbs from trembling or his voice from screaming itself raw in the safety of the night now that it finally had a chance to break through the layers of responsibility holding him back.

He’d held it together for the crew, then he’d held it together for Law. For the crew – *Shachi*, *Bepo* - again, letting them break as they needed because he was the one they looked to for strength and strength he would give.

But his strength wasn’t inherent, couldn’t withstand the pressure forever, and in the lonely darkness of the room with no-one to see, no-one who needed him to be strong, he finally broke.

Chapter End Notes

It's been a while since I last did an angsty chapter, so I thought it was about time I threw another one in. Sort of a companion to *Shatter* (Chapter 79).
The Heart Pirates avoided frontal confrontation when they could. There was rarely any point to them; subterfuge worked so much better and also had the added bonus of not showing their hand to anyone that might be watching.

But they couldn't be avoided forever. Sometimes a battle loomed ahead and there was no real way to escape it. It was those occasions, when Law had enough warning, that he had taken to withdrawing his nakama's vital organs – heart, lungs, liver, kidney, stomach, and whatever else he had time for – from their bodies and depositing them in a secure vault he'd installed inside the Polar Tang for that exact reason.

It was one such day. While there was no guarantee of a fight, and Law hoped it wouldn't come to it, as they approached the docks of the next island there were a few too many pirate flags flying for him to take the risk. Organless, the Heart Pirates had disembarked and gone about their business, procuring supplies and keeping an ear out for any information uttered by a passer-by. Usually there was little to nothing, and this was no exception, to their private disappointment.

While information was scarce, conflict was not.

Shachi surveyed the scene in front of him with ill-concealed exasperation. He just wanted to get back to the Tang, call it a day and flop after reporting back to Law. Having his path blocked by several members of a crew whose flag he vaguely recognised – one of the not-quite Supernovas of that year, weren't they? Nothing special in the New World – was not part of his plan and he yawned, irritated. Unsurprisingly, the other crew weren't too impressed at his less than pleased reaction and took offense.

"Don't you know who we are?" one exploded, and Shachi shrugged noncommittally, somewhat amused by the hypocrisy, especially as at least he was wearing his jolly roger proudly on his chest where it should be clearly visible to the goons in front of him. If they'd seen it, they were ignoring it. Then again, they did have him outnumbered, from appearances (Shachi was well aware of Penguin trailing behind in the previous alley, Ikkaku just around the corner and Law himself a little way up the street). Taking his reaction to mean he didn't, he was subjected to a proud tirade of their identity, the identity of their captain, and some of their more 'impressive' feats.

Shachi had never understood the need for posturing. It just came across like a load of hot air to him, no matter what the crew's strength was. Then again, the first time he'd heard a bunch of pirates posturing it had been accompanying a slaughter he was never going to forget, so that probably contributed to his distaste.
"You've made your point," he drawled when they paused for breath. "Now are you going to let me through? I have better places to be." Things rubbed off on you when you spent twelve years with Trafalgar Law, including the penchant for winding annoying people up.

They were distressingly predictable, drawing hidden weapons and charging him as one. For a crew in the New World, it was hardly impressive, although as Shachi evaded the first strikes he had to admit that they did have the prowess to back their boasts up. Law wasn't going to be happy about him biting off more than he could chew, again, but Shachi knew his nakama would be drawn by the commotion so he was hardly worried.

Keeping his own blade sheathed for the moment, he swung out with a leg, turning the movement into a backflip as the first pirate dodged and another charged at him in a co-ordinated attack. There was an exasperated noise from behind him as he leapt up, directing the next pair to charge him towards each other. Annoyingly, they were experienced enough to not hit each other, but Shachi really needed to stop expecting that in the New World.

"You bitch!" he heard one of them curse, and grinned as Ikkaku's response was an impressive roundhouse. Penguin was also running towards the commotion, and as Shachi landed from his latest aerobatic stunt he found himself back to back with the older man.

"What did you do?" Penguin complained as the pair of them drew their knives simultaneously to parry the blades aiming for their faces.

"Nothing!" Shachi defended himself, pushing his initial attacker back and lashing out with his foot at another's abdomen. The connection was solid and he grinned as the man skidded back, clutching at his stomach while throwing Shachi a murderous look. Such things had stopped intimidating Shachi long ago and he just gave a cheeky grin in response before going on the offensive, catching his target off guard and slamming him to the ground.

"I don't believe that for a second," Penguin retorted, his blade coated black as he drove it between the third and fourth ribs of his current opponent. The man dropped and he turned his attention to the next pirate.

"You bastard!" The call was accompanied by the sound of a gunshot and Shachi scowled as he sidestepped the bullet. Bringing guns to a knife fight was cheating.

Even with one already down, and Ikkaku and Penguin backing him up, they were still outnumbered. Of course, being outnumbered meant nothing by itself, but while weaker than the Heart Pirates, the crew were no slouches and it wasn't long before the blood was flowing on both sides. Ikkaku was holding her left arm whenever the chance arose, while Penguin was favouring his right leg and Shachi was cursing the gash in his right shoulder, which was particularly annoying when he had to parry rather than dodge.

However, the Heart Pirates had one advantage over the other crew, and Shachi was the lucky – unlucky? Law was going to be mad – one that got to demonstrate as his shoulder gave out at the wrong moment and a knife buried itself firmly in his chest. He jerked, his body reacting to the fatal wound as if it was actually fatal, and he saw the other pirate's face split into a grin as he stumbled back a step.

The grin faltered when Shachi didn't topple, but rather straightened and transferred his knife to his left hand, dismissing his right shoulder as useless until Law got his hands on it.

"What was that supposed to be?" he asked, spinning the knife in his hand for a moment before finding his grip on it. Blood gathered in his mouth and he spat it out, his lips stretching into a grin. A
single drop of the blood trickled down his chin, and the man stumbled back.

Another knife plunged into his back, and Shachi laughed, turning around to kick the culprit away.

"What's that face for?" he asked the first one to stab him, who looked like he'd seen a ghost. "Don't you know what I am?"

"If you can bleed you can die!" one of the pirates declared. Shachi neatly side-stepped his lunge and brought his own knife down on the man's back.

"A little scratch like this isn't going to do anything," Shachi helpfully informed the one still standing, stepping forwards into his reach. Instead of taking advantage of Shachi's proximity, the man stumbled backwards, face white as a sheet.

"Y-you-" he spluttered. "You- You're- M-Mon-"

"I'm a Heart Pirate," Shachi grinned, stepping forwards again. "It's going to take more that this to stop me." He put the man out of his misery with a neat slash to the throat before turning back to see how Penguin and Ikkaku were doing.

"You spent too long playing around," Penguin scolded, wiping his knife on one of his fallen opponents' tops. Shachi shrugged and immediately regretted it. His shoulder protested loudly, and while he'd hidden it from his opponents, getting stabbed hurt. He sheathed his knife before pressing his left hand to the wound in his chest, feeling the blood still trying to gush out. His heart might not be where it should be, but that didn't mean his blood vessels were all absent too.

"I can't take you anywhere," Law complained, finally arriving at the scene and heading straight for Shachi, nudging his hand out of the way long enough to assess the wounds. "Back to the Tang with you before you faint." Shachi had no complaints with the order, considering he was starting to get light headed – maybe one of the knives had caught an artery, that would be annoying – and started to head back to the submarine, accompanied by his nakama.

He didn't quite make it back before the dizziness got too much, but that was okay because Law was there.

"I don't do this so you can pull suicidal stunts," he heard his captain grumble. Shachi just laughed as warm arms caught him and everything went dark.

Chapter End Notes

I imagine stabbing someone in the heart and them not dying would be pretty terrifying.

On the flip side, Law's given his crew an excuse to be even more reckless, which would not have been the plan.
While they might be a pirate crew, the Heart Pirates weren't interested in the darker aspects of piracy. Thievery was a part of the life, although if they had the funds and liked the vendor enough they'd pay their way fair and square, but they had no desire for mass terror.

It happened, of course. With Law's false reputation, people would run at the sight of them and that was all well and good (and sometimes very useful indeed), but they never really did anything to further the reputation – at least, not to innocent civilians; underworld brokers, pirates and other criminals were another matter entirely, and mainly how Law managed to maintain his exaggerated reputation.

With members of the crew themselves survivors of massacres, it left a sour taste in their mouth (at best, on the worst days it would send someone to hide in their room for the rest of the day). As much as they wished otherwise, however, it was not a particularly uncommon occurrence on the Grand Line and whenever they surfaced long enough for a News Coo to find them, there was usually one such event detailed somewhere among the pages.

It was no coincidence that another rookie crew's bounty was climbing rapidly.

The Kid Pirates, led by one Eustass 'Captain' Kid, were becoming more and more synonymous with the words 'mass death' in the newspaper. To Penguin, the idea of killing so discriminately was unthinkable. How someone could think they had the right to cause such pain and devastation was beyond him, and when the stories kept coming up, the same red-haired captain's picture grinning brutally alongside each report, so clearly revelling in it, he had to fight to stop himself tearing the paper apart.

On the worst days, he couldn't, and Law would give an understanding yet annoyed look as he and some of the others gathered the shreds up to piece the newspaper back together to read the rest of the news.

Shachi was worse. He had only been a year younger than Penguin, but sometimes Penguin thought that year made all the difference. If there was a member of the crew who just up and disappeared after news of another massacre reached them, it was the ginger. He was never hard to find, unerringly retreating to his bed every time without fail, but the general consensus among the crew was to leave him alone. Sometimes Penguin would go to join him, hauling himself up into the top bunk and listening to the bolts complain at the weight of two fully grown men as he sat by the younger man in silence.

On the other end of the spectrum, Law had a tendency to get clingy. Not in the physical sense, as
their captain seemed incapable of initiating any sort of contact outside of a medical setting, but he would always be found in the most occupied room in the Tang for at least the rest of the day, silent but always watching his nakama as they moved around. When night fell, he invariably ended up in either Penguin and Shachi or Bepo's room. Not through his own deliberate design, as he always started by going to his own room and attempting to sleep there, but night wanderings struck when sleep was riddled with nightmares and they were always the ones first to open their doors for him.

Massacres happened. It was a fact of life, and if they kept running from it they'd face troubles later when they couldn't run any more. Meeting Eustass Kid in person was a trial for them all, having to look him in the eye as if he and his crew weren't responsible for many of their sleepless nights as every news article brought back the memories afresh.

Penguin wasn't sure how they managed it, how they would have managed if Mugiwara hadn't punched out a tenryubito and forced them all to face a common enemy. The man was unapologetic, openly admitting that he'd been slaughtering everyone that had laughed at him for saying he was going to find the One Piece.

Part of Penguin had wanted to laugh at him then and there, to drag the man into a fight and get revenge for all those people in the wrong place at the wrong time. Common sense prevailed – they were outnumbered, an admiral was on the way – and he was forced to content himself with sending death-glares from underneath the safety of his hat.

If anyone noticed, they didn't comment, and the Heart Pirates eventually escaped Marineford without once trying to kill the red-headed demon.

Penguin thought that was quite the achievement. He also knew it wasn't going to last forever. One day the rising tension would reach a head. He was looking forwards to it.

Chapter End Notes

There's clearly some tension between the Kid Pirates and Heart Pirates and I'm looking forwards to their likely meeting on Wano. Kid and his crew seem to be more inclined towards stereotypical piracy, although I want to know their backstory (at least Kid and Killer's - they're Supernovas/Worst Gen so they should at some point) before I really settle my mind on what they're like.
Law wished he could say he was surprised when he took stock of the infirmary, but with recent fights and his nakama's complete and utter lack of self-preservation, it was with a sigh of resignation that he realised their blood stocks were running low again.

It probably wasn't an exaggeration to say that some members of the crew had more transfused blood than their own blood running through their bodies – Shachi had turned into a suicidal moron since Law had taken to removing their organs and if he thought it would cure him of the stupidity he'd stop; sadly it would be more likely to kill him than change his ways now.

They needed more blood, and in the New World Law wasn't going to persuade his own nakama to donate. Most of them were ineligible anyway, having received a transfusion, but even those who weren't Law refused to weaken while in the most dangerous sea in the world. That left Law with only one option: raiding.

Random civilians were no good. Without taking the time to properly test them, Law couldn't determine their eligibility and refused to waste time collecting unusable blood. There was only one solution, and Law couldn't say it brought him much grief.

Raiding hospitals.

He was aware of the implications of the actions. Many innocent people needed blood transfusions, and taking away the supply could have disastrous consequences. Law's nod to that was to not drain the hospitals completely dry. Whether the hospitals used what he left them wisely was a different matter entirely.

The concern was whether or not they would land on an island with a hospital before they ran out. Finishing his inventory, he went to find Bepo.

The navigator couldn't tell him if their next destination would have a hospital, but he did know roughly how far out they were – a few hours – and Law was able to begin the preparations in case there was an eligible target.

"You're bleeding too much," Penguin told Shachi after Law got the crew together to tell them they were going to be raiding the next hospital they found. It was said light-heartedly, and the crew – Shachi included – laughed at it, although Law suspected there was a genuine complaint mixed in. After all, no-one worried more than Penguin whenever Shachi was back in the infirmary for something again, and that said a lot considering how much Law silently fussed.

"Until we get more, blood transfusions are going to be reserved for life or death situations," Law told
them, drawing their attention back to him. "If you'll survive without one, you won't get one."

They nodded in agreement, Shachi getting what could only be described as a warning poke by Penguin, before Law let them disperse. Rationing the blood supplies like that, he probably had enough for one life threatening injury per blood type. Law hoped there would only be one near-fatality before they found a hospital and restocked.

When they finally landed on the next island, several hours later, Law reached the conclusion that he’d used up all of his good luck for the foreseeable future. Not only were none of his nakama on death's door, but there was a hospital. It paled in comparison to Flevance's, of course, but it existed and it had blood.

Stealing blood was easy. All it required was a distraction (which his crew were always eager to provide) a Room, and some Shambles. The blood was never hidden away, the hospitals clearly unaware of the thieves in their midst until it was too late.

Law couldn't bring himself to feel bad for them as he stashed his latest acquisitions into storage. Not when each bag potentially meant the life of a nakama.

Chapter End Notes

Law must have supplies of blood, but said supplies also must require replenishing every so often and with so many things making blood ineligible as a transfusion it makes sense that he'd target places that would have already done the checks.
When Law told them he was going to teach them knotwork, Penguin and Shachi's first reaction was to simultaneously point at the sail, held up by ropes that they had tied.

"Way ahead of you," Shachi scoffed, irritated at the younger teen's lack of observation. "That sail hasn't fallen down yet, has it?"

"No," Law allowed. "But-"

"We have been sailing before, you know," Penguin interrupted. "Fishing was important on Swallow Island." Shachi nodded firmly in agreement and Law sighed.

"I wasn't talking about those knots," he told them, to their confusion. He produced a length of rope from somewhere and brandished it in their face. "If I tied you up right now, would you be able to get out?"

They gaped at him, eyeing the rope nervously.

"Why are you asking?" Penguin asked. "Are you planning on tying us up?"

"Yes," Law said bluntly, and they leapt backwards, away from him. "I want to make sure you two have basic survival skills."

"Since when was being an escape artist a basic survival skill?" Shachi demanded, and Law sighed again, flicking the rope in his hands.

"Since you became pirates," he retorted. "Being captured means torture if you can't get out." A simultaneous chill ran down their spines and they couldn't help the involuntary shiver.

"I suppose you can escape just fine, then," Shachi demanded, hurriedly moving the conversation along. In answer, Law wordlessly held out the rope to him, and then his hands once Shachi took it.

Not to be cowed, and fairly sure it counted as mutiny, the ginger spun him around and secured his hands behind his back with the most complex knot he knew before stepping back triumphantly.

"Get out of that," he challenged, crossing his arms. Law shifted his wrists experimentally and hummed, sounding impressed. Shachi grinned, satisfied, only for his pleased mood to slowly ebb away as Law did some impossible-looking gestures and manoeuvres. It took him less than a minute before the untied rope was in his hands again.

"Not bad," Law said. "We'll have to expand your repertoire a little, too."
"You think I'm going to be capturing people and tying them up?" Shachi spluttered, and Law shrugged.

"No harm in knowing how," he said. "Now, turn around. It's your turn." Shachi didn't move, but Law was once again too fast and too strong for him. Within seconds he was on the ground, swearing and complaining with his hands bound behind him.

"Hey!" Penguin protested, but Law held up a hand to stop him.

"You'll be next," he promised, to the older boy's chagrin.

"What about Bepo?" Shachi demanded, looking at the white fluff ball curled up by the railing, seemingly fast asleep.

"His paws aren't dextrous enough," Law explained. "With his strength and electro he can break ropes anyway."

It made sense, but Shachi still grumbled as he twisted his wrists together, trying to get some purchase to slip the ropes off them like Law had done with such ease.

"This is stupid!" he exploded five minutes later, his wrists still firmly secured together. "What hellish knot did you use?"

"The same one you did," Law replied calmly, kneeling beside him. "Stop, you'll hurt yourself if you keep doing that." Shachi ignored him, despite the pain starting to bloom in his wrists. He wasn't a quitter, and he wasn't going to be so easily bested, dammit! "Stop, Shachi," Law repeated, more firmly. Hands gripped his own, forcing them to still. "Stay back, Penguin," he added as the oldest teen made a move to help Shachi. "Your turn will be in a minute."

Shachi cursed him, trying to move his hands despite Law's restraining grip.

"This is stupid!" he repeated, only to be shushed by Law. "Oh it's easy for you to say, you just used your abilities, didn't you?"

"Pay attention," Law told him, not responding to the accusation. "I'll guide you through it. Tell me if anything hurts." Shachi started to demand to know what he was on about when the cool hands began to coax his own hands into movement. The amount of contortionism required was ridiculous, but Shachi suffered through in silence as his hands twisted in ways they really shouldn't, before the pain got too much for him and a single ow exploded from his lips.

Law immediately stopped the latest manoeuvre, sighing disapprovingly.

"I said to tell me if anything hurt," he scolded. "If your wrists haven't done this before, then they won't be flexible enough yet." Shachi felt the ropes loosen around his complaining wrists. "Try that again." With looser ropes, Shachi's wrists didn't need to flex so far and eventually he found himself free. Law instantly took hold of his freed hands, rubbing them to coax feeling back into them and applying some cool substance to where Shachi had caused enough friction to induce minor rope burns. "We'll keep doing that until you can escape without the handicaps."

Shachi groaned and slumped back onto the deck to watch Penguin getting collared instead.

"No misplaced bravado," Law told Penguin as the older futilely attempted to wriggle out. "These are lessons to help you, not hinder you." Shachi grumbled, pulling his wrapped wrists close to his chest protectively and glaring at his young captain, who returned his look levelly even as he began the task of guiding Penguin's hands out.
Penguin was far more obedient than Shachi, leaving the ginger to grumble again before going to curl up with Bepo. The mink barely shifted, just making enough room for the ginger to sit between his paws.

"Law?" Penguin asked, joining Shachi in leaning against Bepo once he was free again, and gesturing to Law to join them. He didn't. "Are you expecting someone's going to try and capture us?"

The silence was unnerving, but the simple 'yes' their young captain eventually admitted was so much worse.
Lullaby

Chapter Notes

**Characters:** Shachi  
**Rating:** Gen  
**Warnings:** None  
**Tags:** Angst, Singing

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first night alone on the Polar Tang was eerie. Even submerged, Law had decreed that they needed someone to stay on watch. The younger boy had taken the first watch, and Bepo the second night. Now, the third night, it was Shachi's turn to stay up all night, curled up in a chair designed for a fully-grown adult and not a teenager with limbs too long for his body. His knees tucked up awkwardly underneath his chin, with a blanket clenched tightly against the cold (not that it was actually cold, rather almost too-hot, but habit was habit), Shachi stared at the flickering monitors, uncomprehending most of the displays but knowing enough to determine there was nothing else anywhere near them.

He hadn't felt so alone in years. The other three were all in their rooms, sleeping safely. The quiet hum of the engine deep in the belly of the Polar Tang did nothing to distract him from the lack of breathing in earshot. She was a big ship – far larger than anything Shachi had ever been on before, with the sleeping quarters some distance from the control room – and it struck Shachi that it was the first time in years that he'd spent a night alone.

Night watch on the previous boat had been determined by who was sitting up as opposed to lying down. There had been no separation there, the boat too small for such things. Before that, he'd shared a room with Penguin, sometimes even a bed when the night seemed too big.

He hadn't spent a single night alone since *that* day, his parents' house, his home, the only place he'd had his own room to spend the night in with no company except the penguin-toy he'd been given by Penguin (it had been meant as a joke, and Shachi had reciprocated in kind with a stuffed orca toy; he wondered what had happened to those tattered old things now they'd left, and in the too-big night wished he had his penguin toy with him so he wasn't so alone).

Shachi decided he didn't like being alone. The shadows were darker and every creak was louder when Penguin's breathing wasn't there to muffle them. He pulled his wayward feet closer to his body, hugging them tightly. His hat had slipped sideways, but Shachi didn't dare pull his hands from out of the security of the blanket to readjust it. Not in the all-encompassing, all-devouring darkness that surrounded him.

He could turn on the lights. Maybe he shouldn't have turned them off, but it was nice to take the shades off, releasing his ears and nose from the slight weight, and not be forced to clamp his eyes shut. The switch was by the door, several paces from where Shachi was sitting, and he wasn't entirely certain where his shades had slipped off to. Fumbling around blind was an even more intimidating idea than staying put under the blanket.
In a desperate attempt to distract himself, he found himself humming under his breath. It was an old tune, one that he hadn't heard for years but still knew as if he'd last heard it yesterday. His voice wasn't smooth like his mother's had been, but it didn't have to be when he could imagine it was her singing, like she used to when the darkness got too scary for a little boy in the dead of night.

"Goodnight my angel, now it's time to sleep," he sang under his breath, the second verse spilling out as words rather than the quiet humming of the first. "And still so many things I want to say." His voice choked up, and a hand braved the darkness to dart out from under the covers and dash at the tears that began to fall before retreating. "Remember all the songs you sang for me when we went sailing on the emerald sea?" The quick attempt to eliminate his tears had been unsuccessful, and Shachi leaned forwards, burying his face in the blanket as he sobbed out the next lines, muffled by the fabric. Maybe the song had been a bad idea, bringing up as much sadness as it did comfort. "The water's dark and deep, inside this ancient heart you'll always be a part of me."

He sniffled, the expansive, devouring darkness slowly fading away only to be replaced with longing as Shachi realised just how alone he was, and that his singing paled in comparison to his mother's. He missed her, he realised anew. He missed the way she'd always stayed up with him on the nights he hadn't wanted to sleep. He missed always having someone right there to turn to, just a sob away.

With nothing else to do, even though it tore open old wounds that had never really closed, Shachi kept singing, keeping himself company because even that was better than the empty room, with its eerie creaks and inhuman hums.

As the third verse spilled from his lips, accompanied by further tears and sobs, he didn't notice the silent form sat the other side of the door, back pressed against it as they listened with tears in their own eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not good enough to make up lyrics myself; those quoted here are from Billy Joel's 

*Lullabye.*
The port town was a lively one, ships sailing in and out frequently and traders advertising their wares loudly and optimistically from the shoreline. The Polar Tang glided in effortlessly, settling in a bay and somehow not standing out like a sore thumb, despite her distinctive colour and shape.

Penguin surveyed the scene with wide eyes.

"So is this the capital of North Blue or something?" he asked, staring at the hustle and bustle. He'd never seen so many people in one place before.

"There's no such thing," Law corrected, reaching for Shachi and nudging his chin until he closed his mouth. "This one just has a large merchant presence, it's nothing to gawk at." Hearing Law's no-nonsense tone sobered Penguin up. A large merchant presence meant a large underworld market. Penguin had no doubts what sort of thing Law would be expecting from them once they disembarked. Beside him, Shachi straightened, steeling himself for another day of pulling information from the shadier society.

Law was first to disembark, as per usual. Penguin and Shachi followed, but not without a hug and a pat on the back from Bepo, once again staying behind on guard duty.

They were attacked the moment their feet touched the docks. Law retreated instantly, a Room forming and teleporting him back onto the gangway. Penguin and Shachi weren't fast enough, finding themselves pinned to the docks as large dark shapes loomed over them.

Something wet dragged itself down Penguin's face, leaving a slimy trail behind and startling a laugh out of him. The creature responded with a rough bark and beside him Shachi started laughing.

"That tickles!" the ginger complained, although his voice was full of mirth and no reproach. "Get off, no, no, no! Hey! My shades! Give them back you menace!" Said menace sat on him, eliciting an oof from the ginger. Penguin gasped as his own attacker copied the movement, leaving him pinned to the ground.

"Penguin! Shachi!" Law shouted, and Penguin saw the blue sheen of a Room go up. Their captain sounded worried, and he realised that maybe it did look a little concerning even as he brought his hands up to ruffle fur.

"Aren't you gorgeous?" he cooed to the Bepo-sized dog. The creature barked, and he heard the one with Shachi mimicking the sound before the wet, slobbery tongue descended again. It tickled and he writhed underneath it.
"Penguin? Shachi?" Law sounded uncertain now, his Room still active but Penguin still not teleported away so Law was thinking. The dogs moved at the sound of his voice, shifting enough that Penguin and Shachi could make their way to their feet again.

"Law, come here!" Penguin called, managing to make his way to his knees. The dog started at the younger teen intently, and Law recoiled.

"No," he retorted stubbornly. "Have you any idea what sort of germs are on those dog's tongues? Absolutely not." He let his Room drop but stood with arms crossed.

The stalemate was broken by Bepo, who in a rare show of defiance padded silently up behind his captain and herded him towards the dogs, who leapt at the chance and bowled him over with an oof.

"Bepo!" Law spluttered, trying to scramble away from the dog pile he found himself imprisoned inside and failing when Penguin and Shachi grabbed hold of him.

"Just pet the puppies," Shachi said, his eyes closed in the absence of his shades. Law immediately Shambled them up from where they were in danger of being crushed and put them in his pocket.

"Don't tell me what to do!" he snapped, but neither human apologised, too caught up in obeying their own instructions. Bepo let out a quiet noise that could have been an apology, but the dog chose that moment to slurp its way down Law's face, to his intense chagrin. "Stop! No!" Arms grabbed him, preventing him from squirming away, and he glowered at his nakama. Penguin guided his hand to the shaggy fur and held it there until Law's fingers began to move unbidden.

Penguin shared a knowing grin with Bepo, who was still watching from the gangplank. They hadn't planned on making Law snuggle with dogs, but it had a far more positive effect on him than their expectations.

"Good dog," Penguin murmured in its ear, giving it a scratch.

Chapter End Notes

Not every island has bad things waiting for them. A literal dog pile sounds good to me.
Law had a weakness for fluff. Every Heart Pirate suspected it from the moment they first joined the crew – the hat and mink never far away were good indicators, even his sword was fluffy. He wasn't open about it, didn't make a beeline for anything soft and fuzzy and bury himself in it, but the signs were there.

The signs almost exclusively centred around Bepo, the fluffy navigator with a big heart and even bigger hugs. Of all the crew, he was the only one Law would initiate contact with on a regular basis, leaning against him when they were both sat down, or scratching him behind the ear if he was in a particularly affectionate mood (this was, of course, a relative scale, as Law was never in what most of the crew would call a physically affectionate mood). Bepo, for his part, enjoyed offering himself up as a comfortable place for his captain to rest and had been known to trap him in a hug for no apparent reason.

The action often brought a smile to Law's face, so no-one dared mention it in case he got self-conscious and stopped. A peaceful Law was a rare Law and they took every precaution to maintain it when that state occurred.

Law was not, however, the only Heart Pirate addicted to the soft fur of their navigator. Most of the crew could be found closer to the mink than was strictly required whenever they weren't needed elsewhere on the ship, and while Law automatically got first dibs if he so desired, it wasn't unusual to find one of their nakama curled up against Bepo.

Bepo also used his hugs to get what he wanted. It was difficult to deny a determined Mink, and resistance was futile at the best of times. Crushed inside a bearhug and entirely at his mercy, no-one was immune to his demands, when he had them.

Penguin and Shachi were the most common victims. Bepo had enough respect for Law not to smother him at just any opportunity, but the other two that he had met on Swallow Island he had no such qualms about. They might complain sometimes (especially when he was hot and sweaty and using his strength to insist that the Polar Tang surface before he melted), but he'd known them for years. They didn't really have a problem with the bear hugs, no matter what they said. The pair of them were physically affectionate anyway, so what was adding a few more hugs to the mix?

Bepo was more gentle with the rest of the crew, slowly learning their boundaries and how much pressure they could take before the noises they made became alarming. Jean Bart was sturdy enough to take the Mink's full strength, but he was the only one. Ikkaku could take the least, with her slim figure, but while small, Clione was muscular and could take a decent amount of pressure. Law liked to pretend he was stronger than he was, but Bepo knew he was easier to break. Penguin could take more than Shachi, but the ginger took offense at the difference, as if it made him somehow inferior to
his best friend. Bepo thought it was stupid and got around the problem by always trapping them together, nuzzling them both until they surrendered (and then some, because it was always nice to hold his nakama).

Even if a nakama had joined with an aversion to touch (not that anyone ever compared to Law on the personal space thing), with Bepo around it was not hard for him to become the exception, his soft fur and warm hugs inviting – and on some days, just what the doctor ordered (literally. It was not an uncommon prescription from Law).

The Marines thought that Bepo was just a mascot, but even without his invaluable navigation that was too small, too narrow a term for him. He was their comforter, their nakama…

The reason the entire crew had developed a weakness for things soft and fluffy.
Law looked at the building in front of him with a sinking feeling. While clearly nowhere near as decrepit as it had been, the signs of a fire were obvious, tarpaulin pulled over bits of blackened exposed rafters. Some of the windows were boarded up, the white walls above them smoke-stained.

An unpleasant sensation settled in his stomach, which twisted itself in knots. A hospital was a well-defended and well-cared for part of any town. The fact that it had been burnt down made Law pause, wishing his memories of where Cora-san had taken him were clearer so that he could avoid those islands completely. He had no recollection of the place, but he found it hard to believe they’d coincidentally landed on one island in the entirety of North Blue whose hospital had burnt down for a reason other than upsetting Cora-san.

It had been a few years since then, the hospital's state a clear indicator of the island's struggling economy, and Law's tell-tale white splotches had faded away considerably, so it was unlikely he would be recognisable. Still, he didn't want to linger.

"No messing around," he told the other boys. They looked affronted, as if the very idea was preposterous. Law wished it was, but they did like to explore sometimes. He wasn't interested in any explorations here. A glance was shared between them and he waited for the inevitable questions – what was this place, how did he know it, why didn't he want to linger?

They never came, instead he was given two understanding nods from the teenagers. He'd forgotten that sometimes they realised when not to ask questions – a good thing in this case, as he didn't know what he'd have told them. They deserved the truth, but it still hurt too much to recount.

He spared a moment to remember the disaster with the white lead statue and wondered if they'd put anything together from that.

"Just the supplies, then we leave, then?" Penguin asked instead and Law nodded, pulling away from his thoughts and turning away from the sight of the hospital. "Got it."

They headed for the marketplace, where wares were plentiful and prices cheap. Maybe if they charged more they'd be able to fix up their hospital.

"That hat!" a man's voice exclaimed as they entered the main square. Law ignored it despite the clenching in his gut. "It's that boy's hat!" he flailed, sounding terrified.

"The white monster!" a woman's voice joined in and Law couldn't help the flinch. Hands rested on his shoulders lightly and he moved to dislodge them before realising who it was.
"Boys, get away from him!" the first voice said. "He's infected, you'll die!" There was panicked screaming, and Law ground his teeth.

"What the hell sort of nonsense are you spouting?" Shachi demanded, and Law felt the hand on his right shoulder tighten its grip.

"Sound the alarm!" he man continued as if Shachi hadn't spoken. "Call the Marines! Call the authorities!" The cries caught the attention of everyone in earshot. "The White Monster is back!"

Time seemed to stand still, just for a moment, the words echoing in the air and tormenting Law as his mind was thrown back to sitting in the doctor's office, listening to a man who ranked his own skin above an ill child.

The illusion shattered when two fists collided with the man's face, sending him flying backwards. People screamed again.

"How dare you?" Penguin demanded, and Law vaguely registered that the hands had gone from his shoulders. The two older boys moved to stand in front of him, seething. The man wiped his face with his sleeve. It came away bloody from his now broken nose, and he screamed.

Law was getting tired of the screaming.

"Let's go," he said, turning away from the man on the ground and the woman now hovering anxiously by his side, dabbing at the blood as if she'd never seen a broken nose before.

"W-what are you-?" the man blubbered, his voice thick. "No! Stop! Please!"

Law whirled back around to see that his order had been completely ignored by the other teens, who had descended onto the defenceless man with a vengeance. The sight was the same as when he'd first met them – two teenagers angry at the world and taking it out on anyone weaker than them. Only this time their victim wasn't a mink, but a so-called doctor.

This time they were capable of killing, and as Law watched he realised that was exactly what the two were intending. The woman had scrambled back, her fear greater than her desire to help, and Law saw her eyes flicking around nervously, as if she was waiting to be ambushed.

She was waiting for Cora-san to appear. A part of Law relished the fear, watching two of the apparent medical profession panic as they reaped what they sowed for not doing their jobs when they'd had the chance, even as his heart clenched.

Then he caught sight of Penguin and Shachi's faces, twisted with an ugly rage that didn't look right on them. They should be smiling and laughing, keeping his spirits up because that was what they did. They weren't killers – they had killed, but it was always for self-preservation. Law didn't want his nakama turning into cold-blooded murderers. Especially not when their first kills had sent them into a shock that had taken them days, weeks to shake. He was certain that even now, they had nightmares about it, because despite everything they'd been through, everything they'd done, underneath the surface they were still kind and gentle.

Looking at their twisted, furious faces now, Law could see none of that. There was no trace of the grins they usually wore in a fight, as if they were having fun. There was no resigned look as they reluctantly ended a life because it was do or die. Just faces twisted into snarls of anger as they cursed and spat at the bloodied form beneath them.

It felt like a punch to the gut. A haki-coated Law G punch to the gut.
This wasn't right. They shouldn't be so hateful, and the nagging sensation that if he didn't stop them something would irreparably *shatter* drove him to action, lunging forwards and grabbing them by the backs of their collars. Bigger, taller and enraged, pulling them back took more strength than he had. He was fairly certain they only stumbled back because their clothes were throttling them, and the fact that he'd had to do that to them was a douse of cold seawater to go with the gut punch.

"Let go!" Shachi snarled, his voice perfectly matching the ugly hatred on his face. Law never wanted to hear that from him again.

Penguin was wordless, vicious noises more at home from a rabid bear than his nakama's mouth making themselves heard as he threw himself forwards again, causing Law's shoulder to lurch painfully.

"Stop!" he shouted, seeing the limp, bloody form of their target on the ground, unresponsive even as his assailters were bodily hauled back as best Law could manage. No-one took the chance to run to his aid, not even the woman cowering nearby. Disgusted that they would even abandon their own, he gritted his teeth and jerked his nakama backwards, catching first Penguin and then Shachi with a hooked foot around their ankles and causing all three of them to crash to the ground. Law's lungs deflated as Shachi's elbow caught him, and a breathless cry followed as the full weight of both teens crashed on top of him. "Stop!" he wheezed again, taking advantage of their brief stunning to wrap his arms around them more firmly. To his immense regret, the only way he could force them both to stay still was a chokehold, his arms hooked around their throats, and he bit the inside of his cheek hard enough to bleed in an effort to hold back the tears.

Fingernails scrabbled at his arms as both teens reacted instinctively to the attack, clawing at him mercilessly for several long moments as he fought to keep them subdued, all the while battling with the wrongness of the situation. Every fibre of his being wanted to release them, to stop hurting them as they gasped for breath and bit and scratched at every part of him they could reach, but he couldn't. If he let go, they'd finish what they'd started, and lose something precious. They'd *break*, and it would all be Law's fault.

"L-law?" Penguin gasped, the first word he'd spoken since beginning his beatdown. Law needed no further persuasion to lessen his grip, letting his nakama breathe again but unable to let him go completely in case he rampaged again. Shachi was also lessening the fight, and Law didn't know if it was surrender or impending unconsciousness, but he slackened his grip on him, too.

"Stop," he said again, hoping they were in the state of mind to listen to him now. Despite his weakened grip, neither made a move to get up, and Law took a chance, releasing them completely. "We're leaving," he told them, carefully extracting himself from underneath the pair. They stayed still for a moment, just *breathing*, and Law watched them nervously, ignoring the shocked silence of their onlookers. Still no-one had gone to help the unconscious man.

"Yes, Captain," Shachi said, and he sounded resigned. Defeated. The ginger staggered to his feet, rubbing at his throat lightly. Besides him, Penguin mirrored his actions, and this time when Law began to lead the way back to the Tang, they followed.

The island natives parted for them silently, stumbling over themselves in their haste to get out of their path. Law ignored them, infinitely more concerned for his now silent nakama. Did they hate him now? The duo were never silent. Not like this.

"I'm sorry," he said, the moment they were back on the Tang, Bepo watching them with unconcealed worry but keeping his distance. He reached out for them, his hands stopping halfway at the blank faces. "I-"
"No," Penguin interrupted, breaking the silence. He sounded almost like Law was used to, almost normal, and part of Law dared hope that everything was okay. "I'm sorry." Now he sounded sincere, almost severe, and Law's heart dropped. This was it. This was the tipping point, where he'd pushed them too far, hurt them.

Arms wrapped around him, a crushingly tight hug, and Law froze as the older boy buried his face in his shoulder.

"They hurt you," Penguin continued, his voice muffled. "I couldn't do anything."

"We couldn't do anything," Shachi corrected, the ginger suddenly there in Law's personal bubble and wrapping his arms tightly around him, too.

Law felt his eyes water. The idiots. Complete and utter idiots. Barging into his life and his heart and staying there and forcing their way into situations they didn't belong just to help him.

There was a warmth at his back and all around him as Bepo joined in the hug, nuzzling at his cheek gently. The mink didn't know, couldn't know, what had happened and yet he was there, reliable as always.

"I never asked you to," he muttered into their hats. You do more than enough already. The unspoken words hung in the air, and Law let the silence stretch. Nothing had changed. They hadn't crossed the line of no return. Their humanity was still intact, as it should be. As it would always be, if Law had any say in the matter.

Law was their captain. Of course he had a say in the matter.

"You're not murderers," he told them, his voice stern even though he could feel it trembling on his tongue. The hats pulled back far enough that he could see their faces. Both were tear stained and his gut churned. "There's a line between killing for survival and killing for killing. Don't cross it."

They blinked at him numbly, and Law kicked away the memory of his early time as a Donquixote Pirate, when he'd charged over the line only for Cora-san to pick him up by the scruff of his neck and bodily throw him back.

Behind him, Law heard Bepo make a confused sound, unable to fully muffle it.

"Killing… for… ki-" Shachi sounded out slowly, as if testing the weight of each word on his tongue before letting it escape his mouth. "For… ki-"

"Gods," Penguin breathed, comprehension dawning in his eyes. His legs buckled, and Law lunged forwards awkwardly to try and catch him as he fell. Penguin was heavier than Law could comfortably hold, and for the second time that day that he ended up on the ground, holding his nakama. He heard a matching sound from Shachi, and his eyes flicked over long enough to see that Bepo had caught the ginger, lowering him to the ground with far more gentleness than Law had been able to achieve.

"I… we…” Penguin garbled. Shachi started to hiccup, the ugly, painful sound of someone unable to breathe properly because there were tears in the way. "We…” His hands were trembling, his whole body shuddering, and Law knew then that everything had sunk in; the heavy realisation that they'd been about to throw away their humanity, to become murderers, not just survivors.

"It's over," Law said, because he was never good at words, could never make people feel better. "You didn't. Bepo," he called, gaining the immediate attention of the mink still holding Shachi, letting him wipe tears and snot in his fur because Bepo was good like that.
"Captain?" the mink asked, one paw firmly entrenched in ginger hair. Shachi's hat lay abandoned on the deck and Law wondered if that was a trick for successful comforting.

"We need to leave this place," he said, and watched as Bepo hesitated, looking down at his nakama before gently nudging him towards Penguin. Unsurprisingly, the pair melted together, clutching at each other as if they were the only things keeping each other afloat in a sea of emotion, and Bepo gave them one last concerned glance before disappearing to the control room.

Bepo's sudden absence didn't make Law suddenly proficient in comforting. He knelt in front of the pair, awkward and wooden as he sorted through everything he knew, trying to find something appropriate, anything.

There was nothing. None of the books he'd read, none of his life experiences, had left him with any inkling what to do in this situation, how to make things better. He couldn't heal mental wounds, couldn't heal emotional wounds. All he knew was the body, how to stitch it back together so that it could keep going.

His eyes landed on the other boys' knuckles, bloodied and bruised. They were hurt, although it was clear to Law that their physical discomfort had yet to register in their minds at all, too busy tying themselves up in what-ifs and whys and everything that came with a mental crisis (and wasn't it funny that Law knew what they were like but not how to cure them?).

It was small, insignificant. In amongst everything else they needed it didn't even register on the list of priorities, but Law was a doctor and insignificant it might be but it was something. And something was better than nothing.

"Inside," he ordered, trying to soften his tone and internally wincing when it came out sharp and brusque. It was enough to catch their attention, their heads jerking up to look at him with too-blank eyes (and Law knew it was bad when he could tell Shachi's eyes were blank even through his shades). "Infirmary," he clarified when they didn't move immediately. For several long seconds they still didn't move, and Law chewed the inside of his cheek again, wondering how to get them to listen.

Then they moved, slowly unfurling themselves and finding their feet in a jerky, uncoordinated fashion, like a new born animal unsure of its place in the world. They followed in silence as he led the way, the stillness alleviated only by the background hum of the Polar Tang as her engines roared to life.

They slumped onto the beds when they reached their destination, and Law wasted no time in taking hold of Shachi's right hand, dabbing at it with disinfectant to clean away the blood before wrapping it gently yet firmly with white gauze. Something flickered behind the shades as he started to work on the left hand, and as he finished, both hands flexed loosely.

Penguin's hands were in the same shape, and Law treated them just as tenderly, because he couldn't heal their minds but he could heal their bodies, and he'd do anything to stop feeling so useless.

"Law," Shachi said as he finished with Penguin, and he looked at him because Shachi didn't sound like he was crying anymore. "Thank you."

For what, Law wanted to know. For putting them in a situation where their rage had almost destroyed them? For standing around like an awkward puppet as they fell apart, unable to help?

He said nothing, jumping as bandaged hands wrapped around his own securely.
"We won't make that mistake again," Penguin promised. "We won't be murderers." There was an awkward, pregnant silence, and for once Law knew what to say.

"I know."

Chapter End Notes

This ran away from me. A lot. Usually I try to curb these things when they do that but as this is chapter 150 and apparently I'm letting every 50th chapter be a big one I let it do what it wanted.

Someone asked for an encounter with a doctor that refused to treat Law, and that was just filled with angst opportunity so I couldn't resist.
Shachi knew that it wasn't right.

Of course, right now, there was very little that was right. Battered and bruised (and that was the understatement of the century), they were headed straight for the lair of the leader of the man that had put them in their current state. Even simply taking into account their physical condition alone, it was ridiculous.

If only their physical condition was the only thing they had to worry about. Shachi had yet to sleep a full night since being rescued. First it had been the paranoia – Jack would come back; the Straw Hats would pounce the moment they let their guard down. Now, cozied up nice and safe hundreds of metres below the surface in the Polar Tang, the paranoia had faded to be replaced with the nightmares.

The ones when someone died. Where Law came back but it was too late. The ones where Law never came back, lifeless on Dressrosa.

He wasn't the only one suffering, but he refused to share it. They all had their own pain, trying to take on another's burden as well would be too much (then Law saw through the lies and held onto them like he'd never done before, as awkward as always but determined anyway). It was for that reason that he kept his pain to himself, even from Penguin. Penguin, who had suffered more than any of them – worse injuries, Law's vivre card burning against his chest – but who still held his head high, not quite comforting them but staying the reliable presence he always had been.

Something wasn't right, and it stemmed from Penguin. He wasn't too cheerful, his smile as dulled as the rest of them. He didn't shine like a light about to blow, but something wasn't right. Shachi knew Penguin, had never not known Penguin. Penguin was strong, and proud. He'd never let Shachi see him grieve, not even when their parents were suddenly gone and there was nothing but incense and cold, dull stone to take their place.

So Shachi gave him space, left in the middle of the night even though he was blind and too disoriented to navigate the corridors properly, so Penguin could keep the illusion. It seemed to work, was worth nights curled up on the cold bathroom floor, trembling and knowing that one day his body would protest and he'd end up with a chill. Why did he do it? Why didn't he just bunk with nakama (Bepo would pull him in with open arms if only he knew)?

He thought it was the right thing to do, deceiving his nakama about how much it hurt so they could focus on themselves rather than worrying about him.

Then Law caught him one night and he couldn't hold the deception up any longer, not in the dead of
night when he'd let himself break so he seemed whole during the day. He didn't remember getting to bed, his last memory Law's nervous arms pulling him close on the bathroom floor, but when his eyes blinked open from the best night's sleep he'd had since Jack had arrived on Zou he found himself in his captain's bed, with his captain curled around him protectively.

He wondered why Law hadn't taken him back to his own room, but wasn't about to question it when he hadn't wanted to be. Instead, he shifted until his face was buried in Law's shoulder, feeling the younger man stir at the action, and wrapped his arms around him as tightly as his injuries permitted, because now Law had seen him at his worst – broken and ruined on the bathroom floor – he didn't need to hide from him.

Maybe he should do that for Penguin, catch him at his worst so he didn't need to hide away anymore. But Penguin was the strong one and knowing he was breaking and seeing it were two different things. Shachi knew he wouldn't be able to take the sight, not after going on thirty years of Penguin always being the strong one, so he stayed with Law, no longer crying but finding solace in the warmth of his body – all while he hated himself for not having the strength to help Penguin.

Chapter End Notes

Guess who's not done with the post-Zou angst. Oops? Companion to _Shatter_ and _Fragile_ (chapters 79 and 142).
The snow crunched beneath their boots as they trudged up the path, following a route they hadn't taken in fifteen years but their legs remembered all the same.

Penguin and Shachi hadn't bothered to tell their nakama where they were going, most of them too busy enjoying the venerable feast the island's inhabitants had set up. The singing and laughter could still be heard faintly behind them as they headed away from the hubbub, for once not the life and soul of the party. It wouldn't be long before their absence was noticed, but there was only one place they could possibly be going.

Noona had handed them what they needed as they left, the woman somehow still attuned to them despite the past fifteen years of separation. No words had been exchanged, but none were needed.

The graveyard loomed ahead of them, displaying more headstones than the last time they'd seen it – a reminder that life had gone on, even though they hadn't been there to see it – but the path to their destination was still unobstructed. They spared a glance for the newer additions, familiar names reminding them of people they'd never see again, but didn't halt their advance until they reached two stones near the top of the hill, pride of place in the cemetery.

"Hey," Shachi said weakly, dropping to his knees in front of one. The cloth in his hands fell to the ground, lying gently on top of undisturbed snow. "Sorry we were gone so long." He stayed there for several moments before reaching out to trace the two names gently. "You wouldn't believe the things we've been doing," he added, before launching into the tale, starting with a pair of teenagers and a mink fifteen years ago.

As he spoke he retrieved the cloth from where it had fallen and began to wipe at the stone, using the snow to dampen the cloth. The stone was not particularly dirty, certainly not covered in fifteen years of grime, but his fingers found small things – small cracks; smooth sections where the elements had polished the memorial – that had changed.

Beside him, knelt down in front of the neighbouring stone, Penguin mirrored his actions in silence. Shachi was talking enough for the both of them, their stories more or less identical through the years.

"I miss you, Mama, Papa," Shachi confessed once their tale was over. Neither knew how long he'd spoken for, but the shadows had grown longer and the breeze colder. The distant sounds of the feast had long since faded away to nothing, leaving the world silent.

"It might not have been the life you wanted for us," Penguin finally spoke, wiping the engraved names one last time before settling back on his knees. "But it's been a good one. We're still together, we're still watching each others' backs – that's okay, isn't it? As long as we're still together?"
There was no reply, not that they expected any from the graves. As one they drew sticks of incense from the bundles Noona had handed them, placing them reverently in front of the stones and lighting them. The unmistakeable scent, nostalgic after fifteen years of absence, filled the air and they bowed their heads, sweeping their hats off their heads as they did so and holding them in their laps as they closed their eyes.

That was how Noona found them, making her own way to the cemetery after the sun had set to see what had become of her two boys. Kneeling in the space between them with less grace than the last time the three of them had visited the graves together, she wrapped her arms around the pair of them. They leaned into her embrace carefully, and she chose to ignore the way the moon highlighted tear marks on their cheeks.

When they finally moved, the chill of the night in full force and the snow melting through their clothes to freeze their legs, they found Law leaning against a tree by the entrance to the cemetery, hat pulled low over his eyes. He said nothing as they joined him, and they let the silence persist on the walk back to the village.

Before they left Swallow Island, they'd introduce all of their nakama to their parents, but the first day was theirs alone.

Chapter End Notes

This is what happens when I spend too much time listening to sad songs at midnight. Arguably a sequel to Reunite (chapter 86).
It was hot.

As Penguin's consciousness filtered back to him, that was his first observation. There was something soft tightly pressed around him, and past that was the heavy weight of too-many blankets. He attempted to move, to throw off the excess blankets because really, it felt like every single one on the ship and that was just excessive. Arms – warm, furry arms that did nothing to help the high temperature – tightened around him, refusing to let him move.

"He's waking up," he heard Bepo say, a corresponding nuzzle to his cheek leaving him with no doubts who was holding onto him. It was unusual for the mink to hold onto him like that, usually simply serving as a pillow, or occasionally their cuddly-toy substitute.

"Let him move," Law's voice ordered, and the arms gripping him immediately laxed their grip, allowing Penguin to finally hurl the top several blankets off of him; it seemed like his initial impression of all the blankets on the ship wasn't that far off. "I see you're feeling better," his captain continued in a wry tone, and Penguin shifted to look at him.

The movement reminded him of the beating he'd taken as his bruised body groaned in protest and he slunk back down to his previous position, letting Bepo paw at him once more. Surrendering to the mink's whims because it really wasn't worth the hassle not to, he blinked at Law, who seemed like he had two heads – nope, that wasn't two heads, that was just Law and Shachi apparently sharing a single blanket.

"If you're short on blankets you can always take one of mine," Penguin pointed out to them. Law visibly rolled his eyes before slipping out of the blanket, leaving Shachi to huddle himself up in it, and resting a cool hand on Penguin's forehead.

"You needed them more," the younger boy said bluntly, pulling his hand back after a moment, apparently satisfied.

"I have Bepo," Penguin retorted, feeling the mink nuzzle against him again. "That's way better than burying me in blankets." Bepo made a noise that sounded like a surprised whine before he was nuzzled again, more enthusiastically.

"You needed Bepo and the blankets," Law said bluntly, and before Penguin could come up with a remark about overkill he continued talking. "You were in shock and hypothermic." Penguin's mouth clacked shut, and he glanced back at Shachi, who had rather uncharacteristically failed to say a word since he'd woken up.
His hair was a mess, mused until it resembled a birds' nest, and Penguin recalled Law's vigour when it came to the ginger not drying his hair properly. He was still clutching the blanket, and Penguin realised who must have fished him out. Law's use of the word 'hypothermic', and the way they'd been sharing the blanket suddenly held a new meaning, and his mouth curled down into a concerned frown.

"Are you okay, Shachi?" he asked. In hindsight, the explosion should have been obvious.

"Am I okay?" the ginger demanded harshly, shooting to his feet and towering over the bedridden Penguin. "Am I okay? You go and damn near drown and you're asking if I'm okay?"

That was a resounding no, then.

"Come here," he said, ignoring Law's disapproving harrumph as he reached out a hand to yank at Shachi's arm. The ginger let himself be pulled closer, until Penguin could wrap his arms around him firmly. He wasn't cold, per say, but compared to Penguin and the veritable furnace he'd been cocooned within there was a notable chill to his skin.

Law made the harrumphing sound again, and Penguin turned his attention back to him once he'd coerced Shachi into sharing the bed with himself and Bepo.

"So," his captain said, the word full of intent and disapproval. "What stopped you from doing the sensible thing and avoiding a fight?" Penguin shrugged, knowing full well that he'd messed up when he'd underestimated the other pirate crew. He didn't need Law to tell him that, but his captain seemed determined to do so anyway. "You could have died!" Law hissed. On some level, Penguin knew that, had known that since the moment everything started going dark and he was all alone in the water. "You nearly did."

"You weren't breathing," Shachi interjected, as if Penguin wasn't taking it seriously enough. "When I got you out the water you weren't breathing." The raw desperation in his voice forced Penguin to consider that maybe he wasn't.

"You saved me," he replied, biting back the sorry because he knew they wouldn't be content with a single, generic word. "Thank you." He buried his face in ginger hair, smelling the familiar scent even as he extended a hand to Law. "Both of you." He nuzzled Bepo lightly in the reassurance that he knew the mink had done everything he could, too. "I'll be more careful next time."

All three of them responded simultaneously, the words different but the sentiment the same.

You'd better.

Chapter End Notes

Sequel to Drown and Resuscitate (chapters 55 and 56). Penguin PoV for Penguin's birthday :D (and I owe Shachi an apology because I totally forgot about his earlier this month).
The Heart Pirates were pretty okay, Usopp eventually decided after weeks spent confined in their submarine. The ship was a good start – Usopp was no Franky, but Usopp liked things that could be tinkered with, and while Law was far too scary for him to risk tampering with the submarine, he was less afraid of just following Franky around while he investigated.

Even better was their social atmosphere as they gradually opened up over time to the other crew on their ship. They weren't afraid of a good time (Usopp had not expected that, not with Mr Scary-Grumpy-Pants for a captain, but the Heart Pirates seemed good at exceeding the expectations of even the great Usopp-sama). Without Sanji and Luffy and Brook and Chopper, parties couldn't possibly be right, but the Heart Pirates had a similar feel if one stripped away the uniqueness of a Straw Hat party.

Not that the Heart Pirates were throwing parties. They didn't seem like the sort to celebrate after a battle when they were injured (and that was definitely Mr Scary-Grumpy-Pants' influence, although in this particular instance Usopp could concede that as they'd effectively lost to Jack there wasn't much to celebrate past their survival). Still, there was a lightness in the air in the evenings that Usopp genuinely enjoyed, and in true Straw Hat fashion he found himself getting attached to their new allies.

If only their new allies didn't share their penchant for not getting through battles unscathed. Usopp should have seen it coming, after Dressrosa and the realisation that Mr Scary-Grumpy-Pants was human and could bleed. There was always a bit of the captain's insanity in the crew, so logic dictated that the Heart Pirates, too, were human and could bleed.

Usopp was fairly certain that that was supposed to be a fatal wound. Of course, on their own Monster Trio it barely classified as a scratch, but that was Luffy, Zoro and Sanji for you. Normal people were supposed to collapse after being run through, and while it was true they had Mr Scary-Grumpy-Pants for a captain, he'd got the impression that most of the Heart Pirates were at least not that brand of monster (after seeing Law post-Dressrosa, even the Surgeon of Death didn't quite make those ranks). But no, Shachi was still on his own two feet – if swaying a little – despite the definite hole in him.

If that was the strangest thing, maybe he'd have been able to keep his mouth shut. After all, members of his own crew sometimes did ridiculous things like that (to Chopper's frustration), so he could hardly judge.

No, the strangest thing was everyone's reactions. Penguin, who Usopp had come to understand had a similar relationship with Shachi to the Ace/Sabo-Luffy brotherhood, showed no signs of
overprotective older brotherhood. He sighed a lot, as if this was usual, tugged Shachi's arm over his shoulders, and guided him away from what little was left of their enemies. Shachi was laughing and joking, as if he wasn't spilling blood everywhere he went.

None of them seemed to realise that should be a cause for concern, even Ikkaku, who had wandered off with purpose but no frantic hurry to find their captain-doctor. Usopp was no doctor, but he was sure that shock and panic was the appropriate response to a hole running through one's body. Even he, the great God Usopp-sama, would be concerned at such a sight in one of his nakama (and the Heart Pirates were hovering somewhere on the edge of that label, so he was sorta-worried, really).

"What's wrong with you?" he most-definitely-did-not-flail, keeping pace with the group of Heart pirates with their injured nakama in the centre.

"Oh, don't worry about it," Shachi himself flapped casually in response, even though he was leaning more and more heavily on Penguin as each second passed. "It's just a hole."

"J-j-j-" Usopp spluttered, before drawing himself up with some effort. "I mean, of course it's just a hole. Why, I once knew a man who was riddled so full of holes he looked like cheese but was still perfectly fine!" They laughed at him, and Usopp chose to take that as amazed laughter. "However," he continued, his voice serious. "The great Usopp-sama can see that you are not so fine."

"Maybe not," Shachi admitted, although he still attempted a nonchalant shrug. Usopp mentally placed him in his category of 'monsters' because anyone who could do that was decidedly not normal. "But it doesn't matter. Captain'll be here soon, then I'll be all healed up again."

The surety in his voice was one Usopp recognised and appreciated; the complete and utter faith in someone to make everything fine even though it clearly wasn't. He held the same faith in Luffy, and the others. Still, to be so confident that he didn't even slip into shock (at least not noticeably; Usopp didn't know much about medicine but he knew shock came in various guises)? That was an impressive feat of belief, and one Usopp had never seen directed at anyone other than his own captain before.

He was spared the need to recite another completely true anecdote by the arrival of the Heart Pirate's captain. Bizarrely, his reaction fell somewhere on Usopp's Completely Sane to Relatively Normal scale, rather than off the chart like the rest of the crew had been.

Law could get emotional; Usopp had seen it on Dressrosa. It was still jarring to see him worried as he hurried over to them – actually hurried! He started barking orders and Usopp hung back, because allies or not this didn't concern him, not unless his own captain told him to help.

The trust that the Heart Pirates had in their captain's abilities was astounding, but then Usopp thought back to Luffy's scar, and how easily they could have lost him at Marineford. And why they didn't. Then the faith made sense, because with his Devil Fruit Law could do amazing things like that – even moreso than Chopper, despite the reindeer being one of the best doctors Usopp had ever met.

Still, the whole thing was just plain creepy.
shift. What Usopp doesn't know is that Law's done his organ-extraction thing, so once again blood loss would be the only real concern, no matter what it looks like.
The Grand Line appeared to have no intent of curbing its punches, greeting them with ridiculousness the moment the Polar Tang entered its waters. They had thought themselves prepared for Paradise's surprises – temperamental weather and vicious sea kings – but the Island Whale ramming the Red Line as if it thought it could break through very nearly ended their journey then and there.

The Island Whale, however, paled in comparison to its companion, a bizarre old man with entirely too much fondness for prolonged pauses at entirely unnecessary points in his sentences. By the time they finally left the small cape, Penguin and Shachi needed to be physically restrained from attempting to strangle him.

Despite his less than ideal personality quirks, the Heart Pirates ended up spending far longer at the cape than initially planned, due to one small fact. The old man – Crocus, or so he'd introduced himself – had been the doctor of the Roger Pirates. It gained him limited fanfare, to his fascination, due to the crew's lack of enamour with the Pirate King; indeed, the most fanfare stemmed from Law himself, which was entirely down to the complex surgeries the man was performing on the Island Whale (Laboon, according to introductions). Hungry for knowledge, Law trailed behind the man as he went inside the whale.

Penguin and Shachi had attempted to follow him, only to be admonished and firmly ordered to stay. Law was well aware of their homicidal tendencies towards the irritating old man, and observing him at work would be far easier without the pair of them interrupting every minute. Unwilling to let their captain go with an unknown man inside the body of a whale, Uni and Ikkaku had instead been selected as the chaperones.

Bepo, meanwhile, had settled himself firmly on the cape itself, poking at the Log Pose with an unamused paw as it spun lazily, trying to find a magnetic signal to latch onto. His mutterings at how much of a waste of time and money the stupid thing was went unacknowledged by the crew, no-one wanting to bring the mink's rants down on their heads by drawing attention to themselves.

When not tormenting the Log Pose, he would sit and listen to Laboon's wails, the only member of the crew not finding himself driven mad by the constant cries. He refused to share what the Island Whale was saying, but once or twice had been found clinging to the whale's head as if trying to comfort the thing. It was a good thing he was a competent swimmer, as he always ended up shaken off into the water, although he was quick to assure his irate nakama that Laboon hadn't meant it.

After the Log Pose had sent, most of the crew clamoured to leave, tired of having to constantly check the Tang's mooring line every half hour to make sure Laboon's wave-churning lunges hadn't begun to worm her loose.
Law, in as much of a fanboy mode as they were ever likely to see their captain, simply told them to be patient before disappearing back to talk doctor-things with Crocus. It reached the point where Penguin and Shachi could be heard plotting to shackle their captain and throw him on the Tang so they could just leave already.

Whether or not they would have followed through with it was never revealed as Law did, eventually, decide he’d lingered in one place for long enough and gave the order to set sail to a chorus of delighted cheers.

Bepo was the only one not so pleased, as Law told him to follow the direction the Log Pose was pointing, even though Bepo felt it was a stupid direction and they’d be better off going that way instead.

All it took was a stern Bepo, and the mink caved with an apology that was more habitual than genuine, as evidenced by the subsequent grumbling. It was also the longest Law ever went without a mink-pillow, as Bepo remained unusually scarce whenever their captain was looking to take a rest for the next two days.

Chapter End Notes

Okay but you can't tell me Law wouldn't have been interested in Crocus' history as a doctor, and the unusual treatments he was giving Laboon.

And Bepo can rebel too, in his own way! Obviously, this is set before Mistake (chapter 99), so the reality of why a Log Pose is vital even with a mink for a navigator hasn't sunk in yet.
There were many thoughts running through Law's mind as he finally, finally came face to face with Doflamingo, in the ruins of what had once been a magnificent throne room but was now just a roofless rubble.

It was time at least. Thirteen years of running, hiding, and gathering information had all led up to this single moment – him against Doflamingo. Cora-san's revenge.

For much of the fight, it dominated him. Even as he lost Mugiwara-ya and ended up two-on-one against Doflamingo and Trebol, his mind focused on the pain and injustice of those three years, starting with the Flevance massacre and ending with Cora-san's death on Minion Island.

Then Doflamingo mentioned his crew, in amongst a hail of bullets cascading down on Law, or rather, where Law had been, would have been, if Doflamingo's rage hadn't made him miss the first shot. On a lower level of the castle, down an arm and forcibly pushing the screams of his nerves away, he took a moment to catch his breath. Doflamingo's rant was perfectly clear, the Heavenly Demon delighting in being the centre of attention even if his only audience was a corpse and his puppet-on-a-string Trebol.

"Your crew, the Heart Pirates!" Doflamingo raged, and something in Law ran cold. It had been naïve to forget that Doflamingo would have at least known of his crew. With the newspapers declaring it at every opportunity, the name would of course have meant something to Doflamingo. It was almost an inside reference to the two of them, the rest of the world assuming it had something to do with his 'Surgeon of Death' theme. The idea made Law sick, but Heart was Cora-san. It wasn't Doflamingo, nor did Doflamingo have any claim to it.

What was worse was the gnawing doubt that suddenly hit. Doflamingo knew his crew's name, but what else did he know? Bepo was, thankfully, the only one with a bounty, but Doflamingo dealt in the underworld, so who knew what else he'd heard through the grape vine. Law had kept them safe and under the radar, somehow, for the last thirteen years, but had it been enough?

Mugiwara-ya's enraged cries drew his attention to the fact that Doflamingo had stopped shooting his double. For the first time since their initial attack, Law had the advantage, and he was going to use it. Cora-san had to be avenged.

Back face-to-face with Doflamingo, his blond hair and ridiculous height clearly marking him as Cora-san's brother, it was easy to slip back to the *avenge Cora-san* mentality, pushing the temporary relapse from his mind. Besides, as long as he won here, it wouldn't matter what Doflamingo knew about his crew, so he pushed the what-ifs and panic from his mind to replace them with his purpose.
Of course, because this was Doflamingo and he was a complete and utter demon, not even destroying him from the inside was enough to stop him. The bastard gloated, referring to his Gamma Knife as a Kamikaze attack, and Law wished he wasn't right. He had no strength left, not even enough to roll away from the foot descending on him with a vengeance, and his overflowing frustration burst out of him in a single curse.

"DAMN IT!" He was going to die. He'd failed; everything he'd spent the last thirteen years doing hadn't been enough. He'd let his crew, his ever-loyal, faithful, crew down. Let Cora-san down.

He barely registered when the attack was blocked by a single sandaled foot, stopping it dead a foot above his head and saving his life – again, how many times would Mugiwara-ya save his life before this was all over, one way or another?

What caught his attention was the wave of Conqueror's Haki overflowing from his ally, the sheer force of its collision with Doflamingo's own sending him flying, out of immediate danger. The landing settled his thoughts, shocking him back into the now, where Monkey D. Luffy was standing up to Donquixote Doflamingo in a battle of wills and not losing.

Law didn't have Conqueror's Haki. He could stand against it, but he couldn't pour his willpower out in the way required to overpower weaker wills than his own. He had many disadvantages against Doflamingo, but that was the one he'd never been able to do anything about. Now, Law was staring straight at a man – others might call Mugiwara-ya a boy, but as Law watched him stand his ground against a demon all he could see was a man – who could do that one thing Law would never manage.

Mugiwara-ya was better suited to defeat Doflamingo. Law had played all his cards and lost, the steady drip drip of blood from his right shoulder and the hole through his chest a message that nothing he sacrificed would be enough. But there was Mugiwara-ya, tall, proud and dangerous, better suited for this victory. Law didn't want to give up, was – in the words of his crew – stubborn beyond all reason, but he was a realist. Even if, by some medical miracle beyond what even he could do, he managed to reach his feet again, all that awaited him was death.

Half an hour ago, Law wouldn't have cared. Even five minutes ago, he wouldn't have cared, his mind full of nothing but avenge Cora-san, finish what Cora-san couldn't.

Then Doflamingo had mentioned his crew, and battered, almost broken and on the edge of death, Law remembered the idiots that had promised to wait, as long as it took. He couldn't beat Doflamingo, but he didn't have to, not when Mugiwara-ya was still playing the part of his puppet. It wasn't a perfect situation, but Law was resourceful. He had been the mastermind behind the confrontation, so no matter which of them killed Doflamingo, it was still his win.

Law wanted to live. He wanted to take down Doflamingo and live, because his nakama were waiting for him, and Doflamingo had made a big mistake mentioning his crew, because now Law was thinking again, rather than charging blindly like that bull he'd spend too much time on the back of.

Law was always most dangerous when he thought.

Doflamingo he would have to leave to Mugiwara-ya, no matter how much his pride rankled. He barely had the strength to move a single finger, and while he wasn't so heartless as to simply abandon the other captain – it was his revenge, after all, and Law hadn't gone thirteen years to flee and leave it up to someone else – he was nothing more than a liability until his strength returned. If it returned; there was always the chance that he wouldn't receive medical attention in time and die. Quite a large chance, in fact.
Trebol, on the other hand, he could do something about. Law was all but immobile, but against the
dumber executive he still had two weapons at his disposal. He'd always been good at winding people
up, and took a perverse pleasure in once again reverting back to the bratty kid Trebol had always
hated, coaxing him closer and watching as he let his guard down, believing that Law was on death's
door. And maybe he was, but Trebol would be going there first.

His pride as a captain, he claimed it to be as he manipulated his own severed arm to clutch Kikoku
and bisect the mucus man. He couldn't leave it all to Mugiwara-ya, he added, although whether
anyone was listening to him was an unknown.

He almost hoped they weren't as he slipped up, mentioning his own crew and how he wouldn't be
able to face them if he couldn't at least do that much. An innocent sentence, spoken out of pride,
betrayed his desire to be able to face them again, to *survive* and reunite with the crew that had got
him to Dressrosa in the first place.

Luckily for him, Trebol was too enraged to pay attention to his exact words, and as the fire engulfed
Law, regret bubbled up – couldn't avenge Cora-san, wouldn't survive to see his crew again – before
his body finally gave out and everything went dark.

There were a lot of thoughts in Law's head during Dressrosa, first and foremost his devotion to Cora-
San's memory and vengeance. But there were times, sometimes, when he was at his lowest point and
Doflamingo seemed undefeatable, that his mind strayed to his faithful crew waiting for him on Zou
and his resignation to death turned to a grim determination to *live*.

Chapter End Notes

So we all know that Dressrosa is all about Law wanting vengeance for Cora-san etc.,
but there's that *one* scene, when he takes down Trebol, where he mentions not being
able to face his crew if he didn't at least take one of them (Doflamingo/Trebol) down. T
hat comes shortly after Doflamingo mentioning his crew in his tirade, and also seems to
correspond to Law shifting from *must kill Doflamingo* to appearing to almost give up
and rely entirely on Luffy to finish the job. Coincidence? Maybe not.
Ikkaku didn't think anyone would blame her if she admitted her current roommate unnerved her. After having her room all to herself since she joined the crew, suddenly sharing it with another woman was an odd experience. While awake, Nico Robin was decent company. She was intelligent, had a sense of humour Ikkaku could appreciate, and counterbalanced the male Straw Hats perfectly. When the lights were on and her nakama in sight, she could happily spend time with the other woman.

At night, the Tang's halls silent barring the quiet hum of the engine, Ikkaku couldn't help but remember the darker side to the Demon Child curled up on a pile of blankets on her floor. Law would never have let Nico Robin sleep in her room if he thought there was any danger at all, and it was only because of that fact that Ikkaku ever got any sleep, trusting her captain's judgement over the propaganda of the marines.

Still, sometimes not even that reassurance was enough to let her sleep, and that night Ikkaku found herself wandering the halls to the kitchen, seeking a drink of water for the sake of something to do and making up a half-truth when Clione noticed her and asked her why she was out of bed. She would have offered to take his night watch if she hadn't taken it the night before. Law was strict on how frequently they could take the night watch.

Instead, she bid him goodnight and meandered back to her room, and the sleeping assassin's ally inside. The cool water had woken her up, and she was in no hurry to return, two facts which combined to result in an unusual encounter.

Finding Law wandering was not strictly unusual, although he did try to curb it at night, when his nakama were asleep, and Ikkaku braced herself for a silent query about why she was out of bed, the doctor side of her captain never letting anything out of routine slide.

"Ikkaku." It wasn't silent, and Law sounded pained. She headed straight for him, rather than allowing him to bypass her as she'd been contemplating, and realised he wasn't alone. In his arms, asleep – or unconscious – was the limp form of Shachi. In the dull night-time lighting of the corridors she could see he was missing both his hat and ever-present shades, and felt her heart skip a beat.

"Captain," she replied, her voice slightly breathless as she came to a halt before him. "What-"

"He's just asleep," her captain told her, and the fear that something was wrong with her nakama dissipated. "Ikkaku," he said again, and she tore her eyes away from the sleeping – not unconscious – ginger to look at him. "I need a favour."

He still sounded pained, even though Shachi was supposedly fine, and Ikkaku got the sense that
there was something larger going on.

"Whatever you need," she agreed, stopping just short of adding on the customary 'Captain'. Somehow, she got the impression that Law wasn't asking as her captain, but simply as nakama.

"Could you look after Shachi tonight?" he asked, and she looked at the sleeping ginger in his arms again, wondering why he needed looking after, and why Law was carrying him around rather than leaving him in his room with Penguin. He wasn't even walking towards their room.

"Is something wrong with him?" she asked, and Law hesitated a split second before shaking his head. He resumed his walk – heading towards his own room, Ikkaku realised – and she followed him without a second thought.

"Zou affected him more than he's letting on," Law eventually allowed, and Ikkaku didn't need to hear more than that. The screams in her nightmares were another reason sleep was elusive. "I don't want him sleeping alone."

What about Penguin, she wondered, but the words never passed her lips as they arrived at Law's room, her captain inviting her in with a tilt of his head as he settled Shachi on the bed.

"Can you stay with him tonight?" he asked her again, and she nodded without hesitation, perching on the side of the bed and letting her hand rest on the sheets by Shachi's shoulder. Law was talking like he had something else to do, and while he wasn't saying what, she could guess.

"I'll look after him," she said, and while Law didn't say anything, even in the dull lighting she could see the gratitude in his eyes before he turned and left the room, closing the door softly behind him.

If she was going to spend the night awake, keeping watch over her nakama was infinitely preferable to fighting night terrors. She pulled herself fully onto the bed, sitting by Shachi's head with her back to the wall, and drew the blankets up to the ginger's chin, covering her own legs in the process.

She wished she could say she was surprised when the nightmares started, Shachi's previously even breathing hitching in his throat to escape with a whimper. Shachi and Penguin were strong, physically and mentally more than fit for their unofficial role as Law's second in commands, but they were only human. Leaning forwards, she rested her hand gently on his hair, hoping to calm him.

"You're okay," she murmured, burying her fingers in the ginger strands and massaging his scalp lightly. At the contact he frowned, brow furrowing in confusion before his eyes blinked open.

"Wha-" he muttered, pushing himself into a sitting position. "Law?" Ikkaku shifted and his head snapped around to focus on her, eyes wide in the darkness. She still couldn't see what colour his eyes were, one of the mysteries of the Heart Pirates. "Ikkaku?" he asked, still sounding half asleep but aware enough of his surroundings. "Why are you here?"

"Law asked me," she told him, spotting a tremble in his arms that betrayed the nightmare not fully gone from his mind. "Try to sleep." The suggestion made him flinch, and she sighed, patting her lap. Obediently he shuffled closer and she met him halfway, sliding down until she was lying next to him and wrapping her arms around his shoulders.

For several minutes he didn't react, but eventually arms wrapped around her in turn and she buried her face in his hair as she stroked it gently. She felt him slowly loosen, tension draining from him as he burrowed against her chest – an action that, in daylight, would be a prank and treated as such; now, half-asleep with his mental armour down, it was the action of seeking comfort and Ikkaku gave it as his breathing evened out and he slipped back into sleep.
She stayed awake a while longer, listening to his breathing for signs of another nightmare that never came before finally falling into a dreamless sleep herself.

Chapter End Notes

I often end up drawing a mental line between the 'core' crew and the rest of the Hearts, especially on the angrier ones, so I decided to cross it this time because they're all nakama. Once again, one of the post-Zou stories, because I don't think I'll ever get tired of them. Where did Law go? I'll be writing that later ;P
When Law found Shachi having another breakdown in the bathroom for the second night in a row, the ginger once again clutching to him as he cried himself to sleep, he realised that things were even worse than he'd thought. How many nights had he spent like that? They were a week out of Zou, and an unpleasant churning in his gut told him that Shachi had barely spent a single night in his own bed – or in a bed at all, until the previous night.

This couldn't go on. Mental trauma aside, not even his physical wounds would heal if he didn't let himself rest. Like the previous night, Law picked him up gently and carried him from the bathroom. If Shachi needed a different room to sleep in for a while, Law had no issues sharing with him. However, he was conscious that this wasn't just a problem with Shachi.

He didn't even know what state Penguin was in. The older man almost always seemed unshakable; on the occasions he wasn't so steady he always managed to switch it to seem like he was the one comforting the others. Without Shachi in the room, therefore leaving Penguin alone, how was he coping?

Law tightened his grip on Shachi, biting his lip. He didn't want to take Shachi back to their room, because there was clearly a reason he wasn't there – a reason he suspected involved Penguin's own mental state – but nor could he bring himself to leave Shachi alone, even if he was finally sleeping.

What was he supposed to do? He couldn't split himself in two and be with both of them at once; he was only one man, no matter how impressive his devil fruit. One of the two needed to be prioritised, and Law hated anything that even loosely playing favourites but as he looked at the sleeping Shachi in his arms, he made the decision.

He'd helped Shachi yesterday. He had a reasonably good idea as to the ginger's mental state and if he left him in his room, maybe he'd be able to sleep the rest of the night away. Penguin was a complete unknown, and if nothing else Law couldn't let his imagination keep running away with him. He mentally apologised to Shachi, unwilling to talk out loud in the silence in case he woke him, and rounded a corner in the corridor to come face to face with an unexpected but welcome solution.

His heart hurt less at leaving Shachi now that the ginger wasn't alone, and part of him rebelled at the fact he'd had to ask for help looking after his crew, but logic quashed the complaint. If he'd got it right, Shachi just needed company, not specifically Law. Ikkaku would look after him just fine, now
it was time for him to find out exactly how bad Penguin's mental state really was.

A large part of him hoped that he was wrong, and that he'd find the older man fast asleep, but a hope was all it was. His fears were confirmed when he finally reached the relevant door. It was firmly shut, despite Shachi having left earlier; a clear sign that he hadn't planned on returning any time soon. In the quiet of the night, a closed door wasn't enough to completely conceal the sounds of muffled screams from inside.

Law rested a hand on the door, suddenly unsure. What was he supposed to do? This wasn't like accidentally stumbling across Shachi and having to react to whatever the ginger did. Penguin didn't know he was there, didn't have to know he'd been there if Law slunk away and left him to his emotions. Law was no better at comforting people than he had been the night before, despite Jean Bart's advice.

Being himself was no good when Penguin so clearly needed something more.

*Get a grip,* he scolded himself mentally, his hand turning into a fist against the door and his forehead resting against the cool metal. He was both the captain and the doctor of the crew, and therefore their well-being was his responsibility. He couldn't turn tail and run the moment things left his comfort zone.

Steeling himself, he formed a Room and teleported himself the other side of the door. It was quieter than fumbling with the door, and he knew if he gave Penguin any warning at all the older man would clam up, much like Shachi had attempted to do the previous night.

The tactic paid off, Law's eyes focusing on the shaking form on the lower bunk. This side of the door, the cries were deafening, even though Penguin was clearly biting his pillow to gag himself. Law crossed the distance to the bed silently and knelt on the floor beside it.

What did he do now? Did he announce his presence or let Penguin notice in his own time? The older man seemed oblivious to his company, and it would likely be a while before he realised. Watching him suffer without telling him felt *wrong* and in the end Law made a move.

Turning around, so that his back was resting against the side of Penguin's bunk, he spoke.

"You're going to wreck your pillow," he said quietly, unable to ask something as mundane as *are you alright* when the answer was obvious, or say *you don't have to suffer alone* when it was clear that Penguin's intention had been to do exactly that.

The cries cut off abruptly, and Law heard Penguin shuffle around suddenly but didn't turn around, allowing him the privacy to compose himself slightly.

"L-law?" Penguin stuttered, and he made a noise of acknowledgement. "What are you doing here?" His voice was thick with tears, and Law's heart hurt to hear his nakama in such a state.

Dealing with Penguin wouldn't be like dealing with Shachi. Shachi wasn't afraid to rely on his nakama from time to time – usually Penguin, admittedly – but Penguin was always the one relied *on.* He would need to be convinced to let Law help him, a task made harder by the fact that Law had no idea what he was doing.

"There's nothing worse than suffering alone," he said, knowing that somewhere in his mind Penguin would know he was talking from experience. There was no sound from the bed, but he knew the other man was listening. "I don't know what I'm doing," he added, because Penguin deserved the truth, and was rewarded with a sound that under other circumstances he might have called amused.
"But I'm not letting you do that to yourself."

There was more silence, and Law feared he wasn't helping – was making things worse – but waited.

"Where's Shachi?" Penguin eventually asked, his voice muffled again. Law surmised he'd buried his face back in his pillow.

"My room," he answered, unsurprised that even now, Penguin was worrying more about the ginger than himself. "Ikkaku's keeping him company." Penguin responded with another noise, this time relieved, and Law started as a hand slid over his shoulder, the arm wrapping loosely around his neck in an embrace. Before he could say anything, a face pressed against the back of his neck.

He didn't turn around, even as the sobs started, staying still and letting Penguin take what comfort he wanted. In the dark, the passage of time was difficult to measure and Law didn't bother to try as his nakama cried. It didn't matter how long they took, as long as it helped Penguin.

The sobs died down eventually, and Law thought that, like Shachi, he'd cried himself to sleep. Effectively pinned to the side of the bed, he resigned himself to spending the rest of the night in that position, only to be caught out by a tug. Obeying the silent request, Law let himself be pulled up.

"You'll catch a cold sleeping there," Penguin murmured, and despite himself Law felt his lips tug into a small smile, because that was the sort of thing he'd say. He also recognised it for the unspoken request it was, and allowed Penguin to coax him into the bed, where strong arms wrapped around him again. Penguin's head rested on his chest, and Law loosely wrapped an arm around him, to Penguin's obvious surprise. The older man shifted closer, accepting the embrace. "You know," he mumbled, voice now muffled against Law's chest. Law considered it an improvement from the pillow. "You're not as bad at this as you think you are."

It was Law's turn to make a startled noise, and he was rewarded with a watery chuckle.

Penguin didn't fall asleep at the drop of a hat like Shachi did – Law wasn't completely certain either of them got any sleep that night – but the silence was companionable and Law dared to hope that maybe he'd helped Penguin a little.

Chapter End Notes

It was probably pretty obvious where Law went last chapter, I admit. Penguin finally gets some help, because hell knows he needs it after everything I've put him through.
Hoard

Chapter Notes

Characters: Shachi, Law
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Hobbies, Numismatics, Coins

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Law always made it a point to keep a definitive line between himself and the other rabble that classified as 'pirates'. For the most part, Shachi thought he did a pretty good job at it – having a fully functioning brain and something that almost passed for morals went a long way, even if the so-called 'morals' could only really be seen from the Heart Pirates' point of view. Leaving people alive but diced up in pieces was hardly a conventional way of sparing lives.

But despite that, he acquired a stereotype that, while well hidden, couldn't really be denied.

Law liked shiny things.

Well, that wasn't quite fair to him. He wasn't a magpie that would descend upon anything that glittered; Law had standards. But, well, if those standards were met, then Law was getting that shiny thing, come hell or high water.

Shachi didn't know what, exactly, drew his captain to coins – specifically special commemorative coins, that is to say, the rare expensive ones – but he did know that there was a steadily-growing pile on the desk in his bedroom, which Law would sort through every so often, when his duties gave him the chance. He kept a log book, recording all the details of each coin. Shachi had watched him on occasion, more often when they were teenagers, before they had an entire twenty strong crew to keep under some semblance of control, but sometimes, when Shachi wanted some quiet but not necessarily solitude, Law recording coins quietly in his room was an ideal solution.

Law was meticulous in his records. Date, condition, and what event it commemorated were documented in great detail, in that scrawling doctor's handwriting that Shachi could only read because he'd been exposed to it ever since he was fourteen, watching it change and evolve from something arguably-legible when Law was a teenager to an all out chaos of strokes that supposedly made words in adulthood.

Sometimes, duplicates happened. Law never paid too much attention beyond whether or not it was a commemorative coin when he initially liberated it (and Shachi would always be amused that a fruit like Law's, which was supposed to be used for the better good, could lend itself so easily to petty acts of subtle thievery), so sometimes he ended up with two or three of the same one. Only the best conditioned one was filed away in the special chest they'd made specially for Law's collection – each coin had its own slot, a work of mastery that took three teenagers and a mink a year to carve, leaving Shachi to dread the day Law ran out of space and they'd need to make a bigger one. The others were left on his desk, not quite carelessly strewn around.

To the casual observer it might seem an uncharacteristic mess, but to Shachi's informed eye they
were still organised in an approximation of date order, starting with the earliest at the back and the newest at the front.

Rarely, the duplicates served another purpose. While Law could and would teleport items from across the Tang to his room at will, he claimed it was less tiring if he could switch it with something else, rather than having to displace air. The coins were a good way of marking where that book had gone, or that plate of food.

To discourage Law from using it too much, Shachi, Penguin, Bepo, and some of the other longer term Heart Pirates would pick up coins they'd found and wander back to his room, placing them in Law's hand or back on the desk so he'd actually have to leave his room to return the item. Shachi himself would accompany the action with a sighed scolding about using his abilities unnecessarily; he didn't know if the others did the same. Penguin likely did, but Shachi wouldn't be surprised to learn the others didn't.

He still didn't know what drew Law to that particular hobby, and even found it ironic that he was so interested in something created by the World Government – and therefore full of World Government propaganda – without a clear ulterior motive. He just seemed to genuinely enjoy the past time, and Shachi never bothered to ask him.

There weren't many things Law could focus on that didn't bring some sort of shadow over him, so Shachi was content to just accept that Law simply had a hobby that wasn't clearly Doflamingo or Flevance influenced.

Chapter End Notes

One of the two hobbies Oda listed for Law, and one I honestly find quite interesting considering nothing we've seen him do so far in canon seems to have any sort of relationship to it, so I have to wonder what interests him about coins. I don't have any hard and fast theories yet, although I have some loose ideas floating around.
There was no real way to describe the sense of loss when someone so important just wasn't there anymore. It wasn't grief, not for them. He was still alive, would come back to them (because if they lost that faith, what good were they to him?), but he wasn't there. Wasn't with him.

Law hadn't been loud, but that made the silence no less deafening as they walked through their ship. If he was there, their captain would have likely been curled up with some literature somewhere, absorbing knowledge like a sponge. There would have been no extra noise that was now gone, but every time their feet took them past their captain's bedroom they'd pause, as if the sound of paper rustling would magically appear.

It never did. Law wasn't there, was stranded by his own design on an island of ice and fire because that was the next necessary step towards achieving his dream.

Sometimes, they would open the door, tip-toeing inside to see that nothing had changed since the last time they entered. The coins were still piled on the desk haphazardly, that map on Punk Hazard threatened to flutter onto the floor at the opening of the door. The bed wasn't quite made, covers pulled vaguely into alignment but not the crisp neatness of the infirmary beds because Law was meticulous about the rest of the ship but allowed himself to be ever so slightly sloppy in the sanctuary of his own room.

Most of the crew would leave it at that, feeling invasive even though Law's room had always been open for them all, no matter the time or circumstance.

Bepo took to sleeping in there, pulling his own nest of blankets and pillows from his room to pile them high on Law's floor. On the face of it, the mink appeared to be taking their captain's absence the hardest, throwing himself into navigating them safely to Zou because that was what Law wanted him to do, even as he became quieter and quieter, despite his nakama's best efforts to keep his – and their – spirits up.

Penguin and Shachi were the most invasive, to no-one's surprise. It didn't take them long to gravitate towards Law's barely-made bed, because even though he wasn't there and the sheets were long since cold, there was still the essence of Law there. For the two now in charge of the crew, anxiously anticipating the New World's latest challenge and worrying that they wouldn't be up to the task if anything happened, Law's empty, cold bed still held comfort.

It almost felt as though the Tang herself was changed by Law's absence. Physically, there was nothing different; her engines ran at the same heat, took the same amount of fuel and propelled her through the water at the same speed. Despite that, there was a sluggish feel in the air, as if they were travelling against the tide, or against the wind. As an engine propelled submarine, neither thing
should have delayed them.

From there it was a simple step to assume the Tang was well aware of her captain's absence, and was taking it as hard as any of the rest of them, even as she ploughed on with her responsibility to the crew.

"He'll be back."

Shachi was the only one that ever voiced anything, talking to empty rooms – the Tang – sometimes. To the rest of them, voicing it meant voicing that he wasn't there anymore. Law would be back, but it was easier if they never accepted that he'd gone in the first place.
Law didn’t like the Straw Hats. He could see their use to him, with their easily distracted captain a perfect tool to draw Doflamingo’s attention or to blow up the factory, whichever plan Law eventually settled on, and the rest of the crew so loyal to their captain that they wouldn’t disobey despite their vocal misgivings about everything – him. Law didn’t begrudge them their suspicion; after all, he was taking advantage of their strong but naïve captain exactly as some of them suspected.

(It was only much later that he realised he was oh so wrong about who was naïve and who was using who).

Having to watch his back constantly was tiring, but with Mugiwara-ya firmly convinced that Law would do no wrong, it was at least less stressful than Punk Hazard had been. The pay off was having to deal with his fellow captain’s innate stupidity, but at least he could enter something of a doze in their presence when Caesar was being a loud nuisance and drawing all their attention.

However, there was a single eye that never left him. Law could feel it boring into his back, prickling his skin, and when he looked around, it didn’t disappear like most watchers would do. No, the single dark eye of the Pirate Hunter met his gaze evenly. Law wouldn’t say he was afraid of the man, but he was certainly wary of him. He’d always considered the epithet to be rather odd, despite the man’s bounty hunting past – the Marines could easily have used "Santoryu" or "Demon Swordsman" instead – but now the sole subject of that unrelenting eye, Law did feel rather like prey.

Not that he thought the swordsman would be able to hunt him easily. It wasn’t like Zoro was actively hunting him down, anyway. No, it was more of a passive observation with the underlying knowledge that their tentative truce could end at any time, at which point the man would pounce.

Law had heard of the phrase "keep your friends close but your enemies closer". It wasn’t one he used often, preferring to survey his targets from a distance while his nakama surrounded him, and it certainly wasn’t applicable in his current situation. The other end of the deck, seemingly sleeping except that pricking feeling was still there, was quite close enough for Law.

So when Zoro-ya broke their silent stalemate and stalked over to Law – still that lazy 'you're not my target but we both know that can change any moment' aura – the Hearts captain found himself awkwardly wrong-footed.

"Zoro-ya," he said, to cover up any slips. If any made it through, the younger man didn't react.

"Name?" the man grunted, sitting next to him. For the first time, that eye left Law and instead focused on Caesar, who immediately squawked. He went ignored as Law pondered the question. He didn't get the chance to decipher the one word inquiry, only just determining that it was indeed a...
question and not a demand, before Zoro-ya spoke again. "Wado Ichimonji," he said, shifting the white sword in his grip lovingly.

Law's eyes strayed to his own sword, perched against his shoulder as the permanent fixture she had become since he'd left his sanctuary months before. It figured that the swordsman of the Straw Hats would be interested in his own weapon, especially as there was a similar presence emanating from his own collection of blades.

"Her name is Kikoku," he acquiesced, one hand coming up to hold her sheath protectively. He doubted that, despite being a pirate, Zoro-ya would do something as sacrilegious as steal another man's sword, especially as she was a nodaichi while he clearly favoured katana like Shachi (not that Law would be encouraging a meeting between the two any time soon; either Shachi would talk too much or they'd end up in a spar and, yes, Shachi was skilled, but he knew enough of Zoro-ya's abilities to know which way the outcome would fall). "Yours?" he asked out of courtesy, gesturing subtly towards the blade with the darkest aura in the bunch.

"Sandai Kitetsu." Zoro-ya's face morphed into a fond smirk as he isolated the blade in question from its fellows, holding it out in front of him. "He's a bit of a problem child."

Well, that was one way of referring to a cursed blade. To the casual eavesdropper, the sentence sounded like an admittance of weakness. To Law, with his own cursed blade, it was a warning. Cursed blades did not obey like a normal weapon. They had their own opinions, their own agenda, and if the aims of blade and wielder clashed then a cursed blade was nigh unusable, except for a master swordsman.

Zoro-ya had just casually mentioned that he was capable of using a cursed blade that disagreed with at least some of his ideals, simultaneously with two other blades. If Kikoku hadn't been satisfied with Law's own opinions, he could not honestly say he'd still be capable of wielding her. He didn't know what sort of 'problem child' Sandai Kisetsu manifested as, but he'd seen what Kikoku did to people she didn't agree with.

Penguin would still only hold her for very short lengths of time, and even then it was emergency only.

Zoro-ya didn't say anything more, and Law didn't bother to break the silence again. The man had sated his curiosity – like Law, he'd probably gleaned far more than the simple conversation (if it could even be called that) had offered.

To Law's annoyance, the younger man didn't bother to leave his spot just verging on the edge of Law's personal space, and Law himself refused to move lest it be mistaken for him submitting to the other man's dominance. It didn't matter if he was the clear first mate of the ship, and that Law was back-footed from that fact alone.

Law backed down to no-one, so he clutched Kikoku tightly and forced his muscles not to tense into a flight or fight mode as Zoro-ya started snoring away beside him.

Law really, really, hated this crew.

Chapter End Notes

Request for Law and Zoro bonding over their cursed swords.
A small note: I do honestly think that as a swordsman, Zoro is superior to Law. However, that in no way makes him stronger than Law, as Law of course uses Kikoku in conjunction with the Ope Ope no Mi. I wouldn't dare suggest which one would win in a fight until we see Zoro finally go all out post-timeskip, because right now we just don't know how strong he is. He steamrollered Pica (once he finally caught him), after all, and we can hardly say we saw Law at his peak against Doflamingo (honestly, for a 440mil bounty head that was a pretty poor showing, until you consider that he was exhausted before he even started that final fight - I don't believe for a single moment that he was able to fully regain his strength while Luffy was carrying him around because kairoseki. In fact, the first time I watched that arc I fully expected him to collapse the moment the cuffs came off and Luffy put him down), so I think he has more to give yet, too.
Law's opinion on the stubbornness of certain members of his crew fluctuated depending on the situation, ranging from amusement to frustration.

Today placed him on the more frustrated end of the spectrum, as he watched Shachi stumble around, not quite *unsteady* on his feet, but lacking his usual grace. Penguin got to him first, and Law was too far away to hear the conversation but surmised from Shachi's hastened pace and Penguin's sour expression that the ginger's stubbornness was out in full force.

Unable to stay back, especially as Penguin had failed to find a solution himself, Law passed him on his way to collect his serving and asked his own questions. Agitation of his eyes fit the reactions – Penguin's disapproval and minor disagreement, the headache Shachi was doing a poor job of masking – and Law forcibly stopped himself from reminding him of the possible treatment. Penguin had probably said that already.

Shachi consented to at least rest after dinner, which was the best outcome Law could have hoped for, and he watched the ginger later slip out of the door quietly.

"Doesn't he realise he's only hurting himself?" Penguin complained in an undertone to Law as they made their way to the sinks simultaneously to clear their crockery (and Shachi's, because the ginger had kindly left that with Penguin). "I don't understand why he doesn't accept treatment."

The older man sounded lost, and Law knew that if *Penguin* couldn't comprehend what was going through Shachi's mind, then he didn't have a hope.

"We can't force him," Law simply sighed in response, sticking his plate on the draining rack. That wasn't strictly true; they *could* force him, but to Law that was unthinkable. If they didn't respect his wishes, even if they directly contradicted theirs, they didn't deserve to be called his nakama. With that in mind, Law decided to leave him alone for the moment. He'd check up on him later – 'somewhere dark' was only likely to mean the ginger's bedroom.

The plan was rudely shoved aside around ten minutes later, when his crew had dispersed to their various stations after dinner only for Uni to come sprinting through the corridors – to Law's disapproval – to report that Shachi was collapsed in the fuel storage area.

Running was discouraged on the Polar Tang, her corridors not quite wide enough to be safe at speed, but Law hurried as fast as he could to where the ginger was lying. Clione was knelt beside him, talking but receiving no response, and Law joined him.

Shachi was in an odd position, and after determining that no-one had moved him, Law got the
impression that he'd fallen from the top of the fuel tank he was lying besides. What could have possessed him to climb that in his current state eluded him.

"Shachi?" he called quietly, despite Clione's attempts to rouse the ginger already. There was nothing, and Law reached out for him, first locating his pulse and temperature. Neither were too far from normal, a slightly sluggish hint to his breathing and a temperature a little too cool the only discrepancies. There was still no answer, so Law gently pulled him into his arms to carry him to the infirmary.

This was no simple eye ache. Law wouldn't know what it was until he did a Scan, but either Shachi had been lying earlier, or he'd mistaken the symptoms for the cause.

In the infirmary, a bottle of sleeping pills was left out on the side haphazardly, and Law frowned because that didn't fit. It should have been the painkillers, if anything, and the thought crossed his mind that Shachi had overdosed

There was the sound of booted feet running, and Penguin burst through the door. Law assumed Uni had told him.

"Shachi!" he exploded as Law was wrapping bandages around the ginger's eyes to help soothe them when he woke. "What happened?" He didn't get an answer, and Law tuned out his reactions as he finally activated the Scan, finding the traces of sleeping pills amongst other things. The invasive substance was quickly spotted and a sample taken for research.

Law may have hurried it a bit, immediately fearing poison and needing to know what it did and, perhaps more importantly, how it had ended up in Shachi's system.

Finding that it was a perfectly naturally occurring poison secreted by the plants on the previous island was a huge relief; Shachi had been careless, but there was no malicious intent behind it. Maybe the recovery period would teach him to be a bit more cautious.

Law could hope.

With symptoms of sensitivity to light, headaches and nausea, it was no surprise that Shachi had mistaken it for something snowblindness related. The hallucinogenic properties explained the sleeping medicine (Shachi had clearly been after painkillers) and the odd location they'd found him in, slotting the last pieces of the puzzle together until Law finally had the explanations he needed.

Now all that was left was for Shachi to recover, a process made worse by the fact that Law could remove the poison, but not the effects.

Chapter End Notes

Law's reaction to Discomfort (chapter 88).
Bepo wasn't sure what to think of the humans. Law, the one that helped him but didn't say he was his friend, was strong and made him feel safe, but didn't seem like he wanted to stay with him, even though he'd stopped telling Bepo to leave him alone.

The other two were worse. Bepo just could not decipher what they were thinking or what they wanted – did they even know themselves what they wanted? Yesterday they'd been violent and cruel to him, until Law had stepped in. Now they were back, but something seemed different.

They didn't have the club they'd been beating him with yesterday. Their hands were stuffed in their pockets, making it impossible to tell through the thick coats whether or not they were in fists again, and their backs were rigid. Bepo would even dare to say they looked less like hunters and more like the hunted now. The bruises and bandages that wrapped the wounds Law had inflicted yesterday stripped them of all the intimidation they'd had. De-clawed. That was how they looked, although they still had their fangs.

"What's your name?" the older one said, with far less of a demanding tone than Bepo had expected from the violent human.

"I don't see why it concerns you," Law replied steadily, and something that wasn't his electro tingled inside Bepo. Law had told him his name.

"The name's Penguin," the boy continued, as if he hadn't just been rejected. Bepo noticed the tenseness in his jaw that betrayed otherwise. "This is Shachi." The ginger nodded his head jerkily.

"I don't care," Law dismissed, and turned away, striding towards the docks. Bepo watched him forlornly, and heard the grinding of teeth. The ginger – Shachi – was quickly highlighted as the cause. "Aren't you coming?" Law added, and Bepo looked around, wondering who he was talking to. Whoever it was, they didn't appear, and Law continued his trek.

"Why didn't you go?" Penguin asked, and Bepo jumped, finding two pairs of eyes focusing on him (or so he thought; it was difficult to tell with the hats and shades in the way). "He was talking to you."

"Me?" Bepo asked, pointing at himself. He tensed as the pair approached him, and reflexively channelled his electro as they made contact, working together to shove him forwards mercilessly, along the same path Law had taken.

"Get going, you crazy animal," Shachi grumbled, hopping around on one foot and clutching at his other. Besides him, Penguin had sat down heavily in the snow and was tentatively rubbing at his own foot.
They looked dejected. They were trying to hide it behind harsh words and actions, but Bepo knew the feeling too well not to recognise it when he saw it. They’d wanted something, and it had been snatched away from them. To Bepo's mind, there was only one explanation, no matter that he didn't understand it at all.

Then again, maybe he did, because he was about to do the same thing.

"You could come too," he offered, shrinking back as they leapt back to their feet.

"Why would we want to do that?" they yelled in chorus, and Bepo cowered further.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. He'd thought that, like him, they'd been drawn to Law, despite their first encounter. Had he been wrong?

"Sure," Penguin said, and Bepo blinked, certain he was hearing things. It made no sense that they'd complain but say yes. They didn't seem to be lying, though, so Bepo started down the path. Sure enough, the boys followed him, an uncomfortable silence descending over them as they caught up with Law, who was walking too slowly.

Was he going to collapse again?

He might have done, except when he stumbled Penguin and Shachi were there, catching him by the arms and hauling him upright.

"What are you doing?" Law yelped, forcing his way out of their grip and ending up leaning on Bepo instead. Law didn't seem bothered by it – at least, not as much as he had been by the two boys.

"You'll need a boat," Penguin said, crossing his arms. Beside him, Shachi mirrored the action, and Bepo wondered why he was so quiet when yesterday he'd been the loudest. "You're not planning on staying here."

"Not that that concerns you," Law said coldly. "Besides, I have a boat."

"If you mean that lump of firewood, it got broken up for scraps yesterday," Penguin informed him. "That thing lost its seaworthiness long ago." Law made a noise Bepo could only describe as an offended hiss. "We can get you a new one."

"Why?" Law asked, and it was hardly difficult to pick up on the heavy suspicion in the word.

"Because we're coming with you."

"No you're not," Law retorted.

When he thought back to that moment later on, Bepo was always glad that was one debate his captain lost.

It took almost an hour of first bickering, then horror stories meant to dissuade them, for a conclusion to be reached. It was only reached because Law had another of those spells where he got dizzy, and Penguin and Shachi took the opportunity to pick him up and drag him over to a fishing boat that, in Bepo's humble opinion, didn't look like it could possibly be theirs.

As they sailed away, Law flipped them both out of the boat, only for the pair to both be far stronger swimmers than he'd obviously expected and easily catch up with the slow pace of their boat.

"Why?" Law demanded of the two sopping wet forms as they hauled themselves back on board,
bandages slipping.

"You're interesting to be around," Penguin grinned. "So, what's your name?"

Law seemed too stunned to have an answer.
Bepo was the navigator of the Heart Pirates. It was an important job – very important, seeing as none of the rest of his nakama had a hope of getting it right in the Grand Line without that silly log pose – but it wasn't his sole job in the crew. Officially, maybe, but he also served as the general pillow and hug giver to anyone that wanted it.

His nakama were physically affectionate, so they rarely had qualms about burying their hands in his fur all of a sudden, or flopping against him when he was sitting down for hugs or even just a pillow to nap on (Law was the main culprit, but far from the only one).

Sometimes, they wouldn't accept they needed a hug. Getting a hug for hug's sake was easy, but there was a stubborn and prideful streak that ran through most of the crew that stopped them seeking comfort when they were down. It was at that point that Bepo would simply give it to them, without waiting for permission.

Once again, Law was the worst offender on that front. He put up a strong front for everyone because he was Captain and held this silly notion that Captain meant invulnerable. Bepo had powerful allies in the presence of Penguin and Shachi for that one, who both refused to stand for Law's self-isolating attitude and poked and prodded him into getting a hug when needed.

If only the pair weren't so hypocritical about the whole thing. Bepo knew they looked out for each other and were rarely far apart, so usually it wasn’t a concern. But sometimes, he’d find one by himself and the other nowhere near. Penguin would spend time with him on watch, even though Penguin was supposed to be sleeping, and even when he claimed it wasn't nightmares that were keeping him awake Bepo was taking no chances. Penguin always ended up falling asleep beside him, and while Bepo could carry him back to his room he never did. Instead, Penguin's sleeping form would find itself carefully curled up in his lap, the mink's arms around him firmly.

In direct contrast, Bepo rarely found Shachi in need of help at night. He stayed in the room he shared with Penguin, sometimes in his own bed, sometimes sharing with Penguin on the lower bunk until he was ready for the day to begin again. He ended up most in need of hugs in the daytime, when the sun was too bright, or there’d been too much talk of things that dredged up bad memories. Shachi would tell him to go away, that he was fine, but past a token protest he always let Bepo pull him against his chest, nuzzling him gently until the tension drained from his body.

The other particularly stubborn of his nakama was the newest, Jean Bart. The man was huge, bigger than Bepo, which meant he couldn't envelope him in the safety of his arms like he did everyone else. Jean Bart was also stiff around them, slowly breaking into their pace but still reluctant to take part in the physical nakamaship prevalent in the Heart Pirates. Bepo thought long and hard for a solution, because new or not, Jean Bart was nakama and it was his job to keep them smiling.
It was a nightmare that broke the ice, Jean Bart just down the corridor but loud enough for Bepo’s hearing to detect. He didn’t know if any of the others knew, nor did he wait to find out. He knocked once before entering, just to be polite, to find Jean Bart sat up in bed, staring blankly at the wall. He was too big to pull into a hug, like Bepo would do with anyone else, so Bepo reversed it, settling in Jean Bart’s lap silently and waiting for the man to notice him. Nothing was said, but arms wrapped around him tightly, pinning him in place, before Jean Bart lay back down and settled back to sleep, Bepo still held like a comfort toy.

Bepo didn’t mind. It was different not to be the one doing the hugging for once, but he was still comforting his nakama so he was still doing his job. And that was all that mattered.
Shachi was getting rather fed up of being in the infirmary when it wasn't his fault. When he was the one lying in the bed it wasn't so bad – usually because he was unconscious for most of it – but the chairs for the not-sick weren't the most comfortable (they weren't supposed to be in the room at all as they weren't bolted to the floor like the rest of the furniture, but Law had given up complaining for the moment, maybe because he was in his own chair the other side of the bed).

Law had said it wouldn't be long before Penguin woke up. His injuries weren't too severe – here, there'd been a disapproving glance at Shachi's now heavily bandaged side – so Law claimed he wasn't too worried. Shachi would have been more inclined to believe him if he wasn't slumped on one of those chairs he hated so much, golden eyes fixated solely on Penguin's unconscious form. He hadn't asked what Law was worried about, not wanting to know.

Law was the best doctor they could hope to have. Shachi trusted that, whatever it was, the younger man could fix it. Law was only waiting, wasn't frantically pushing himself to save Penguin, so it couldn't be too bad. His hands trembled where they were fisting the sheets Penguin lay on. He had to believe that, otherwise what did he have left?

"Ow," came from the bed, and Shachi's attention snapped to Penguin's face in time to see eyes blink open lazily, protesting at the light. Penguin shifted, stretching his muscles and wincing. "What the hell happened?"

"You-" A tattooed hand stuck itself in front of Shachi's face, startling him into silence.

"What's the last thing you remember?" Law asked, and Shachi didn't like the way his mouth pulled taut as they waited for Penguin to answer. It felt like an eternity before he looked at them, brow furrowed in concentration – no, confusion, Shachi realised with a bad feeling. There was no recognition in his eyes.

"Why don't you tell me what it should be and we'll go from there?" Penguin responded sharply, pulling himself into a sitting position against the head of the bed. His eyes flicked constantly between Shachi and Law, and Shachi hated the way his first thought was 'like a cornered animal'. He wasn't the only one that noticed; Law moved to the other side of the bed, now next to Shachi. The ginger didn't like the way he was treading carefully, pulling on the air he held when dealing with people not in the Heart Pirates. This was Penguin.

"Do you know who you are?" Law asked, far too calm considering the implications of what he was asking. Shachi's hands had stopped shaking when Penguin had woken, but they started up again with a vengeance. If Penguin had forgotten-
"Penguin," Penguin said, as if Law was asking stupid questions (and Shachi had no way to escape the fact that it wasn't his 'you're being stupid, Law' voice, it was his 'who's this idiot' voice, although he tried). Law nodded, seemingly pleased but Shachi knew that set of his jaw meant nothing of the sort.

"Do you know where you are, Penguin?" he asked, and the older man's eyes narrowed as he took a quick glance around before his eyes snapped back to his nakama.

"An infirmary," he shrugged, and Shachi almost collapsed off the silly, not-bolted-down, chair he was still perched on. This was wrong. This was very, very, wrong. Penguin should have been able to identify it as the Tang's infirmary, not just any old infirmary. He saw the line of questioning Law was taking, but didn't know if he wanted to hear the next exchange.

"Do you know who I am?" Shachi didn't make up his mind to flee or not before Law asked the question he'd been dreading.

"The doctor of this infirmary, I would presume," Penguin retorted, and this time Shachi really did fall off the chair, which clattered away noisily as he landed heavily on the ground. He bit back a cry as his injured side protested. "Are you about to tell me I have amnesia, doctor? That guy seems to think I should be giving different answers."

That guy.

Shachi's breath caught in his throat, cutting off his attempts to regain his feet.

That guy… He couldn't have been talking about him, could he? Penguin… Penguin hadn't forgotten him? Had he? The tremor in his hands had extended up his arms and Shachi felt a pressure behind his eyes, one that warned he'd be sobbing like a child any moment. He blinked it back fiercely.

"What do you think?" Law asked, and Penguin made that humming noise he always did when he was thinking hard.

"I think things aren't adding up," he eventually said, sounding out the words slowly and carefully as if he was still thinking things through. "You're wearing a Jolly Roger, so you're a pirate. This is probably your ship, but I'm not restrained, so either you think I'm no threat, or you know me. The ginger guy is getting upset, so either he's a good actor and this is some brainwashing tactic, or I'm at the very least an ally."

Shachi couldn't take it any more, the fact that Penguin had considered brainwashing before nakama one blow too many.

"What the hell are you talking about, Penguin?" he demanded, pulling himself to his feet despite the pain. "That guy, that ginger guy… You can't have forgotten me! It's me, Shachi! We're nakama, hell, we grew up together! What the hell you doing saying you don't remember us- remember me?" He ripped his shades off, despite the light in the infirmary, because Penguin would tell him off, and then everything would be fine. Everything would be fine.

"Shachi!" Law said sharply, and there were hands on his shoulders, pulling him back from where he'd ended up looming over Penguin. Shachi fought his grip, eyes watering fiercely although he didn't know how much of that was the light and how much was his own emotions. "Shachi! Stop!"

A hand clamped over his eyes and he stumbled backwards, against Law. The only sound was his own laboured breathing. Penguin hadn't said a word, still didn't as Law forced a thick blindfold on
Shachi. It was only once Law was finished, a warning hand clamped on his shoulder, that Penguin spoke again.

"Your eyes…” he trailed off, as if thinking, and Shachi held his breath, feeling Law similarly tense. Had it worked, was Penguin out of his funny five minutes? "What happened to them?"

The world disappeared from under Shachi's feet and he stumbled, even with Law's hold. This- this was real. Penguin would never take a joke that far. He didn't know what was going on anymore, didn't know what to think. Penguin didn't remember him, didn't know him at all – didn't know any of them. What was he supposed to do now?

"Hey?" Penguin asked, his voice tentative, and Shachi felt him reaching out for him. He recoiled – he didn't know this man, this wasn't Penguin even if it wore his skin and used his voice – stumbling out of Law's grip as well and sprinting for the door, tripping over his own feet uncertainly as he did so.

The combination of the blindfold and Shachi's turbulent emotions had him running straight into something soft and giving, crashing both of them over to the floor.

"Oof!" the cook exclaimed involuntarily. "Shachi, wha-" Shachi clung to his uniform, too drained to get back to his feet as he sobbed into the blindfold. "Shachi? Shachi, talk to me!"

There were more footsteps, several other members of the crew close enough to at least hear the collision running to the scene – no running in the hallways rule be damned, apparently – and the voices rose in a clamour around him as they all started asking questions. Shachi just shook in the cacophony, a quivering leaf in the centre of the storm of his nakama.

"Everyone be quiet!" a booming voice ordered, cutting through the noise sharply. Everyone fell silent, and Shachi regained enough awareness of his surroundings to hear Jean Bart's unmistakably heavy footsteps resounding through the corridor. They stopped less than a metre from where Shachi was still using the cook as a cushion, his nakama's hand stroking his hair gently in an attempt to calm him. "Shachi." There was a captain's order in the tone, despite the fact that Jean Bart had never been his captain. The deep rumble did what the panicked questions hadn't and cut through the haze in Shachi's mind. "Did something happen to Penguin?"

Shachi nodded into his nakama's chest.

"Amnesia," he managed, his voice quivering and breaking as it forced its way through his constricted throat. "H-he doesn't k-k-know w-who I am!"

There was a collective intake of breath from everyone who heard him.

"It'll be okay." Uni broke the silence. Shachi shook his head. It wasn't okay, how could it be okay? What if Penguin never remembered? Shachi couldn't face seeing that empty husk of his best friend forever more. "He'll remember."

"And won't be pleased with you reopening your wounds," Ikkaku said sharply. A gentle hand pressed lightly on the bandaging on his side and he gasped. "That needs rewrapping." He was coaxed to his feet gently, and stumbled along as they guided him… somewhere.

It wasn't back to the infirmary, he knew that much, but it wasn't until he was lightly pushed to sit on a bed that his brain kicked in gear enough to recognise his location as Law's room, the unofficial back-up infirmary. His bandages were gently but firmly changed, and at the end a warm mug was pushed into his hands.
"Drink up," the cook said, sitting on the bed besides him and putting an arm around his shoulders. "You'll feel better."

The hot chocolate was sweet, and while Shachi cried at the taste – just one of thousands of memories he'd shared with Penguin over the years – his hands finally stopped shaking.

Chapter End Notes

I got a request for amnesiac Penguin, either as a stand alone or multiple chapters... haven't decided if I'll leave it as this or not yet.
Laughter rang through the corridors of the Polar Tang, reverberating off the many pipes and distorting the sound slightly, but not enough to hide his nakama's amusement. Tucked away in his room, taking a well-deserved break after hours spent recording Doflamingo's latest known actions by flicking through a decently solid medical tome, Law smiled.

He wondered what they'd done this time. They were always finding new ways to have fun – even though a quick glance at the clock showed that the basic chores were supposed to be being done. Downtime wasn't for another half hour or so. Law carefully placed a piece of paper between the pages of his book, marking where he'd got to for later, before leaving his room.

He doubted he was going to need to seriously play the kill-joy captain, but his curiosity was roused so he followed the echoing sounds to their source: the laundry room. More people than was strictly necessary were in there, and Law stood in the doorway, taking in the sight.

His nakama had decided to swap clothes, or so it appeared. Ikkaku was fiddling with the peak of Penguin's hat – her voluminous hair the only reason it fit at all on her smaller head – while Clione was wearing a tank top several sizes too small that Law was fairly certain belonged to Ikkaku. The swaps continued around the room as they all helped each other into ill-fitting clothes, some too tight and others too baggy, and Law shook his head, smirking to himself, until he caught sight of a very familiar feather-necked navy blue top perhaps a size too big for its current wearer.

Ah yes, Shachi had been on laundry duty, hadn't he? The ginger did sometimes decide to do very random things, like increase his workload by wearing clean clothes that weren't his, as appeared to be case this time. The rest of the crew present had clearly found the idea amusing enough to join in on.

"You realise you need to wash those again?" he asked him, startling several with his presence. Shachi shrugged, not ruffled at all (he'd probably noticed him coming half the ship away, Law realised), and nestled his face further into the feathers around his neck.

"I'll manage," he shrugged.

"You don't have a choice," Law reminded him plainly, before deciding that was enough of playing the killjoy. "You look ridiculous." Not only was Shachi curled up in a thick top too long for him – his hands were almost lost inside the sleeves – but he'd also somehow tugged on a pair of spotted jeans. His feet were bare, although with the way the jeans were bunched around his ankles it was clear why. Law hoped Shachi wasn't stretching the fabric; while he was shorter, his legs were more muscular.
"It's comfy," Shachi retorted with a whine, sounding more like a child that the fully grown man he supposedly was, and Law crossed the room to him in lazy strides, the rest of the crew parting for him and watching silently to see what he'd do.

"You're an idiot," Law told him, receiving a pout and having to consciously remind himself that Shachi was twenty five years old, not five. He reached out and grabbed the green hat on Shachi's head, removing it from ginger hair that tried to follow it, waving around in the air limply from the static. "I'll be taking this."

With his spare hand he took his own hat off his head, and gently yet firmly pushed it down onto the messy ginger hair.

"Much better," he said, pulling Shachi's hat onto his own head. It was still warm. The ginger blinked up at him owlishly before a grin stretched across his face.

"Much better," he agreed, fussing with his own hat on Law's head until it sat properly as the crew's light-hearted laughter started up again.

Chapter End Notes

I've seen a couple of pictures around with Shachi in Law's clothes, hat and all, and they're pretty cute.
When Penguin opened his eyes, consciousness returning with a rush and accompanied by a definite throbbing in his skull, he panicked. His – he'd call them companions for the moment - were unfamiliar faces, and he had no recollection of meeting them.

The taller of the two was annoyingly smart, not falling for his attempt to casually get information about them and silencing the ginger when he *did* fall for it. With that tactic a failure, Penguin had to resort to another, deflecting the question back at his interrogator because the last thing he remembered had nothing to do with the pair, and if they were a pair of innocent Samaritans that had happened to find his unconscious form and treat him with no ulterior motive, Penguin would eat his hat.

When he was asked if he knew who he was – his deflected question completely ignored – he couldn't help the derision that slipped into his voice. He gave them his name only because it was already on his hat, which he spotted resting on a nearby bed. Whether or not they believed him was a moot point, as far as he was concerned.

Where was he? Well, clearly this was an infirmary – a well stocked, state of the art infirmary. He didn't voice his further suspicions (on a ship, and not one on the right side of the law, for all that the infirmary was as hospital-grade as they came), hoping to be underestimated. He didn't expect his blunt answer to almost knock the ginger off that flimsy chair he was sitting on and narrowed his eyes slightly. The other man ignored the commotion.

He didn't know who they were, but from the way he was acting it was obvious this man was the ship's doctor. The front of his top proclaimed a jolly roger, and Penguin's stomach sank. *Pirates.* He was on a pirate ship. The only saving grace was that he wasn't restrained at all, although whether that was because they didn't think he was a threat or for some other reason he didn't know.

If the man wasn't a pirate, he might have felt sorry for the ginger as he toppled off his chair, crashing to the floor with a cut-off cry, but the ginger *was* a pirate, and so Penguin more or less ignored him as he asked after his condition. They were acting like he had amnesia, and he could admit that some things didn't quite add up in his mind.

How did he know they were pirates? That insignia wasn't a skull and crossbones like most were, and they were doing a good job of keeping the bloodlust concealed. He must have heard of this particular crew before, but how? And perhaps more importantly, why? Had he met them before, or was this the first time and he'd just seen them in the News Coo before? Either way didn't bode well – both demanded some sort of reputation, and pirate reputations were never for community service.
The ginger exploded at him first, as fiery as his hair colour suggested, and finally Penguin got some information, or at least, the information he was supposed to hear. The doctor hadn't silenced him this time, leaving him to spill some ridiculous story about how he was a pirate. As if. Penguin hated pirates.

He couldn't deny he was taken aback by the sight of the eyes behind the shades, bright with tears of pain as desperation as they wept, clearly damaged beyond repair. Was this ginger stupid? Revealing such a weakness to a stranger could be suicidal, and he'd been doing a good job of hiding it with his shades. Penguin hadn't noticed a thing in his earlier observations. The doctor once again let the ginger talk, to Penguin's surprise. There was no way that was faked, so there was no benefit to feeding him that information.

Seeing another opportunity to coax some information out of them, he asked what had happened, feigning ignorance. The most likely response would be for the doctor to silence the ginger again, maybe giving some plausible-sounding but wrong answer. Penguin was almost interested what lies they'd come up with – he knew what snowblindness looked like and the ginger clearly had it; lies would be easy to pick apart.

He had not expected the ginger to wail and flee the room and something that felt a little like guilt bubbled up in his gut. He quashed it. The man was a pirate, pirates deserved no sympathy. Even if there was some uncomfortable parallels with the way the ginger had claimed they'd grown up together, and the snowblindness that was common on Swallow Island.

"Aside from Shachi, the only one who knows what happened exactly is you," the doctor said, picking up the fallen chair and sitting on it.

"You're not really trying to convince me I'm a pirate, are you?" Penguin asked, disbelieving. It was true he couldn't actually remember what he was, but a pirate? No way. Even if he did somehow know the ginger from Swallow Island, that was impossible. "Instead of wasting your breath, shouldn't you pay more attention to that guy?"

"His name is Shachi," the doctor corrected. It didn't escape Penguin's notice that he'd yet to get the name of him. "The rest of the crew will help him." There was a slight quiver in his voice now, a new addition that caught Penguin's attention. The man wasn't steady as his first impression implied.

Either he was a brilliant actor, or there was more truth in what he and the ginger had been saying than Penguin was comfortable admitting.

"So, do you have a name or am I going to keep calling you doctor?" he asked, watching the man's jaw tense momentarily.

"Law," the man admitted instantly, a stark contrast to earlier when he refused to volunteer any information at all. Penguin figured the best way to play it was to go along with their inferences that they were acquainted. If he said what they wanted to hear, maybe they'd tell him information he could use.

"Is that what I call you?" he asked, and something that looked a bit like hope flashed across the doctor's face.

"Sometimes," he said, resting his elbows on his knees and seeming to relax slightly. Of course, he had just made it sound like he maybe remembered something. "Or Captain." Penguin forced himself to nod along, despite the fact that several things were wrong with that. It was another suggestion that he was a pirate, of all things! Also, did you even get doctor-captains? Weren't they completely different things?
It might explain why the infirmary was so well stocked… and Penguin was not going down that route. Keeping hold of who he was was difficult when he didn't remember what he did, but there was no way he was a pirate. For now he would have to gather as much information as possible and go from there.

If he was lucky, maybe he'd get some memories back to help disentangle truth from lies.

"So, Law," he drawled, watching something that looked a little like hurt flick across the other man's face. He'd been hoping for 'Captain', had he? Or maybe a friendlier tone. No, Penguin didn't trust him enough for that. "What happened to me?"

Chapter End Notes

People wanted more from **Recall**, so more you can have! I know for a fact there's at least one more directly-related instalment on the way at some point.

Penguin is scared, paranoid, and doing his best to hide it because **pirates**. Working out exactly what he remembers and what he doesn't is pretty tough, especially as Shachi - an almost constant presence in his life - has been removed from his memories.
The atmosphere in the Polar Tang was tense, and Law hated it. Despite the overly cheery smiles of his crew – most of them, anyway – there was no hiding the way they were all looking over their shoulders as if they expected something bad to happen any moment.

The fear wasn't totally unfounded, either. As much as Law wanted to be an idealistic optimist, it was cold hard fact that right now he – they – couldn't trust Penguin. Refusing to keep him confined to the infirmary like some sort of prisoner, Law had let him wander the ship as he liked, under one condition. Penguin was not allowed to be by himself at any time. Some of the crew, particularly the newer ones, thought it was for his protection; after all, the Polar Tang was full of hazards for the unwary, and without his memories of her, Penguin was likely to fall afoul of them.

Law wished that was all it was. Penguin's safety was, of course, paramount; amnesia or not, he was part of Law’s nakama no matter what the situation. Unfortunately, there was a less known fact about Penguin that many of the crew did not know.

Penguin hated pirates. Law had overheard him and Shachi talking more than once about the irony of it all and was well aware of their past experiences with pirates. While Penguin had forgotten even Shachi's existence, Law could see in his eyes, could hear in his voice, that he hadn't forgotten that. Thus, they had a pirate-hating man on a ship surrounded by people who would love nothing more than to trust him. If Penguin didn't regain at least some relevant memories soon, that was going to become a problem. Law knew full well that Penguin was scoping them out, looking for weaknesses to exploit. He'd allowed it in the hopes that if he learnt enough his memories would resurface, but if he was remembering anything he wasn't admitting it.

The fact that he couldn't do anything to help was frustrating. While he knew the basics of amnesia, and had seen the potential signs before Penguin even woke up, he didn't know anywhere near enough about the workings of the brain to even attempt to fix the damage. He wouldn't do anything he wasn't completely and utterly confident on when it came to his nakama, especially with the potential for irreversible damage. There was also Penguin's reaction to Law's attempt to examine him earlier, before discharging him from the infirmary.

Law had been called all sorts of names before, especially from people who didn't know how his abilities worked, but hearing the common "freak" from the mouth of Penguin – who had never, not even the first time he'd seen it, said the word with as much vehement disgust as he had then – had hurt badly. He could admit that it had unbalanced him enough that he'd ended up discharging Penguin only halfway through his usual procedure, unable to take those judging eyes any longer.

Holed up in the library, Law had torn through every book he had with any reference at all to head
injuries and amnesia, only to be met with what he already knew. There was no hard and fast cure. Not even something so complex and difficult it would take a miracle – or the Ope Ope no Mi – to pull off. No, there was absolutely nothing Law could do as a doctor. All he could do was expose Penguin to his usual surroundings, wait, and hope.

Now, as he watched Penguin pick through his meal – his favourite meal, the cook had enthusiastically joined in on doing everything possible to jog his memory – Law identified a problem. There was, one person that had more familiarity with Penguin than anyone else, and therefore the greatest chance of success at coaxing his memories back. However, that same person hadn't been seen since Penguin had left the infirmary.

Finishing his plate, he left it in the sink with an apology to the cook and picked up the untouched plate of food. The cook waved him off with a tired grin.

"Make sure he eats it all," he said, and Law nodded, leaving the room with the plate held securely in both hands. He could feel the heavy weight of a gaze on his back, and didn't need to turn around to know it was Penguin, gathering more information and drawing more conclusions.

Despite everything, Shachi was still in the same bolt hole he always used when he wanted to escape. Law's haki picked up on him in his room, face down on his bunk, and he shuffled his grip on the plate until he had a hand free to knock on the closed door. There was no answer, and normally Law would have left him alone – not quite true, normally he'd go and fetch Penguin – but he couldn't do that this time.

"Shachi?" he called, knowing that the ginger was well aware it was him. "I'm coming in." There was no protest, so he pushed the door open, walking in to the dark room. "I brought your dinner," he said, when there was no response from the top bunk, and finally there was the sound of movement as the ginger shuffled around.

"Not hungry," he mumbled, but he came down anyway, gliding down the ladder. Law stayed where he was as there was the sound of something being picked up, and then the light turned on. With his shades on, Shachi was sometimes difficult to read. The dried tear stains on his cheeks left Law in no doubt how he was feeling this time.

"You still need to eat," Law told him, nudging him to sit on the bottom bunk – well aware it was Penguin's and probably the last place Shachi wanted to be – and placing the plate on his lap before sitting next to him, ducking his head to avoid hitting it on the top bunk.

Shachi didn't say anything but he did pick at the meal, very similarly to the way Penguin had been picking at his own food. Law kept that observation to himself, choosing to sit in silence while Shachi ate. The silence reigned until he finished, setting the plate on the floor.

"How... is he?" Shachi asked, head bowed and looking at the floor. Law leaned on his elbows, but kept his eyes on the ginger.

"Physically fine," Law told him. "His injuries are healing well." Better than yours, he didn't say, even though the fresh bandaging on his side was clearly visible.

"But he still doesn't remember anything?" Shachi guessed, his voice thick. Law nodded. "You can't...?" He made a funny motion with one hand, clearly mimicking the way Law summoned his Room.

"There's nothing I can do," Law admitted. "It might be possible, but I don't know how and I won't risk damaging him permanently if I make a mistake." Shachi's sigh sounded resigned rather than
disappointed; he'd already known the answer. "Shachi," he started, knowing what he needed to ask but faltering in the reality of the situation. His nakama made a noise that could either be intrigue or dismissal. Law chose to interpret it as intrigue. "Can you spend time with Penguin?"

Shachi's breath hitched, and his hands started to tremble where they were balled in his lap. Law ploughed on, knowing that Shachi was hurting more than any of them but also certain that out of all of them, he was the one with the best chance of helping Penguin remember.

"The best chance of recovering his memories is exposing him to things that should be familiar," he explained. "Out of everyone, you're the closest to him, so if there's any chance, it's you." He didn't want to put that pressure on Shachi, not when he was falling apart, but things couldn't continue like this. He – they – needed Penguin back.

Shachi said nothing for several minutes, the silence stretching over them, laden with heavy expectations. With the shades on, Law didn't know where Shachi was looking, if he was looking at anything at all or just staring into space. Looking forwards himself, towards the opposite wall, he saw sketches of what he presumed were their parents, alongside more familiar faces.

If Penguin saw those, would that trigger something?

"Okay," Shachi said suddenly, and Law's attention snapped back to him, his mind scrabbling to put the word into context. "I'll help him." Law blinked, startled, as the ginger got to his feet and retrieved the plate before giving a grin that was far too painfully fake.

"Shachi-" Law started, only for the ginger to turn away, opening the door.

"It's the only way we'll fix this before he does something stupid," he said. "If he tries to kill us, would we be able to stop him?"

Law had known that, had known Penguin was gathering information for that exact reason, but hearing Shachi say it was like a punch to the gut. He didn't ask how Shachi knew Penguin remembered he hated pirates, instead numbly watching his receding back as the ginger left the room to inflict constant emotional pain on himself in order to help Penguin.

Why did it have to be like that? Why did someone always have to hurt to help someone else? Why did Shachi have to be the sacrificial lamb? Why wasn't Law enough to take the burden?

Nudging the door shut with a Room and a Tact, Law curled up on the bed as the tears he'd been holding back ever since Penguin woke up amnesiac burst out. The bed was cold, unused for the last two nights while its owner was in the infirmary, but the unmistakable presence of Penguin still lingered and Law buried himself in it, wanting his nakama back and hating himself for being so useless.

Chapter End Notes

And that's how well Law is (not) handling it. I'm really not letting them catch a break, am I? Maybe I should go for something a bit less angsty tomorrow...
Penguin was torn between being irritated at the constant chaperoning and pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to get information out of these pirates. They told him that he was being accompanied everywhere for his own safety, as the Polar Tang – the name of the ship, apparently, and Penguin was trying hard not to dwell too much on the fact that it was a submarine currently hundreds of feet underwater – was full of hazards. The interesting thing was that most of them seemed to genuinely believe that was the case, horrified when he suggested maybe it was because they didn't trust him.

The captain and the talking bear – what was this, a circus? – were the only two to demonstrate any indication of guilt (even if the captain was subtle about it) if the topic was brought up in their earshot. And then there was the ginger who, after finally reappearing from wherever he'd fled to, firmly attached himself to his side with a blinding grin Penguin knew for a fact had to be fake considering his earlier display, and didn't even bother pretending otherwise.

"I'm just hoping you get your memories back before you start trying to kill us," he said far too cheerfully when asked, and honestly Penguin had no response to that. If he knew he was gathering information in order to successfully destroy the crew then why wasn't he doing something about it, rather than answering every question Penguin threw his way?

Night time came, or so he was told – with darkness constantly outside the windows, there was no way to tell what time it was except to rely on the clocks – and his ginger shadow informed him bluntly that he'd be sleeping with him and forcibly led the way to a bunkroom.

"Bottom bunk's yours," he was told, and he sat on it, wondering who normally slept there. It was warm, as if only recently vacated, so maybe it was the one on night watch?

"Who's bed is this?" he asked, because the ginger had never refused to answer a question. The shorter man's shoulders sagged ever so slightly.

"Yours," he said. That would have made some sense, if there was any way that Penguin could ever have been a pirate. He looked around the room, because if nothing else he could at least find out more information about the ginger.

The desk – if that was what that poor thing was supposed to be – was full of clutter, random pieces of paper and paraphernalia covering it until almost none of the wood was visible. Only a single corner, closest to the bed, was visible. There was just enough room for something to settle there, and considering the contrast to the rest of the desk Penguin was certain something did often sit there. A collection of boots – not all the same size, so this really was a shared room – were arranged in some semblance of order by the door, and some of the weird uniforms he'd seen many of the crew wearing hung from hooks above them. The far wall housed a pair of chests with clothes hanging out of them.
– the left was far more organised than the right, another indication of two people living in the room – and above them, tacked to the wall, were pictures.

The bounty posters drew his attention first, "Surgeon of Death" Trafalgar Law worth a not inconsiderate amount of beris, while the bear boasted a far more pitiful bounty. Penguin couldn’t even buy a decent pair of boots with that little money. The poster for the giant of a man, Jean Bart, looked old and crumpled, as if it had been pulled out a bin. No poster for the ginger now shrugging off his clothes without a care in the world to pull on something to sleep in – Penguin noted the copious bandaging around his abdomen; that was an obvious weakness he could definitely take advantage of.

"You can turn the lights out whenever you're ready," the ginger said, shimmying up the ladder into the top bunk with the ease born of years of practice. Penguin turned away from the wall and headed to the lower bunk, flicking the light switch as he slid into the bed. He didn't bother getting changed, not wanting to wear any clothes belonging to a pirate. It was bad enough that he was spending the night in a pirate's bed.

Sleep came for him faster than he expected, dragging him under almost as soon as his head hit the pillow. It felt… right, but he didn't stay awake long enough to register what that implied.

He didn't know what he dreamed about, but when he started awake, heart pounding and feeling decidedly guilty, he knew there must have been a dream. It was probably his memories pushing at his subconsciousness, and Penguin rolled out of the bed and padded towards the door silently, needing to get out. Knowing that his memories were so close, yet out of reach, was frustrating. He was trying not to think of the obvious gaps in his memory, the things that didn't quite fit, or were just plain missing, and in the daytime, gathering information and formulating plans made for an effective distraction. At night, his mind refused to be so easily distracted.

"You want to talk?" the ginger asked suddenly, startling Penguin. He'd figured the man would be fast asleep as it was clearly the dead of night.

"No," he said shortly, yanking the door open and striding out of the room, mentally the seconds until he was caught up, and jumping when it was less than two before the ginger was walking by his side. "Go back to sleep!" he growled, not in the mood for puzzles while he was dwelling on his missing memories. The ginger said nothing, remaining a silent shadow as Penguin stalked his way around the entire ship for the rest of the night.

It was when the rest of the crew stirred, hours later, that Penguin recalled something. Not one of his missing memories, annoyingly, but one of the things tacked to the bunkroom wall. With the call for lights out, he hadn't looked at anything other than the bounty posters in any detail, but there had been a sketch that now stood out in Penguin's mind, registering as important.

His parents. Even without colour, it had been unmistakably them, but they hadn't been alone, and Penguin didn't recognise the man and woman also in the picture, but the boy in front of them strongly resembled the ginger still shadowing him. Did that mean that he'd been telling the truth about them growing up together? If so, why had he forgotten his family but not the others on the island? Why couldn't he have forgotten his parents' deaths?

The memory washed over him, uninvited and unwelcome as he screamed from underneath his mother's corpse until he was pulled out, Noona bundling him in shaking arms as a quiet, scared voice called for his mother.

Wait, that wasn't right. He hadn't screamed, hadn't called for his parents. He'd been struck dumb by the shock, going through the motions but unable to react. It had been the little ginger boy who was
crying, begging his mother to wake up even as he'd been drawn into Noona's hold, too. He'd been bleeding – they'd both been bleeding. Penguin saw the gouge by the ginger's left eye, bleeding profusely but ignored in grief. That would scar.

"-uin?" a voice called, jerking him out of his recollections. "Penguin?" He forced his eyes open to see the ginger in front of him, a concerned look on his face.

Ginger. Like the boy. Penguin lurched forwards, snatching the shades off the man's face to a startled cry. There, by his left eye – twitching and weeping in the light and that guilt washed over him again – was a neat scar, perfectly matching the memory. Penguin touched it, feeling the change in skin underneath his fingertips.

"Hey!" voices shouted, and there were hands on his shoulders, pulling him back from the ginger, who hadn't moved, not even to flinch back. He could have killed him then, it would have been so easy when the man didn't even have the instinct to retreat from him, but the bloodlust had drained away all at once. Staring into snowblind eyes as he was bundled back, his mind supplied a colour for them despite the fact there was no colour visible due to the damage.

Penguin knew this man. It was only one memory, but it had revealed something important, and potentially changed everything. He'd lost his parents to pirates, too. The same pirates, the same attack. Yet, he was a pirate. Penguin still couldn't think what would make him choose that path, but if the ginger had, then maybe… maybe it wasn't so impossible that he had too.

"What's going on?" a voice demanded, but Penguin ignored it, surging forwards and catching the pirates out, many of them losing their grip.

"Shachi," he said, reaching him again and tracing that scar once more. "You got this the day your parents died." The hands that had been restraining him slackened, but Penguin continued to ignore them, waiting for a response. He expected a nod, or maybe a spoken 'yes'.

He didn't expect to be body tackled, the ginger's arms wrapping tightly around him and his face burying itself in Penguin's shoulder as he staggered backwards.

"Hey!" he complained, instinctively catching Shachi. "What are you doing?"

"You remembered me!" the ginger sniffled – was he crying?

"Just one memory," Penguin corrected. "I still don't believe this pirate nonsense."

"Let's take things one step at a time," the captain said. Penguin realised he had been the one demanding what was happening. "You're not going to remember everything straight away. See if you can focus on Shachi for now."

Penguin was dubious – it was only one memory, it didn't prove anything beyond knowing of Shachi's existence as a child – but looking at the ginger sobbing into his shoulder the same guilt he'd woken up with surfaced again. His arms wound themselves around the shorter male of their own volition, and it felt right.
Well he's not going to get it all back at once. One little memory with lots of implications is plenty to be getting on with for now.
Chores were, by the very nature of the word, a chore. Things had to be done to keep the Polar Tang running smoothly, or even just to keep living standards bearable (well, Law refused to let them keep to such a low standard, but the sentiment was the same). Some chores were nicer than others – cleaning the bathroom, for example, was usually reserved for punishment detail or else they drew lots – and the week's rota would be found in the mess hall.

Shachi hated the cleaning chores with a passion. Scrubbing down the pipes of any grease stains that had mysteriously appeared was never fun. Most of the time, they were still submerged and using the engine to move, so the pipes were humming and hot to the touch. Thick gloves were a requirement, but they weren't the most dexterous things to use, making the task take forever and leaving him with sweaty hands – and a greasy face, when he swiped at the sweat on his forehead without thinking.

There was only one way to endure the task, usually alone deep in the bowels of the Tang with nothing but the engine for company. Shachi didn't like being alone, finding that silence had a deafening quality that made him feel almost claustrophobic as it hemmed him in. While the sound of the Tang's engines had grown into a reassurance for him over the years, it still wasn't quite enough to keep the loneliness at bay for long, so Shachi had to fill the silence somehow.

He didn't think of himself as a particularly brilliant singer, capable of holding the key (when not drunk) but little more. However, filling the silence with a tune helped to keep his mood up, no matter that it was weak and thin.

It was said that music brought people together. Shachi was no musician – certainly no Soul King (he was fairly certain the singer was one of the elusive and supposedly dead Straw Hats, if only because he doubted there was more than one living skeleton with an afro in the world) – but whenever he started singing to himself it was never long before one of his nakama appeared out of nowhere. Most of the time it was someone else working elsewhere within the engine's complex, out of sight but not necessarily out of earshot. Sometimes they came to help out, helping scrub at grease stains vigorously to get the task to pass quicker.

Other times, they came to sing.

Shachi sang a variety of songs, some from Swallow Island, others from elsewhere in North Blue, picked up on his travels. His nakama knew most of them, either from their own travels, or from listening to Shachi.

Penguin was a common visitor, voice slightly deeper but steady as he seamlessly inserted himself into the song. He knew them all, of course, even the quirkiest ones from Swallow Island that everyone else just hummed along to, unsure of the words. Bepo could hardly be called a singer, but
he belted the lines out (apologising later) with as much gusto as he could. Ikkaku brought a new element to the songs, her higher voice picking out a counter melody more often than not, usually made up on the spot and off-key.

Shachi's greatest surprise had come the day Law had been the one to appear, covered in grease himself even though his name was never down on the chore list. He'd expected quiet company, maybe a conversation if Law was feeling talkative. He had not expected his captain to start humming under his breath as he reached out to fuss with Shachi's gloves, nor had he expected him to fully join in at the refrain.

The revelation that Law could sing was a strange one. Logically, there was no reason why he couldn't, but Shachi didn't take Law for someone that ever sang, yet there he was, duetting away to a well-known North Blue song with a voice that made Shachi's attempts sound lack-lustre and weak. He didn't stop singing, though, knowing that if he did Law would get self-conscious and stop himself.

Shachi didn't want that, so he kept his head down and worked. Chores were awful, especially the cleaning ones, but they weren't so bad with a bit of singing and some company.

Chapter End Notes

As someone that hates chores, music is the only way to get me to do them. While I have no idea how good a singer Shachi is (we've barely heard him even talk so far in the anime!), Lost In Shinsekai and Dr Heartstealer are a very good argument for Law being able to.
Teenagers and alcohol were not a good mix. Sure, there were parents who let their kids sample something under supervision, or irresponsible pirates that let their cabin boys drink themselves into a stupor, but letting teenagers have alcohol was like adding fuel to a fire.

So, when a trio of teenagers came into her shop and asked nicely how much it would be for a large bottle of rum, she blinked once, twice, then politely suggested they consider juice instead.

"That won't do," the smallest said adamantly – he couldn't have been older than thirteen, surely. The other, taller, boys flanked him as if he was the leader of their little gang. It would almost have been cute if they weren't far too determined to get their hands on alcohol. "Rum, please. Whisky would also be acceptable if you're out of rum."

Considering both drinks were clearly visible on the shelves behind her, there was absolutely no point to that sentence except to tell her that the kid knew what he was asking for.

"Is it for your parents?" she tried. "They'd need to come and buy it themselves, I'm afraid."

"Is it so hard to just give us the damn drink?" one of the other boys, one with striking ginger hair, demanded. The smallest put his hand out to pacify him, and he settled back down with a glower.

"No, it's not for any adults," the little leader responded. His golden eyes were hard, and she wondered if they were orphans. They weren't from around the village, so they must have come in on one of the boats docked in the port. "We have the money, why is there an issue?"

"Teenagers shouldn't be drinking alcohol," she told them firmly, refusing to cower back when the taller ones took a step forwards, up to the counter. The one with the hat was taller than her, and her hand edged towards the gun concealed under the till. Pirates frequently tried to liberate her stock, but she wasn't so rich that she could afford to let a barrel or dozen go for free. She hoped these teenagers weren't going to force her to pull the trigger.

"It's not for drinking," she was told. "Our infirmary is in need of stocking and this island is lacking in medical supplies. I refuse to set sail without anything, so drinking alcohol will have to make do as a substitute until we find a better stocked island."

"In which case your doctor should be the one doing the shopping," she told him. "They must know alcohol isn't sold to teenagers."

"The doctor is the one doing the shopping." The kid crossed his arms. "That would be me. Now, are you going to sell it to me or am I going to have to take my business elsewhere?"
"This is the only liquor shop on the island, kid," she told him. "And even if it wasn't, no-one would sell you any."

"A pity," he sighed, then turned to his escorts. "We're leaving." She expected them – the ginger, at least – to kick up a fuss, but they both shrugged and followed him out. That didn't bode well; she'd be sleeping in the shop tonight, in case they tried to steal it later.

She turned away from the door, only to freeze as she caught sight of her shelves.

The rum was gone.

Not just the rum – the whisky, gin and vodka had also disappeared, leaving her with only the weaker alcohol. A note rested innocently on the shelf where they'd stood and she swiped it up viciously, crumpling it in her haste.

*It's never a good idea to turn away paying pirates,* it said. There was something scribbled in the corner, some sort of demented smiley, and she tore the note to pieces. How? How had they taken the drinks from right behind her when she'd watched them leave the shop?

Well, they couldn't be far. Swiping her gun and checking it was loaded – she didn't want to shoot them, but they'd stolen thousands of beris of stock and she *needed* that back – she ran out of the shop, sparing a moment to lock up, before sprinting for the port.

There was no sign of them.

"Hey!" she hailed the harbourmaster. "Three kids – short one with gold eyes, one with ginger eyes and one with a penguin hat. They been around here?"

"Oh, them?" he asked. "Just gone. Strange folk, teleporting around like that. They had a bear on their ship, too."

She looked back at the water, but couldn't see any sign of a freshly departed boat. And *teleporting?* What nonsense was that?

"They really did appear out of nowhere," the harbourmaster protested when she voiced her disbelief. "Some blue light and then, *poof,* there they were. The smallest one looked a bit tired, maybe it's one of those demon fruits?"

"Their boat?" she ground out. "Which way did it go?" If she had to go out to sea to catch the thieves then she *would.* No kids playing at pirates were going to get away with stealing that much stock, damn them!"

"Down," the harbourmaster said, sounding as if he didn't believe it himself. "Sank, cool as you please."

*Sank?* Those brats stole her alcohol just to, what, chuck it in some dinghy and sink the whole thing? That was taking petty to new extremes, and her hand tightened on the trigger. If they were really teleporting around, then they wouldn't have stayed on the ship while it sank. That meant they were still somewhere on the island.

She was going to find them, then she was going to *gut* them.
Rubbing alcohol is obviously the best stuff, but in a pinch the strong spirits can be used as a stopgap measure.

Outsider PoVs are always fun, especially when it's so easy to make them misunderstand what's going on.
Bepo was getting in some mapwork before breakfast, watched by Ikkaku, when Penguin stumbled into the room. He didn't look well, hat missing and skin ashen, and Bepo abandoned the maps to wrap his nakama in his arms, pulling him into his lap and holding him securely as he squirmed, startled.

"Let me go!" he demanded, but he'd never been able to physically overpower Bepo, and the mink had no intentions of releasing him until he knew what was wrong.

"You don't look well," Ikkaku observed, crouching down in front of them and resting a hand on his forehead. He shook his head to dislodge her. "I'll get Captain."

"No!" The woman froze, halfway to her feet, at Penguins unexpected outburst. "No," he repeated at a more normal volume. "Don't."

"Why not?" Bepo wanted to know, nuzzling against his cheek lightly. "Did you remember something?" While Penguin's memories had returned enough to finally convince him he was one of them, the last few gaps were, to Bepo's knowledge, still filling in.

Penguin nodded, drawing Ikkaku to abandon her silly halfway up stance and settle into a crouch in front of them.

"What did you remember this time?" she asked, and Bepo nudged Penguin again, also interested in the answer. He couldn't think of any reason why that would have the man so against going to see Law.

"I think… everything important," Penguin admitted slowly. "Everything makes sense now, like I've got all the context."

"That's great!" Ikkaku gushed, lunging forwards and hugging him tightly, resulting in an extra body in Bepo's lap. He didn't mind, shifting his hold until he was holding onto both of them.

"So… why won't you see Captain?" he asked, confused. Penguin shook his head again. "If there's something wrong."

"I called him a freak!" Penguin wailed, burying his face in Bepo's boiler suit. "I called him a freak, and his face. He looked like he was about to cry! How am I supposed to face him now?"

"You didn't remember him," Ikkaku said sensibly, and Bepo was glad she was there because he could do hugs but not words. "It's not your fault."
"But it is," Penguin insisted, inconsolable. "I was awful to all of you, and I made Shachi cry. I didn't stop him hurting himself, even though he did it all for me. And Law. How am I going to look them in the eye ever again?"

Bepo had had enough. There was only one way he could see to fix this, so with an apology he stood up, both humans securely in his arms as he followed Law's familiar scent to find the captain in his room. Shachi's scent was there, too, and as he neared – Penguin squirming wildly and Ikkaku trying to hold him back with minimal success – he heard the ginger talking.

"-just left without a word this morning. What am I supposed to do, Law?"

Hefting Penguin onto his shoulder as the man made an almost successful bid for freedom, Bepo strode over to the door and pushed it open.

"Sorry," he mumbled as he walked in, seeing both Law and Shachi staring at him, or more likely the wriggling mass of Penguin on his shoulder.

"Penguin!" Shachi was the first to speak, heading straight for Bepo and the nakama on his shoulder, who had stopped fighting and was now slumped bonelessly on Bepo's shoulder. "Are you okay? You left so suddenly this morning and I was worried you were sick but you didn't go to the infirmary either."

"He's got the rest of his memories back," Ikkaku told them, and Law was up in an instant, joining Shachi in crowding the older man. Bepo refused to let him retreat.

"That's great!" Shachi beamed, reaching to hug Penguin. The man recoiled and Shachi froze. "Penguin?"

"How can you be so... happy?" Penguin mumbled, and Bepo shifted until he was sitting on Law's bed, pulling the man firmly back into his lap and pinning him there. Without his hat to hide behind, it was easy to see the way he was avoiding looking at anyone in the room. "I was awful to you. How are you just brushing that off?"

This time when Shachi lunged for him the ginger didn't back off at the flinch.

"Oi," the ginger said, mussing his hair. "It wasn't your fault. You didn't remember us."

"Well, yes," Penguin admitted. "But-"

"But nothing," Law interrupted, nestling his way into Bepo's lap until he was shoulder to shoulder with Penguin. "You did nothing wrong, Penguin."

"How can you say that?" Penguin exclaimed. "I called you a freak, I agitated Shachi's snowblindness. I made you both cry, didn't I?" Law's mouth opened, but Penguin kept going. "I hurt you and you're just writing it off as nothing?"

"It wasn't your fault," Law said firmly. "Being unable to help you was what upset me, not what you said and did."

"So stop blaming yourself," Shachi added, and suddenly Bepo had a lap full of nakama as all four of them – Ikkaku included, letting the others speak but still there – managed a group hug, Penguin at the centre.

"But-" Penguin tried one more time, only for three hands to clamp over his mouth.
"No buts," Law repeated.

"And no beating yourself up over it," Shachi added, putting his own hat on Penguin's head.

Penguin made a noise that sounded suspiciously like a sniffle, hiding under the hat as his nakama embraced him.

Chapter End Notes

The last thing I had planned for the amnesia lot - Penguin realising just how badly he treated his nakama in Recall and Ordeal.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This is probably going to be the last update until June. I may be able to get something out tomorrow, but I'll be going on holiday without internet until the end of the month on Weds and I haven't even started packing yet.
Raizo tried to limit his company to the samurai. He wasn't a shy person, but he knew the Heart Pirates from when they'd arrived on Zou, before Jack had come. They hadn't been injured then, but when he'd finally been allowed out of the Whale Tree they'd been sporting similar injuries to the Minks, clear evidence that they'd fought alongside them. The guilt had yet to fade, so he hid himself away, not wanting to see what had become of the smiles they'd had.

He was surprised, in a way, when Trafalgar Law-dono – as Kin'emon and Kanjuro called him – entered the small storeroom he'd been using as a bedroom. They'd been at sea – under the sea – for several days, bordering on a week, with little interaction. Their alliance was tentative at best; Raizo clearly recalled the way Luffy-dono had made the call without consulting the other man.

"Law-dono," he greeted, wary of the man's sudden desire to seek him out. "Can I be of assistance?"

"I find tallying debts is usually a waste of time," the man said without preamble. "There are few people honourable enough to pay up, so it's easier and safer not to bother. Those with honour will pay up regardless."

Raizo was many things, but stupid wasn't one of them. This was no idle conversation starter.

"What a jaded view on life," he commented in reply, thinking of the men and women of Wano, many of whom took great pride in their honour. The samurai in particular would rather die than tarnish it. As a shinobi, Raizo was less strictly bound to honour codes than most, but he still had his own that he adhered to.

Law-dono didn't respond to his words, folding his arms across his chest and facing him down with a piercing golden gaze from beneath the peak of his hat. Despite the colour, there was no warmth to be found in the look. His eyes were cold and calculating, almost to the point of hostility. It had been easy to forget, with the Hearts' friendly disposition and the tales from Kin'emon and Kanjuro, that their companions were pirates – the same social caste as the cause of all their nightmares – but as he met that hard stare, Raizo was suddenly reminded what, exactly, he was dealing with.

"My crew were tortured," Law-dono eventually said, and Raizo hid a flinch. He had suspected as such, but to hear it stated so bluntly was painful. "They had no obligation to you, but they refused to sell you out regardless." He disguised it well, but Raizo could sense the simmering anger beneath his skin. Those gold eyes were judging him, peeling him apart and searching for what had prompted his crew to such loyalty.

"I am in your debt," he acknowledged. Law-dono had been under no obligation to help them, and yet here they were.
"You owe me nothing," Law-dono cut in, and Raizo floundered, caught off guard. Surely the man didn't think he had so little honour?

"But-"

"You owe me nothing," Law-dono repeated, and this time Raizo heard the emphasis on the word 'me'. "I cannot say I would not have sold you out in a heartbeat if it would have spared my crew." Looking at those eyes, Raizo didn't doubt him for a second. Law-dono was a dangerous man. A dangerous man in whose domain he was currently residing. "My crew, on the other hand, you owe much to. Be sure to pay up."

Raizo was given no chance to respond to the thinly veiled threat before Law-dono left, shutting the door behind him and leaving him with much to think about. The man could not be fully trusted, but his loyalty to his crew was absolute. That was useful information to hold, although Raizo doubted Law-dono had blindly surrendered such potentially devastating blackmail material, in turn implying some element of trust. There was nothing simple about the interaction, Law's words and body saying one thing while the implications suggested something almost completely opposite.

He resolved to discuss it with Kin'emon and Kanjuro when they next returned. Both had spent far more time with the pirate and might be able to help unravel the mystery.

Later that evening he left the safety of his storeroom. To repay the debt – and he had every intention of doing so even before adding in the consideration that Law-dono's amicability towards the Kozuki Clan would improve if he proved his honour – he had to understand the depth of it. That required seeing and understanding the damage the friendly crew had suffered.

He found most of the crew in the recreation room, laughing brightly and playing cards. Law-dono was sat in the corner, book in hand although his eyes were looking over the top, notably softer than the hard gold that had pinned him in the storeroom earlier, watching his crew relax. Sat either side of him, on blankets piled high on the floor, were the pair Raizo recognised as the two that had been in charge on Zou, Penguin-dono and Shachi-dono. Both were fast asleep, heads resting against Law-dono's thighs as if they were comfortable pillows. Their clothes failed to reach their wrists, leaving the bandaging around them clear to see. More bandaging was faintly visible under the clothes.

Law-dono met his eyes, the softness melting away to leave the hard gold regarding him meaningfully. His left hand – the one not holding the book – slipped down for a moment, resting on Shachi-dono's vibrant hair lightly. The message was clear.

You owe them.

Chapter End Notes

I'm back! I was asked a while ago if I remembered the Wano cast existed, and while I can't say I like any of them (Raizo being the only one I don't mind too much), it is true that they are there on the Polar Tang, so I thought I should probably do something with them.
A pirate was nothing without his weapons. Whether those be simply their fists and feet, or a multitude of blades, caring for them was often the difference between life and death. Penguin and Shachi were no exception, keeping their blades sharp and rust free. Both were weapons that didn't lend themselves well to subtlety, so the yagi and katana were often left behind on the Tang if they weren't looking to do anything more than information gathering, leaving them with the more subtle tools.

Both were physically fit, attributed to Law's strict regimes and frequent check-ups almost as much as their own training. Years of brawling, followed by a forced honing of their styles thanks to Law and Bepo, left them perfectly capable of fighting unarmed if the situation called for it, but despite that there was one thing neither of them would ever leave behind.

Tucked securely under the breast flaps of their boiler suits lay identical knives, small and easy to wield even for young, untrained hands. Despite being well cared for, their age was obvious in the way their hilts had been rewrapped several times, the simple wood underneath stained with blood that would never come out completely.

Those knives had several memories attached, many of them surprisingly negative. They'd almost killed each other with them, once, in an argument over nothing that had blown up to such ridiculous proportions that it had taken everything Law had had to stop them, confiscating the blades for a month afterwards because he'd decided they clearly weren't mature enough to handle them yet. Neither of them had disagreed, too shell-shocked at what they'd almost done to each other.

They were also the knives they'd used to perform their first kills, an emotionally-charged venture that had almost gone badly wrong and split the Heart Pirates before they'd even formed. There was an underlying guilt emitting from Law whenever the origins of the crew were brought up, despite the fact that both Penguin and Shachi had not only long-forgiven him for the event, but with enough hindsight had become thankful for it.

With such devastating events attributed to them, it could surprise people to discover that they guarded the weapons fiercely, even thirteen years later. No matter how quickly they needed to retreat, they would always make sure to retrieve them if they'd lost their grip during a fight (Law even helped on occasion, a Shambles materialising them in their hands even as they ran, or in his own to be returned later if they were too injured to accept them at that moment). At times their nakama liked those plain-looking knives to their captain's hat, a seemingly innocuous thing that they would never leave without.

What, then, was so special about the knives that they would go to such lengths to keep them and care
for them? Why, despite the bad memories, would they never be separated from the blades they kept so carefully on their person at all times?

Well, that was simple.

They were the first gifts Law had ever given them.

There had been no grand ceremony, in fact there had been nothing at all, just two blades thrust at them with which they were expected to kill a pair of prisoners. Knives that had been dropped in disgust, only to be reclaimed later as they cemented their future of piracy in cold murder because it was us or them, and despite the cost, they wanted to survive. Law hadn't taken them back after, disappearing with them only long enough to clean them of the bloodstains before handing them back.

"For self-defence," he'd said, in a tone that clearly stated he wished it would never come to that. He'd shown them how to use them, though, giving them the sheathes so they could carry them around without risk of self-injury, and while they'd been useless he hadn't taken them back, simply treating their small cuts patiently as they learned.

Material gifts weren't common in the Heart Pirates. Excepting birthdays, anything they wanted, they had to get themselves, and that was what made those knives so special, because Law didn't give gifts, but he'd given them their knives all the same.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you that were asking, my holiday was awesome. The weather was kind (no rain, despite going to a stereotypically rainy place) and I got to see a load of things in person that I'd only read about before.

Back to the fic, and I've been casually bringing up these daggers time and time again, so I thought it was about time I let them have a chapter of their own.
Law was getting fidgety, not that he dared let it on to his three new companions. With the pain finally fading away to nothing in the aftermath of the White Lead, many things that had slowly been stripped from him as he grew weaker and weaker were once again within his grasp, if only he would reach out and take them.

Many things, he had. Exercising his body, forcing it back to the peak it had been during his time as a Donquixote Pirate before his strength had ebbed away and then going on to push it further, to get *stronger*, because he was truly on the run now, and his life wasn't the only one he was responsible for now. More simple tasks, like reading and writing. The feeling of being able to grasp a pen between his fingers and not have it slip out as he fumbled from a surge of pain, the thin paper of pages turning under his fingertips. Law hadn't realised how much he'd missed the simple actions.

There was one thing left, something that found its origins back in Flevance as his father suggested a method for limbering up his fingers. It was nothing Law had ever expected, but with a willing Lami he'd gone through with it, noticing the difference over months. He'd done it again, wishing it was Lami but making do with an easily manipulated Baby 5, a couple of times in the Donquixote Pirates (and turning viciously on Buffalo when the other boy laughed, because what did he know).

It had grown rarer and rarer as his body seized up in pain more often than not, ebbing away to nothing once he was travelling with Cora-san, both because of his illness and the lack of suitable company. Now, with the pain finally fading and his fingers stiff from lack of use, he wanted to reach out again, to help his fingers regain the nimbleness they'd had when he was a child, before everything turned to hell.

There were two problems. The first was that he wasn't sure he trusted his new companions not to laugh at him like Buffalo had done, and he didn't want to beat them up, not now they were officially a crew. The second was a more practical one… there was no-one to use.

Well, Law pondered as he eyed a sleeping Shachi, sprawled out in a chair comfortably and snoring gently from the uncomfortable angle his head had settled in, that wasn't *strictly* true. While not the length of Lami's or Baby 5's, the ginger hair was arguably long enough for his purposes.

Penguin and Bepo were in the control room, their turn on shift as the four of them adjusted to the Polar Tang's controls, and Law found himself slipping forwards, towards the sleeping ginger. He'd shed his hat, the unusual absence the final trigger for Law's itching fingers as they crept forwards, tangling themselves gently in the hair. It wasn't soft like Lami's, nor did it have the smooth feeling of Baby 5's, but the coarseness held its own appeal as he let the strands run over his fingers for a moment.
Shachi didn't stir, remaining fast asleep and oblivious, so Law got to work. His fingers were clumsy to start with, dropping strands and mixing them up as he fumbled, but it wasn't long before the muscle memory kicked back in. Across, over, under, across. Shachi's hair wasn't long enough for him to get into the rhythm completely before he ran out of hair, so he simply started again, watching his fingers flash through the ginger hair with more and more confidence. The repetitive action had its own calming influence, and by the time he considered himself finished his nerves had settled.

It didn't matter if they laughed at him. If they found out. Shachi was still snoring away, and the other two were still navigating the Polar Tang across North Blue elsewhere. With a satisfied smirk, and fingers that felt more limber than they had barely half an hour earlier, Law slipped out of the room.

Shachi's exclamation could be heard loud and clear through the metal corridors of the submarine when he eventually woke. Law hid a smirk when Penguin was blamed for a prank, despite the older boy's protests, amused that Shachi seemed incapable of even suspecting him.

It was harder to hide the smile when Shachi, despite his vocal complaints, made no move to unravel the many braids in his hair.

Over time, it became routine, and by the time Shachi finally cottoned on to who the real culprit was, Law's fingers were back to the dexterity he expected of them and the braid attacks (as Shachi had taken to calling it) began to cease.

It took Law much longer to realise that braiding hair wasn't standard practice and that it had been his father's way of manipulating him into simply spending more time with his sister.
Ruin

Chapter Notes

Characters: Law, Shachi, Penguin
Rating: Teen
Warnings: Major character injury, blood
Tags: Angst

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Plans sometimes go wrong. Law knew this, had spent the last thirteen years making plans and watching at least half of them crumble away to dust as something went awry. He'd got better at improvising, and even better at making contingencies as experience taught him what failed him the most (his stamina, his nakama's inability to do as they were told if they thought it would leave him in danger). It didn't matter, he'd come to think, if a plan went wrong, because somehow they'd all pull through anyway.

Naïve.

Two years since he'd entered the New World, two years of stronger opponents, wilder fights and crazier possibilities, and he still thought he was ready for anything? Laughable.

Law wasn't laughing now. How could he, when his plans had gone so horribly wrong that his mind – his genius, never failed him, mind – had short-circuited. It was a simple reconnaissance, laying the groundwork for later. Nothing new, nothing his crew hadn't done many times before. There shouldn't have been anything to go wrong, not when he'd taken Penguin and Shachi with him, by far the most experienced in staying low and under the radar. Even if something had gone wrong, they'd been with him all those times before, when his plans crumbled to dust and it became improvise or die. They could handle it.

So why was Penguin frozen next to him, unable to even react, much like Law himself. Other members of his crew – a hand-picked minority of five in total – were in similar condition.

Plans went wrong, but never had a plan gone so horribly wrong.

The gorilla zoan in front of them laughed, a deep laugh that reverberated through his impressive chest and through the ground; Law could feel it through his feet. It wasn't a pleasant laugh. It was condescending, cruel and full of wicked malice, all at once. Beside him, chuckling along with similar sentiments, was the reason everything was wrong. Law didn't know what subtype it was, exactly, but the dog zoan was fast and vicious enough to catch them out, leaving them in their current situation.

Huge hands, far larger than an average gorilla but since when did zoans follow the laws of nature, almost entirely dwarfed the arms they held, the limbs looking like little more than frail twigs as they writhed, their owner desperately trying to worm his way loose, kicking at the air as if he could get enough purchase to wriggle out of the grip.

Shachi was having no success, his bids for freedom doing nothing more than providing a source of amusement for his captors. Of everyone, Shachi was the one Law had always thought (naively, he
was too damn naïve) wouldn’t be caught. He was the fastest, and had the best observation haki to match. Few opponents could even touch him in a fight (unless he was being a self-sacrificing idiot which was sadly all too common), so to see him bowled over by the canine zoon too fast for him to dodge, a vicious bite to his leg immobilising him just long enough for the dog's gorilla companion to scoop him up was something so incomprehensible Law couldn’t react.

And so there they were, frozen in disbelief as the unforeseen, unimaginable scene unfolded before their eyes. Law's body wouldn't move, his eyes fixated on the struggling form of his nakama even as he cursed himself – too slow, too naïve, move you idiot – and from the unnatural stillness of his nakama behind him, he wasn't the only one.

"The Master doesn't appreciate you snooping around in his territory," the dog yapped self-importantly, chest puffed out. Law didn't particularly care, had never cared what his opponents did or did not appreciate. A pirate trying to please people was contradictory at best, and under normal circumstances, Law would take great pleasure in antagonising them further, just because he could.

These were not normal circumstances, and his brain had yet to restart from the mind-numbing shock of seeing Shachi captured so easily, so Law said nothing, trying to find a way to salvage the situation. One of his contingency plans would work, surely, if only he could remember them.

Shachi's flailing landed a solid kick to the gorilla's face, and the zoan's laughter stopped, his face morphing to a disgruntled scowl.

"We don't need them all?" he asked, the dog clearly running the show. (If Law could make observations like that, then why couldn't his brain stop being a blank slate?). The dog shrugged.

"One won't make a difference," he replied, and finally Law's blood started to boil as the implications forced their way in, his brain starting to whirr back into activity.

"Any funny business and you'll be next," the gorilla growled at them, the Heart Pirates still in varying states of frozen. It was cliché, Law managed to think. Clichés had a weakness, too well known, too obvious-

His brain screeched to a stop again as Shachi suddenly went rigid, legs stilling too fast, and the muscles in the gorilla's arms flexed.

The sound of fabric ripping cut harshly through the air, sleeves dividing roughly at the seams as the gorilla pulled. Two and two didn't add up for a moment, Law's brain back to numb as beads of red made themselves known around Shachi's upper arms, where the deltoid connected – had connected.

No longer connected.

Shachi didn't scream, but the absence of vocal agony meant so much more. A small, choked-off noise, and clarity finally, finally, crashed over Law.

A flick of the fingers, then another, and Shachi was on the ground. Too close. Too close to the gorilla but that was where the dog had stood and Law wasn't a sadist despite his reputation, but the shriek as spindly limbs tore off and the armless body crashed to the ground in a pile of blood and agonised screams gave him a split second of satisfaction before he reached Shachi's side and reality sank in.

The ginger still had his arms, somehow. The skin was stretched and torn and Law could see a complex surgery in front of them to repair the damage, but they were still there, and that was a small victory he could take. Less victorious was the way he lay in the crumpled heap he'd landed in, still and unmoving. He wasn't unconscious, at least not by standard definitions. His eyes were open,
unseeing through the shades and Law got the impression that even if he removed them Shachi wouldn't so much as blink. His breathing was shallow yet rapid and his skin quickly flushed.

Law wanted to finish off the gorilla too, leave him in pieces like he'd been about to do to Shachi and watch him squirm because he wasn't sadistic but he could be vindictive and if the doctor side of his brain wasn't so dominant he'd have done exactly that. He left it to his crew instead, hearing their irate roars as they, too, broke free from the mental numbness and unleashed their fury, because Shachi had gone into severe shock and needed treatment now before it became fatal.

Some back alley that couldn't even pretend to have a modicum of cleanliness was almost as far from ideal as it was possible to get, but that was where Law was and there wasn't time to relocate before he could begin to stabilise Shachi. He stripped off his coat, thankful that he'd chosen to wear it that day, and threw it over the ginger like a blanket before lifting his feet.

"Can you hear me?" he asked, hoping to incite some sort of reaction. "Shachi?" There was no response, as he'd feared, and he threw up another Room to use a Scan. Shachi's arms were a mess, as he'd already surmised. The muscles were frayed, and the humerus had been forced so far out of the socket that all the ligaments had snapped. It wouldn't be inaccurate to say his arms were hanging on by a thread, but impossibly, that wasn't Law's concern, nor the aim of his Scan. He needed Shachi's blood pressure to rise again, just enough to be able to move him and get back to the Tang, where he had access to everything he needed.

It wasn't rising, and Law wasn't willing to wait for it to get around to starting by itself, reaching in with his powers and forcing the blood around until it could sustain the pace without him. A cry tore itself from Shachi's throat, a painful broken sound that was the sweetest music Law could ever hear because it meant he wasn't gone yet, and he judged his patient as safe to move, wrapping the coat more firmly around him and lifting him into his arms.

"Shachi- Is he-?" Penguin was suddenly there in front of him, covered liberally with blood and the black of his haki not yet faded from his skin. The rest of the group of Heart Pirates were behind him in a similar state, dyed red and sporting numerous injuries that Law couldn't treat right then, because Shachi was safe to move but not out of danger and there was nothing else fatal in front of him.

"We need to get back," he said, his voice clipped and strained. Penguin's face fell, horror settling in as the implications struck him. Law, already moving as fast as he dared with his precious cargo, felt bad for him, but false hope was worse than the truth and he would never do that to his nakama.

His boots splashed through the blood on the ground, and while he wasn't consciously looking, he noticed the unmoving bloodied lumps and allowed himself a wry smile. Ordinarily he'd call such ferocity going overboard, but after what they'd done to Shachi it was simply penance and while part of him wished his nakama had left some for him, he was undeniably delighted to see the mangled corpses in his periphery as he hurried past.

Shachi was still breathing when they got back to the Tang, and he left the rest of his party to recount why, exactly, they were coated from head to toe in blood as he finally got the ginger settled in the infirmary, replacing makeshift field treatments with hospital grade equipment and coercing Shachi's body back to its regular performance.

Unsurprisingly, Penguin was first to follow him, silently obeying Law's instructions as the shock finally lifted and Law could safely sedate his patient enough to begin to repair the damage. There was a lot, the arms needing delicate treatment beyond anything conventional surgery could reliably offer and the long-lasting effects of the shock not easily reversed, but Law persevered in the end, allowing his Room to fall after he'd done everything he could.
A moment of black, and then he was on the floor, held awkwardly by Penguin, who had clearly managed to catch him before his head collided with the metal but only just.

"Get some rest, Law," the older man said, and Law absently noted the thickness in his voice that meant he was trying not to cry. He didn't get a chance to reorient himself before he was picked up, Penguin gently depositing him on the next bed over. "I'll wake you if anything changes."

Drained, Law didn't have much of a choice, exhausting forcibly overriding worry and dragging him back down into the realms of unconsciousness.

Chapter End Notes

It's been a while since I went angsty, and this has been floating around in my mind for the last few days so I thought why not.
Regret

Chapter Notes

Characters: Shachi, Law, Penguin, Heart Pirates
Rating: Teen
Warnings: Mention of major injury
Tags: Nakamaship, Angst, Painkillers

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was nothing gentle about Shachi's return to consciousness. Often, he floated somewhere between awake and asleep for a while, gradually acclimatising to the situation before his senses fully returned to him. This time, awareness crashed over him like a tonne of bricks, as if he’d jerked awake from a nightmare, leaving him grasping at straws of reality to ground himself.

"Shachi?" a voice asked, but the ginger paid it no mind, attention stolen by the way his nerves seemingly cut off just before his shoulders, nothing but a void where his arms should be. Memories slammed into the forefront of his mind; being caught, cruel laughter, the pain. A searing agony that took his breath and voice away in one fell swoop as his arms tore, warm blood trickling down his skin.

No!

He jerked forwards, trying to sit up, to see his shoulders. His arms. A firm hand pressed down on his chest, restraining him and stilling his movements. It was off-centre, a little to the left; right over his heart.

"Don't move," the voice said again, gentle but firm like the hand.

"My arms!" he gasped, fighting the pressure to no avail. "I can't-"

"It's okay," he was told, and the fog cleared from his brain enough to recognise Penguin's presence, the older man bent over him in thinly veiled concern. "Don't worry, it's just anaesthetic." Shachi stopped struggling, staring at Penguin in muted comprehension as the words and their implications settled in.

"They're not..?" he asked, unable to finish the sentence, to voice what could have happened, had been happening.

"They're still attached," Penguin said calmly, although his fingers were trembling lightly. "Law already did the surgery, you just need to rest now." He looked away for a moment, his gaze settling on something Shachi couldn't see from where he was lying, and he was far too tired and shaken to even consider focusing his haki. "I promised I'd wake Law when you came to," he said, sounding apologetic. "He's just in the next bed, hang on a moment?" There was a pleading note in his voice, but Shachi wasn't paying any attention to him again.

Law.

He remembered Law's face, like he remembered fighting to get free and pain. He remembered his
captain, just standing there, watching. Penguin, too, and more of his nakama behind. They'd watched, just watched as he was dangled in powerful arms like a ragdoll, doing nothing.

Somewhere, deep in the recesses of his mind, rationality whispered that they'd been frozen in shock, couldn't have moved no matter how much they wanted to. He'd been there himself, knew intimately what it was like to watch in muted horror while muscles ceased taking orders from the brain.

Shachi's mind wasn't listening to rationality, stuck in the rut of they watched, they didn't help as it circled around and around in his mind.

Tousled black hair invaded his sight, followed by a pale face with red indents of fabric and eyes bright with weariness. The implications were lost on Shachi, who opened his mouth to croak a single word before Law could finish gathering himself together.

"Why?"

Law blinked, confusion gathering in his tired eyes.

"Shachi?" he asked, gently, as if he thought he wasn't in his right mind. "It's okay," he continued after a moment, just before Shachi could clarify his question. "The surgery was a success, you just need to rest to let it take, then your arms will be operational again. The anaesthesia is to make sure you don't move it accidentally."

Shachi couldn't care less about any of that, not right now when the betrayal of being abandoned to his fate had swollen to encompass almost all of his brain.

"Why didn't you save me?" he rasped, his weak voice cracking halfway through. "You were there, you were right there, and you… you just watched."

Law's face turned stricken, half horrified, half guilt-ridden. Beside him, Penguin's face matched his perfectly.

"I…" his captain said, faltering. "I…" He fell to his knees, the impact reverberating clearly along the metal flooring. "Oh, Shachi, I'm sorry. I'm so, so, sorry!" Tattooed hands groped wildly, eventually settling for his shoulder, half on the numbness, half burning his skin with the raw emotion. "I… I froze up, I couldn't move, couldn't think. I just shut down, I'm sorry, Gods, I'm sorry!"

The grip was too tight, hot fingers clenching as if he'd disappear any second without them there to ground him to the mortal plane. Sobs echoed in the air, broken, heart-wrenching sobs as Law buried his face in Shachi's sheets.

The rational part of Shachi's brain forgave him instantly; Law was blameless, that could happen to the best of them. He was still alive, still had his arms, so they must have done something after he blacked out, rallying themselves just in time to save him when it really mattered.

He still wasn't listening to the rational part, letting the crazed, terror-fuelled instincts do the thinking for him, and turned his head away, unable to shed the feeling of betrayal even though this was Law and he was beating himself up over it enough even without Shachi adding fuel to the fire. Penguin, too, he supposed, although he could barely see the other man from where he stood a little behind Law, looking at least as distraught as their captain.

Shachi couldn't deal with those faces, not now while everything was still sinking in.

"Get out," he said, the words mumbling together as they left his mouth and became acquainted with
the pillow half covering his mouth. There were twin intakes of breath, sharp and painful.

"Shachi-" one of them started, he didn't care enough to sort out their voices.

"Out," he repeated, voice sharper this time as he moved his head a fraction so it wouldn't be swallowed by the bed linen. Another broken sob and then the pressure on his shoulder lifted. A hand carded through his hair, just once, but he stoically refused to look up and meet their gaze. Another devastated sigh and footprints began to recede, pausing a short distance away.

"Call if you need us," one said, not moving for several long seconds as if they were hoping Shachi would change his mind. He didn't.

Shifting his head was the closest he could get to rolling onto his side, stubbornly facing away from the door as it shut, so that was what he did, finally catching sight of an arm-shaped lump by his side, where it should be even if he couldn't feel it at all. From it were several thin tubes, running various liquids into his dead arm, and at the sight of them the rational part of his brain gained a slightly louder voice, wishing he'd kept his mouth shut because none of it was Law's fault and he shouldn't have taken it out on him and Penguin.

They'd understand, of course. Painkillers strong enough to completely cut off all sensation from his arm certainly had the ability to mess with his brain and Law would know that better than anyone. It didn't stop any of it hurting – his sharp words, or the perceived betrayal – and he gulped in a large breath, wanting to go back to sleep where the pain stopped and his tongue wasn't a razor edge but unable to fall back under.

He couldn't sleep, but he feigned it whenever the door opened, because if they thought it was asleep they wouldn't bother him and then he wouldn't lash out at his undeserving nakama. He had no idea how many of them were really fooled, several coming to sit by his bedside and some even talking to him in a low voice. They apologised for being useless, told him what had become of the enemies (and Shachi would have hugged them for that if he could), wished him a swift recovery. It was all low-volume, and gentle enough that he could continue to pretend he was asleep, so he did.

He refused to face them again until the painkillers wore off and he knew his thoughts and words were truly his own once more.

Chapter End Notes

Continuation from yesterday's Ruin, where painkillers do their job but have negative effects on the psyche in the process.
It wasn't like Law to hesitate, but he couldn't summon his usual confidence this time as he stood outside the closed doors to the infirmary. Shachi was inside, still recovering from his ordeal, and while Law knew well the side effects of the various medication he was on, that didn't stop the words from hurting.

He didn't think Shachi had truly meant any of it, not when the side effects included increased paranoia, irritability and depression – all of which could have easily led to the previous day's outburst – but that didn't mean that they weren't true. He had, to some extent, abandoned Shachi. If he'd reacted faster, then he wouldn't have been anywhere near as badly injured, likely would have just been shaken.

His nakama had told him and Penguin, when they'd left the infirmary with tears stubbornly refusing to stop, that there had been nothing more they could have done. Everyone had moments like that, even so-called genius captains. Shachi was alive, would heal up just fine, so it was okay. They'd pulled through in time.

Still, Law hadn't gone back into the room since Shachi had demanded he leave. He'd seen others go in, re-emerging later with varying degrees of a smile on their face although they all claimed he was sleeping, but Shachi had needed space, so Law had given it to him. Now, though, a day after the surgery, he needed to assess Shachi's condition personally, to make sure that everything was indeed healing up correctly.

Taking a deep breath, he knocked once – just in case Shachi wasn't using his haki and hadn't been able to sense him and his emotional quandary for the last ten minutes – before pushing the door open and slipping inside. Shachi didn't stir; the ginger was lying exactly where he had been the last time Law had seen him, head turned away from the door but otherwise on his back, kept immobile by the painkillers.

As Law approached, it became painfully obvious that Shachi was faking. Having spent thirteen years with the other man, sleeping in the same room – the same bed – a large minority of the time, Law knew all the little shuffles and noises he made when he was asleep. There was none of that here, his breathing a little too carefully even and regulated to be genuine. Clearly, Shachi was not interested in any interaction.

"Shachi," he greeted, walking around until the ginger was facing him and perching on the side of the bed, carefully avoiding all the equipment. No response, of course, so Law reached out and ran his fingers through his nakama's hair a couple of times. "I know you're awake," he said, forcing fond amusement to take prevalence over the churning worry inside him. "You don't need to do anything,"
he reassured him, "it's time to check on your progress, that's all."

"Get rid of these painkillers messing with my head," Shachi grumbled, abandoning the deception and rolling his head back to face the ceiling. Law didn't expect him to open his eyes, but retrieved his shades for him so he had the option.

"I'll see if I can lessen the dose," he promised, summoning his Room. "Scan." The improvement was obvious, Law's own powers once again proving their effectiveness as things that would ordinarily take weeks to heal had already begun to knit together properly. Shachi still wouldn't be able to move his arms for some time, but the minor damage from the neurogenic shock had almost healed entirely. He judged that it was, in fact, possible to reduce the pain killers, and told Shachi as such.

"Good," the ginger grunted, and Law couldn't help a small smile.

"Before that, I need to immobilise your arms properly," he admitted, surveying the healing muscles and determining the best way to move them.

"Can't you do that after?" Shachi complained, and Law fixed him with a hard look that he wasn't sure Shachi could see.

"It will hurt," he said bluntly. "Not in your current condition." Shachi whined loudly, but Law wouldn't relent, ignoring the protests as he retrieved a sturdy immobilising sling and cautiously manipulated the healing arms into it, watching carefully for any signs of additional damage caused by the movement. There were none, and to Shachi's clear delight he switched out the current pain medication for something lighter.

The changeover wasn't instantaneous but Law waited with Shachi, disentangling his hair for him and watching as lines of pain began to cross his face as the effects slowly shifted.

"Law..?" Shachi asked hesitantly, wincing slightly at the discomfort. "I'm sorry."

"You don't need to apologise," Law replied, slipping off of the bed and seating himself in a chair instead. "I know the side effects of the medication, and you weren't wrong about us not reacting. I'm sorry it took so long."

Shachi chuckled, groaning slightly and Law worried that he'd reduced the medication too much.

"You saved me in time," he grinned weakly, and Law realised that he had opened his eyes. "And now you're going to spoil me rotten until I'm healed, so it's all fair."

"Spoil?" Law asked, frowning, and Shachi laughed again.

"Don't even try to deny it," he chuckled. "We both know you will. You always do." Well, that depended on Shachi's definition of 'spoiling', but Law saw no need in arguing the point. Certainly, Shachi wouldn't be capable of doing much of anything for himself for the next several days, and Law had every intention of keeping the recovery a bearable experience, so if Shachi called that being spoilt then yes, Law would be spoiling him rotten.

He'd do whatever it took to keep Shachi smiling. As long as he was smiling, it was difficult to associate him with the flushed and dying body Law had held in his arms only yesterday.

"Get some sleep if you can," he said, finding his feet. "If you're up for it, you can have some solid food later." Shachi's grin widened.

"Awesome!" he said, before turning slightly more sombre. "Hey, Law?"
"Yes?" Law asked, taking note of the change in atmosphere and preparing to summon another Room if Shachi needed something.

"Could you get Penguin? I want to talk to him."

Law didn't ask questions, ruffling Shachi's hair lightly instead.

"Make sure you sleep afterwards," he said firmly before leaving the room to find the requested nakama. Penguin was with Clione in the engine room, but dropped everything – literally, to Law's disapproval – the moment he heard the summons, darting off like a shot.

All Law could do was shake his head, amused and glad that everything was returning to the way it should be.

Chapter End Notes

Final installment of this plotline (at least for the time being), because the angst is fun but I still like the happy endings.
Many of them were thinking it, but it was Clione that voiced it later that day, when Penguin and Shachi returned from wherever they'd stashed the newspapers they'd swiped from under the captain's nose and settled down to eat.

"Earlier," he began between mouthfuls, having managed to successfully seat himself at the same table as the captain and the two senior crew members. "You two said you were Captain's big brothers... does that mean you're older than him?"

It was a risky question, Law never giving a consistent answer about his age, but the way he hadn't really refuted the claims earlier – Clione might have only been on the crew a little over a year, but he knew the difference between Law seriously protesting and Law trying to save face against Penguin and Shachi's mischief – implied that maybe there was some truth. He wouldn't be surprised at all to find that the pair knew how old their captain was, and probably far more besides.

The side glances they gave Law cemented Clione's belief – Penguin's more so than Shachi's due to the shades hiding what the ginger was thinking – as did the pregnant pause while they waited for him to answer. For his part, Law kept chewing, finishing his mouthful of rice in no hurry and reaching for his glass of water after swallowing.

He didn't speak until he'd drunk half the glass, by which time the entire present crew's attention was firmly fixed on him.

"They are," Law admitted at last, lips curling into a smirk that signalled an imminent smart comment, most likely at someone's expense. "Not that you'd know from the way they act sometimes."

"Hey!" the pair exclaimed in unison, and Uni took that as his clue to chip in.

"I can see it with Penguin, Captain," he said, and several of the crew nodded. Penguin quite clearly big-brothered half the crew, with Shachi and Law prominent in his priorities, so to find that he was genuinely older than their captain wasn't as much of a shock. "But I'm afraid I can't believe it with Shachi."

The ginger spluttered as they laughed, Law's smirk taking on a definitively smug aura, as if he'd expected someone to say it. Clione wouldn't have been surprised if it had been carefully orchestrated with that exact outcome in mind. It had certainly had the effect of diverting the conversation back onto the pair, and away from Law's age. Still, in the confines of his mind Clione did the maths. Penguin and Shachi's ages were no such well-kept secret – twenty six and twenty five respectively, with little under a year between them – so for Law to be younger than them he would have to be no older than twenty five, if it was only months between him and Shachi. He figured that was likely as,
all joking aside, Shachi didn't act older than Law. He had his moments of seriousness, as they all did, but there was a steel to Law that Shachi either didn't have or hid far better.

Considering the way he hid from his problems, as best Clione could fathom from his disappearances whenever certain topics came up, he was fairly sure it was the former.

Law, on the other hand, Clione would honestly have pegged as closer to thirty. He had his playful streak, but there was no doubt he was a seasoned pirate, and Clione didn't even want to think how young he must have started, or why, to give off that aura so young. And Ope Ope no Mi aside, Law's medical knowledge was incredibly advanced, on par with renowned doctors easily more than twice his age.

No-one else had asked the question out loud, content to tease Shachi on his immaturity while Penguin and Law laughed and the ginger sulked, and Clione decided against it as well. They didn't need to know how old their captain was, anyway. All that mattered was that he was their captain, and good at it. It was hardly a secret that Penguin and Shachi supported him, so to find that the three of them considered it a sibling-like relationship was of no surprise at all.

Penguin had swiped Shachi's hat, ruffling the ginger hair patronisingly as Shachi whined before realising that he could drag Law – sat between the pair of them and not aware of the danger until too late – into the heart of the chaos. Law let out an undignified yelp as an arm wrapped around his midsection and he was bodily hauled until he was half in Shachi's lap, the ginger reaching up to rest his chin on his captain's shoulder with a grin, carefully removing the fluffy hat to ruffle Law's own hair.

Law flailed, long limbs not quite as under control as maybe he'd have liked, but he never made a Room to Shambles away from the attack and Clione realised that in that situation, and only for as long as that situation lasted, Law really did seem like the youngest.

Chapter End Notes

Someone mentioned how the crew might react to finding out Law is younger than Penguin and Shachi, and that tied in well with the 'little brother' comments in Tease and Distract (chapters 123 and 124), so here's a follow on from that.
Deep

Chapter Notes

Characters: Polar Tang, Heart Pirates
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Submarines, Underwater

For many people, the idea that a submarine had a maximum diving depth was something that never crossed their minds. Even the Heart Pirates barely gave it a second thought, used to cruising along in the twilight zone of the ocean, occasionally going deeper if they needed to.

The Polar Tang hadn't come with a user manual. She probably had one, somewhere – and sometimes Law would worry about that, when he remembered there was confidential information about his ship in the hands of the World Government, if they ever thought to look – but it hadn't been anywhere on here when they'd searched, so everything was a case of trial and error.

They hadn't truly trialled her maximum depth. The first time they'd gone deep had been an accident, three teenagers and a mink cub going into a knee-jerk reaction at a pink flamingo on the horizon. They'd dived through the currents until they'd hit… something. Something fast and furious that wrested all control away from them and sent them hurtling towards the sea floor, only to spit them out at the last possible second.

Torn between the terror of Doflamingo and the terror of the event, the four had ended up huddled together on the floor of the control room, not knowing if they should try to go back up or if they were safe where they were. The Tang's readings proclaimed that they were down at six thousand metres, the first time they'd gone into a four digit number at all. They hadn't thought her scale went down so far, but now, as they watched, the graph rolled, exposing further numbers below.

If the scale went that far, then they were okay, Law eventually determined, extracting himself from the shaking pile to inspect the instruments more carefully. The lower number was still concealed from view, but the pressure gauge alongside told a more worrying story. Law had been vaguely aware that the deeper underwater you went, the higher the pressure would be. The number glaring at him on the screen was far, far higher than he'd even imagined, and for a moment he feared that the submarine would crumple in on itself.

She didn't. There were no groans or creaks of metal, just the humming of the engines as she propelled herself along. The temperature was higher and the humming was louder, but there were no other signs of the additional strain she was under, and for the first time the question struck Law.

Just how deep could she go?

He didn't experiment. First, they had to find a way to get back up to their usual diving levels before their air suffered, and then it would be time for research. What had sucked them down so fast, was it the only way down to their current depths, and how could they utilise it?

Feeling the Polar Tang staying true in such pressure wiped away all of Law's fear, replacing it with
curiosity. If they could get to these depths intentionally, Doflamingo would never be able to reach them, not even with his strings. Had they stumbled across the best hiding place in the ocean?

The answer, it transpired after they found a current that carried them skyward and gently deposited them back in the twilight zone, was yes. The Downflow only existed in certain areas, but with additional engine power, the Tang could dive to the same depth under her own power – a far safer, less hair-raising ride – and so six thousand metres below the surface became their new usual haunt.

It wasn't without its dangers, of course. True sea monsters lived at those depths, some scared off by the bright lights of the Tang blinding them but others lured in, and the pirates quickly learnt to use the Polar Tang's built-in weaponry when necessary.

The question didn't come up again for a long time, until the now adult crew, swollen in number to a fully fledged pirate crew with a reputation to match, departed Sabaody for the last time in their journey forwards.

Fishman Island was ten thousand metres below sea level. They'd become fond of cruising at depths of six or seven thousand, but ten thousand was unexplored territory.

"Can she do it?" someone asked nervously as they began the initial descent. "I mean, we could get her coated, to be safe, right?"

"If she can't do it, no-one can," Shachi had said firmly, resting a hand lovingly on the pipes. "We've got the best ship in the whole world, just you watch."

"Coating only works for sailboats," Penguin had added. "Just because she has a sail doesn't make her one of those."

The decision had been to keep going, deeper and deeper through the sunlight zone and into the twilight zone. The Downflow in the twilight zone was the obvious route to take, but the Heart Pirates had become a crew well-versed in hiding. Taking the obvious route meant lining themselves up for potential traps, so with enough research (mainly on Bepo's half, but they'd all chipped in), they'd found and plotted an alternative route to the dark levels, using a smaller version of the current the other side of the archipelago, which would bring them down to the deep sea earlier than most ships. Not having to rely on a bubble for their air supply, they could afford to go deeper earlier.

They'd concluded that using a Downflow (if not the Downflow) was for the best. That way, they could all but cut their engines, using enough power just to keep them on course and thereby saving fuel. After all, who knew what would be waiting for them when they surfaced the other side of the Red Line? They couldn't afford to use up most of their fuel supplies.

Still, that didn't stop more than a few members of the crew gulping in trepidation as the current loomed in front of them, impossibly large and fast as it sucked them in violently, catapulting them into the murky depths far below. Their instruments reported a familiar depth of seven thousand metres when they were spat out, engines roaring to life to control their exit as best the Polar Tang could, and it was then their adventure truly began.

For other crews, snuggled up safely inside their coated sailboats, the hardest part would be over by that point. If they'd survived being tossed around in a violent current surrounded by enough rocks to wreck a fleet, the last three thousand feet were relatively plain sailing, so long as they watched out for the local sea life.

For the Heart Pirates – and the Polar Tang herself – this was where it started. Slowly, they began to dive, keeping a careful eye on both their depth and the surrounding pressure. Fending off the sea
monsters was second nature to them, helped by their kairoseki hull and specialised weaponry, which was undoubtedly a good thing, as nerves began to rise the lower they went.

Any moment, they feared they'd hear an out of place creak, or a groan as the metal shell of their beloved submarine began to strain under the ever-increasing pressure. None of them, not even the captain, were at ease as they descended slowly, hoping that keeping the speed gentle would help keep the pressure inside and out even.

When their sonar finally reported Fishman Island, their instruments loudly declaring that they'd reached ten thousand metres below sea level, nervous breaths were shakily released. They'd always known the Polar Tang was special, but as she cruised the last stretch at ten thousand metres below sea level, louder engines and a stuffy heat the only signs that she was battling through pressure a thousand times greater than the surface of the sea, they realised just how special she was.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so throwing away real life physics here, where submarines don't seem to be able to handle more than 1000m below sea level, I present the question: how deep can the Polar Tang go? The Shark Submerge can go to 5000m below, and we've seen (in the anime) the Polar Tang going through an underwater volcano field, which seems to be around 7000m deep, if we go from the Strawhat's own depth when they encountered one. However, Fishman Island is 10000m below. I don't see them coating her, because coating a submarine seems a bit silly, in all honesty. Besides, if the Shark Submerge, which was built by Franky out of what I suspect is scrap metal, can get to 5000m, then a professional-grade submarine must be capable of going far deeper.

As for their odd route to Fishman Island, underwater is their playground. If anyone can find a different route down to the bottom, I'm willing to bet it would be them.
Penguin didn't really understand the kid at all. He'd decided, alongside Shachi, to leave Swallow Island and follow the brat, but there were times when he wondered what wisdom had been in that. Law was not open about anything at all. Just getting his name out of him had been a stretch to start with, and while they'd since pried out of him that he was younger than them and had no family after extensive prying, that was all they knew. The mysterious white splotches on his skin were a banned topic, and while Penguin was well aware that the kid both had nightmares and was not exactly the picture of perfect health, discussion of those was also shut down immediately.

It was probably because Law didn't want to think about it, but it made things frustrating for the rest of them. It had been useful the first time, when they'd been able to take advantage of it to force their way into his company, but while Law seemed to be generally getting better (he would shut himself away in the infirmary or the room he'd claimed as his own for hours at a time with orders to not be disturbed and Penguin didn't think that was unrelated), sometimes it transpired that he still had a long way to go until he was what Penguin would consider healthy.

It wasn't all that long after they'd acquired the Tang, her name freshly bestowed and her controls still a mystery to them all. They were learning through trial and error, and had crashed into the docks at a higher speed than maybe they should have done. To their relief, no damage had been done to the ship, and minimal to the wharf (at least, nothing that would be noticed until she'd gone and was no longer hiding the damage), and Law had disembarked, gesturing for Penguin to follow while Shachi and Bepo were firmly told to stay and guard the ship.

They had no money, just the odd beri Law had found in his pocket to their name (which, they very quickly learnt, wouldn't even buy them a meal. Back on Swallow Island, Penguin and Shachi hadn't needed money. The small community had largely worked on a trading basis). Law had seemed unconcerned, proving himself to be a highly adept pick-pocket so that by the time they reached the central market hub, they had enough beri to at least pick up some food. They'd need to find some way to earn honest money, Penguin mused, uncomfortable with the fact, but food, at the least, was a necessity they couldn't afford to go without, and his morals were loose enough to accept that.

Whether Law brought him along to be anything more than a pack mule, Penguin wasn't sure. The younger boy handled all of the transactions, simply passing their purchases to him as and when he finished at a stall. Maybe he was supposed to be watching and learning, but his mind was too preoccupied by the blatant thievery, leaving him on edge in case any of Law's victims came to hunt them down.

No-one did, but that quickly became the least of Penguin's worries as, between stalls, the smaller boy gasped, swaying lightly on his feet for a minute before crashing to the ground.
"Law!" he exclaimed, letting their shopping fall to the ground as he knelt besides him. Law was flushed, breathing heavily and, when Penguin put a hand to his forehead, clammy. The mysterious illness was back, and the only thing Penguin could think to do was to get him to a hospital. There had to be one around somewhere. "Hold on," he said. "I'll get help."

A hand gripped his sleeve fiercely, the strength of the grip catching Penguin off-guard.

"No," Law rasped. "Don't-" He tried to use his hold on Penguin's sleeve to pull himself to his feet but he was too weak, grip failing him and causing him to crash back to the ground. "The ship… Back to the Tang."

"Is he okay?" A worried looking woman crouched down besides them, and Penguin saw Law tense up. He seemed almost scared. "Do you need to get to the hospital?" Penguin had a brief moment to think. He wasn't a liar, had never been one (that was Shachi's job), and this woman was offering to help.

A tight grip on his sleeve drew his attention back to Law. The younger boy said nothing else, but Penguin doubted his opinion had changed much in the few seconds since he'd asked to go back to the ship.

Penguin tried for a smile, hoping to put the woman at ease.

"No, it's… it's okay," he said, fearing it was more a grimace than a smile. "My brother… he has these episodes sometimes. He's got medicine, he… he just left it back on our parents' ship." Even to his own ears it sounded pathetic, and the look Law was giving him was half shock, half resigned disapproval.

"if you're sure…" the woman trailed off, sounding dubious. Penguin nodded, despite the fact he wanted to shake his head. No, he wasn't sure. He didn't know what was wrong with the kid, or how to fix it. He wanted help, but Law seemed almost afraid of going to a professional.

"I'm sure," he said, returning his attention to Law. "Can you get on my back?" he asked quietly, and Law clawed his way into a sitting position, glowering at him.

"I can walk," he complained, but Penguin wanted to be away now and letting the ill kid walk would just slow him – them – down considerably. Turning his back, he grabbed Law's arms and wrapped them around his neck before forcibly grabbing him at the back of the thighs and lifting him. He didn't weigh much, and after he realised he wasn't about to be dropped, Penguin felt Law willingly hold on, burying his face in his shoulder and relaxing slightly.

Scooping to pick up their shopping – they needed that stuff and Penguin couldn't pick pocket anyone to get more money – he headed back to the Tang, taking grimy-looking back routes to shake the concerned woman before finding himself finally back at the dock. Law had gone suspiciously quiet on his back, and when he hurried onto the Tang, palming their shopping off on Shachi and depositing Law in their infirmary he realised he was barely conscious.

He didn't have a clue what to do.

"Hey… hey!" he tried. "Law!" He shook him, inciting a disgruntled groan from the boy as his eyes blinked open blearily. "What do I do?" he asked, and Law's unamused face faded away as he realised Penguin was serious.

"How… do you know… nothing?" he despaired, before taking some deep breathes and starting to direct Penguin. Penguin shrugged, even as he obeyed the instructions, watching Law get weaker and
weaker in some concern. Finally, Law stopped giving instructions, and Penguin looked down at the younger boy, who looked much smaller without all his airs.

"You're not dying, are you?" he asked, despite the fact that Law actively discouraged questions relating to his condition. Law's response was a grin that looked far too sad.

"No," he whispered, closing his eyes and seeming to go to sleep. Penguin stayed by his side, waiting and hoping for a recovery. "Not any more," Law finished, so quiet Penguin barely heard it, and that gave him far more questions than answers. Not, he realised, that he would get any, so he had to make do with staying by his side, watching over him as he fought whatever relapse it was he was facing all by himself.

Chapter End Notes

White Lead Poisoning was something so complex no-one could find a cure for it. I don't think Law would have been able to heal it all in a single stint, considering the complexity and stamina drain, so a relapse is probably possible.
"Hey, what's that?"

Law looked away from the sonar to glance over to Shachi, who was crouching down in front of a section of exposed wiring. The panel had fallen off in a storm earlier that day, and Shachi had tasked himself with putting it back on. It was a simple task, requiring nothing more than locating the escapee screws and using a screwdriver to put them all back where they belonged. It wasn't the first time they'd had to put a panel back – it was almost as if she hadn't been quite ready to sail when they'd liberated her – but it was the first time Shachi made a fuss about it.

"What's what?" Penguin asked, wandering over to him. Shachi pointed at something in the tangle of wires, piquing Law's curiosity just enough for him to leave his chair and look for himself.

"Does that look right to you?" Shachi was asking Penguin, who was shaking his head, looking concerned. Law crouched down besides them to get a better look. The exposed wiring was nothing new – a complex pattern that none of them knew enough about to understand – but Shachi's reason for concern was immediately apparent.

One wire was sparking slightly, spitting out fragments of light every second or so as if it was damaged. Law leaned in closer, now sharing Shachi's concern. They didn't know enough about the technology to make more than basic repairs; if this was something complicated they were going to need to find someone that knew submarines, and such people were few and far between.

"It's falling out of its socket," Penguin observed, and Law realised that he was right. That shouldn't be too difficult a fix, although the way it was actively sparking concerned him.

"That's what I thought," the ginger mused, before shifting closer, weaving his arm through the intact wires. "I'll just give that a n-"

The moment his finger made contact, there was an energy surge, slashing its way through Shachi and hurling him backwards. He crashed into the wall before slumping to the ground, unresponsive, and Law scrambled to his side, hearing Penguin following suit behind him.

"Shachi?" he asked, hoping to get some sort of reaction. There was none, the ginger completely out cold, but Law quickly realised that the unconsciousness was the least of his worries. His breathing was uneven and hurried, and a feeling of dread crept over Law.

"Shachi!" Penguin reached for him, probably to shake him until he woke up (Law had discovered early on that the pair had almost no knowledge of any treatment), but Law threw his arm out, halting him. He didn't pay attention to Penguin's complaints, his attention instead focused on Shachi. He
knew these symptoms, knew what an electric shock could do to the heart, and how fatal it could be.

Cardial Arrhythmia. An erratic heartbeat that had to be treated immediately to increase the odds of survival, but there was a major problem. The Polar Tang, for all her space and potential, didn't have a defibrillator, and they had no time to find one.

"What do we do?" Penguin asked him, sounding frantic, and Law forced himself to think because he wasn't losing a nakama to their own ship. A second shock to restore the rhythm was needed, but Law wasn't about to zap Shachi again with the exposed wire.

He had the ultimate Devil Fruit, didn't he? He had a fruit that was tooted as being able to do medical miracles. Surely there was a way to mimic a defibrillator?

Trying to work that out would take too long. They needed a secondary shock and they needed it now.

"Bepo!" he shouted, his voice too shrill and panicked even to his own voice. He vaguely heard the mink respond, fumbling his way over, as he tore at Shachi's clothes, exposing his chest and praying it would work.

"Captain-?" He didn't give Bepo a chance to talk, grabbing the mink's paws and pressing them on the ginger's torso, upper right, lower left.

"Electro, now!" he snapped, and to his credit Bepo didn't question it, jumping at the tone and sending a surge of electricity out through his paws almost reflexively. Law barely had a moment to retract his own hands and ensure Penguin was back before the charge shot through Shachi, eliciting a small sigh from him. Law watched, staying back just long enough for the residual charge to filter away before lunging forwards, fingers finding the pulse in his neck and praying.

Thumpthump. Thumpthump. Thumpthump.

It was still fast, but it was regular, as if Shachi had just done a sprint. Just to be sure, Law rested his other hand on the ginger's chest, right above his heart, to feel the heart doing its job properly. Bepo hadn't moved his paws, but Law didn't bother to remind him as Penguin reasserted himself in the group, fingers tangling lightly in ginger hair.

"Ow," Shachi whined, and his eyes opened slightly, squinting in the light. Law had been so preoccupied with everything else that he hadn't realised the shades had been lost in the process. "Ow. What the hell happened?" He tried to move, one arm shifting to prop him up while his other tried to go to his head, but his arms flopped back to his sides.

"You got electrocuted," Law told him bluntly, silently assessing his condition. Certainly he'd be going nowhere under his own steam for a while, and Law tossed up between putting him in his own bunk or the infirmary. "How do you feel?"

"Urgh," was the ginger's eloquent response, and Law shook his head fondly. That told him nothing he couldn't already see. "Kinda dizzy? But I'm not moving so it's weird."

The infirmary, then. Law didn't want to risk him falling out of his bunk.

"What were you thinking?" Penguin demanded, sounding thoroughly fed up with the ginger's stupidity. "It was sparking so you just decided to put your hand in there? Without even a glove on?" Shachi winced, letting out a sheepish laugh.

"Not my brightest moment," he admitted.
"Clearly," Penguin drawled, his fingers carding through the ginger hair. "Don't do it again. You made Law panic." Law shot him a glare but didn't bother to deny it. He couldn't, really. Not when his fingers were still on Shachi's pulse and his palm was still over his heart.

"Oops," Shachi grinned nervously.

"Bepo," Law said, choosing not to respond to his fellow humans. "Carry him to the infirmary."

"Aye, Captain," the mink obeyed, finally moving his paws from their position on Shachi's chest and gathering him up gently in his arms. Shachi sighed a bit at the action.

"And no-one is touching any wiring without insulating gloves from now on," Law added firmly. "We are not having a repeat of this stupidity."

Once Shachi was settled and largely recovered, Law would start experimenting with his own abilities. Having a nakama capable of producing electricity on command was useful, but he couldn't rely on Bepo always being close enough to get there on time. He had the Ope Ope no Mi. There had to be a way to defibrillate using it.

Law just had to find it, preferably before any other stupid mistakes happened.

Chapter End Notes

Countershock (and its potential origins) is fascinating. I've seen it where Law came up with it on the fly one time when he needed a defibrillator, but that's one of those scenes that seems a little too cliche to me (just happens to unlock the ability he needs, in time, and get it right first try?) With Bepo's electro, that's a potentially useful defib right there, and I can't see Law not thinking of that in a pinch. Of course, with Bepo not knowing how much voltage to use it's a risky strategy, but it's still an option if it comes down to it.
Law liked to consider himself as not easily shaken. Things that would upset many people did nothing for him – bloodshed and general gore, for example – and he strode around in public with his smirk fixed firmly to his face. How true that statement really was, however, Law tried not to think about too much. He'd been shaken before, as a child alone and abandoned in the world, and sometimes those feelings would come back if something happened to one of his nakama, or his nightmares surged to the forefront of his mind.

It was more common than he cared to admit.

He hid it from his nakama when he could, staying in solitude until he had control over himself again, which a decent success rate (not even the ever attuned Penguin, Shachi or Bepo could tell if he contained it in the safety of his room before going out to face the new day).

That morning, it was his mind churning up memories and convoluted what-ifs of their winter island adventure the previous day. Carelessness and bad luck had conspired against Law, leading the snow he'd been walking on to being not as solid as he'd believed, giving way beneath his feet with an alarming crack and sending him plummeting down into frigid water before he'd managed to summon a Room and escape.

The shock of the cold water had stolen his breath away in one swift blow, leaving him unable to even struggle to keep his head above the water. Luckily, he hadn't been alone, his nakama close enough to come running the moment he crashed through the snow and firmly grasp his arms before his head submerged. Less luckily, they'd also ended up on weakened ice hidden by snow and had also found themselves taking an unexpected swim.

They hadn't lost their grip on their captain, though, pulling his arms over their shoulders as they trod water, keeping him afloat as they hunted for a way back out of the water. Limp and useless, Law could do nothing except be a dead weight against their struggles, feeling himself being passed from nakama to nakama as their strength waned. He'd ended up in Ikkaku's grip, the last one with enough strength to keep her arm wrapped around him, with the rest of his nakama bobbing wearily in the water and barely capable of keeping their heads up, when help finally arrived.

Like the rest of them, Bepo crashed through the ice as he got close, but unlike his human nakama his thick fur insulated him from the shock. A rope was clenched between his teeth, running back to the rest of the crew, where Jean Bart was anchoring himself firmly back away from the broken ice and Penguin and Shachi helped grip it. In the water it took some fumbling, human fingers frozen and Bepo's paws not helpful for knot-tying, before the rope was secured around Law's torso, just under his arms, and he was pulled out. Soaked to the bone, Law could do nothing more than collapse on the ground, panting heavily and watching with half-lidded eyes as the rest of his nakama were pulled.
out.

He must have passed out, as the next thing he knew was the sight of his bedroom ceiling. He was warm and dry, bundled up in blankets.

"Captain!" a delighted voice exclaimed, and he turned his head to face Ikkaku, who was similarly bundled in blankets but otherwise looked fine. "You're awake!" There was no need to state the obvious, Law thought, but gave her his best attempt at a smile, considering the circumstances.

"Is everyone okay?" he asked, trying to move but finding his strength had been entirely sapped by the water.

"Everyone's fine," Ikkaku reassured him. "You were the only one to pass out." His pride should have rankled at that, but all he could think of was how relieved he was to hear it. Being the only fruit user, it carried a certain amount of sense, anyway.

"I see," he said with a smile, closing his eyes again. "That's good; I'm glad." He kept the smile up until he heard her leave the room, presumably to tell the others he was awake, when it dropped suddenly.

If someone had been seriously ill… he would have been useless. Falling unconscious when half his crew were in serious danger of hypothermia was a failure as both captain and doctor. His hands shook, and he balled them into fists. That none of them were suffering was luck – far too much luck. Law didn't get luck like that, and it made him nervous. He wanted to see them, to confirm it with his own eyes, but his body didn't want to move, stubbornly unresponsive.

Bepo's arrival was well-timed before Law started to strain his body too much.

"I need to see them," he said bluntly, and Bepo didn't question it, scooping him up into his arms and taking him to the recreation room, where everyone was bundled up in blankets, regardless of whether or not they'd taken a dunking.

"Captain!" Uni called out, waving until Bepo made his way over, depositing Law inside the blanket-bundled crew where he was quickly surrounded. They kept moving around, so it was difficult to focus on everyone long enough to check they were truly okay, but with the light atmosphere and constant movement he was reassured that there was no lasting damage.

If only his subconsciousness wasn't so willing to show him "what ifs" while he slept, jerking him awake more than once during the night with the fear that someone was dying, a sensation only pacified by a trek around the sleeping quarters. The following morning found him tired, the combination of his disrupted sleep and residue weariness out with a vengeance, and he fumbled his cutlery at breakfast. If anyone noticed, no-one commented, to Law's relief. Perhaps they thought it was residue from his dunking, Law didn't bother to ask. After one too many almost-accidents with his mug, Law retreated to his quarters, citing the cold as an excuse when asked.

He'd be fine in a few hours, he reassured them. He didn't need them hovering, either. Yes, he'd come see them once he felt better. Heavily implying that they shouldn't disturb him, he returned to his room, sitting on the bed and staring at his hands.

They were still shaking, but they weren't cold at all. It was fear, the fear of what he could have lost and he shuddered as unwelcome mental images formed of his nakama, all frozen to death while he was merrily sleeping away, victims of his carelessness. He rested his head in his hands, trying to shut the images out.

The door opened and his head jerked up, hunting down the intruder with a scowl because he’d wanted to be alone. Shachi said nothing as he walked in, shutting the door behind him and heading straight for the bed – for Law. The younger man did nothing, hoping that if he didn't react, Shachi would get the message (a fool's hope) and leave him in peace. There was no such luck, the ginger sitting a short distance away from Law on the bed.

Law waited for him to speak, expecting some sort of pep talk, and jumped when Shachi simply flopped over, his head landing solidly in Law’s lap.

"Sha-"

"Butterfingers," Shachi said bluntly, his voice muffled by Law's legs. Law scowled at him, or rather the back of his head. The hair was warmly coloured, the ginger shoving the cool what-ifs further back in his mind. If he put his hands in there, would they warm up?

Law hadn't braided Shachi's hair in years, stopping in silent embarrassment after realising what his father had really been after, even if it had also worked to control his fingers. He didn't know what Shachi's aim was, flopping like that and disturbing him when he'd specified he wanted to be left alone, but his fingers remembered what his hair was like and never gave Shachi a chance to escape.

The ginger didn't even try to move away as Law gave in, shaky fingers threading through ginger strands a couple of times before attempting a braid. His fingers settled into a familiar pattern, and not only did Shachi continue to stay where he was, but Law could have sworn he felt a smile against his thigh. Was this really what he was after? Law knew that Shachi preferred having other people cut his hair, but to extend that to things like having his hair styled was a new consideration, with suspicious timing.

Law didn’t notice when his fingers finally stopped trembling.
Braid

Chapter Notes

Characters: Shachi
Rating: Gen
Warnings: Implied past character death
Tags: Family

Shachi only had one problem with someone braiding his hair while he was asleep. There were some inconveniences, like how the braids were never quite right, pinching in places and too loose in others, but there was only one problem. Not that he dared admit it out loud.

It was the fact that it was done while he was asleep.

It wasn't something he advertised, but Shachi had a weakness for people playing with his hair. The hints were there, like the way he insisted that someone else (Law) cut his hair for him, rather than doing it himself like the other two, and the way he kept it around shoulder-length, rather than a more practical style, like Law and Penguin did.

Penguin knew. Shachi didn't recall if he'd ever been told, or if he'd just picked it up over the years, but it was hard to miss the way he'd go straight for Shachi's hair when the ginger was feeling down. He never braided it though, had never bothered to learn how and that was fine because Shachi didn't expect Penguin to do more than ruffle his hair at any given moment anyway.

In the end, that was the way Shachi figured out that what he'd coined "braid attacks" had to be Law's fault. While it was right in line with a prank Penguin could be expected to pull, if Penguin could do a braid he would have done it years ago. Bepo's paws had no way of controlling hair to that degree, which meant their tiny, grumpy, brat of a captain liked to braid hair.

It was because he was a grumpy brat of a captain that Shachi didn't tell him he didn't have to wait for him to be asleep. He didn't know how he'd react to being caught, and he certainly didn't want to see the reaction when he learned that he enjoyed the sensation of having his hair carefully twisted up into a braid. Penguin was one thing, but the volatile and unpredictable brat of a captain was something else entirely.

His enjoyment didn't come from nowhere. His mother had had long hair, and the practical way to control it was a simple braid – on the rare occasions she felt it needed controlling, rather than allowing it to spill freely down her back like a lava flow anyway – so Shachi had hours of memories of watching her braid it before she baked, or went out on the boats. His mother had also been very pretty, even to a seven year old boy (although whether that was just a son's adoration for his mother or a generally accepted fact in the community he was never quite sure), and he'd loved her hair, delighted that he'd inherited it rather than his father's choppy brown.

Growing it out had been the natural thing for him, a homage to his mother's similar hair, although she'd smiled and asked him to keep it short enough to play without getting tangled in the branches. He'd pouted – a conversation Shachi remembered well, despite only being four at the time – and said he wanted pretty braids like Mama, only for her to laugh and prove that shoulder-length was practical.
but also easy to tie up if he wanted to. Low-maintenance, she'd called it, not that he'd understood what the words meant exactly at the time.

He was glad of that now, living on a submarine where long hair would have been a bit of a problem (not that Ikkaku seemed to care, after she joined). Having found the balance between long, practical and low-maintenance as a child, he didn't need to change anything to survive life on the Polar Tang.

His hair hadn't been braided since his mother died, not really. Noona would cut it for him, keeping it the length he and his mother had agreed on and sometimes twisting it around her fingers in a mimicry, but he'd been too withdrawn in the immediate aftermath to ask her, and with everyone in turmoil (Noona, in particular, seemed uncertain how to handle them now it was a full-time responsibility and not just once a week) he and Penguin had quickly matured until asking for things like that seemed like just a child's thing to do. Shachi no longer felt like a child.

Waking up to find someone had braided his hair for the first time in seven years had been a shock, but more than indignation (even if that was the face he showed to his companions) it had prompted nostalgia, almost a reminder that he was still a child even if he hadn't been a child since he was seven.

If he started sleeping in the recreation room with his hat off more often, well, that was his own business.
So they had a woman in the crew. Just one woman, and to begin with this was the best thing that had ever happened to the Heart Pirates, to many minds. Of course, they quickly learnt that Ikkaku was as stubbornly badass to nakama as to a random group of men she barely knew, but that was no bad thing. They didn't need a nakama that couldn't pull their weight, and Ikkaku threw herself into life aboard the Polar Tang with a much vigour as any of the boys.

Having her around to laugh with them, fight with them, and generally be a nakama (but not a love interest, because she'd made it perfectly plain that she wasn't interested in any of that nonsense, and romantic relationships within a crew were often doomed to fail) was great, and not one of the men regretted the loss of their unisex crew status.

There was, however, one small thing that made itself quietly known over time, which most of them had conveniently forgotten about, either genuinely or deliberately. Ikkaku was a woman, and therefore dealt with a menstrual cycle. She didn't advertise it, to the relief of many, and most of the time they were completely unaware when it struck – which was just how they all liked it.

Some of the crew found out more often than others. Law, as the doctor, had reluctantly had a talk with her regarding what was normal, as part of his records on his crew's health, although he'd clearly wished he could palm that responsibility off on someone else. That had included the regularity of her cycle (not that anyone ever expected pregnancy to be a problem, Ikkaku included), so he was (regretfully) aware of the schedule. Bepo's more sensitive nose meant the Mink always knew, but once he'd been told it wasn't something to worry about he didn't share the information, to everyone's relief. The last member of the crew to usually find out was the cook, when his kitchen was raided for chocolate steadily for a week or so.

Beyond that, they tended to stay blissfully unaware, and that worked for everyone just fine. Ikkaku, for all that she loved teasing her nakama, was usually content to suffer in silence. If she got slightly more clingy at times, draping herself over random nakama instead of finding her own chair, no-one wanted to read too much into it. Besides, the woman could be scary when she wanted to be, so it was better for everyone involved if they accepted their temporary position as a cushion. It wasn't like they minded, anyway. As a whole the crew were physically affectionate, so no-one really needed a reason to create human cushions out of their nakama.

Then there were the months when things went wrong. The months that Ikkaku got inexplicably snappy for no reason and everyone guarded themselves with chocolate offerings, or the months when she ended up curled in a ball on the bathroom floor because it was worse than normal and no-one knew what to do but couldn't just leave her there so awkward cuddle piles ensued with the woman firmly in the centre.
And then, then there were the *disasters*. The times when she'd race to the infirmary and traumatise her poor captain (and anyone else in earshot) because for whatever reason she had nothing to use and had to improvise, which meant Law, desperately trying not to go completely red-faced, was put on the spot about finding some temporary measure because after one mortifying occasion involving toilet paper that everyone had forcibly removed from their memories, Ikkaku refused to settle for something that unreliable. No-one argued with her on that.

Such mishaps happened less and less through the years, not because Ikkaku got any better at remembering to stock up when supplies were low, but because her nakama slowly realised that they didn't have to be mortified at the idea of picking up a few things for her if they saw them (Ikkaku had a fond memory of a red-faced Shachi, clashing wonderfully with his hair, and an equally scarlet Clione shoving packages into her hands before fleeing), and that if everyone chipped in she wasn't going to be running out any time soon.

Well, that was a win-win situation for everyone involved.

Chapter End Notes

I've been discussing this with a reader recently, and how the female pirates deal with their monthly fun is an interesting idea. It depends what's available in One Piece's universe, of course (reusable stuff would probably work best if they can get hold of it).
"Hey," it’d started, in the crew’s downtime between a round of cards. "What was Captain like as a kid?" It was clearly aimed at Penguin and Shachi, who simultaneously tilted their heads up to look at Law from where they were sat on the floor. For his part, Law raised an eyebrow at the room in general, something between an inquiry and a challenge.

"Captain was Captain," Bepo said faithfully from his position as the pair’s backrest and got a light swat from both of them. "Sorry…"

"Not helpful, Bepo!" they scolded, grins never leaving their faces. "So," Shachi added, turning back to the attentive crowd of nakama. "That was vague. Anything in particular?"

"Every story you tell will equate a story about you," Law cut in, but it was a promise, not a threat. There was no annoyance in his countenance, just amusement, and that seemed to be enough permission for Penguin and Shachi, who laughed.

"That's fair," Penguin accepted, reaching behind him to ruffle Bepo's fur. "What about you? Joining in on this?" The mink stretched, shifting enough that his nakama lost their balance and collapsed into heaps on the floor. "Hey!"

"Sorry," Bepo mumbled, before looking up at Law. "I remember a few things," he added, manoeuvring himself until he was positioned at his captain’s feet. The only one now sat on a chair, as the rest of the crew gathered around as if it was story time, Law too vacated his seat, electing to make himself comfortable on Bepo's lap instead. The mink wrapped his arms around him and rested his chin on the fluffy hat.

"How about the beginning?" someone suggested, and the four shared amused looks. Bits and pieces of the story behind the Heart Pirate’s origins had been mentioned over the years, so most knew of the fighting, and how they’d got the Tang, but it was still as good a place as ever.

"Oh, back then?" Shachi asked, with the air of someone trying not to laugh. His lips quirked into a grin regardless. "You know, I don't think I've ever met such a brat." That startles the crew, looking between a smirking Penguin and Shachi to an equally amused Law.

"Clearly you've never looked in a mirror," their captain muttered, and they all burst out laughing.

"Brat?" one of the crew asked. They could sort of see it in the way Law intentionally winds up people he doesn't like, but the idea that he’d ever turned that on his own nakama was startling.
"Completely," Penguin agreed, attempting to pull a solemn tone that was ruined by Shachi's sniggering and the glint in his own eyes. "He threw us overboard, into freezing cold water, the first time we got in a boat together."

"I don't recall ever inviting you onto the boat," Law supplemented dryly. "In fact, I distinctly telling two stubborn idiots not to." There was no bite to the accusation, not years later when they were nakama and Law would rather die than lose any of them.

"You let Bepo on," Shachi pointed out, and Law gave that grin, the one that meant someone was about to get verbally ruined.

"I liked Bepo."

True to form, both reacted exactly as expected, dramatically clutching their clothes over their hearts and collapsing backwards with noises of pain.

"That hurts," Shachi moaned dramatically, flailing with the hand not bunching up fabric. "After everything we'd done together… so cold, Law!"

"All you'd done was fight each other," Bepo interjected, and both bolted back upright, their apparent emotional torment vanishing in the blink of an eye.

"That's not the point!" they chorused, and he shrunk back a little, burying his face in Law's hat.

"Sorry…"

"You haven't changed at all," Shachi sighed, but it was fond and the way he reached out to ruffle Bepo's fur was met with a large mink grin and a white paw crashing down on his own head, dislodging his hat and mussing his hair.

"He got bigger," Penguin interjected, and even Law agreed at that, his own tattooed fingers sinking into the fur of the paw holding him in place.

"So did Law," added Shachi, suddenly looking sulky. "Did you know Captain used to be tiny?" he asked the rest of their crew, all of whom shook their heads in surprise.

"That's hard to imagine," one of them admitted, and Law sent them a fondly exasperated look.

"He was smaller than Shachi," Penguin emphasised, and the ginger's hand flailed out, landing on the older man's face with fingers splayed. Penguin spluttered and licked the fingers closest to his mouth until Shachi retreated with a disgruntled look. "His face when Law finally outgrew him was hilarious!"

"It was," Law agreed, before Shachi could even start to defend his corner. "He didn't take it well."

"Poor Shachi," Bepo added in quietly, and the ginger wailed.

"Why are you ganging up on me?" he demanded, not pacified by the paw still on his head and Penguin poking his cheek.

"You were content to poke fun at me," Law commented casually, leaning back against Bepo and watching with a smirk twisting at his mouth. "Who were you calling a brat?"

"I take that back," Shachi admitted, a glower visible even through his shades. "You're still a brat."

Law swatted him.
"I'm still your captain," he admonished, except he had graduated from a smirk to a smile and the rest of the crew took that as reassurance it was okay to laugh. Shachi pouted for a moment before snapping at Penguin's finger, still prodding at his cheek. The ginger then wrestled an arm between Bepo and Law's bodies, hooking it around his captain's shoulders and tugging him closer, into a one-armed hug. Law didn't fight, and after another moment Penguin joined in.

That was a cue for the others to join in, scrambling forwards from their position as an attentive audience to mob the four already intertwined nakama.

As far as their early days had gone, that had been barely the tip of the iceburg. They could also have talked about Law's well-hidden desire to protect them, his hunger for knowledge and the hours he put into the Tang to make her the perfect home she'd become. Or Penguin and Shachi's journey from short-tempered children to experienced pirates, via mishaps, mistakes and lessons. Even Bepo, for all that he was still apologetic, still easily overpowered by a stronger will, had changed from a scared and lost cub to a central force bonding three headstrong humans, spending years training himself to use a pen and learning to harness his innate navigation abilities into something that he could consciously use to help his nakama.

Thirteen years was a long time to spend together, the changes so subtle that they were missed at the time and only visible in hindsight. Law was still a brat, yes, but rarely to his own crew now and never to the magnitude Penguin and Shachi had once felt the full force of. Penguin and Shachi were still immature, but they knew how the world worked and when that immaturity just didn't cut it anymore. Bepo was still apologetic, but he wasn't lost and afraid now.

Most importantly, they had more nakama to laugh and cry with now, nakama that they could share those old stories with because their pasts had painful moments, but they were also littered with happy ones that deserved to be heard time and time again.
Bepo hadn't started life with low self-esteem. Bepo didn't remember a time when he hadn't apologised for existing, but he knew it wasn't always the case. It hadn't started with the minks. It had started with the humans.

The humans were big. The humans were scary, and it didn't matter that Bepo had electro and they didn't. It didn't matter that as a cub he could take down a full grown man. They crowded him, with weapons and fire and shouts, hurting him because he was too busy cowering to fight back. Wounds could heal, a young and oh so alone mink cub fleeing to lick them in whatever bolthole he could find (he got stuck a few times, struggling and scraping his fur down to the skin to get free, only to find the cycle starting over again). At least, physical ones could heal.

The ones to his self-consciousness – cries of monster, abomination, demon – never got past the scabbing over stage before it started again, wounds ripping open until they were raw to the world once more. None of these humans knew what a mink was, and Bepo was too young to understand the concept that they were more afraid of him than he was of him. It was just that, while his fear manifested in the flight instinct, theirs shone through as fight.

Bepo didn't want to be a monster. Bepo just wanted to find his brother and play with him again, like they used to, but he kept being driven back, going the wrong way, and it hurt to go against the tide.

It was an accident the first time, the word slipping out between sobs, but the humans stopped chasing him when he said it, so maybe it was the right thing to say. Maybe if he said it, he wouldn't be a monster any more.

Sorry.

In the face of fear, grovelling became easy. It stopped the pain, stopped the shouts, the words. Gave him time to escape, scrambling on paws that became bloody as he abandoned his bipedal upbringing and recessed to the quadrupedal gait of a real bear. I'm sorry, he'd say whenever another human came near him, and they'd freeze. Bepo didn't realise it wasn't what he was saying, it was the fact that he was talking at all. He didn't realise that after he'd fled sometimes they tried to hunt, seeing a money-making opportunity in capturing a talking bear.

Didn't know that the right people would pay almost a million beris to have the privilege of trapping him in a cage for the rest of his life, watching him starve and delighting in it even as they prodded him with blades and brands to make him keep talking – never stop talking because he was only valuable as long as he spoke. It was only later, much, much, later in an auction house but as a buyer not an item, that he saw the price on his head and suppressed a shudder.
His defence mechanism kept working, kept saving him from the humans even if it was ultimately
pushing him the wrong way, further and further from the way Zepo had gone until he couldn't even
tell anymore. He didn't know where Zepo was, didn't know where home was, and in the end he got
on the wrong boat, quivering in the bows as it passed over monsters swimming in the deep, taking
him further and further away until he didn't even know where he was.

A combination of his disorientation and his fear drove him further and further north (further from
where he wanted to be but he didn't even know that any more, didn't know which way was up).
North was quieter, north had less humans to call him names and force him to grovel to escape with
his life and freedom. And that was how he ended up quivering in a cave, white fur blending in with
the cold snow all around him.

He could smell the humans, but they didn't come that way. It was safe, and while food was hard to
come by, he could finally start to heal. His fur grew back, forced into action by the cold until it grew
over and around the scars. It was uneven, would never be even again, but someone would have to
get close to notice. Bepo didn't plan on letting anyone close.

Then his peace was shattered, weeks after he'd found his safe haven. Footsteps, more of a crunching
sound than the solid thuds Bepo had learnt, approached, and he took too long to identify it, too long
to put two and two together and realise that humans were coming.

"A bear in our hideout," one of them commented, face screwed up in a face Bepo knew all too well
– disgust. "What does it think it's doing there?"

They were angry, and Bepo shrank back as they approached, whimpering sorrys. They didn't hear
him to start with, didn't make out the words amongst the pained noise, too intent on driving him out.
They were stupid, cornering a wild animal like that. It would end with pain, as the terrified creature
lunged for them, tearing them to shreds until he was free.

They were lucky that Bepo had long since had the fight taken from him by other humans, ones
armed with more than just a lump of wood. The first blows didn't hurt, glancing off fur made thick
by winter, but then they changed tactics, lunging forwards and grabbing clumps of fur in their hands
to drag him out of the cave.

Bepo's electro surged, jolting its way up their arms with enough force to send them stumbling
backwards. Off-balance, they showed him an escape route, right between them, and Bepo took it,
barrelling straight on through and out into the white snow.

The humans chased him, hurling abuse at him as if it was supposed to make him stop. It didn't, not
even when they pulled out the monster, the demon. He called apologies as he ran, fear blinding him
to his directions again. He skidded to a stop as his brain registered the smoke rising from a gap in the
trees ahead of him. Several lines of smoke, and his brain realised what his nose was telling him. He'd
run straight to the human settlement.

The humans seemed scared when they caught up, but like the rest of their race fear made them more
vicious. No grovelled apologies stopped them, didn't even give them pause as they beat him,
punching, kicking and even biting. Bepo didn't know what to do, didn't know why
saying sorry wasn't enough (later he learnt, finally learnt, that humans were more scared of him than
he was of them).

Then he was saved, by another tortured soul that stood up for him. A human cub that wasn't scared
of him, didn't blink when he spoke, didn't flee when he shocked him by accident. Bepo didn't have
to be afraid anymore; he wasn't alone anymore.
He learnt what nakama were, learnt that not all humans were bad (and that even the violent ones could be the best friends once they weren't scared of him anymore). He never lost the *sorry*, couldn't stop it slipping out whenever he drew attention to himself and was greeted by stares. It got easier, though, because his nakama were there now. Law, who had never even blinked. Penguin and Shachi, who despite their fear had never reacted to the fact he could *speak*, just the threat they'd thought he'd posed to them and their village.

They let him find himself again, physically and emotionally, and while Bepo could never accept the titles *monster, abomination, demon*, he could certainly accept *pirate, navigator, nakama*. 
Penguin opened his eyes, groaned, and immediately closed them again, rolling over onto his front and burying deeper under the covers. Cancel the day, because he was going nowhere.

"Penguin?" He groaned again. Of course Shachi wasn't going to leave him alone. He should be the one dragging the ginger out of bed, but for once he'd seemingly got up by himself. How inconvenient. "Hey, Penguin, the alarm went off ten minutes ago." Had it? Penguin didn't remember.

Wait, maybe he did remember groggily reaching over to slam it off. Maybe. He wasn't sure. His head felt like it was stuffed full of cotton wool, asking him to recall something was plain mean. If the alarm had already gone off, good for it. Penguin had no intention of leaving his bed for anything.

The bunk above him creaked as Shachi moved, and Penguin pulled the covers completely over his head to shut out the noise of shuffling. It only worked until the creaks started up again in earnest, and at another call from his name he poked his head out far enough to glower at Shachi, who was hanging out of his bunk head-first, looking at him in concern. That was the sort of thing Penguin should be scolding him for, afraid that he'd lose his balance and topple from the bunk to the hard floor below. Normally, he would.

Today, his response was to bury his face in his pillow – becoming uncomfortably aware that his nose had been running non-stop for some time in the process – and hope that Shachi would stop being an idiot.

"Hey, Penguin?" Shachi sounded worried, and moments later there was the familiar sound of him shimmying down from his bunk, landing on the ground with a gentle thud. "You okay?" He didn't wait for an answer, not that Penguin was planning on giving him one anyway, before there was the step of a bare foot and Penguin's bunk sank with the extra weight.

"Geroff," he mumbled into his pillow as Shachi climbed on the bed next to him, tugging at the covers in an attempt to expose his head. Penguin clung to them tightly, growling at the weight that appeared on top of him as Shachi decided the best thing to do was to partially lie on top of him, limbs wrapping around both Penguin and his covers. Penguin tried to shake him off, but bundled up in his own covers could do nothing against the determined ginger. A cool hand wrestled its way around him until it was jammed between his forehead and his snot-soaked pillow.

"Are you sick?" Shachi asked, sounding disbelieving as though he couldn't comprehend that Penguin was human enough to succumb to such things.

"Yes," he snapped, dislodging the hand so he could bury his face back in his pillow. "Go 'way." He expected Shachi to run to get Law, the obvious and smart thing to do, but the ginger defied expectations as he wriggled and writhed until he somehow ended up under the covers, with Penguin.
Neither of them spoke for several long moments as Shachi's limbs wrapped around Penguin like some sort of four-legged octopus, pressing them together so tightly that Penguin could feel the ginger's heart thrumming away in his chest.

"What are you doing?" Penguin grumbled eventually, when it became apparent that Shachi had no intention of moving. "You'll get sick too, idiot." He felt Shachi shrug, the arms around him tightening briefly with the action, and gave up. He should have kept arguing, because Shachi really was going to get sick, but it was too much effort. Besides, Shachi was a nice cool compared to the raging heat, and part of him really didn't want the nice temperature to leave him. He burrowed backwards slightly, closer to Shachi, before closing his eyes.

He couldn't sleep, not with his head stuffed full of cotton wool, but he could and did zone out, losing track of time as he relaxed against his nakama, until sharp words yanked him back into reluctant awareness.

"What are you doing?" Law demanded. "You two were supposed to be in the control room half an hour ago."

"Penguin didn't want to get up," Shachi defended himself, twisting around to face their captain. Penguin stayed still. "He smashed the alarm then huddled back under the covers and refused to move."

The bunk sank again, creaking slightly as the weight of a third person was added.

"Shachi, get up," Law ordered, and Shachi grumbled. He must have obeyed, though, as the arms around him disappeared. The bunk rose slightly, signifying that someone had stood. "Penguin, I know you're awake."

"Don't want to be," Penguin grumbled in return, fighting the new hands as they tried to roll him over onto his back. He won, but his victory was short-lived when Law summoned his Room.

"You're sick," Law told him after a moment, as if he hadn't known that already. Law didn't sound overly concerned, so it wasn't anything too bad, though. He lost his covers as Law teleported them away, but before he could protest, his captain was pulling him into his arms. "You know the drill, Penguin."

Penguin did know the drill, but it didn't stop him complaining when Law stood up. It was cold without his blanket, and while he knew telling Law to get go would be even less effective than talking to a brick wall he could easily kick up a fuss about being cold.

"How bad is it, Law?" he heard Shachi ask, just before a blanket was draped over him. Somewhat pacified, Penguin stopped fighting.

"Nothing serious," the younger man said as they left the room. "Luckily for you. What did you think you were doing?" Shachi made a non-committal noise, as if to say he hadn't been thinking at all. Penguin could believe that, and from Law's sigh, so could he. "Control room," Law ordered, and Shachi whined but obeyed, peeling away from their route. "You'll be having company in here soon, I expect," their captain continued privately to Penguin as he set him down in a bed. Penguin didn't doubt it.

He busied himself with burrowing into the fresh covers, the crisp scent of the infirmary comforting in its own way.

"Stay," Law ordered him gently, and Penguin chuckled lightly. He had no intentions of going
anywhere, would have been happy to stay in his room if Law hadn't forcibly moved him because he
didn't like sick people in their own rooms for the exact reasons Shachi was later going to regret.

"Not going anywhere," he mumbled, and Law let out an appreciative chuckle.

"No, you're not," he agreed. "Take it easy."
Endurance

Chapter Notes

Characters: Law
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Ope Ope no Mi

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had taken Law an embarrassingly long time to realise that using his new abilities drained his stamina. He’d noticed the oncoming exhaustion, of course, but as he was stuck in the thrall of White Lead Poisoning for much of the early days, he’d simply assumed it to be more of the same. There hadn't been much of a pattern to the White Lead induced weakness, so it had been easy for the Ope Ope no Mi's drawback to hide amongst it.

Having been surrounded by Devil Fruit users for much of the past three years, Law had never known that they had any drawbacks beyond the well-known loss of ability to swim. Doflamingo had never so much as broken into sweat, and even Baby 5 had plenty of stamina to spare after her various transformations. Of course, a fire or sand logia would logically be disadvantaged against water, but there was no logical detriment to operations.

Even after the worst of the White Lead had passed and his body began the long road to recovery, Law failed to realise that the exhaustion was a physical result of using his abilities. Mentally, the control needed was outstanding, so Law instead attributed it to the mental strain.

Takt, the first ability he found a name for (and a use outside of surgery), was difficult. Moving something with his fruit was a far cry from simply doing it with his hands. What his body catalogued with ease – weight, strength required – the Ope Ope no Mi demanded conscious recognition. Lifting a coin with his fingers was simple. Reach, hold, move. His body automatically filled in the rest of the steps, leaving his conscious mind free to focus on other things. Lifting a coin with the Ope Ope no Mi was nothing of the sort.

There was no reach. That was covered by the span of his Room, whatever size that had been. Nor was there hold. It didn't work by invisible hands doing all of the work. There was only move. Move began with the identification of the object, analysing its weight and the forces that would be needed to shift it. Then came the application of the forces, or rather mimicking the application of the forces, because there was no such thing in the Room. It was, quite simply, just Law and his mind.

Moving things with your mind was nothing like people thought it was. He couldn't just tell it to go somewhere and it would obey. He had to push it, working out how much pressure to apply so that it moved, but didn't go too fast. He also had to guide it, to make sure it went where he wanted it, and that meant manipulating the forces perfectly. Time, trial and error taught him that pointing with his fingers helped him to focus, although his paranoia compelled him to train without the crutch, because he knew what Doflamingo could do.

Doflamingo could take his movement away from him, stealing control of his limbs until all he had
left was his mind, imprisoned inside a body that wouldn't obey him. Having a weapon he only needed his mind to use was the only way to counter the strings, so he persevered, assuming that the mental strain was the reason for his exhaustion.

With that assumption, it was no wonder it took Law so long to realise that no matter how competent he got with his abilities, finally managing to shift that coin from one end of the table to the other with similar ease to if he'd moved it by hand, the exhaustion still lingered. By this point, White Lead was almost a distant memory, so he couldn't blame that, and the mental strain had been trained out of him, leaving the revelation that his own fruit was sapping his strength.

That was unhelpful, to say the least. Law could tell that his stamina wasn't ideal (he could beat Penguin and Shachi in many things, but endurance was not one of them), and with his medical history it was unlikely he would ever be able to match the older boys on that front. Below average stamina alongside a stamina-sapping fruit was not a good match-up. Still, he was unrelenting in his training – if not more so, after the revelation. The more he pushed himself, the more his overall stamina increased, and even if he was never going to reach the heights of some people, he could at least make it so that he didn't get light-headed after moving a coin.

Chapter End Notes

I don't think Law needs all those hand and finger gestures to use his abilities, it's just a way to help channel his focus so it makes it easier for him to concentrate. The actual requirements to do some of the things he does, especially ones like Takt and Shambles, seem like they might be far more complex than he makes it appear.
It was the simple things that did it. The Heart Pirates were an experienced crew, capable of going toe to toe with most enemies, or escaping the ones they couldn't. There were a few close calls, of course, because what was a life of piracy without those, but for the most part Law didn't have to deal with too many problems.

But when the problems did appear, so did Law's headaches. In some ways, the serious injuries were less of a hassle, because once they passed into unconsciousness at least they weren't making themselves worse. That didn't mean that he preferred them unconscious – far from it; unconsciousness brought its own realm of difficulties and there was nothing pleasant about seeing his nakama's limp forms.

However, when they were still conscious, most of them had some ridiculous ideas of bravado and insisted on doing stupid things, as was the situation Law was currently facing with no small amount of frustration.

Uni had broken his ankle. He hadn't even been doing something impressive, like fighting. He'd simply stepped on a rock, only to find the rock wasn't as stable as it had appeared and gave way beneath his weight. That hadn't been the problem. A broken ankle was a nuisance, but with some bedrest and treatment from Law it would heal up just fine.

No, the problem was Uni's attitude.

Law hadn't been there when he'd fallen. His nakama had, sensibly, called for him straight away, but the scene when he arrived had him wanting to tear his hair out. Uni was not, as he'd been told, sitting where he'd fallen and clutching at his ankle. That would have been the sensible thing to do, and Law's crew were many things, but sensible was a term he hesitated to apply to them.

Uni had managed to find his feet and hobble over the rocky terrain a reasonable distance. Law encountered him attempting to make his way back to the Tang under his own steam, and immediately ordered him to sit down with a scowl, eyeing the way his left ankle was quivering alarmingly under the weight.

"It's okay," Uni tried to tell him, limping forwards until Law forcibly stopped him. "I can walk."

As if that wasn't a line Law had heard a hundred times before from foolish nakama underestimating their injuries.

"Can does not mean should," he snapped. "Now sit down and let me take a look." Sitting down turned out to be beyond Uni's comfort zone, as he started to obey only to freeze when his balance
threatened to fail him. Law sighed. "You should have stayed where you were," he pointed out, reaching for his nakama and guiding him down. Uni was tall – taller than Law – making it difficult, but they persevered in the end.

Law's Scan agreed with what Uni had told him over the den den mushi – the ankle was broken. It was a clean break, and Law reset the bone then and there as Uni grit his teeth. Wrapping it firmly in bandages so that it wouldn't move around too much on the journey back, he turned around so that Uni could cling to his back.

"Uni," he growled when his nakama didn't immediately obey.

"But Captain…" Uni protested, and Law looked back over his shoulder to fix the man with a glare.

"If you try to walk on that ankle I'll Amputate it," he promised him. As he'd hoped, the idea of hopping around on one leg didn't appeal to Uni, who finally (albeit reluctantly) wrapped his arms around his shoulders and let Law heft him onto his back.

Law wished he didn't have quite as much experience carrying taller people, because the only time he carried anyone was when they were in no state to walk (unlike some of his other nakama, who liked to pick people up for fun), but it wasn't the first time he'd had Uni on his back, and the man's taller height was no issue for him as he finished the journey back to the Tang.

"You are not leaving that bed until I say so," he said firmly once Uni was settled in the infirmary, ankle wrapped properly and suspended. "I do not care if you can walk. It will do your body no favours in the long run."

Now safely back on the Tang, Uni was far more amenable.

"Yes, Captain."

Chapter End Notes

It is possible to walk on a broken ankle, just really not advisable. There's a big difference between "can" do something and "should" do something, and in One Piece there are several moments where people do things they can but probably shouldn't (Law included, the hypocrite). I'm sure it extends to the cast we haven't really met yet.
"Where is it? Where is it? Where is it, dammit!"

Penguin returned from his morning shower to exclamations and swearing coming from his bedroom and frowned. Shachi sounded panicked, which was not something Penguin wanted to deal with before breakfast. He loved the younger man, he really did, but for someone that refused to get up until his blankets were stripped, Shachi was entirely too energetic at stupid times in the morning.

"What's wrong?" he asked wearily, pushing the door open to find the room had become a warzone in the ten minutes he'd been gone.

"It's gone!" Shachi wailed from where he was throwing everything out of his clothes chest. Penguin glowered as a sock whacked him in the face and peeled it off slowly before letting it drop limply to the floor – not that the floor was particularly visible. Penguin realised that his own clothes had also been tipped out of his chest and snarled. If Shachi noticed, he didn't react.

"What has gone?" he demanded, only for Shachi to turn to him, almost in tears. "Oh, spare me the theatrics. It's too early for that. What the hell are you so desperate to find this early in the morning?"

Because he was, slightly – only slightly – worried, he looked around at their warzone of a bedroom to see if he could work out what had Shachi so wound up. It wasn't his hat – that was faithfully perched on the post of his bunk, yet to be picked up for the days. Likewise, he was already wearing his shades, so it couldn't be that, either. His katana was perched in the corner, as always, and Shachi was dressed, so he wasn't missing any clothes…

"My hairbrush!" the ginger exclaimed. "It's gone!" It was only then that Penguin registered the state of the ginger hair. His earlier shower had done no favours for his bedhead, and the ginger strands stuck out at all sorts of crazy angles, waiting to be forced into some sort of order by a brush and a hat. Penguin was not impressed.

"It's too early for this nonsense," he grumbled, stalking over to the desk and picking up his own, which he hurled at his nakama's head with what was probably more force than strictly necessary. Shachi caught it without looking – *stupid observation haki* – and turned to face Penguin with a pathetic look on his face.

"But-" he started, and Penguin had had enough of this pre-breakfast drama, crossing the room in short, purposeful strides (careful not to trip on one of the many hazards now on the floor) to snatch the brush back out of Shachi's hands. "Wha- Ow!" Shachi whined as he attacked his hair, too irritated to be gentle.
"After breakfast you're clearing this mess up," he ordered as he tugged at the ginger hair until it submitted.

"But my hairbrush…" Shachi whined, and Penguin attacked a knot particularly viciously, shutting him up.

"You're more likely to find the damn thing by tidying up than making more mess," he pointed out, yanking the last few knots out ("ow, what was that for?") and grabbing Shachi's hat to jam on his head. "Law would have a fit if he saw this."

As if on cue, there was a knock at the door. Penguin froze – no not now, Law, please don't come in right now – and watched in apprehension as the handle turned and the door opened.

"Shachi?" Ikkaku asked, sticking her head in the room. "I brought your- What the hell happened in here?"

"Nothing!" the ginger chirped, a little too happily, but the woman didn't pull him up on the obvious lie.

"Oh," she said instead, dismissing the topic. "Well, I was just coming to return this, thanks for letting me borrow it yesterday." Penguin had a horrid sinking suspicion what was about to happen, and sure enough, Shachi's damn hairbrush sat innocently on her palm. "Clione repaired mine last night, but I forgot to give this back then, sorry."

Shachi stared at it blankly for a few moments, before comprehension dawned on his face and he took it back.

"Ah, don't worry about it!" he grinned, and Penguin waited only until the door shut again, Ikkaku promising to see them at breakfast, before he rounded on the idiot.

"How the hell did you forget you loaned it to Ikkaku?" he demanded. Shachi's grin turned sheepish.

"Oops?" he offered, and Penguin snarled again.

"I changed my mind," he said, picking up his own hat and setting it on his head. "You can clean this up before breakfast."

"Penguiiiiiiinnnnn!" Shachi whined, but he just turned his back and left the room, shutting the door firmly behind him.

It was far too early for this nonsense.

Chapter End Notes

Why did Ikkaku have Shachi's hairbrush? Look back at chapter 141 (Luck)!
When Jean Bart had followed Trafalgar onto the submarine for the first time, he had never imagined that within a week he would be helping the Polar Tang dance her way through ice and bullets of light as they dived as fast as she was capable of down towards the seabed. As it turned out, not only was he in that exact position, but he did it successfully. A single scratch would have been disastrous at those depths, yet despite being the combined attacks of two of the Admirals, the Polar Tang never felt the fatal sting.

Some ships were more responsive than others. That was a fact of life, and powered by engines rather than the wind, Jean Bart could see how the Polar Tang could be easier to handle than a sailboat. Waves were no issue when you were below them, and the nuances of the wind were irrelevant even when they were on the surface. But at the hands of a truly genius helmsman, one of those sailboats could truly dance.

Jean Bart hadn't thought that the clunky-looking submarine could do that, and certainly not with him at the helm. He was experienced, but he was not one of the masters that could coax a ship to dance.

He was wrong.

Adrenaline was a powerful tool. Under its effects, humans could do feats far beyond their usual capabilities, and trapped alone at the helm with death pursuing them far too doggedly behind them, he had honestly thought that was it. Trafalgar's gamble hadn't paid off, and they were all going to die because any moment they'd be caught by the ice, or slashed wide open by the light. No matter how doggedly he clung to the controls, watching the sonar scream warnings as the Polar Tung lurched from side to side as if caught in a violent storm, there was no way he'd be able to guide her past the barrage in one piece.

The controls had been light in his hands. It wasn't the first time Jean Bart had controlled the ship – lessons on her unusual steering had been one of the first things he'd received, barring a medical check-up – but never before had the controls been so light under his hands. There was the thrum of life, as if the ship was a living being rather than a metal box, and determination flowed through him.

The smallest motion had her flying from side to side, twisting and looping in impossible movements as each attack passed them by. Faster and faster she went, until the altimeter was little more than a blur, and Jean Bart was terrified that they were going too fast, that her hull couldn't take the pressure, but she held out, leaving the ice far behind them and responding so quickly that it was almost as though she was reading his mind.

He mentioned it later, when they were safe (somehow, impossibly, safe), and his nakama grinned
widely. Shachi rested a hand on the pipes lining the corridor fondly, dragging his fingers along the section gently.

"She's a good ship," he said, cryptically. "The best ship." Jean Bart understood the sentiment, but the implication didn't register until Shachi rested his head against the pipe as well. "Thank you." It wasn't addressed to him, he realised, but to the ship herself.

He'd spent enough time on the seas to know of the tales. Ships that became more than just ships, rising to the occasion to do impossible things to save their crews. They were just stories of superstition, he'd thought, the delusions of dying men as their ships sank. But he couldn't deny what had just happened, how the controls had moved almost before he'd guided them – how they'd escaped from certain death. There was something special about the submarine and, looking around, he could see how whole-heartedly the crew believed in her.

If Klabautermann really existed, Jean Bart mused, looking at the love his new nakama poured into her, the Polar Tang surely had one.

"Thank you," he rumbled even later, catching a moment of solitude to mimic Shachi's earlier actions and resting his hand over one of the pipes. His hand wrapped all the way around it, and he felt a pulse running through. It could have just been the natural movement of the submarine's mechanisms, but the timing was too perfect.

You're welcome, it seemed to say, the warmth inexplicably shifting up his arm, as far as his elbow. It felt a little bit like when Ikkaku had hung from his arm for no reason other than it seemed fun.

The idea of an invisible fairy mimicking her actions brought a small grin to his face.

Chapter End Notes

Their escape from Marineford was awesome, but I can't see how Jean Bart could have dodged all of Kizaru's attacks, especially as he'd only been in the crew (and subsequently on the Tang) a week at the time. But if you look back to Enies Lobby, and the Merry sailing herself, maybe the Tang had some input in the evasion. We don't know all that much about what a Klabautermann can do and under what circumstances, but as usual I have a few headcanons.
As best as Law could tell, Penguin and Shachi were honest with him. They wore their hearts on their sleeves (Shachi more obviously than Penguin, but Law had learnt to look over the years) and over time he grew to understand what was going on in their minds for much of the time – as best Law could read anyone, anyway. He knew when they were happy, and when they were scared. He knew when they wanted help and when the best help was to leave them alone for a while.

He didn't know why they had chosen to follow him off of Swallow Island that day (or drag him onto a boat with them, to be accurate). No matter how much he thought about it, he couldn't find a motivation that made sense. They were orphans, but their clothes were clean and well looked after, not to mention the boys themselves being in excellent health. They'd had more than just a roof over their head, and while Law had never asked (and the pair had never told), he suspected that they'd had a guardian who had raised them with love since they were orphaned.

Compared to how Law knew he had been back then – arrogant, ill, abandoned and teetering on the edge of depression – there was no logical reason for the pair to abandon their comfortable lives to brave the wrath of the seas (and paint targets on their backs for Doflamingo). He had been nothing special, certainly nothing to warrant the lifetime of devotion they gave him.

"You're interesting to be around," Penguin had said, sopping wet and destined for a cold from where Law had hurled them over the side of the boat in an attempt to ditch them and losing the bandages to reveal the injuries Law had inflicted on them the previous day. They hadn't been severe – Law too weak to do too much damage although he certainly hadn't held back – but they were the reminders that they'd met as enemies.

Law still hadn't worked out what he'd meant by that.

"Why?" he'd asked them once – more than once, more times than he could count. "Why did you follow me?"

They'd never given him an answer, shrugging their shoulders with a grin that could equally mean work it out yourself or hell if we know.

"Does it matter?" Bepo asked him, paws twisting together slightly in preparation for a correction that Law never gave. Law had never asked him why he'd followed him. That much was obvious, or so he thought. He had saved Bepo, so the young mink had attached himself firmly to the only friendly face he knew. "Isn't it more important why we stayed?"

Law had no idea why they hadn't abandoned him either. He hadn't been a kind captain – he hadn't even been a kind human being. Bepo might have put up with him for safety reasons, but the other boys had had no such incentives.
"You're overthinking it," Penguin told him eventually, a grin on his face as he watched Shachi wrestle with a brand new fishing rod. "Is it that hard to get your head around the fact that we just wanted to?"

That answer didn't make sense, didn't give him a reason, and either that was on purpose, or Penguin was trying to tell him there hadn't been a reason. Knowing the older man, either option was as likely as the other, and Law decided to stop pushing.

Bepo was right, as much as Law liked to know the hows and whys of things. It didn't actually matter why they'd got in that boat with him. What mattered was that they were still with him, alternating between supporting him and playing around as their fancy took them, and Law wouldn't trade it for the world. Not even when Shachi lost his grip on the rod and the hook caught on Law's precious hat.

While he didn't know why they'd followed him in the first place, he knew with certainty that they wouldn't have things any other way, either.
When Law announced a compulsory check up for all members of the Heart Pirates once they were back safely underwater, the Polar Tang taking them away from Zou and towards Wano, Penguin and Shachi shared a single glance. No way.

Law's face, back when he'd first laid eyes on them and spotted the bandaging, had been full of concern. Then there had been the shock as the truth set in, followed by the self-loathing as he blamed himself for sending them to what had become a battleground. If he learnt the truth behind their injuries, it would just get worse.

Spending the entire day avoiding their captain was easy. He had situated himself firmly in the infirmary, dealing with nakama one after the other as they trickled through the door to reassure him that they were okay. He never left the room, and if he'd asked anyone to send either of them his way, no-one passed on the message.

Everyone agreed that Law didn't need to know. Bepo and Jean Bart went through with their own health checks, but somehow Law didn't see what their wounds meant. Jean Bart lied to his face, saying that some of his old wounds from his time as a slave had become agitated in the fight. Bepo simply relied on his thick fur to hide the worst of it. With Law unable to use his Room, such measured proved to be surprisingly effective.

Penguin and Shachi had no such measures, so they chose to hide, which served them well until the morning, when Law invaded their room without so much as a 'by your leave' and caught them, rather literally, with their trousers down. They probably should have expected it.

Law had never been good at dealing with skittish animals, and it was that awkwardness they were faced with. He'd worked out that they were the centre of the unsettled atmosphere amongst the crew and tried to reassure them. For Law, it wasn't a bad attempt. They knew Law respected secrets, and his admission that they didn't have to tell him anything was welcome. It was just a shame that the one thing he did ask for they couldn't give.

It was a lost cause. Their captain was stubborn and wouldn't cave until he'd reassured himself that they weren't seriously injured. He was also shrewd and calculating, and regardless of whether or not he meant to do it, he began to piece the puzzle back together all by himself.

Shachi gave in first, realising the eventuality fast approaching as Law pressed in the wrong places and gleaned answers each time. Besides, he reasoned, his own eyes on Law's bandaged arm, the concern went both ways. Hearing that their captain's arm had been cut off (but don't worry because it's all repaired now) was not reassuring in the slightest, and he saw a way to even things out for all
of them. Penguin was harder to convince, his fear over Law's reactions greater than his own concern. Physical wounds were easier to heal than mental ones.

Shachi got his way in the end, but it was Penguin who was right. Law's arm really was healing well, even without the additional support of the Ope Ope no Mi (the use of which was strictly banned until further notice), although they insisted on a sling so it felt like they could do something for him.

Then it was their turn, and Law reacted as badly as they'd expected, losing control of his fingers in ways they'd previously seen only when he was ill or recovering from a dunking. Law's fingers were always steady, the hands of a surgeon, and to watch them lose that was startling.

They hugged him, mindful of all the injuries but more determined to save him from the demons rearing inside his head. It helped them, too, even though Law hadn't wrapped his arms back around them – couldn't, now his right arm was securely tucked in a sling. Deceiving Law had been emotionally draining; even though they'd known that he wouldn't take it well, all but lying to his face was something they had never done, and never wanted to do again.

Besides, it was over now. They were no longer tied to wooden crosses, screaming as they prepared to defy Jack to the last. Law was no longer bound to vengeance, free from the eternal nightmare that had been Doflamingo. They were hurt, but it was over and the floodgates broke until all three of them – Shachi, then Penguin, then finally Law – began to sob.

They ended up a tangled mess on the floor of the infirmary, but that didn't matter. They were together, they were alive, they were free.

Chapter End Notes

Ages ago, I was asked for Penguin and Shachi's PoV to Worry (chapter 18), and it was pretty tough to write, but I got there in the end!
Shachi had expected some level of hostility from the brat – Law, the bear-cub called him – even after they’d sailed away, and he hadn't been disappointed. The waters were cold, too cold to take a swim, but he was starting to get used to being randomly flipped into the sea as the kid tried and failed to dissuade him and Penguin from their decision to follow him. He didn't think the kid was trying to kill him, although in all honesty that wasn't a bad way to go about it, but it was certainly unpleasant. And cold.

Very cold.

Shachi had taken to pressing against Penguin, trying to share what warmth he could as he shivered, stuck in sopping wet clothes because they hadn't thought to bring spares with them. Even Bepo had started to curl up with them in concern, sending baleful looks at Law and even starting to stand up for them ("they're too cold, Law!") at times. The creature's heart was as soft as his fur.

Law took longer to come around to the idea that he didn't need to throw them overboard, not that Shachi expected any real change of heart. When he wasn't throwing them out of the boat, he seemed to be largely ignoring their existence, spending his time curled up in the stern of the boat and staring into space for hours on end. It would have been hard for him to have been much clearer about the fact he wasn't fond of their presence.

Shachi began to fear that Law was planning on abandoning them somewhere – some other island, maybe. Throwing them in the sea was doing nothing besides soaking them, then again-

He sneezed, startling himself in the process, and shuddered, trying to press closer to Bepo and his warm fur.

Then again, it was wearing them down. Shachi was reasonably resistant to the cold, but repeated dunkings followed by abandonment on the deck in sopping wet clothes was wearing his immune system thin. Beside him, Penguin coughed.

"Idiots," Law said, breaking his silence suddenly. Shachi tensed as the smaller boy shakily made his way across the boat towards them, bracing himself against another cold dunking. He couldn't take much more of that, if he was honest.

He wasn't dunked. Instead, Law reached for the dripping wet bandages and slowly peeled them away. Shachi couldn't stop flinching away. All of his injuries had been at the hands of this small, volatile child, and further interest from the culprit didn't bode well at all. Gentle fingertips traced around the wounds softly, and those golden eyes looked almost kind.
"You need to change these," he said, peeling the worst offenders off of Shachi's body. "And dry off, or you'll get a cold." He seemed almost worried, which Shachi found rich, as it was entirely his fault in the first place. He said as much, only for Law to fix him with a glare. "I'm a doctor."

At his age? Shachi managed not to laugh only because he knew laughing would be a one way ticket to the sea. There was no way that was true, but if Law wanted to play at being a doctor, Shachi would happily take that over another dunking, and he suspected Penguin would, too.

There was barely anything they could use to dry off and wrap up in, the boat they'd liberated outfitted for a day's travel, not a week's, but Law found something that sufficed, somehow. Shachi didn't investigate too thoroughly as he curled back up against Penguin and Bepo.

The mystery of the kid's sudden charity could wait.

Chapter End Notes

At some point, Penguin/Shachi/Bepo found out Law is a doctor, but that doesn't mean they believed him to start with.
"You two need new clothes," Law blurted out, startling himself and clamping his mouth shut as the two older boys turned to look at him in surprise. He'd been keeping himself to himself since realising that no matter how many times he threw them out of the boat, they weren't going to leave (the only thing that was going to stop them was if they drowned, and while Law wasn't above murder these two boys hadn't done anything to deserve that). He hadn't planned on saying anything, simply ignoring them until he could find a way to abandon them without killing them in the process, but the snivelling and coughing from the other end of the boat had got to him.

He'd tried to dry them off earlier, before they caught hypothermia and died, but with no change of clothes (not that Law could really talk about that when he didn't, either) there was only so much they could do. It was far too cold for them to take the clothes off for long, and the tarpaulin might have been good for keeping water off in the first place, but it was neither warm nor good at getting water off of something (or someone) already wet.

They weren't going to properly dry off and warm up until they got some fresh clothes, but Law refused to go back to Minion Island, which meant they had to survive to reach Rubeck Island. It shouldn't be too far from where they were, if he was remembering Cora-san's map properly. In all honesty, he also needed new clothes. His tattered cloak was doing a passable job at hiding it, but there were far too may blood splatters on his current outfit – Cora-san's as much as his own – and the fabric had gone stiff where it had dried.

"What's wrong with our clothes?" Penguin – his hat helpfully reminding Law of his name – demanded, attempting to cross his arms defiantly. It would have worked better if his teeth weren't chattering and his body wasn't quivering, despite the tarpaulin wrapped around him and Bepo trying to warm them with his body heat.

"You'll get hypothermia and die if you don't get fresh clothes soon," Law pointed out, reluctantly continuing the conversation he'd accidentally started. He heard the ginger mutter something along the lines of and whose fault is that. "How much money do you two have?"

It was a vain hope, considering they hadn't even brought spare clothes with them, but he was hoping they could keep their heads down and pay their way around, at least for the moment. Doflamingo took more notice of stories where people didn't pay. He probably had enough money on him for a single set of spare clothes each – he didn't recall carrying money but sometime after Minion Island he'd found a purse of beri caught up in a pocket and had had to fight the tears because only one person could have put them there – but that would leave them having to scavenge for food. He only had enough money for one person, not four.
"Money?" the ginger asked, and something about his tone caught Law off guard. That didn't sound like we have no money. That sounded like what are you talking about, but Law couldn't believe the two older teenagers didn't know what money was.

"Beri," he specified, pulling out a ten beri coin to show them. Thankfully, there was some dawning comprehension at the sight of the coin.

"Oh, those things?" the ginger continued, with a shrug that was far less careless than he was trying to pretend it was. "No. Should we?"

Law couldn't help face palming. Even a child knew that money was a necessity.

"How were you planning on buying anything?" he asked through his hand, voice muffled despairingly. If they didn't even know how the world worked, he'd have to go back to Swallow Island to dump them. Anything else would kill them.

"Bartering?" Penguin offered, as if that was the natural answer. "We're pretty good at fishing, and we can do some simple fixes for boats and nets." Law stared at them in disbelief. Had they honestly thought they could do that? That was the sort of thing they'd find in fiction. The world didn't work like that.

"This isn't a game," he snapped, but instead of recoiling in shame, the pair straightened up. Bepo, too, Law noticed in concern.

"We never said it was!" Shachi retorted, sounding wounded. "One item for another, that's how it works! You give them something they need, and they give you something you need! It's simple, dammit!"

Law blinked and caught Bepo nodding in agreement. What sort of nonsense were they spouting?

"If you can't be realistic about this, you can go home," he told them coldly, only to scramble backwards as the two irate older boys lunged for him, clearly insulted.

"That's how it works!" they insisted, snarling and seemingly forgetting that they were shivering. "We fixed the sails, so we got fish. We went hunting, so we got clothes!" Law looked up at them, now quivering with rage as well as the cold, and blinked again. He knew he wasn't the best at reading people, he never had been, but they seemed like they believed what they were saying. Swallow Island had seemed a primitive place, from what little he'd seen of it, with log huts instead of houses and dirt tracks instead of paved roads. Maybe exchanging services was possible in such a small place.

That left him with a problem. If the pair didn't understand the power money held, they were going to be in trouble very quickly.

"The rest of the world doesn't work like that," he told them, deciding that it would just be easier if he played along. "Without beri, you won't get anything." From their vehement protests about trading, he expected them to be confused, but they just sighed, sitting back on their haunches. Their eyes were shadowed by their hats all of a sudden, and Law blinked again at them as the mood shifted.

"The village head does have a treasury," Penguin admitted, his voice low. "But it's just for... for emergencies."

There was a story there, but Law had just enough reason to not ask. Instead, he sighed and reached for the purse, emptying out its meagre contents onto a spare tarpaulin.
"Pay attention," he said, resigned to teaching the older boys something even pre-schoolers knew back- "You too, Bepo," he interrupted his own thoughts, beckoning the mink over. He'd said nothing during the exchange, but his silent support of Penguin and Shachi suggested that he, too, came from somewhere that didn't bother with money.

That ignorance would get them killed one day.

Chapter End Notes

More cultural differences because they're fun! Swallow Island's inhabitants are aware of money, and do have a supply from where people have bought things from them, but as a small community (as I headcanon it), they could well operate on a system of exchanging goods and services instead of currency. We haven't yet seen anything in Zou implying that they use money, either - no shops or anything - and as another small and isolated community they probably wouldn't really need it either. Flevance, on the other hand, was a highly advanced, large city that thrives on wealth, so it would fall more in line with First World ideas of buying and selling goods.
Puberty hit Law late. He wasn't overly surprised by the fact, considering the damage his body had taken as a child thanks to the White Lead Poisoning, although still having his pre-pubescent high voice long after Penguin and Shachi's had settled into their deeper vocals grew to be annoying on the occasions they chose to tease him about it (not often, but it happened).

He'd had plenty of time to watch the other two get taller – Shachi never quite catching Penguin – and complain about needing to shave as their faces got prickly with stubble before it was his turn. Despite that, he hadn't stopped to think about what it meant. Getting taller by a foot overnight (as Shachi claimed; Law was sure it took at least two days) was a nuisance, with growing pains making themselves known loudly and none of his clothes fitting properly anymore. His final height was unexpected – as his growth had been stunted by the disease, he'd never expected to be tall – although it had the bonus of Kikoku no longer being too long for him to wield, but aside from the minor practical inconveniences it was easy enough to ignore.

The face he caught sight of in the mirror one morning, however, was not.

Over time, memories faded. Law knew that, tried not to think about the fact that his family's faces were hazy in his mind (and that Cora-san's was fading rapidly), but when he woke up one morning to hazily stumble into the bathroom, he saw his father looking back at him. It was unmistakably his father, glasses missing but identifiable regardless, and Law jumped, startled into sudden wakefulness by the shock.

Blinking and rubbing his eyes furious, he looked again to realise he was staring into a mirror. Stubble had sprouted on his face overnight, another greeting from puberty, the faint pattern resembling the shallow stubble his father had never had time to shave completely before his next shift at the hospital.

Law faced a decision: to let the facial hair grow, or to get rid of it. On the one hand, letting it grow would require maintenance – he had no intentions of letting it go wild – but on the other, shaving it daily would mean waking up every morning to the shadow of his father's face.

There wasn't really a choice.

Penguin and Shachi seemed amused by his decision to not shave away the stubble. They might respect and follow him as their captain, but there was that part of them that always treated him like a younger child – sometimes annoying, other times turning out to be just what Law needed – and they clearly saw it as a way for him to appear more mature than his years. He ignored them, knowing that they'd get used to it in time. Bepo, as always, followed the flow meekly, not even commenting on his new look.
It took time for his beard and sideburns to grow long enough that they no longer resembled his father's (Law did, however, eliminate the budding moustache). For as long as the goatee remained thin enough to resemble his father's, Law hid away from mirrors, trying not to jump whenever he caught sight of his reflection. Penguin and Shachi, displaying that uncanny ability to read him when he wasn't sure he wanted to be read, never made him face a mirror despite their teasing. Then again, he realised, he'd never asked them how closely they'd grown up to resemble their own dead parents. Maybe, they understood.

It didn't stop them teasing him, but by that point Law had long learnt that nothing was going to stop that when they were in the mood for poking fun. He could put up with the light-hearted mischief, and eventually the day came where he let himself properly face a mirror again.

This time, he saw himself. There was the family resemblance to his father, of course, but it was no longer so obvious it hurt. The full goatee and the slightly shaggy sideburns were a step further than Law had ever seen his father, thereby serving their purpose.

The fact that it made him look a little bit older didn't hurt, either.

Chapter End Notes

Law looks a lot like his father. A lot. The only real difference seems to be the length of his hair and his facial hair, once you take away the glasses, and as those are both cosmetic things Law has control over, I suspect they're intentionally different so as not to look like his father.
Over time, Law got used to Penguin and Shachi finding themselves in trouble. The two older boys collected scrapes like Law had begun collecting coins, and barely a day went by without one of the two ending up in the infirmary for treatment. Most of the time, it was nothing serious, some silly minor incident leading Law to prod them along as they laughed and joked. Sometimes, it was less light-hearted, bordering on downright terrifying as he was left to deal with an unconscious and bloody nakama.

No matter what happened, it was always one of the humans (sometimes Law himself), which made the first time it wasn't a major shock.

Bepo, for all that he was the youngest and the quietest, was the strongest. No matter what happened, he remained a steady presence, seemingly unshakable and untouchable by North Blue humans. His strength was both constant and reassuring, and at the end of the day, they could always curl up with him and feel perfectly safe and protected.

Bepo wasn't indestructible.

It was the first time they'd faced an opponent with haki. Despite Law's knowledge of it, haki wasn't overly common in North Blue – uncommon enough that for a long time the young Heart Pirates had never encountered it. Bepo's strength hadn't saved him from a jab, and he'd crumpled to the ground to the horror of his human nakama. When he hadn't got back up, they turned on the offensive, seeking vengeance as well as hurrying to finish the fight so that Law could treat Bepo.

The victory was hard won, but the three boys didn't stop to think about that as they crowded around the unmoving Bepo. His pure white fur was matted where the blood had reached it, a stark contrast they could have done without.

He'd grown, now taller than all of them and with the bulk to match. It took all three to manoeuvre him to safety, down into their infirmary where he took up too much of the bed, but no-one was laughing at the sight. Carefully cleaning away the blood – a task taken up by Penguin and Shachi while Law focused on the wounds themselves – was done in frigid silence.

The injury itself wasn't fatal, a simple strike to the wrong place slicing through all Bepo's natural defences to down him in an instant. There was no cause for concern, although the boys couldn't bring themselves to think that way as they took it in turns to take over the steering. It wasn't the same without Bepo telling them which way to go, but he needed rest, even after he finally woke.

"Sorry," he said, predictably, as if his injury had been his own fault and not some impossible to predict event. It took the combined efforts of Law and Penguin to keep him in the bed, firmly
reminding the mink that they could navigate if it came down to it. Of course, they were nowhere near Bepo's own standards, but they were still in North Blue. Compasses still worked. "I'm sorry."

The mink himself was almost inconsolable about his injury, directly stemming from the knowledge that he was the strongest and that therefore he should always be supporting his nakama. He wouldn't settle until he had returned to his position as crew pillow; all three ended up clambering into the infirmary bed together, cramming in as best they could despite the small bed.

Law was used to Penguin and Shachi being injured, but Bepo was a different matter entirely. He was a difficult patient, and that was before he took into account how difficult bandaging fur was. He was their rock, and all four of them knew it. Realistically, none of them were invincible, but until the fur dyed red, it was so easy to forget that minks could bleed, too.

Chapter End Notes

Someone mentioned Bepo being the one to get hurt for once, and how the others would react. Bepo doesn't make a good patient.
Regaining consciousness hurt. Bepo had heard that, from when he'd asked Penguin and Shachi about their own experiences, less because he was curious and more because he wanted to know what he could do to help them. They'd told him there wasn't really anything he could do, except pump them full of painkillers and just be there because there was nothing worse than waking alone. He hadn't understood then, wondering why he couldn't help them forget their pain like he did when they were awake, but in that same situation for the first time himself, it now made sense.

Pain bloomed from an epicentre somewhere in his abdomen, sharp and insistent, and no amount of hugs would have stopped that. He didn't seem to be under any painkillers – there was no pinch in his paw that Shachi had once described to him – and when he tried to get up, realising that he wasn't where he'd fallen, there were hands in his fur to keep him down.

Knowing that they were there – Law and Penguin, so Shachi was guiding the Tang – brought a relief to him, even though he didn't want to lie still on the bed, and then he understood why they'd said that waking up to company was one of the best things they could have. Seeing their worried faces morph into ones of relief, grins forming out of concerned creases, told him that it was okay now. Even though Law sprang into action, asking questions and making checks that he'd witnessed so many times before but never been on the receiving end of, he couldn't find it in him to be scared of his injuries and what they might mean.

As it turned out, his injury was nothing serious. It had been enough of a blow to knock him out, but nothing vital had been damaged. Bepo knew he wasn't a doctor – that was Law's job – but that meant he was fine to move, right? He was no stranger to pain, and besides, they needed him. He couldn't stay there like an invalid when he was their navigator – no, more than that, because they knew how to use a compass at least. He was their pillow.

Bepo wasn't one for complex comparisons, but pillows served multiple purposes. Somewhere to rest, somewhere safe. A support, soft and yielding but always there. A comfort. If Bepo was to fill even one of those roles, he had to be up, away from the infirmary bed rather than sprawled across it.

They didn't let him up. No matter how much Bepo argued with them, unwilling to use his strength in case he hurt one of them as they pinned him down yet again, they wouldn't let him leave that bed.

"You have to rest!" Penguin protested, his weight pressing down on Bepo's left shoulder. On his other side, Law mimicked the action, and while Bepo could easily force his way up, he didn't fight them.

He did, however, complain. Law called him the worst patient ever, except he was smiling so Bepo
didn't take it to heart, mumbling apologies but not backing down. It paid off in the end, as they reached a compromise. Bepo still wasn't perfectly happy with it, because it meant he was still in bed, but now his nakama joined him.

They were careful around his wound, until he decided they were treating him like he was made of glass and yanked them closer. All three humans ended up in the bed eventually, hands and faces buried in his fur, and it wasn't perfect, but Bepo would take it because it meant he could still be a pillow, even while he healed.

Chapter End Notes

Companion piece to yesterday's *Injury*, because Bepo has his own stubborn streak too.
Travelling in a submarine posed a unique problem, which the Heart Pirates had noticed early on, and that was the requirement for fuel. Mercifully, the Tang had several huge tanks, half of them reserves, so the likelihood of ever finding themselves running on empty was slim.

The run of bad luck started when island after island was unable to provide them with any fuel. The Tang wasn't picky about what powered her – a stroke of luck, considering how specialised she otherwise was – but they'd been young and naïve enough to not start looking for fuel until they were down to the reserve tanks, believing that they still had plenty of fuel left.

"I don't like this," Shachi admitted, staring at the display panels in the control room. All four of them were gathered there, not quite comfortable with their current situation as the dials claimed they were down to less than an eighth of a single tank. In an ideal world, they'd have resorted to sailing long ago, manoeuvring her bulk the traditional way until they found enough fuel to start the engines going again.

Doflamingo had unhelpfully decided to be in the same area as them, and Law's pink flamingo-induced paranoia had overridden his running low on fuel paranoia, so they'd taken in the sail and dived, regretfully igniting the engines to escape.

"He won't linger long," Penguin said hopefully, looking at Law, who shrugged helplessly.

"Keep the engines on minimum power," the youngest ordered. "We'll let the currents carry us, just use the fuel to keep our vital systems running. Bepo, chart where it takes us so you can get us to an island once we resurface."

"Aye, Captain!" the mink agreed eagerly, already surrounded by maps and his paws covered in ink, which smeared onto everything he touched. The maps seemed unintelligible to the humans, inky black smudges covering the lines between land and sea, but Bepo didn't seem perturbed by his additions to the cartography. "We're here," he explained, adding another splotch of ink to the map as he nudged the spot in question. The other three leaned in, unable to tell for themselves and trusting that the mink was right. "The current seems to be heading this way so far," he continued, dragging the claw along the parchment, leaving a black streak.

"There aren't many islands that way," Penguin commented dubiously. "If the current takes us past that cluster," he pointed to a small group of islands almost but not quite on their route, "we're going to be sailing for a long time."

"We should be able to surface there," Law said. "If we come up just past them and backtrack, it'll take a little more fuel but we'll be able to avoid Doflamingo. He wasn't heading this way from what I
saw, so coming up the other side of the islands should keep us out of sight."

"Do we have enough fuel for that?" Shachi asked, unconvinced, as he glanced back at the gauges again. He couldn't read the exact level from where he was, but it was worryingly low.

"Yes," Law said, sounding about as certain as Shachi had been. "We might need to cut power everywhere except this room," he added, thinking out loud. "But we have enough."

No-one bothered to ask if they knew how to isolate a single room. They all knew they didn't.

"It'll be fine," Bepo said, his grin almost genuine, and they smiled weakly. It was a testament to the fear Doflamingo instilled in their captain, and by association the rest of them, that running out of fuel underwater was still their preferred doom.

Two hours later, with their fuel gauge now firmly at the bottom end of the red, Shachi ventured out of the control room to make sure all the lights were turned off in all the other rooms, and anything else that was taking unnecessary power. A painful order from Law had him shutting down even the machines in the infirmary, and as he carefully picked his way through the darkness back to the control room, the external lights flickered off.

"Where are we?" he asked Bepo as he re-entered the room to find even the control room's lights had been dimmed as much as possible.

"An hour away from the islands," Law replied for him, having clearly just asked the same question himself, and Shachi breathed a shaky sigh before collapsing into a chair. It let out an oof, but Penguin didn't push him off. Opposite them, the other side of the table, Law was covered in ink and nestled on Bepo's lap. For once, he wasn't protesting at the mess. "This current is staying steady." There was nothing left to say, so Shachi slouched back against the taller boy, whose arms loosely wrapped around him while a chin found rest on his left shoulder.

It was going to be a long hour.

Or so they thought.

If the external lights had still been on, they might have had some warning. As it was, there wasn't even a flicker outside the sole, dark, window in the room before the Tang lurched wildly. A high-pitched wail started up as they were flung to the floor, caught off balance. Something shattered.

"I thought we turned that off!" Penguin shouted above the wailing, flapping a hand towards the red light now flashing away urgently on the control panel.

"Priorities!" Law snapped back, already fumbling his way forwards to slap the external light controls. Shachi shrieked.

Suddenly illuminated outside the singular window was a row of gleaming teeth, each one easily larger than any of the pirates. As they moved, heading forwards towards the prow of the Tang, scales glinted in the light, and a large eye passed right by the window.

"S-s-sea King!" Bepo screamed, throwing himself back, away from the window.

"Why now?" Shachi lamented, scrambling towards the control panel himself. "Weapons, weapons, weap-ah!" The Tang lurched again, jostling him sideways into Law, who toppled to the floor. "Law!"

"Weapons are offline!" Penguin shouted from where he had managed to cling to the section of the
panel that controlled the engine power. "Fuel is almost zero. If we turn the weapons on we won't be able to surface!"

"We won't be able to surface if we're dead!" Shachi yelled right back, slamming a fist on the power button. "Come on, come on, come on!" he muttered as the systems started to re-engage. "Come on, come on, come o- no! No, no, no, no!" he screamed as the lights flickered and died. "No, dammit, come on! You can do it, please, come on!"

The external lights flickered once and died, followed shortly by the ones in the control room itself, plunging them into almost total darkness. The faint glow from the control panel, the sonar screaming now-silently as it declared the threat circling them.

"What do we do?" Bepo cried. "Captain?"

Law was silent for several long moments, fingers dancing over the controls as if he could coax some response, any response from them. The fuel gauge declared total emptiness, completely drained by the attempt to turn on the weapons, and slowly the background hum of the Tang faded away to nothing.

"I don't know," he said finally, and for once sounded his age – a scared young teenager trapped as death raced towards them - in the unnatural silence. "I… I don't know."

"There has to be something!" Penguin exclaimed frantically, joining his captain in flicking controls. "Something, please, please."

The Tang lurched again, sending them all toppling to the floor in one giant heap, and they clung to each other, each of them trying to use the darkness to hide the way they were sobbing in terror.

"Please!"

None of them knew which of them said the final plea out loud, maybe it had been all of them, but as if it were a cue, a familiar roar sounded.

The roar of the Polar Tang's engines coming to life.

None of the lights came back on, and in reality it was less of a roar and more of a dying splutter, but the stuttering hum beneath their feet was unmistakable, and they all looked up at the panel as one, just in time to see the lights signifying the weapons were active flicker weakly on.

The sonar shrieked, the sound once again on, as the shape denoting the sea king hurtled towards them, and before any of them could move, could comprehend what was happening, the Tang moved.

It was a lurch, but this time there was no shuddering impact to go alongside it – a fact only noticed in its absence. It felt more like a roll, the sort of movement they did when dealing with a sea king attack with plenty of engine power to spare.

The controls moved, just a little but enough that it couldn't be explained away as a trick of the half-light, and the Tang lurched back the other way just as the sonar reported the sea king passing over their heads.

Bepo was the first to react, pulling himself out of the pile of pirates on the floor to run to the panel, where the gauges still said there was no fuel despite the way the Tang's engines were humming and her weapons system was somehow online. He grabbed the moving controls, glancing at the sonar and steering the Tang as if she had a full fuel of tank, away from the next attack.
The impossibility of the situation could wait. Shachi was next to surge to his feet, throwing himself to the weapons and firing off at the sea king as it lurched towards them again. True to form, as a World Government standard ship, the blast was powerful enough to knock the sea king a long way down, into the depths.

They didn't wait for it to come back, Law and Penguin now joining them at the control panel as the Tang roared painfully, accelerating and peeling away from the current she'd been riding to head for the surface.

Doflamingo was long-forgotten as they broke the waves, the action feeling like a triumphant leap from the water even though in reality it was little more than a final splutter before the Tang's engines went silent, all of the controls turning off and locking up as whatever mysterious energy that had powered her disappeared, leaving her a drained husk.

"We… we're alive," Shachi panted, flopping over the dead control panel limply. Beside him, Penguin was shaking in disbelieving laughter. "We're… how?"

"Raise the sail," Law said automatically, looking around blankly. "Bepo, where are we?" The mink scrambled to pick up his map and carry it over to the window, where daylight was streaming in. The map was covered in black ink, and he frowned at it for several long seconds before his ears flattened in defeat.

"The map's ruined, I'm sorry," he mumbled, following Law as he decided to leave the still-dark control room and head for the main door. Somehow, despite the Polar Tang being completely offline, the main door slid open jerkily to let him out on the deck.

"Don't worry about it," Law said absently and Penguin and Shachi wandered past, still dazed, to raise the sail.

It was only once the sail was up, the white fabric catching the breeze and slowly pushing the submarine to glide along the surface of the water, that Law let himself sink to the decking, head in his hands. The others congregated around him, all in equal states of shock.

"How did she do that?" Penguin asked, his voice cracking. "She was empty – is empty. How..?"

No-one had an answer for him, shaking with relief and the fading dregs of adrenaline as they flopped back on the deck. Somehow, the Polar Tang had done the impossible and snatched them from the jaws of death. None of them knew how.

"You're amazing," Shachi said, running a hand along the damp wood. The ship remained silent, save for the wind in her sail and the waves lapping at her side, but he just smiled.

"We'll get fuel at the next island," Law said, and it wasn't a wish, it was fact. No matter what it took, they'd fill the Tang to the brim with fuel so she never had to do that – whatever "that" had been – again.

"Best ship ever," Bepo added, his fur still stained with ink that was rubbing off on the deck as he lay there. "Thank you."

She bobbed just a little bit more vigorously over the next wave.

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 200? What is this sorcery?

Crazy chapter numbers aside, I have a lot of ideas about klabautermanns and the ships in general, which in this case boils down to "if Merry can sail with a broken keel and no-one on board, why can't the Tang run on no fuel with her nakama on board?" Running on fumes is a viable thing for engines anyway (I've driven a car on fumes before, nerve-wracking but possible). I still have more ideas, so I'm sure the Tang will be making more appearances later on.
Bepo took to navigation like he'd been born to it. As far as the other Heart Pirates knew, he may as well have been. While a compass had taken him a day to understand the concept, and a week to master, he didn't need them to know which way was which, and consequently where they should be heading.

What he couldn't do was draw a map. It was hardly a requirement for a navigator to also be a cartographer, but it was useful and Bepo despaired at his inability. Maps could only be bought (or otherwise obtained) from certain places, and in the grand scheme of things they covered very little of the seas. None of the other three could draw a map, either, despite the fact that they, too, could read maps with little trouble and (more importantly, in Bepo's opinion) had hands that could hold a pen properly.

Paws were not designed to hold pens. Bepo couldn't even make a fist with his paws – at least, not in the human idea of a 'fist' – let alone keep a grip on something as small and slippery as a pen. It was frustrating, because unlike his nakama he understood how maps were constructed, but for all their skills with a pen, no matter how much Bepo tried to describe to them what he wanted, they could never get it right.

It disappointed them, too. He could see it in the slump of their shoulders when he shook his head with a mumbled sorry, only for them to mumble sorry back and that wasn't right because his nakama didn't apologise like that – not as if they were a disappointment. They wanted to help him make the maps, so he could chart where they were and where they had been, but their individual skillsets couldn't come together in the necessary way.

Bepo didn't find a solution for well over a year after they set sail. Law had ended up banning him from touching pens eventually, after he continuously sprained his paw trying to force it into unnatural positions.

"You'll cripple yourself," he'd said firmly, taking the pen away from a crooked paw and gently rubbing some sort of balm in before lightly wrapping bandages around it. "No more pens." His response had been to cry, tears of frustration soaking into his fur uncomfortably as an uncertain Law continued to treat him.

"We'll find something that works!" Shachi had said confidently, before wilting under Law's withering gaze.

"Something that doesn't mean you hurt yourself in the process,” Penguin had clarified, appeasing their doctor, who let go of the bandaged paw with clear reluctance.
The answer, in the end, had been almost laughably simple. Bepo couldn't hold a pen, but his paws were steady and he'd often shown routes on already-existing maps with a single claw dragging along the parchment.

Just because he couldn't hold a pen, didn't mean he couldn't use ink.

A small pot of black ink caught his eye one time he left the Tang – for once not on guard duty, because he'd begged Law to let him out on land, and with a hat jammed on his head to hide his race from casual observers he followed his captain around the marketplace.

In a corner, there was a calligraphy stall. The man sat, cross-legged, with parchment in front of him and a brush in his hand, and Bepo watched, mesmerised, as he dipped it in a pot of ink before sweeping strokes left clear black lines in their wake.

He didn't even stop to think, grabbing Law by the hand and dragging him over to take a closer look. His captain had protested, but wasn't strong enough to break free. Not that he protested for long, once he realised what had caught Bepo's attention so avidly.

"Could I do that?" the mink asked him quietly, and Law's lips pulled into an appreciative grin as he surveyed the artist with a gleam in his eye.

"Jii-san," he said, catching the man's attention. He probably wasn't that old, but Bepo wasn't one to question his captain's sparse attempts at manners. "Are you selling any ink?" The man frowned, glancing not so subtly towards his completed works on one side, and Law's smile hardened.

"No," he said, and Bepo watched Law's back straighten. If he'd had fur, the mink was certain his hackles would have raised. "Is what I'd normally say," he continued, "because kids usually want it for making a mess." His gaze landed on Bepo, and the mink squirmed uncomfortably. "You're the one that wants it, right? Come here."

Law tensed further, a hand reaching out to stop Bepo, but Bepo smelt no ill intent from the man, so he nudged past his captain. He jumped when a small vial of ink was pressed into his palm, almost giving the man a shock in the process.

"Thank you," Bepo said, when he realised what the man was doing, and the man shook his head with a wry smile.

"You won't be thanking me later, when you're trying to get that ink out of your fur," he said in amusement. "Now, I'm not in the business of taking money from kids, so you two run back to your ship before I decide to make my money by telling people there's a mink on this island."

Law bristled, but Bepo couldn't hear any malice in the man's voice, so he grabbed his captain's arm once more and began to haul him back to the Tang, where Penguin and Shachi were messing around on deck instead of keeping watch obediently.

"What you got there, Bepo?" Shachi asked after a moment, spotting the small container in his paw, and Bepo showed it to him.

"I'm going to draw a map!" he said and all but ran into the Tang to find some parchment. He couldn't find anything new, so he picked up one of the maps his nakama had tried and failed to draw to his specifications and flipped it over. Tip of his tongue between his teeth, he pulled the stopper from the ink pot and dipped the claw he usually used to trace routes in, coating it with the cool liquid. Paw shaking, he touched it to the paper, wincing as ink dripped off before he was ready, leaving a black spotted trail up to the start of his lines.
What he made hardly classified as a map. The lines were too thick in some places and barely there in others, and he'd ripped the parchment in more than one place when he'd added too much pressure, but Bepo couldn't help gleaming widely at the sight of the amalgamation of lines he'd produced.

He needed practice, but finally, he'd found a way to draw his own maps.

Chapter End Notes

So we know that Bepo's no Nami when it comes to drawing maps, but considering his paws (which are not as flexible as some other minks', such as Carrot or Wanda), the fact that he can write and draw at all is pretty amazing. There's no way he can actually hold a pen, after all.

And not everyone is mean to poor orphaned kids. They get a break sometimes!
Law's ability to sniff out the first whiff of an illness in the crew was legendary within the Heart Pirates. No matter how much they tried to hide it, within an hour of the first symptoms he would be there (and that was if he was distracted elsewhere and they were attempting to hide it). They weren't sure how he did it – surely he wasn't constantly Scanning them, he didn't have the stamina for that – but, somehow, he was always there.

According to Penguin and Shachi, that had always been the case. Law hadn't been particularly friendly to them to begin with, but despite that he'd always ended up hounding them into the infirmary – which grew over time from the basic room of a World Government ship to the complex state of the art room.

Travelling in a fishing boat only meant for short day trips for a solid week had done none of them any good. Law was weakened by his mysterious illness and the water that constantly splashed into the rickety boat, while Penguin and Shachi couldn't shake the onset of colds from their early dunkings. Bepo fared the best, although he couldn't hide his own misery at his damp fur either.

Gaining their own ship was a blessing. In addition to being a submarine – Law's reason for aiming for her specifically – she was well equipped with plenty of indoor space, heating and vital requirements. After their dramatic departure, Law left to explore the ship only to triumphantly return several minutes later, clutching clean clothes. They had the World Government's insignia on them, but while he clearly disapproved, Law made quick work of the two older boys.

Their waterlogged clothes – never quite dry despite their best efforts – were stripped from them by the determined thirteen year old to cries of annoyance, before warm and fluffy towels were dumped on their laps. The boy followed it up by pointedly leaving the clean clothes beside them. They were too big – designed for men, not teenagers – but they were dry.

Unfortunately, the warm towels and fresh clothes were too little, too late.

Law maintained that Shachi was the first to succumb, although the ginger claimed that he and Penguin had felt the full force of the consequences simultaneously. Regardless, Shachi became the first patient in the Polar Tang's infirmary. He squirmed and fought Law as the younger boy attempted to drag him in, his protests about his well being drowned out and contradicted by the alternative coughs and sneezes he was producing.

Penguin went somewhat more quietly, still attempting to escape but resigned after watching Shachi get subdued so easily by Law (who had enlisted Bepo's help, and the mink was scrawny but strong). He didn't like the infirmary – neither of them did. Not after the cold blooded murders they'd committed in that room, in those beds. Still, Law refused to take no for an answer.
None of the children wanted to think about why the beds had restraints built in (and in time those ended up removed), but Law saw the opportunity to keep the two older boys in his crew securely in the infirmary while they shook off the illnesses. Their attempts at claiming perfect health would have been amusing, if Law was in the mood to be amused.

He was more interested in making sure they didn't end up dying from the dunkings, that first time he used the Polar Tang’s infirmary. It took another week for them to shake the remnants of the illnesses completely, during which Law never once fell for their attempts to lie about their condition.

_Uncanny_, Shachi said loudly. Law just told him to be a better patient and get some rest.
It did not take the young pirates long to realise that entrusting Law with cooking anything edible was not a good idea. The younger boy swore he could cook, and while they supposed that technically the charred stuff piled on the plate was edible, it was hardly palatable (after finding out about Cora-san and how Law had had to cook for them both, they marvelled at the man's taste buds).

Law was promptly banned from the kitchen, to his derision. Neither Penguin nor Shachi could claim to be competent cooks, but as they pointed out, at least they didn't burn everything. Fish-based foods were easy enough to prepare for the pair, who had spent several years learning to fish and the various uses that could be gained from a fish as children. What they served up – primarily done by Shachi, who was voted as the least worst cook – tended to be fish-centric with little accompanying ingredients, at least to begin with.

A balanced diet was important, so once they found the Polar Tang and discovered her kitchen was stocked up with various foods, Law began to sort through until he found things to go with Shachi's latest fish concoction.

It was safe to say that, in those early days, meal times were merely a necessity rather than an enjoyable part of the day. Out of necessity, Shachi's meals improved over time with Penguin, and even Bepo, chipping in to help out and learn a few tricks themselves. Shachi got knocked around a lot, both in training and real fights, relying on him to be in a state to cook every day was foolish.

It took them ten years before a cook joined their crew. Time had necessitated improvement, but having an actual cook on board was a blessing they had never had a chance to take advantage of before. No more did one of them have to dart off to prepare the meals when the Tang's engines needed a clean, or any other immediate requirement of the submarine came to light. With a designated cook, their meals could finally work around their schedule.

There was one thing that remained Shachi's domain. While cooking was not his forte, he both loved and was good at making hot chocolate. Law and Bepo never asked how he had learned to make the drink that ended up an addiction for half the crew, and Penguin had had the same lessons, only had never been able to get the mixture quite right. Their new cook knew how to make hot chocolate, but that was a responsibility Shachi was not quite ready to give up.

It was still nice to not have to make it on occasion, however. Days when he was the one down and in need of a pick me up, the cook would make one for him (Shachi maintained it was the best hot chocolate, despite the rest of the crew saying his was the best, but Penguin suspected the fact that he wasn't the one making it had a lot to do with that). Nursing the mug in his hands, it almost never failed to cheer him up.
Hot chocolate aside, however, bequeathing the cooking responsibilities to someone who could actually cook was a great relief to the Heart Pirates, despite ten years of fending for themselves.

Chapter End Notes

Well they had to feed themselves somehow. I know Law cooked at least some of the time when he was with Cora-san, but considering the alternative was burnt fingers minimum, I don't think that means he was any good. It was just safer.
No-one was infallible. Law gave off the impression that he was, but Shachi knew better. Much better. While his Rooms were active, he really was the omniscient being he portrayed (within the scope of his devil fruit's range, anyway), but the rest of the time? Not so much. Despite his demeanour, Law's speciality was not Observation, so it wasn't impossible to pull the wool over his eyes, if someone was sneaky enough.

That wasn't to say deceiving Law was easy. He was naturally suspicious and mistrustful, a level of paranoia reasonably healthy for a pirate of his reputation, so anything he noticed would immediately be assessed for threat levels and treated accordingly.

Sadly, that required Law to notice such things, and while he managed to do so most of the time, there were occasions when someone was sneaky enough to avoid detection. That woman that had slipped something in Law's drink somehow after he'd Scanned it seemed to have managed it, to Shachi's annoyance.

Still, it wasn't like Law was alone in keeping an eye out for threats. While he didn't specialise in Observation Haki, Shachi did, and was all too willing to use it in situations like this, where half the crew had descended upon the bar. The hustle and bustle of so many people made it easy for experienced people to cause damage, and there was no way Shachi was letting anyone hurt any of his nakama.

Law hadn't touched his drink, and part of Shachi wondered if he hadn't missed the woman's action. As he was in conversation with Clione, however, that wasn't a risk Shachi was going to take. The woman in question hadn't left the bar, although she was now laughing and flirting with a group of men the other side of the room, not looking their way once, and Shachi forced himself not to scowl. She was a professional, whatever it was she'd done. With his captain having such a large bounty on his head nowadays, there was little doubt that he was the real target.

Alerting her to the fact that her little action hadn't gone unnoticed would be no good. She'd disappear before any of them could get close, and then they wouldn't know if she was working independently, or if there was a whole gang of them gathered around to try and get hold of Law. Shachi wouldn't have been surprised if the group she was flirting with were her cohorts.

Warning Law was therefore out of the question, and Shachi swallowed back a sigh. There were, technically, several things he could do, but without knowing who they were up against, what their goal was, and even what it was they'd tried to slip Law, Shachi wasn't confident about using any of them, leaving him with a single choice that he knew was going to get him in trouble later.
"Hey." He nudged Uni, who was perched on a stool next to him, with calculated clumsiness. He hadn't had much to drink, so he couldn't pretend to be all out drunk, but there was a certain level of tipsiness that could realistically be feigned. Uni glanced down at him, and Shachi was pleased when he didn't let on that there was no way he should be acting like that when he was only on his second pint.

"You okay?" Uni mumbled, mouth hidden as always by that cloth, and voice low enough to be easily lost in the overall hubbub.

Shachi shrugged and laughed, as if he'd said something funny, before resting his head against the taller man's arm. The position just happened to hide his own mouth from the woman, if she turned around. He didn't trust the bartender either, so he couldn't talk plainly, but Uni wasn't stupid. Considering the only plan Shachi's brain had come up with in the time he had, he was glad for that.

"I'm about to do something really stupid," he admitted, grinning conspiratorially just in case there were unfriendly eyes close enough to read his lips. Uni rolled his eyes as if he was talking nonsense, but pressed up against his side, Shachi felt the tensing of his muscles hidden underneath the thick clothes.

"You could at least try to be careful," he said in a tone that plainly said he wasn't expecting to be listened to, and Shachi grinned at him again before slinking – the occasional misstep to continue the suggestion that what little alcohol he'd had was getting to him – over to Law, sparing a moment to be thankful that Penguin was on guard duty at the Tang, and not there to witness what he was about to do.

His captain was reaching for the drink, cradling it in his hands as he continued his conversation, and the thought crossed Shachi's mind again that maybe Law knew, but he wasn't leaving it to chance. Normally, if Law knew something wasn't right, he'd get a signal to Shachi somehow because he knew the ginger would notice anything he did. There had been no such signal, so Shachi proceeded.

"Snooze you lose!" he proclaimed, sweeping the tankard out of his captain's grip and sending one last glance over at Uni, out of the corner of his eye where his shades didn't quite cover the movement if the person was sat in the right place to see it. Shachi had made sure to face the right direction to put Uni – the one he'd prewarned and therefore the one that knew how drunk Shachi wasn't – in that spot. Deliberately, he flicked his eyes towards the woman in question, and the final pieces in the puzzle clearly started to assemble themselves in Uni's brain.

"Shachi!" Law protested, sounding annoyed as he reached for his drink, but Shachi didn't know what was in it, and there was no way he was letting Law drink whatever it was, so he tipped his head back and downed it all.

It was a huge gamble. If it had been a poison, drinking that quantity would probably kill him on the spot. Shachi didn't think it would, though. Straight up killing Law in the middle of a crowd of his nakama wouldn't help anyone. The Heart Pirates would tear the place apart looking for the culprit, and the Marines needed a body before they'd give out the bounty. There would be no claiming the body in those circumstances. His assessment told him it was likely something slower-acting than that, or even something simple to separate him from his nakama for a while.

He hoped he was right as he set down the tankard with a large grin at Law, whose face was torn between annoyance and dawning horror. His grin widened as his vision started to go foggy, and then there were hands gripping his arms, keeping him from collapsing. Clione, his quickly fading haki reported alongside the fact that Uni had started to slip towards the woman and her companions. The taller man had got the message perfectly.
"Shachi!" Law said again, now less annoyed and more worried, but Shachi simply slipped back against Clione's chest until that was the only thing supporting him. The darkness was encroaching rapidly and Shachi hoped it was just a potent sleeping drug as his eyes slipped closed, Law the last thing he saw.

_Better me than you_, he thought, and then there was nothing.

Chapter End Notes

It is possible to fool Law sometimes, so some backup never hurts. I can't say Shachi's solution was smart, though. He is used to infiltration ad doing things undercover (in my 'verse, anyway) thanks to years of gathering intel on Doflamingo, however.
Drink

Chapter Notes

Characters: Law, Shachi, Penguin
Rating: Gen
Warnings: Alcohol
Tags: Protective!Law, Nakamaship, Protective!Shachi

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Law realised something was wrong when he caught a glimpse of Shachi's teasing grin. He'd been on the receiving end of it long enough to know when it was fake, and the grin Shachi flashed him as he downed the drink he'd just swiped was definitely an act. Law had Scanned his drink subtly the moment he'd got it; it had been exactly as it should have been – a simple pint of cider – and he hadn't thought anyone had got close enough to him to tamper with it since then.

Shachi didn't even like the particular cider Law had ordered that day, though, and those two facts combined led to the realisation that the ginger didn't think it was safe for him to drink, and had taken matters firmly into his own hands to make sure he didn't.

Clione caught him as he stumbled backwards, and Law hadn't been paying that much attention but he was sure Shachi shouldn't have been drunk yet. Then Shachi went completely limp, and all doubts fled as he scrambled off his stool to help Clione lie him on the floor.

"Shachi!" someone else exclaimed, and the entire crew present in the pub abandoned their own drinks and conversations to cluster around. Law was about to send them away, instruct them to find whoever it was responsible for the spiked drink, when a ruckus kicked off the other end of the room. Looking over, he saw Uni grabbing a woman in a headlock, as her male companions drew weapons. It didn't take a genius to work things out from there.

Shachi had been sat next to Uni. Clearly, he'd managed to pass on the information before pulling his stupid stunt, and Law wasted no time in directing his crew to help Uni subdue the crowd. Only Clione stayed with him as he returned his attention to his unconscious nakama. He'd have loved nothing more than to lead the crew in restraining the perpetrators, but he didn't know what had been in the drink and what it was doing to Shachi.

"Why didn't you just knock the damn thing over?" he demanded of the ginger as he summoned a Room, searching for the invasive substance. "What the hell possessed you to drink it?" Predictably, Shachi didn't answer. Law found the drug and frowned. He didn't recognise it, but it didn't seem to have done anything beyond knocking Shachi out, which meant that it was either some form of sleeping drug, or very slow acting. Either meant it was safe to get him back to the Tang, so he turned to Clione.

"I'll stay with him," the smaller man reassured him before he could even open his mouth and Law nodded sharply before finding his feet. A small shick of a blade being drawn behind him as he walked away reassured him that Clione was not taking any threats lightly. They'd be fine.

His crew had been successful in their endeavour, and by the time he reached the commotion, all of
the perpetrators were face-down on the ground in submission holds, their weapons neatly piled out of reach. He crouched down in front of the woman Uni was still holding.

"What did you use?" he asked her, only to get snarled at as she strained against Uni's grip to no avail. He let a grin paint his face, even though mirth was the furthest thing from his mind. "We can do this the easy way or the hard way," he told her, and she spat.

"Go to hell! Damn pirates, scum of the sea! I hope he dies, I hope you all die!"

Maintaining the grin was difficult, but somehow Law held it because the alternative was showing how much she'd scared him with those words. He'd thought the drug wasn't likely to be a problem, but now he was second-guessing himself and torn between finishing off the group now and turning tail back to Shachi so he could treat him properly, now.

"He won't die," Uni cut in, slamming her face into the floor. He sounded certain, and Law envied his faith. "He's not alone."

"What's that got to do with anything?" the woman managed around a mouthful of splinters, but the words hadn't been meant for her in the first place, and Law let himself relax again. Of course, Clione was with him. If something wasn't right, he'd alert them straight away.

"I won't ask again," he said instead, summoning his Room and picking up a knife. Her eyes opened wide, but she didn't say anything so with a single slash he took off all her fingers. She shrieked, although Law knew from experience that the action wasn't accompanied by any pain. He supposed the shock of seeing your fingers part company with your hand could be reasonably intense, though.

"Just a sleeping drug!" she garbled. "I don't know why he collapsed! It shouldn't have taken effect that fast!" Law didn't like the sound of that one bit, his mind automatically springing to the idea of an overdose. The desire to get the hell out of there and return to the Tang now rose its head again.

"How long should it have taken?" he managed to ask instead, quelling the instinct for the moment.

"An hour!" she admitted, her eyes fixed firmly on the knife in his hand. Law was almost disappointed she was talking so easily. "It should have built up gradually!"

They'd been trying to get him weakened slowly enough that he wouldn't notice until it was too late, had they? Law frowned; he needed to break his habit of drinking his way through a pint slowly, if that was what they'd been aiming for. If Shachi hadn't interrupted, then it might have worked, and that was an idea that didn't sit well with Law at all.

"Finish up here," he told his crew, straightening back up. There was so much more he needed to get out of them, but overdoses could be serious and he was the best suited to dealing with them. His crew knew enough about gathering information to know what sorts of questions to ask. He returned to Shachi's side, where Clione reported no change in his condition, and pulled the ginger over his shoulder.

Shachi didn't react to being moved, not that Law had expected him to, and he headed back to the Tang with Clione.

"Shachi!" Penguin exploded as they boarded, sprinting over to them. Clione peeled away to man Penguin's post as the older man promptly stuck himself like glue to Law's side. "What happened?"

"Someone spiked my drink," Law told him, shifting Shachi until the ginger was now bundled up in his arms, where he could see his face. There was no change. "This idiot decided drinking it was a good idea."
Penguin groaned, reaching out and taking Shachi's hat off his head. The ginger always seemed smaller without it.

"Why didn't he just knock it over?" he lamented rhetorically.

"I plan on asking," Law assured him as they finally entered the large room. "It appears to just be a sleeping drug, luckily, although it wasn't tailored to be drunk in one go." He set Shachi down on a bed, watching the ginger's head loll slightly to the side on the pillow, and plucked the shades from his face.

"So, are you taking it out or letting him sleep it off?" Penguin asked, his tone clearly showing which direction he would have picked. Law summoned a Room in answer.

"It's acting like an overdose," he said. "He can probably sleep it off, but I'm not patient enough to wait." Penguin made a noise of acknowledgement and sat on the edge of the bed, watching Law as he got to work.

It wasn't a difficult extraction. The sleeping drug had been exactly that, not even causing any other damage to Shachi's body. After the various poisons Law had been extracting from his nakama over the years, it was almost easy. Once he was done, he put Shachi's shades back on his face and jostled him.

"Wake up," he ordered, Penguin assisting by way of several pokes to Shachi's side, and the ginger groaned, swatting at Penguin's finger.

"Tired," he complained.

"I'm not surprised," Law replied scathingly. "Idiocy is tiring, from what I've observed." He was glad to see him awake and acting normal, but he wanted to get to the bottom of Shachi's stupid decision before doing anything else.

"Idiocy?" Shachi parroted with a yawn. "What did I do this ti- oh."

"Oh," Penguin cut in, agreeing. "What the hell, Shachi?"

"Well, I was fairly sure it wasn't poison," the ginger shrugged. "So it probably wasn't going to do any harm, and I was right about that, so-"

"You could have just knocked it over," Law pointed out, and Shachi paused, clearly thinking hard.

"I… yeah… I had a reason for not doing that," he mused, pulling himself into a sitting position and resting his chin on his palm. "What was it..?"

"You'd had too much to drink?" Penguin suggested disapprovingly. Shachi flapped a hand at him.

"I was only on my second pint," he defended himself. "Oh yeah! Figured we should find out what they'd slipped you so we knew what they were after," he steamrollered on, drowning out Penguin's suspicious "of what?".

Law agreed with Penguin. Depending what Shachi had been drinking, two pints could have left him completely sober or teetering on the edge of drunk and not capable of rational decisions. He had to admit he didn't remember what the ginger had ordered, but Shachi's argument held no water at all when he knew who had been the culprit. It would have been simpler and safer just to question them from the start.
From the dawning look on Shachi's face, the realisation was sinking in at last.

"Okay, that wasn't my smartest moment," he admitted, slinking back down on the bed. "I'm just... just gonna go back to sleep now."

"Haven't you slept enough?" Penguin asked, amused, and Shachi sent him a withering look – the intent obvious even with the shades – before pulling the blanket over his head. Laughing, and therefore clearly no longer worried at all, Penguin stood. "I'll go tell the others," he said, and Law nodded, watching him leave the room.

Turning back to Shachi, he tugged the blanket back down, revealing the shock of ginger hair.

"What?" Shachi grumbled, resting his arms over his eyes, despite the fact he was also wearing his shades. "Yeah, sorry, I messed up. You'd already noticed it anyway, hadn't you?"

It was Law's turn to perch on the edge of the bed.

"I hadn't noticed at all," he admitted, finally able to say what he wanted to now he knew Shachi had just been a little too affected by the alcohol. "Thank you."

Shachi let his arms drop away from his face, one reaching up to muss Law's hair. Law caught the hand disapprovingly and placed it back on the bed.

"Always gonna watch your back," Shachi said. "I got you. Now can I go to sleep? I'm feeling a hangover approaching. That cider of yours was gross as always, by the way. How do you drink that stuff?"

Law ruffled his hair, only to get swatted at.

"Just sleep it off," he said. "And don't do that again."

Shachi muttered something under his breath as he rolled over, and Law hoped it hadn't been what it had sounded like.

Better me than you.

Chapter End Notes

Follow on from yesterday - it was noticed by some people that Shachi's decision was not the smartest one yesterday and now you know why he didn't do the obvious thing.
It was hardly the first time Uni had wished his Observation haki was a bit better… say… Shachi-level. Being able to actually detect things would be useful in just about any circumstances, but now he really wished he'd sensed whatever it was Shachi had sensed that had set him on his "I'm about to do something really stupid."

As it was, he'd been unable to do anything more than trust Shachi, keeping an eye on him and getting the message that the woman in the corner was bad news, and while he normally had no issues trusting the ginger (or any of his nakama), seeing him down a drink he hated – stolen from the captain, no less – before collapsing was not reassuring in the slightest.

Still, he had his job – the one Shachi had entrusted him with – and as the pieces of the puzzle slotted together to make a clearer picture, he couldn't really fault the ginger's attitude. Except for one thing, he decided as he overpowered the woman and stripped her weapons from her, conscious of his nakama now at his back. Did Shachi really have to knock back the drink? It would have been far safer to just knock it over, he was definitely capable of pretending to be that drunk.

Watching the captain worry his way through half an interrogation before giving up and leaving the rest of it to him, the seeds of guilt planted in his stomach began to grow.

He had been the one Shachi had told. Out of everyone, he was the one that knew what Shachi was planning, so he should have stopped him, or at least made him explain more, until he fully understood. And then stopped him, because drinking a spiked drink was stupid, and Law was far too worried for it to be a simple sleeping drug. The way Shachi didn't even stir as Law ran out of the room with him hardly boded well.

The rest of the interrogation passed in a flash – they were working alone, were just bounty hunters going after too-big fish – and Uni all but sprinted out of the room, his nakama hot on his tail. He had to see how Shachi was doing, if he was safe, or-

Or if Uni's incompetence had had disastrous consequences.

"Easy there!" Clione called as he almost overbalanced off the gang plank, and he looked up at his shorter nakama, who didn't seem overly worried. Uni's chest stopped constricting. That wasn't the face of a man with a dying nakama.

"One person in the infirmary is quite enough," Penguin scolded, and the words made the crushing start straight back up as Uni realised who the person in the infirmary was, until a hand clamped around his wrist and pulled him the rest of the way on board.

Penguin was smiling.
"How is he?" Uni asked, words garbled together because he had to know but at the same time didn't want to. "I'm sorry, he told me he was going to do something and I didn't stop him is he okay?"

"Breathe!" Penguin sighed, ruffling his hair and putting an arm around his shoulders in a one-armed hug. "The idiot's fine. Go see for yourself; Law's with him." Uni nodded and slipped out of the hold, making a beeline for the infirmary. "Oh, and Uni?" He paused, glancing back over his shoulder at Penguin. "No-one can stop Shachi when he gets an idea in his head. Don't worry about it."

Well, that was certainly true, but Uni couldn't fully shake the feeling that it would have been his fault if something bad had happened to Shachi.

Law was, just as Penguin had said, in the infirmary with Shachi. The ginger seemed to be asleep, and the captain was perched on a chair next to him, book in hand. He set the book down on the bed as Uni approached.

"He's fine," he said, before Uni could ask. "It was just a sleeping drug that he took too fast. It's all removed, and he's sleeping normally now."

"Sleeping again?" Uni asked. "How?"

"He claimed a hangover," Law replied, sounding amused. Uni pulled up a chair, laughing lightly. Shachi had been drinking some reasonably potent stuff, so that was hardly surprising.

"He told me what he was going to do," he admitted, watching his captain carefully for a response. "Not exactly, but I should have realised what he meant. I didn't think to stop him, and he ended up in danger."

"You can't control him," Law pointed out, echoing Penguin. "He was sure it wasn't poison, so his alcohol-addled brain decided it was safe to drink. There's nothing you could have done." That was true, Uni could concede. That didn't mean he liked it. "Yell at him when he wakes up," his captain continued. "He's already had it from me, and Penguin, but a third won't do him any harm."

Privately, Uni thought that if neither Law nor Penguin had made him repent, he wasn't going to have any luck. But he supposed it wouldn't hurt.
Shachi mistook the first flash for a trick of the light. There was no reason for a bright light to suddenly appear in the corner of his eye, so he figured he was probably imagining things. It wouldn't be the first time. The second was less easily dismissed, but it wasn't until the third that he realised maybe something was up – either with his eyes, or something really was flashing away on the horizon.

"Uh, Law?" he called, looking away and blinking furiously. Even through his shades the light was blindingly bright after he'd looked straight at it, and his eyes had begun to water in complaint. "Lots of flashy things on the horizon. Is that something to worry about?"

The younger teen looked up from where he'd been napping on Bepo – Shachi knew if he said that, Law would deny it and claim he'd been researching, but he hadn't turned a page in well over an hour.

"That's just lightning," he said, sounding unconcerned. "That's a storm over there."

The word storm did little to reassure Shachi. With a name to go with the phenomenon, it was vaguely familiar, but storms never boded well for anyone. Storms usually meant avalanches, and while he didn't think that would be happening in the open sea, he did then expect there to be some annoying side effect. He wasn't used to storms flashing like Bepo's electro, though.

Penguin cuffed him around the head and he turned to glower at him, rubbing at the abused spot.

"What was that for?" he complained, and Penguin rolled his eyes.

"If you didn't always sleep through every single one, you'd know what a thunderstorm is," he pointed out, and Shachi paused, thinking. "They normally hit Swallow Island at night, and you snore right on through."

"Huh," Shachi responded noncommittally. "Wait…" The memory of charred and destroyed boats in the harbour one morning sprung to mind. That had been a lot of work to repair. "Not the same things that wrecked all the boats?"

"Yup, those things," Penguin nodded, before what he'd said registered and he froze. "Uh… Law…" Their captain had evidently been listening to their conversation, because he was already halfway up the mast, tugging at the sail. "Law get down from there!" the oldest shouted, only to be given a middle finger.

"Don't tell me what to do!" the teenager shouted back, and Penguin and Shachi shared a single look
before lunging for the mast themselves. Law was not allowed up the mast. It was an old rule, established as soon as they realised he couldn't swim. If he fell, the only thing waiting for him would be a watery grave.

Consequently, he wasn't as sure footed as them, and they quickly caught up.

"What are you doing up here?" Penguin demanded, grabbing hold of the back of his top firmly.

"Furling the sail," Law replied, as if he wasn't a single misstep away from drowning. "Let go of me."

"I'll let go if you go back down," Penguin told him. "Shachi and I will deal with the sail."

"Don't tell me what to do!" Law repeated, and Shachi huffed, scampering past him to deal with the sail. Law's stubbornness was a nightmare; the only thing that would get him down would be if the sails were furled. Shachi hoped that meant they were about to dive. With those flashes – now occasionally visible as powerful bolts – heading their way, he thought he'd feel much safer under the water than on it.

Especially as their boat was made of metal.

Below him, he noticed Penguin finally lose his patience and pry Law away from the mast and over his shoulder. The smaller boy was visibly annoyed, but clearly knew better than to wriggle when Penguin was the only thing between him and a dunking.

"The agreement was, you do not climb the mast," Penguin was scolding as he descended, a surly captain over his shoulder. "You want that sail furled, you get me or Shachi to do it, remember?"

"I am perfectly capable of climbing a mast," Law retorted. If it wasn't for the approaching thunderstorm, Shachi would have been content to sit and watch the argument from the safety of the mast, but the sail needed furling and clearly he was doing it by himself now, which made the task needlessly complicated.

Still, he persevered, and landed back on the deck slightly more heavily than usual to interrupt the argument that was still going on. Bepo appeared to have made himself scarce, the smart mink.

"Sail furled and mast ready for diving," he reported loudly, overriding whatever Law was spitting out – he seemed rather like an affronted cat, Shachi observed idly. "Can we dive now, Captain? That's storm's getting closer."

Law's glare focused on him for a moment, before realising that Shachi hadn't been undermining his authority, but would very much like to be safely several hundred feet down before the lightning reached them, please.

"Get inside," their captain ordered, and Shachi was only too glad to obey, hurrying to the control room where Bepo was ready to send the Tang into a dive. "Bepo, take us down."

The sirens were a comforting sound as the Tang warned for imminent sealing of the doors, and Shachi wandered over to the window to watch as the waves rose until they were lapping at the glass.

Peace and quiet, however, was apparently too much to ask for, as Penguin and Law resumed their argument now they were safe from the lightning. Bepo looked like he wanted to flee, so with a theatrical sigh, Shachi wandered over to them.

"You're giving me a headache," he complained, interjecting himself between them. "The lights were bad enough, I don't need you adding to it."
He hadn't expected it to work as effectively as it did, striking the pair of them silent instantly as their argument died. Success!

The unexpected downside was when both grabbed his arms and all but dragged him to the infirmary, apparently taking the budding headache very seriously.

Well, he wasn't going to complain at the painkillers.

"Hey, Law," he muttered, trying to keep out of Penguin's hearing. Whether he was successful or Penguin was just being nice and pretending he couldn't hear, he didn't know. His captain made an interested noise. "You know Penguin was just worried, right?"

"I don't need anyone worrying over me," the younger boy retorted, but it lacked the bite of the earlier argument, as if even he didn't quite believe it.

Well, believe it or not, Penguin was always going to be a worrier, and Shachi couldn't deny his own budding protective streak for the kid.

Chapter End Notes

Storms are more common at the equator, and less so at the poles, so with my headcanon of Swallow Island being one of the more northern islands in the world, it follows that storms wouldn't be a frequent occurrence. And while Luffy and the other Straw Hats might dart all around the masts of the Sunny, it seems a little silly to me to put Devil Fruit users somewhere it's so easy to fall into the water from.
Adopt

Chapter Notes

Characters: Penguin, Law
Rating: Gen
Warnings: None
Tags: Family, Protective!Penguin

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Law was a peculiar kid, Penguin decided. It wasn't necessarily a bad thing, in fact his peculiarities largely worked in their favour – not having to find and pay for a doctor whenever someone got ill was definitely a blessing for their coffers – but there were some things that just stood out to Penguin as being downright odd.

For starters, while it had taken him a few months to get past enough of Law's barriers to see the tell-tale signs, he had all the makings of a big brother (and as a pseudo older brother himself, Penguin felt qualified to make that call). That by itself wasn't overly odd; while Penguin would admit his maturity levels seemed unusually high even for an older sibling, considering his age, being an older sibling required some sort of maturity. How else were they supposed to keep their younger siblings in check?

What made it odd was how lost he seemed. Penguin didn't know what had happened to whoever he'd been a big brother too, but they'd been separated somehow and Penguin knew enough people who'd lost someone precious permanently to recognise the slightly hollow look in his eyes. When Penguin had lost his parents, he'd turned first to Noona, and then made his own way in the world, supporting Shachi in the process because that was something he could still do.

Law didn't seem to have found any coping mechanism at all, aside from a prickly wall that Penguin was learning wasn't as impenetrable as it initially seemed. He hadn't tried to fill the role himself or allowed others to keep him steady, despite Penguin being an obvious potential older brother (or so he liked to think – Shachi hadn't turned out that badly, had he?). On the flip side, he hadn't picked up another younger brother, despite Bepo practically screaming that he was available for adoption (Bepo was quite clearly a younger brother through and through, and Penguin was succumbing to that truth himself slowly but surely).

Determined not to let Law flounder in a sea of uncertainty (and he was, no matter what he claimed), Penguin had started trying to do little things for him, so he could find his place in their crew, but so far he'd had little luck. Law was stubbornly remaining the captain, and just the captain, and drowning a little more each day.

If an attempt was obvious enough, Law reverted back into the prickly kid he'd been when they'd met him, and Penguin was getting fed up of being pushed away. It was as if the idea of someone wanting to look out for him scared the younger boy, and while Penguin didn't expect to get the story out of him, he wasn't going to let him keep running.

Shachi seemed to find the whole thing vaguely amusing, but Penguin was well versed in dealing with his stupidity and point blank ignored it, because at some point he had started to worry about the
kid they'd decided to follow, and if he was going to worry about someone, he was going to go the whole way and not just give up when they tried to out-stubborn him.

Penguin was stubborn too.

Chapter End Notes

Relationships aren't built in a day, especially when you're dealing with someone as emotionally scarred as Law, but some perseverance goes a long way.
Shachi stretched, yawning as wakefulness overtook him and rolling onto his back. His shades were gone, although he had no recollection of removing them himself, but he ignored that for the moment, keeping his eyes closed as he familiarised himself with his situation.

He was in the infirmary – yup, that matched with his memories. He’d ended up drugged into a deep sleep thanks to the drink Law was supposed to have drunk, and his nakama had dumped him in the infirmary to recover. He hadn’t bothered to leave the bed after he’d woken up, the early warning signs of a hangover starting to hammer softly at the back of his head, so he’d just gone back to sleep where he was.

The sleep it off tactic appeared to have worked. There was no throbbing in the back of his head to distract him, so the hangover had probably passed. He hadn’t drunk all that much, anyway, so it was only ever going to be a light hangover. Still, Shachi was glad to have missed it.

Speaking of missing things, he distinctly remembered Law being there when he fell asleep, but his captain’s unmistakable presence wasn’t in the room at all now. That was unusual – Law liked to be there when his nakama woke up. Penguin wasn’t there either, which was also odd. On the times Law wasn’t there, Penguin would always make sure to be around, although Shachi did remember him leaving before he fell asleep.

Instead, it seemed as though the designated presence for the day was Uni. The taller man didn’t often linger in the infirmary, preferring quick visits where possible, and while Shachi would never say he didn’t want Uni around – Uni was nakama, through and through – he wasn’t used to him sitting by his bedside, especially without anyone else.

"Hey," he said, despite the fact that Uni would have known he was conscious the moment he woke. "Pass my shades, would you?" Uni shifted, and Shachi held out his hand expectantly. The glasses didn't come.

Instead, a fist clenched itself in the neckline of his top and Shachi found himself bodily hauled into a sitting position by the hold before Uni's arms wrapped around his midsection tightly.

"Uni?" he asked, slightly concerned. Now that he focused, Uni's emotions didn't seem stable at all. "What's-" He was cut off by a tightening of the arms, restricting his breathing and leaving him gasping slightly.

"You scared me," Uni muttered, leaning down until his chin rested on Shachi's shoulder. It was a good thing Shachi was used to translating whatever Uni said from behind his cloth barrier, as the same neckerchief muffled his voice. "You… why didn't you tell me what you were going to do?"
"I," Shachi started, but paused as he realised he didn't have a valid reason. Before his grilling from Law and Penguin he might have tried to claim it, but after that it was clear he'd been a little too intoxicated to make calls.

"I'm sorry," Uni continued, as if he hadn't spoken, and Shachi was selfishly glad his nakama wasn't making him face his mistake again, although why Uni felt the need to apologise was beyond him. "I didn't make you clarify, so I didn't think to stop you. My negligence could have got you killed, I'm sorry."

Shachi hadn't even stopped to think about how his actions would have seemed to his nakama. He'd just made sure someone was around to pick up the pieces if things went wrong then merrily gone on with his plan.

His potentially suicidal plan, now he was sober and realised that his logic for why it couldn't have been poison was seriously flawed.

The idea that his chosen nakama would bear the guilt if the plan had gone seriously awry had never crossed his mind, but his current position, crushed against Uni's body as if the taller man feared he'd disappear if he let go, brought reality crashing down.

He knew, realistically, that there was nothing Uni could have done. Penguin and Law had both complained on multiple occasions about his stubbornness, and Uni didn't have what it took to out-stubborn him. Uni knew that too, but the situation had scared him into the what-ifs, and Shachi couldn't blame him for that.

He wrapped his arms around his nakama in turn, burying his face in the front of his shoulder and feeling Uni's cheek settle on the top of his head.

"I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking properly," he admitted, muffled against the familiar material of their uniform boiler suits. "None of it would have been your fault."

"I knew how much you'd had to drink," Uni argued. "I should have realised you weren't thinking straight and stopped you." Shachi shrugged as best he could in the other man's embrace. There wasn't really a reply for that, unless he wanted to open an entire debate, which neither of them needed.

"I'm okay," he mumbled eventually, just to fill the silence. The hold was tight, and he'd probably be bruising slightly later, but it was warm. Shachi was content to stay as he was for as long as Uni wanted, hiding his eyes from the light using Uni's shoulder. "You don't have to worry about me anymore."

Uni chuckled, and the noise sounded slightly damp, as if he'd been crying a little.

"Next time you tell me you're about to do something stupid, I won't let you go anywhere until you give me the entire plan," he said, and Shachi didn't doubt him. If he was honest with himself, the idea was even comforting.

Chapter End Notes

Another instalment to the **Defend, Drink and Guilt** series (chapters 204-206), because the idea wouldn't leave me alone.
In other news, I'm going to be going off on a dig on Sunday, so while I still intend on keeping up with the daily updates, depending on how exhausted I am and how good the wifi is where I'm staying the chapters may be a bit sporadic for the next two weeks.
It was often a surprise when people learnt of Law's preference for sweet things. For some reason, which he never understood – although judging from the cackling coming from a certain ginger's direction whenever it was brought up, Shachi could see why – everyone seemed to expect him to like things bitter.

His newest nakama would always, without fail, stare the first time he dumped a spoonful of sugar into his coffee, blinking as if they thought they were hallucinating. Once or twice, he'd even been presented with a mug of coffee, only to find it black and bitter, to his dismay. The face of his well-meaning nakama when he invariably either made his way over to the sugar and creamer or simply shambled them over would have been priceless, if it amused Law at all. It certainly amused Shachi, and more than once he wondered if the ginger was putting them up to it as some sort of prank.

"No!" Shachi had protested the one time he'd brought it up, sounding genuinely affronted. "What's the point in that?"

His own amusement, Law had decided against pointing out, instead letting it slide.

The strange notion extended further, to other things such as cakes. Grabbing a slice of gluten free cake piled high with icing never failed to earn him a surprised raised eyebrow from a new recruit, although why they'd think he didn't like cake was a mystery. As long as it was gluten free and therefore not about to try and kill him, Law liked cake.

"It's your attitude," Penguin finally explained to him, after yet another new nakama showed exaggerated surprise at his desire to put sugar and creamer in his coffee. Law frowned, resting his right cheek on his hand as he shifted the cake in his mouth into his left cheek in order to eat it properly. With his mouth full of food, he couldn't ask Penguin to clarify, but thankfully the man didn't need a verbal response to continue. "The whole "Surgeon of Death" thing you've got going on, for starters. Pretending a smirk's the closest thing you can get to a smile, or that you don't like fluffy things."

A meaningful glance at first Bepo and then Kikoku's hilt left Law under no illusions about Penguin being deceived by that particular mask.

"So what?" he asked, tonguing the cake firmly over so he could talk without spraying Penguin with food.

"Don't talk with your mouth full," Penguin scolded idly, and Law restrained himself from defying the order on principle just because it would have been a waste of cake. Also because Penguin was right, technically, as well as being one of very few people in the world Law would take
instructions from if he felt like it. Penguin had earned that respect over the last decade or so they'd been nakama.

He made a muffled noise instead, implying that Penguin should continue with his explanation.

"So, it's a general stereotype that the gloomy people – and you act it, don't even try denying it – don't like sugar." Law had made a sound of protest at being called gloomy. "So when people discover that not only do you like sugar in your coffee and cake, but also devour hot chocolate in seconds whenever Shachi makes it for you, it throws them for a loop."

Law wished Penguin hadn't mentioned the hot chocolate, because now he wanted some, but Shachi was on duty in the control room and no-one else made it as well as him. Changing the shift just so Shachi could make the drink was an abuse of authority – and Penguin was eyeing him in a way that said he knew exactly what he was thinking and wouldn't be letting Shachi off shift a second early.

Law resolved to get him to make it the moment he came off shift, then.

Penguin sighed and pushed another mug of coffee (just the right amount of sugar and creamer) his way. Law had barely noticed he'd finished the first, but wasted no time in making a start on the new one. He heard Penguin sigh in fond amusement.

"We spoil you far too much, " the older man muttered, not that he sounded as though he regretted it, to Law's ears.

"I'm your captain," he responded, and chose to ignore the roll of Penguin's eyes and accompanied spoilt brat mumbled under his breath.

Chapter End Notes

I see a lot of fics where Law has his coffee black, and while I can see why authors make that decision, I see him as having something of a sweet tooth at times. After all, he clearly had no issues with ice cream as a kid! That isn't to say he goes for everything sickly sweet, by any means. He'd just rather have a sweeter edge to his coffee, and some nice (gluten free) cake every once in a while. And all the hot chocolate, because hot chocolate is the best drink ever.
Uni fidgeted with his scarf, trying to ignore his shorter companion, who seemed far too enthusiastic about their current situation. It wasn't that he didn't like being able to go out on shore occasionally, escaping the confines of their submarine for a few hours, but it was only a supply run. Clione had no reason to be quite so hyped up. Although, he supposed he was still new to the crew, so maybe the weight of the responsibility hadn't registered yet.

A supply run with so few people meant that the captain wasn't planning on staying there any longer than necessary, which in turn implied that there was something fundamentally off with the island in question. Normally Penguin or Shachi would be in charge of the run in that situation, but for some reason, the captain had decided that Uni and Clione should be the ones to go today. The logic behind the decision hadn't been made known to any of them, as best he could figure, although neither Penguin nor Shachi had protested.

Either they were sick of the shore runs, or they were capable of reading their captain's mind and knew why they hadn't been sent this time. If it was anyone else in the crew, Uni would have automatically gone for the first one, but those two had never been heard complaining about it – never mind the fact that if there was anyone in the crew that could read the captain's mind, it was those two and Bepo. Regardless, that meant that it was him and Clione going incognito – all signs of piracy hidden under orders from a seemingly paranoid captain – into a bustling island town.

Uni found supply runs simultaneously boring and incredibly stressful. There was nothing fun or interesting about traipsing from stall to stall, picking up various items depending on what had been called out as they'd left the ship, although from the way Clione was bouncing around it seemed as though the sandy-haired man disagreed. Uni was certain he'd be changing his tune as soon as he realised how much they had to pick up and make sure they didn't forget. If they were in a hurry, as it seemed like they were – anything they forgot wouldn't be noticed until they were already on their way, with up to a week before another chance at getting it.

Uni could do without that pressure, thank you very much. Or at the very least, he could do with a nakama that shared it, as he grabbed the tip of Clione's hood to pull him along towards the sign proudly proclaiming fresh vegetables.

They never made it there.


The hood in his hand felt suddenly heavy, as though Clione was fighting against him – and he had been, but only half-heartedly, complaining that he was a spoil sport and that he could walk by
himself stop pulling – and Uni looked back at him, wondering what the problem was, because if there was trouble they needed to get out.

The problem was that he was supporting his entire nakama's weight; trouble had already found them.

"Clione!" he shouted, inadvertently loosening his hold until the smaller man collapsed onto the street before kneeling down beside him and rolling him onto his back. A patch of red bloomed on his chest, and his mind froze.

Clione had been shot. Clione was unconscious. Clione was bleeding.

Uni didn't know what to do.

More gunshots rang out, and he hunched over his nakama's still form, shielding him as he tried to take in the situation. Bullets were falling indiscriminately, hitting anyone unfortunate enough to be in their paths. Uni relaxed slightly at that – Clione had been unlucky, not a target.

But he had to get him out of there now, and the captain had said he was moving the Tang to an outcrop away from the town and that they were to meet them there once they were done with the shopping. That meant that they were far further away than normal. Hooking his arms under Clione's shoulders, Uni hauled him to a more sheltered spot, behind a stall knocked over in the panic, before fumbling in his pocket.

It took several long moments to register and accept the absence of a den den mushi. In the hurried situation with mooring and the captain's impatience to be moving, they'd clearly forgotten to pick up the small transponder they usually took on supply runs.

"Wake up!" he hissed urgently, shaking Clione's shoulders with far more vigour than he should have done. He needed Clione awake and on his feet so they could run for it. The captain would understand their lack of shopping, he was sure.

Clione wasn't waking up, and Uni didn't dare try to move him any further as he was. He didn't know how bad the injury was, didn't know if the bullet had gone all the way through or if it was still lodged in bone. Their nakama would eventually get wind of the chaos, but how long would that take? Was Clione's wound fatal?

He found himself gasping for breath, hands shaking uncontrollably. He'd thought the pressure of making sure they got everything they needed was stressful, but this was off the charts in comparison. He could fight, but what good would that do? All the stalls were broken and abandoned, so there was nothing to be gained there. He was outnumbered, and the chances of dodging all the bullets was slim to none.

Most importantly, that wouldn't help Clione. He had to stay with his nakama, had to save his nakama, but he didn't know what to do, flinching as the stall they were sheltering behind creaked alarmingly.

Stop the bleeding.

The voice sounded a bit like his captain, or maybe his mother. He wasn't even sure, but it was steady and confident so Uni obeyed unthinkingly, yanking his scarf away from his face and balling it up before pressing it to where the blood seemed to be coming from. He didn't know if it was the right place, but his trembling fingers pressed harder and harder. His vision was blurry, but Uni wasn't looking for reasons.

"Help," he sobbed, feeling less like a pirate and more like a scared child. He leaned over Clione's
Life wasn't a fairy tale. People didn't just miraculously appear because they were called, not when they were out of earshot. This was no different, screams and crazed laughter Uni's only reply as he huddled closer to Clione, resting their foreheads together and staring at the out of focus closed eyelids in front of him.

"Hey!" A hand landed on his shoulder gently and he jerked upright, scrambling backwards while trying to keep himself between Clione and the intruder. The man that looked back at him, hands held up as if dealing with a spooked animal, was young and fresh-faced. He offered a comforting smile that would have served its purpose far better if he hadn't been wearing the white and blue uniform of a low-ranking Marine. "It's okay," the man said, "I'm here to help. Your friend needs treatment, doesn't he?"

"No!" Uni snapped before he could think. A Marine – there was hardly anything that could have been worse! Marines didn't help pirates, Marines tricked and locked up pirates, although why they'd even bother with those steps when he hadn't even noticed him approaching was beyond Uni.

"Easy," the Marine said again. His hands were still raised. "My nakama are subduing the pirates; it's safe now. Let's get your friend some treatment, okay? He doesn't look too good."

Unable to help himself, Uni glanced back at Clione – too pale – and blinked. In everything that had happened, he'd forgotten that they'd been incognito. Trying to keep down and out of trouble, they'd forgone wearing their uniforms, leaving them in civilian clothes.

This Marine thought they were regular citizens.

Uni didn't want to accept help from a Marine. They were pirates – more than that, he'd been a Heart Pirate long enough to know that several of his nakama had personal reasons for hating Marines. But Clione wasn't waking up, their nakama didn't even know they were in trouble, and this Marine could be the ticket between life and death.

His heart screamed at him as he forced himself to relax, shifting backwards and lowering his defences as much as he could bring himself to do. It wasn't much, but hopefully the Marine was young and inexperienced enough not to notice.

The Marine smiled, finally lowering his hands, and Uni couldn't stop himself from tensing when he put a hand in his pocket. A baby den den mushi was withdrawn, and Uni considered changing tact, just taking down the Marine and stealing the den den mushi to get in contact with his own captain. That would be stupid, he scolded himself as the Marine spoke urgently, calling for a stretcher and a doctor. Marine den den mushis were probably all tapped and tracked. He'd end up giving away the Tang's own number at best, and completely revealing all of his nakama at worst. Besides, as much as the whole situation screamed wrong, the Marine doctor would reach them first.

"What are your names?" the Marine asked them, pocketing the den den mushi. Clearly the call was over.

Uni shook his head, unwilling to make up a name – lies always came back to haunt you in the end – but certainly never giving a Marine their real names. The Marine looked taken aback, but thankfully didn't press, changing tact instead.

"Do you live here?" Another shake of the head – another lie he couldn't tell – and Uni began to
dread the other questions. He couldn't say they'd arrived on a ship, or the Marines would look for the ship and their nakama. "Are you visiting someone? Are you with anyone else?"

He shook his head to both, although the second was more twisting the truth than anything. He was only with Clione on the island, but the rest of his nakama were offshore and waiting for them.

The arrival of another man saved him from any more questions, and he was forced to make way so the Marine doctor could get at Clione, tearing his clothes carelessly to get at the wound.

Stitches, he said, already pulling out a small pack of things Uni recognised from the Tang's infirmary. Needles, sutures and shots of anaesthetic. "Is he allergic to anything?" Uni had to think hard, but ended up shaking his head. He hadn't heard of anything, and he hoped that was good enough as the doctor got to work, doing all the things Uni should have done, if he'd known how.

"We'll take him to the hospital," the first Marine said. "You'll be able to find him there-"

"I'm not letting him out of my sight," Uni growled, once again forgetting to think and allowing his pirate attitude to shine through. He didn't – couldn't – trust the Marines. They might be closing the wound, but any moment they could find out that they were dealing with pirates, and then it wouldn't matter that they were victims.

Clione had a tattoo, he remembered suddenly. He was new, but not so new he hadn't joined most of them in getting their jolly roger inked into his skin. The doctor hadn't found it yet, but it wasn't all that far from the wound, and while it wasn't a conventional jolly roger it was still unmistakeably pirate.

"It won't be for long," the Marine tried to reassure him, but Uni wasn't having that – couldn't have that. If they realised Clione was a pirate now… It would be easy, so easy for them to kill him. "You can follow right on behind us, that's not a problem."

"No," he said firmly. "Leave us here. We'll be fine."

"That should hold for now," the doctor interrupted. "I'll just bandage it up then we can move hi-What's this?"

Uni whirled around, the sudden change in tune sending alarms blaring through his mind, and as he'd feared-

"What's what?" the young Marine asked, leaning forwards.

Uni moved.

The doctor didn't have a chance to react, his eyes still open and face shocked even as his throat was slashed. As he fell, he stopped blocking the Marine's view of Clione's chest – jolly roger now on show – and the young man's face twisted into horror, his hand plunging back into his pocket for that den den mushi. Uni lurched forwards, but there was too much distance – he wouldn't make it in time.

A flash of a blade, and the Marine crumpled, revealing a familiar face behind him.

"That was way too close," Shachi panted, flicking blood off his knife before sheathing it and pushing forwards until he was by Clione's side. "Fuck!" He fumbled in his own pocket. "Pick him up, they're going to come investigating after these guys any moment."

The ginger's presence was a comfort, the orders simple to follow and overriding the residue panic in Uni's mind. Clione was still breathing as he pulled him into his arms; Uni hadn't expected that,
somehow, some corner of his brain giving up and writing Clione off as dead.

"This way," Shachi urged, and Uni had no issues keeping up with the other man as they darted through the streets, evading the Marines. Shachi made it seem so easy, barking short sharp reports over a den den mushi as he led the way, and Uni was reminded how much he still had to learn.

"Uni." His captain's voice emerged from the creature, and he focused on it, making a noise of acknowledgement. His voice didn't want to work at all now, a whirlwind of emotions choking him up. "You did well."

Uni didn't know how he could say that when he wasn't there, hadn't seen him break apart and end up helped by Marines, of all people, but Shachi was giving him a comforting grin and a thumbs' up, too, as if he'd saved Clione single-handedly.

He hadn't. He didn't even have any shopping to show for their excursion.

"He's still breathing," Shachi said, pocketing the den den mushi again. "Marines aren't ideal, but using them was the best thing you could have done with what you know."

"I didn't-" Uni protested, because he'd done nothing. He'd just let them come in and walk all over him.

"You didn't drive them away," Shachi interrupted him. "There was one weak one, you could have killed him, but you didn't, and now Clione's going to be okay." The ginger's eyes were hidden as always by those darkened glasses, but Uni felt the weight of the gaze resting on him regardless. "He's going to be okay."

There was no room for argument, and Uni didn't bother, although he felt like he'd failed some unspoken test. Clione was almost killed, he let the Marines near his injured nakama.

Shachi could say what he wanted, but Uni needed more than empty words.

Chapter End Notes

I'm back! And with angst because what better way to return than to torture some Heart Pirates?
There was something not quite right about their current island. Law seemed slightly uneasy, and Shachi himself could feel something in the air that raised the hairs on the back of his neck. If asked (as Law did), he couldn't explain what, exactly was wrong, but there was something off, and none of them liked it.

Still, they needed supplies, and an off feeling wasn't enough to justify potentially running on empty until they reached the next island. Someone had to go, and Shachi was already on his way to get ready for yet another incognito run (he had done far more incognito than in uniform, and while he liked being in uniform better, the idea of secrecy had long since ingrained itself in his mind) when Law had stopped him.

"Not this time, Shachi," he said. "I want you here today."

Shachi was well versed in reading what Law wasn't saying. There was a flash in there of the early days, when Law was trying to get him, Penguin and Bepo to understand something. This time, it was back but not aimed at him. Instead, Law seemed to have another target in mind, and he trailed behind his captain as Uni and Clione were selected.

It wasn't Uni's first incognito supply run. Shachi had done one with him before, and knew the taller man got easily stressed under the pressure. Adding in the newer recruit to the mix would be interesting, that was for sure. Shachi privately thought that Uni was going to get more stressed, but if Law wanted to try that experiment, then he'd stay quiet.

If only the bad feeling would go away. Uni and Clione both knew to get in, stock up what they needed, and then leave again, but Shachi wasn't going to be happy until they were back in the safety of the Tang. From the way Law and Penguin were fidgeting, he wasn't the only one, and wished that he'd been sent out. He knew how to handle those situations, where the world felt like it was conspiring against them, although he understood why Law had sent a different pair for once. They needed more people that could cope under pressure, and while the island had them tense, it wasn't openly dangerous.

Realistically, it was a good balance of urgency without danger, which made it perfect for learning. As he watched them go, he tossed the den den mushi he'd pick pocketed from Uni up and down in the palm of his hand. Law's idea – and not necessarily one he agreed with, having been sent out to shore many times without one himself and acutely aware of how much of a crutch it could be.

"You can't baby them," Penguin pointed out, and Shachi looked up at him with a sigh. Behind the older man, Law was watching him too, and he suddenly felt as though he, too, was being tested.
"I'm not," he protested, but his denial appeared to fall on deaf ears as his nakama dispersed to their stations. Moving the Polar Tang further away was another decision Shachi did not agree with, although there were enough pirate ships in the docks that he could see the logic. He just wished they'd done it before setting Uni and Clione on shore.

The feeling of wrong didn't go away, and he stayed on the deck, looking out towards the direction of the town. Despite his paranoia, he didn't leave the ship. No orders from Law, and no physical reason to do so left him trapped on the deck. It could just have been because he was used to being the one out there, doing the dangerous tasks. Maybe he was starting to panic because of the unknown, because it wasn't him facing danger, but rather his relatively inexperienced nakama. Still, for as long as there was no proof, he had to deal with it.

The screams were faint when they started, and it was only by straining his ears that Shachi made out the unmistakable sound of gunfire, at which point he couldn't stay still any longer.

"I'm going," he said, already halfway down the gangplank by the time Law caught up with him, face twisted in concern. Penguin was below deck, in the engine room, and Shachi hoped he stayed there. His blood was freezing in his veins at the sound, and the idea that two of his nakama were out there, in the carnage…

"Go," Law said, tossing a den den mushi his way. It was the one he'd picked from Uni's pocket earlier. Shachi didn't need to be told twice, barrelling towards the unfolding nightmare and blinking tears back. This wasn't the same as Swallow Island. His nakama were armed, could defend themselves. No-one was dying today.

It grew harder to remember as he battled through the stream of fleeing civilians, ducking for cover as bullets rained down in bursts and searching desperately for Uni and Clione in the chaos. Every woman's scream sounded like his mother shrieking his name, every man's cry sounded like his father's defiant roar, and he tightened his grip on the hilt of his knife, willing the memories to go away.

It wasn't the same. It wasn't the same.

A familiar presence finally prickled at the edge of his consciousness, a panicked flare he knew was Uni, and he changed course abruptly, making a beeline for him. He couldn't feel Clione, and combined with Uni's panic…

No, they must have just been separated, he tried to convince himself. Uni was panicking because they'd been split up in the chaos, and Clione was just out of range. It was fine. They were fine.

The Marines were there. Someone had called them, or they'd noticed of their free will. It didn't matter how. They were there. Shachi crushed the resentment as it attempted to well up. Of course this small trading town would have Marines at its beck and call whenever something happened. Of course this place was more important than a small backwater island almost always covered in snow and minimal trade to speak of.

Clione's presence finally registered, faint but in the same place as Uni, and the panic welled up anew. Shachi knew the feeling of life slowly yet steadily trickling out of a person, and that was unmistakably the sensation he felt from Clione.

Shachi had lost enough to pirate raids. He wasn't losing another.

There was a Marine with his nakama, he saw as he rounded the final corner to see what his haki had been telling him all along. Another Marine was bleeding sluggishly from his throat, not far from
Clione's unmoving body, and Uni was tugging his knife back, turning to face the still alive Marine.

He wouldn't be fast enough. Uni was determined, but the Marine already had a den den mushi out. If he was allowed to make that call…

Uni wasn't fast enough, but Shachi was. His muscles would be feeling the strain later, always hating it when he accelerated beyond the normal limits of the body, but Clione wasn't moving, Uni was panicking, and maybe Shachi was panicking too (there was no maybe about it), but he couldn't lose his nakama. Not like this.

The Marine made a sickening gurgle as he dropped, but Shachi had no time for him, stepping over the body and catching his first good look at Clione. Hurried stitches held together a wound in the right of his chest – not the left, and he wanted to cry at the luck, because they'd come so close to losing a nakama and they wouldn't have known until too late – and Shachi entered autopilot mode. He knew he called Law, Penguin in the background, but he didn't know what he was saying. Uni was looking at him with something an awful lot like respect, but Shachi didn't deserve that.

Not now, when he was falling apart as the past threatened to overlap the present. Not when he was spewing nonsense that was supposed to sound confident, just to comfort Uni. It rang hollow to his own ears, some nonsense about the Marines saving Clione because Uni hadn't driven them away.

He didn't remember getting back to the Tang, either. One minute there was land, and then there was the wooden decking beneath his feet. Law must have taken Clione, and there was Penguin with an arm around a shaking Uni. If anyone said anything to him, he didn't hear them. Everything was just white noise, broken up only by the echoing sounds of gunshots and screams.

*It was different this time*, he told himself as he ended up face-down in Penguin's bunk, his shades pressing uncomfortably into this face. *They're alive. They'll be okay.*

He was still shaking when Penguin found him.

Chapter End Notes

Last chapter from Shachi's PoV, because I couldn't resist. Saving people while facing your own demons isn't easy.
"I'm fine."

Law had come to despise those two words. They usually prefaced an argument, whereby he – as the ships' doctor and captain – had to forcibly dismiss any such claims as thoroughly as possible until he could get the offending nakama to sit down in the infirmary. Anyone who claimed they were fine was very probably not, in his experience.

Where Shachi thought he could pull that concept from in this particular scenario, Law would love to know. Not only was the ginger, returning from some skirmish or other he'd ended up embroiled in while on the shore, not quite demonstrating his usual energy – a red flag by itself – but he was full out limping.

By no definition could that be called fine, especially as it had long since passed a simple favouring of a single leg to instead progress to a fully formed limp of both legs, and Law was utterly flabbergasted that Shachi thought for a single moment that he wasn't destined for a spell in the infirmary until the injury was treated and he was capable of walking again.

"No, really, I'm fine," the idiot continued to insist. Law might have given him the benefit of the doubt (well, not really, but at least allowed him to get the infirmary under his own steam) if his face hadn't chosen that particular moment to twist into a brief expression of pain. He was not fine, not under any definition, and it was child's play for Bepo to scoop him up into his arms at a single uttered word from Law.

"How many times do we have to go through this charade?" Law demanded, keeping pace with the mink easily as they headed to the infirmary. "You are limping and wincing; neither of those symptoms all under any definition of the word 'fine', which you should be well aware of by now."

"Yeah," Shachi began, sounding as though agreeing was an unimportant factor, and Law waited for the- "but, I'm not injured, so it's all fine."

Well, they'd managed to progress from 'I'm fine' to 'it's fine', which Law counted as a minor victory. A very minor victory. More pressing was Shachi's confidence that he wasn't actually injured, despite the faces he was pulling and the occasional hiss of air escaping between suddenly-clenched teeth when Bepo jostled him accidentally.

"If your pain and inability to walk is not caused by an injury, then what do you think the cause is?" Law asked, hoping that Shachi could come up with an answer to the impossible question just so he didn't have to deal with the apparent insubordination the older man was showing him. There was only so much he could take, especially when his nakama's welfare was involved.
"It's just cramp," Shachi said flippantly, as though a simple cramp was enough to cripple him. Law had not spent so many years flinging him and Penguin around the training room for them to be brought low by something as simple as a cramp. He didn't waste his breath responding, instead lifting a dubious eyebrow as he waited for Shachi to elaborate.

It didn't take long.

"You know that… that thing some of those Marines do?" Shachi attempted to explain, and Law sent him a withering glare because thing told him nothing at all, never mind the fact that he highly doubted Shachi of all people was casually picking up Marine tricks. "The really fast thing," he clarified. "Where they disappear and go whoosh and then reappear where you don't want them?"

"Soru?" Law hazarded a guess, starting to see where he was going. One day, he'd remember how much of an idiot Shachi could be.

"Yeah, that thing!" Shachi grinned, far too pleased with himself considering the punishment he'd probably just put his body through. If he'd been trying to emulate their high-speed movements without limbering up properly though years' worth of exercise (and Law knew he hadn't been training that long), then it was no wonder his legs were complaining, to put it mildly. "I-"

"You tore up the muscles in your leg trying to emulate it and now you're trying to pass that off as cramp." Law cut in, unamused. Shachi had enough common sense – barely – to look abashed at the scolding. "Idiot. You could have crippled yourself.

"Well I managed it!" the ginger grinned, and Law wanted to groan because that meant he'd be trying it again. Not that high speed movement was a bad idea for Shachi, with his complete lack of Armament Haki and mastery over Observation, but Law was willing to bet he'd leapt straight into Soru as soon as he'd figured it out the same way he threw himself into anything new – with no restraint or consideration for consequences.

He didn't bother giving Shachi's claim a response, directing Bepo to set the idiotic ginger down on a bed so he could perform a Scan and assess what damage, exactly, he'd done to himself. Shachi let out another discomforted hiss as he settled on the bed, and Law tried not to think of how much pain he was in that he was letting it show.

Shachi had been lucky, he eventually surmised. His flexibility and limber body appeared to have absorbed most of the stress, leaving him with a case of tight muscles. Of course, because this was Shachi and he could never do things all the way, it was going to take more than a simple operation to get the muscles functional again – and Law was not letting Shachi go anywhere on those legs until they were fully healed, otherwise he'd just make himself exponentially worse.

"Bepo," he said, catching the attention of the mink, who'd rested a paw on Shachi's shoulder while they waited for the verdict. "Get Uni."

"Aye, Captain!" Bepo chirped, picking his way around the bed with an elegance his bulky frame didn't seem like it should have and disappearing out of the room.

"No more walking until further notice," he told his idiotic nakama, who pulled a face.

"How bad… is it?" he asked, and the sudden hesitance made Law want to hit him. If he hadn't been certain about his own condition, he should not have attempted to play it off as 'fine'. He refrained, barely, and idly wondered if Shachi knew how close he'd come to being slapped.

"Somehow, you've avoided permanent damage," he said instead, leaning in to start on the minor
operation. "I don't know how, so you are not going to be trying that again until your legs can handle it." Shachi made a disappointed noise, but Law was unrelenting.

"And what's with the operation right now?" the ginger asked, peering down at where his legs were now in pieces as Law skilfully manipulated the different parts.

"I'm just accelerating the healing process," he admitted. "Stay still." The order was redundant – even if Shachi was mobile he knew better than to mess around while Law was working. "This will shave a few days off the recovery process, although I'll still be having you take it easy." Shachi made a noise of comprehension, but if he was planning on saying anything else it was cut off by the arrival of a confused Uni.

"Captain?" he asked, his gaze immediately zeroing in on Shachi's legs, and Law gestured for him to sit.

"Shachi's damaged his legs," he explained shortly. "I'd like you to try and relax the muscles. I'm accelerating the healing, so you'll be able to start immediately."

"Yes, Captain," Uni agreed, and that was all Law needed to hear. Sure enough, no sooner than he'd finished putting the last pieces of Shachi's legs together, Uni was there with skilled hands that coaxed far more pained sounds out of Shachi than Law had been hoping for.

Still, Law knew from personal experience that Uni had magic hands, and while Shachi was groaning to start with, it wouldn't be too long before they'd be pleasant sighs instead. Shachi was a vocal character – Law wasn't sure it was possible to shut him up if he didn't want to (barring bringing up traumatic events, but that was never an acceptable tactic to use on his own nakama) – and the background groans and sighs were no exception as Shachi let them know exactly how successful the treatment was being.

"Feeling better?" Uni asked Shachi several minutes later, although from the pleased noises Law considered that a redundant question.

"Hell yeah," Shachi mumbled. "You're awesome, Uni."

"This isn't going go get fixed all in one go," Uni pointed out, to Law's approval. "What the hell did you do to yourself? There are far less destructive ways to get a massage, you know."

" Tried going a little bit faster," Shachi muttered, sounding vaguely sulky as though he couldn't comprehend that Uni was also scolding him. "It isn't as easy as the Marines made it look." Law could hear the raised eyebrow as Uni tried to reconcile the idea that Shachi was trying out a Marine technique, and apparently failed.

"There are better ways to try and get a massage," the tall man eventually grumbled, and Law didn't comment on the way he'd moved beyond Shachi's legs now, easing the muscles of his abdomen and edging towards a full-body massage, to Shachi's obvious delight. "Like asking."
Sharing a bed with nakama (or just a blanket pile in the middle of the room with his entire crew bundled up close around him) was one of Law's favourite places to be. Not that he would ever admit it, or actively seek it on any day that wasn't his birthday, but there was something about not being alone that brought comfort.

Whether or not his crew had cottoned on to this fact, Law wasn't entirely certain. He suspected that at least some of them had – at the very least, they all knew he wouldn't say no to the offer – but it was one of those things that was never discussed.

His nakama all made noises when they slept. That wasn't particularly remarkable; most creatures didn't slumber in complete silence, but it was the combination of the not-silence, and the trust he held in all of them, that allowed him to relax enough to enjoy it.

Bepo made a little whistling noise in his sleep, not a snore but not his regular breathing either. Law wondered if it was a mink thing. He could hold a conversation, too, much to the annoyance of some of the crew if it occurred during a daytime nap. At night, there was no-one else to converse with.

Sometimes Shachi would snore – a light noise, not the elephantine racket Jean Bart made if he was ill – and other times he'd make small noises that Law never mentioned because they sounded too close to a whimper. He was also a restless sleeper, somewhat capable of staying where he'd fallen asleep but almost guaranteed to wake up with his limbs arranged differently.

Penguin's breathing was much heavier than when he was awake, strong and even all night long. Law had never known it to be any different, and often found himself gravitating towards the older man for the reliability when they had their blanket nights in the recreation room.

Ikkaku spoke in her sleep. Most of the time it was nonsense, sentences of gobbledygook falling from her lips just because it could. Other times, maybe there was some meaning to it, but Law was careful never to listen. Unlike Bepo, she didn't need anyone else to talk to before she opened her mouth.

Unless he was ill, Jean Bart was quiet. Out of all of them, it seemed the most jarring contrast, and Law tried not to think about why such a large man was so silent. He was fairly sure that hadn't always been the case.

Every group always had that one snorer, and in the Heart Pirates it transpired that that was Clione. The crew had long since learnt to sleep through it as and when required, although more than once the man had woken up to find his head buried under a pillow.

Uni, meanwhile, made a series of strange clicks as he slept, joining the chorus of his nakama as they
all gathered around.

With arms holding him tightly and the familiar noises in the background, Law could ease his way into sleep almost as and when he wanted. It was much better than silence.

Silence had had its time, back when he was twelve and travelling with a man that could ensure it with a simple click of his fingers. It had helped Law sleep back then, but that time was long since passed now. Silence meant Cora-san, and Cora-san meant thinking of that day on Minion Island, when the lifting of the silence had told him the exact moment the man who'd saved him died.

Ever since then, Law had been unable to sleep in silence.
In the back of his mind, Shachi supposed it was an inevitable eventuality. But that didn't make it any easier to deal with as he found himself staring down the barrel of a gun.

It wasn't the first time they'd come up against someone with a gun, nor was it the first time guns had been fired in their vicinity, but somehow Shachi had always powered through, blocking them out as they scrambled to escape. It was, however, the first time a gun had been so close, close enough for him to see the finger tightening on the trigger. Too close to deceive himself about reality, this time.

Muscles flexed, and never had Shachi been so intimidated by the sight of a curling index finger, finding himself frozen in place as though icy chains had bound themselves around him, sending a chill through his body while immobilsing him. He couldn't flee, couldn't even breathe as the world shrunk to just the barrel – etched on the inside, and that was funny; Shachi hadn't known that was a thing – the finger, and him.

There was noise, had been noise, but it was nothing more than a buzzing in his ears, in turn drowned out by the thud thud of blood pounding in his ears. Something important was probably happening, but Shachi couldn't tear his eyes away from that finger, now snagged firmly on the small slip of metal and straining slightly against the sudden resistance it faced.

He might as well have been staring death straight in the face. Guns were death, and with his body frozen, there was no escaping. Beneath the raw terror, indignation attempted to spark, tried to provoke him into moving, trying to dodge, but it couldn't quite get through, and Shachi watched with wide eyes as the finger finished its deliberate pull, jerking the last section as the sound from his nightmares sounded and a bullet sped straight for him.

Something hit him, forcing him to stagger for a moment before gravity and momentum won the fight, sending him crashing to the ground. That same something, warm and heavy, landed on top of him, knocking the wind from his chest in a single oof.

Blood splattered to the ground in front of his face, but there was no pain. Shachi knew the pain of a bullet, knew there was no way he'd mistake it for anything else, and it wasn't there. Warmth wrapped around him, surrounding him from all sides, and his eyes widened as another drop of blood splashed to the ground.

There was someone there. Someone was bleeding and it wasn't him. He strained to look, turning his head inch by torturous inch until he could see something fuzzy and… white?

"-achi?" he heard, and there were not-hands shaking his shoulders. His head lolled with the movement but in the process he saw worried dark eyes staring at him. "Shachi?"
Shachi tried to reorient himself, tried to piece together who it was and why he didn't hurt when a bullet had been fired at him. He might even have managed it, if a bloodied arm hadn't been the first thing his vision focused on. Not his arm, but that just meant it was someone else's.

Meant someone else had taken the bullet.

His mind screeched to a halt, flinging itself backwards eight years to the last time he'd stared down the barrel of a gun. The last time someone else had taken a bullet.

*Mama,* was his only thought – maybe his lips moved, maybe he even said it, he didn't know – before everything fell dark.

Chapter End Notes

So this is set a little after chapter 101 (Trigger), way back in the very early days. And no, I haven't forgotten about Penguin's own trauma, but while they're a double act, they still react to things differently, so one at a time.
"Bepo, tell them it's a bad idea," Penguin groused, glowering at the two younger teens – or rather, the backs of the other boys, as he was being completely and utterly ignored by them both. What good was being the voice of reason if they blanked him whenever he tried to actually point out that they were being stupid?

"Is it?" the mink asked, and Penguin growled half-heartedly, burying his face in his hands. "Yes," he said, voice muffled by his palms. "Very."

"Sorry!" Bepo backtracked hurriedly. "Captain! Penguin says it's a bad idea."

"Penguin needs to lighten up a bit!" Shachi retorted, still not looking back. "It'll be fine, stop worrying!!"

Penguin didn't think it was possible to stop worrying when he had two hot headed and stubborn younger boys to keep an eye on.

"What are you going to do if it gets infected?" he demanded, knowing it was a last ditch effort. Their destination loomed in front of them; he was running out of time. Bepo, previously beside him, slowed down; with his fur, Law had said it was for the best if he wasn't in the room when the piercing happened.

"Really, Penguin?" Law asked, sounding bemused. "You need to calm down. This won't take long."

"Besides!" Shachi chirped, finally turning around, and Penguin scowled darkly because he knew exactly what card the ginger was going to play this time. Sure enough, a hand tapped lightly on his hip, and he glowered at Shachi, who didn't seem inclined to stop. "You didn't have any problems with the tattoos, so what's the problem this time?"

Penguin had known he was going to lose the debate as soon as the tattoo entered the discussion, and if he was totally honest, he'd had misgivings about that one at the time, too. He couldn't say that it hadn't been worth it, though, even if he'd only had their jolly roger done, unlike the other boys who'd seemed determined to turn their bodies into canvases.

"Are you sure you don't want one?" Law asked as they passed the threshold into the shop. It looked dark and a little seedy, but then again, so had the place they'd had their tattoos done. Anywhere more respectable wouldn't do that to teenagers. "Last chance."

"Quite sure," Penguin bit out, crossing his arms and fixing the men in the shop with a hard stare, one
after the other. He hadn't had to come. Law had given him the option of remaining with the Tang, but with his misgivings about the whole thing, Penguin couldn't justify letting them go alone. "If you're that determined, get on with it."

"Getting on with it," Shachi mimicked, following Law to the vendor. Penguin stayed back as they started the discussion, watching out for anything out of the ordinary. It seemed his fears were unfounded – as he'd hoped would be the case – as first Law, and then Shachi had their ears impaled by a needle before a simple silver stud was put through the new holes.

Penguin knew exactly what they'd been planning on, but seeing it in person, rather than simply hearing their discussions, was an odd experience. Law, unable to make anything simple, had ended up with two holes per ear, which Penguin thought was a little excessive, but then again this was the same teenager with a giant tattoo over his chest. Shachi had gone for something slightly more normal, to his relief, with a single stud in the lobe of his left ear.

"Not for you, son?" the man asked, and Penguin shook his head yet again. "Well, if you're sure." What was it with everyone and wanting to triple check if he wanted to let something sharp anywhere near his ear? Subconsciously, his hands found the edges of his hat, tugging at the ends until they lay flush against his unpierced and staying that way ears.

"No need to get so defensive," Shachi laughed, and Penguin sent him a glare. The ginger's own hat had been left behind, alongside Law's precious fluffy one, and his hair had mysteriously found itself braided while he'd been asleep earlier. Penguin was amazed Shachi hadn't realised it was Law's doing by now.

"Let's go," Law cut in, saving Penguin from having to retort to either the man in the shop, or Shachi. If Penguin practically herded the younger teens out, it wasn't entirely unintentional, meeting back up with Bepo, who scrunched up his nose and muttered something about blood, to his concern, before they made their way back to the safety of the Polar Tang.

"Let me see," he ordered, pushing Shachi to sit in a chair before the ginger could protest.

"Don't touch it," Law warned, and Penguin rolled his eyes before leaning in. Bepo's comment about blood didn't sit well with him, and he spent several long seconds staring at the new silver stud in Shachi's ears before accepting that there really didn't seem to be anything wrong. Law acquiesced to the same inspection, and Penguin shifted his hair out of the way – it wasn't long enough to tie up, but the strands covered part of his ear nonetheless – to check the four new studs.

There was the blood.

Penguin frowned and moved closer, carefully touching the ear a little way from the new stud to get a better look. Bleeding was normal, Law had said before they'd gone, back when they were doing their research. That didn't mean Penguin had to like it.

"Leave it," Law grumbled, catching his hand by the wrist and pulling it away.

"It's bleeding," he countered, only for Law to sigh.

"I'll monitor it," he promised, and Penguin huffed but reclaimed his hand. "You're worrying too much."

"Someone has to," Penguin retaliated, and Law gave a fond smile.

"I know," he said, and arms slid over Penguin's shoulders from behind until there was a body pressed up against him, chin on his shoulder. Bright ginger hair in his periphery left him under no
illusions about the person's identity.

"It'll all be fine, though!" Shachi grinned. "Just no touching for a while, and leave the studs in for a few months. Nothing hard."

"You sleep on your left side quite a lot," Penguin pointed out, and Shachi froze for a moment, as if he hadn't considered that when he'd chosen which ear to get pierced. He probably hadn't.

Then he chuckled, tightening his hold on Penguin briefly.

"You'll make sure I don't," he said, and Penguin rolled his eyes. Facing him, Law grinned fondly.

"Look after yourself!" he complained, but they all knew Shachi was right.

Chapter End Notes

I've never had any piercings myself, so all my info here comes from google, then translated slightly to suit the One Piece world. As usual when I mention something about Shachi and Penguin... we don't know at this point if they have any piercings (Shachi's hair gets in the way, as does Penguin's hat), but we do know Shachi has forearm tattoos, so why not a small earring, too?
Upon getting their own ship, Law wasted no time in exploring all of the rooms, quickly identifying the sleeping section of the submarine. Unlike previous ships he'd been on, there didn't appear to be one large bunkroom, but rather several smaller rooms that slept between two and four people. Having spent far too long in the company of others at night, he had no qualms about claiming one of the larger rooms all for himself. His own room.

He hadn't had a room to himself since Flevance, a lifetime ago, and part of him wondered if he wanted to go back to that when he'd moved on from everything else. The small wooden boat they'd been using didn't have separate areas to sleep in, so it wasn't as though Penguin, Shachi and Bepo hadn't already discovered that he had nightmares. He could probably persuade them to all sleep in the one room, if he wanted to.

No, Law decided. He wanted his own space; the room he'd chosen was big, but he had no intentions of changing boats until the submarine was no more. In time, it wouldn't feel so big and empty. He didn't need to fill it with people; they'd end up on top of each other, much like he, Buffalo and Baby 5 had had little space to themselves.

Outside the room, he could hear Penguin and Shachi chattering. Their own explorations, independent to Law's, had finally brought them to the area, and he scowled at them as they opened the door of the room he'd chosen.

"This one's mine," he said, ignoring the way their eyes flicked to the four bunks. "Find your own rooms."

"If you say so," Shachi shrugged, and the duo moved on, seemingly unconcerned with the dismissal. Law watched them go, glad they hadn't complained at him for taking such a large room for himself. Then again, he supposed, he'd basically set a precedent for them to both claim similar rooms, so he could see why there was no reason to protest.

What he hadn't imagined, with so many vacant rooms available, was that they'd end up picking a room to share. It was again, one of the larger rooms. There were only two beds in it, stacked as bunks, but they'd managed to find one with a desk, and Law realised it was probably meant for a higher-ranking member of the crew.

"You realise there are plenty of rooms?" he felt compelled to point out, despite the fact that Shachi was happily hanging out of the top bunk with a smug grin on his face while Penguin slouched on the bottom bunk, amused. "You don't have to share, you know."

"We're fine sharing," Penguin told him, and there was an odd note in his voice Law didn't comment on. Shachi made a noise of agreement.
"Suit yourself," Law shrugged at them. If they wanted to be on top of each other all the time, then so be it. Privately, Law doubted they'd last long before one or both moved to another room, desperate for personal space.

He was wrong. Weeks passed, their rooms beginning to look slightly more lived in (and Bepo's, who had picked a smaller room right next to Law's), and still there was no sign that either of them were getting annoyed at being unable to escape the other. Law's own room had gained a desk, liberated from an empty room, and lost all of the bunk beds to replace them with a larger single bed they'd found elsewhere, probably the room designated for the noble.

Law couldn't understand it. Why would they willingly share a living space? There was no privacy at all.

"We're just used to it," Penguin said when eventually pressed, although he didn't elaborate on why. Having seen the huts Swallow Island seemed to have considered houses, Law wondered if the inhabitants all slept in one room. He didn't think the two were blood related, but maybe different families all lived together?

It was much later that he finally learnt the truth.
Clione supposed it was inevitable that not everyone in his new crew – his new nakama – had had a pain free past. He knew of plenty of pirates that had taken to the sea for fortune, fame, and the One Piece, but right from the moment he'd met the Heart Pirates, it was apparent that they were not one of those crews. This was a crew that had another reason for existing – and he'd known of some of those, too.

What he hadn't known was what that reason was. No-one really advertised their pasts, and he could respect that; the freedom to keep your own secrets was a rare one, and cherished. It was safe to assume that whatever those secrets were, they wouldn't impact the rest of the nakama, and that was the only thing that mattered.

Sometimes, though, those pasts came back to haunt them. Clione would always remember the first time he stumbled over his captain, curled up in a corner and tight in the thrall of a nightmare. The captain had always seemed unshakeable, a pleasing mix of wry wit and unyielding authority in equal measures. To find him so vulnerable – so human – was a shock.

He'd run to find someone to help. If he'd touched the captain, tried to wake him, he felt as through something would have broken. He was too new to the crew to be making bold decisions like that. Penguin had been the first one he'd found, but he didn't seem surprised to hear the story on their way back to where the captain was still shivering away in a corner.

"Law," Penguin had said as they'd arrived, kneeling down next to him and wrapping his arms around him. Clione fully expected a Room to form, the captain jerking awake half terrified as a powerful pirate captain would, should be at being disturbed so suddenly. What he hadn't expected was for his captain to barely react, shifting in Penguin's grip until he was comfortable and then keep on sleeping. The only difference was the way the shivering slowly calmed, until the captain was simply just asleep.

Penguin had smiled, pulling him into his arms and standing up. It looked a bit odd, the captain's lanky limbs folded up until he fit in Penguin's arms comfortably, but Penguin did it with such ease that Clione realised it was nothing new.

"Let's get him back to his room," Penguin had said then, and Clione had gaped at the casual nature of everything before following. "Law isn't the only one you'll find like this, sometimes," the other man had added as they'd walked. "Most of us have our demons; just wake us up." Clione didn't think his use of the word 'us' was accidental, but just like with the captain, the idea of the steady, reliable Penguin suffering from nightmares was a mental image he couldn't quite reconcile.

"Does it happen a lot?" he'd asked, and Penguin hummed, thinking.
"Depends on the person," he'd admitted. "But reasonably. You'll get used to who has them when." Clione wasn't sure he wanted to get used to his nakama having nightmares. Uni had so far slept soundly through the night, as best he could tell from the bunk above him.

"What about you?" he'd dared to ask, before allowing himself to stop and think how good an idea that had been. He almost back-tracked, maybe he would have done, if Penguin had hesitated.

Penguin hadn't hesitated, giving him a date that Clione scrambled to memorise.

"Nightmares don't follow a set schedule," Penguin had pointed out. "But you can guarantee I won't be sleeping well that night." He didn't elaborate further, and Clione didn't ask. He didn't offer anything of his own, either, but he didn't have a traumatic date, or anything like that. Not that he'd noticed, anyway.

They'd arrived at the captain's room by then, Penguin nudging the door open with a toe and crossing the distance to the bed briskly so he could lay the taller man down, pulling off the boots and hat before pulling a blanket over him.

"He'll wake up soon," Penguin had said, confident, and Clione didn't doubt him. How could he, when it transpired this was a common event? "Don't worry about it. If you're not comfortable dealing with nightmares, no-one expects you to."

Clione appreciated the thought, but if he was going to be a member of the crew, he was going to be there when they cried as well as when they laughed.
Everyone was on the rota for the night watch. Jean Bart had no issues with that when he'd been told – had no issues with anything as long as he was away from the Tenryubito and a free man again – and with a wry smile Trafalgar had informed him that he'd be sharing for the first one, to make sure he knew all the ropes. Shachi would be his supervisor, he was told, and Jean Bart hadn't had time to try and remember which one was Shachi before the ginger was almost in his face, grinning widely.

"When's our shift?" Jean Bart asked, looking down at the small man – he was big, but even compared to most of the crew, Shachi was one of the smallest – and was unsurprised to be told that it was that night.

"You're fit enough, physically," Trafalgar said, and Jean Bart wasn't certain about the captain-doctor thing, but it wasn't his place to comment. "But if you don't think you're ready, we can put you shadowing someone else later."

"I'm ready," Jean Bart said, because he didn't want to sit around doing nothing. That was the recipe for wallowing in self-pity, and he'd had enough of that in his life. He hadn't finally got away from a life as a slave to be constantly reliving it in his head.

Shachi was an interesting companion, he quickly learnt. On Sabaody, he'd seemed easily panicked on the surface, before regaining his composure enough to fight, but once back with the crew he'd been at ease again. He was the type Jean Bart had always liked in his own crew, one of the central figures that acted as the glue keeping the crew together.

As their night shift started, that fell away. Whether it was an exhausting act that Shachi put on constantly, or if it was simply tiredness that caused the change, Jean Bart didn't have enough experience to tell, but as the lights faded to a faint glow and everyone else went to bed, Shachi didn't seem the same.

"Is something wrong?" he asked, cramped up in a too-small chair and watching the ginger curl up in his own chair, arms wrapped around his legs and his chin pressed to his knees in a despondent façade.

Shachi didn't reply, reaching out to fiddle with some instrument or other on the Polar Tang's control panel before retreating back into his ball. Jean Bart didn't press. He was new; he'd joined them because the alternative was being a slave, not because he'd particularly been interested in the Heart Pirates. In truth, one of the other two captains would have appealed to him more. It was easy to see why he wasn't trusted.

To say he was surprised, ten minutes later with a lap suddenly full of ginger, would be an
understatement. He hadn't noticed him move, not until he was clambering onto his legs in a manner more suited to a child than a member of a well-known pirate crew.

"Shachi?" he asked, his large hands hovering uncertainly near the much smaller man before resting on his arm, wrapping around him lightly.

"I don't like night watches," the ginger grumbled. "They're too lonely."

Jean Bart had nothing to say to that, feeling too new to be able to offer comfort, and far too unaccustomed to helping people even if he knew how. The fact that Shachi even felt he could curl up on his lap baffled him.

"Saboady sucked," Shachi continued after several minute of silence. Jean Bart had almost wondered if he'd fallen asleep. "Dark King Rayleigh showing us how damn weak we are, showing me how weak I am, then that nonsense with Eustass and Mugiwara, and then Kuma clones."

Jean Bart only knew what had happened with the Kuma clones, and if Shachi was referring to the three captains' fight maybe he had some idea about that too, but it was clear that whatever he'd gone through while on Sabaody had upset him and shaken his confidence. That wasn't overly surprising, in itself.

What was surprising was that he was confiding in him, and not his captain or another older nakama. It left a warm feeling in his gut, one he hadn't felt since he'd lost his crew and ended up in slavery.

The feeling of belonging.

Chapter End Notes

This is set sometime in that week between Sabaody and Marineford, while everyone's trying to find their feet again. Shachi has no concept of personal space and Jean Bart learns that quickly!
Law had known that at some point, Doflamingo would not be the worst threat. Not immediately – as a bitter, angry child, Doflamingo had been the be all and end all for him – but after a few years of piracy with his new crew, learning of their own demons and gradually realising that Doflamingo was hardly in a class of his own when it came to monstrous strength and terrifying abilities, Law was hit with the realisation that for as long as he was a pirate, there would always be some threat or other.

He'd hoped that they wouldn't rear their heads until Doflamingo was dealt with. At some point, maybe, they might encounter the crew Penguin and Shachi despised, and upon learning of the existences of the Shichibukai and Yonkou, Law realised that he would either have to follow them or fight them. Law had had enough of following.

In the short term, and even medium term, things went his way. Staying under the radar, in North Blue, kept the attention of the other big names off of him and his crew. Small scale skirmishes happened, but the eyes of the dangerous pirates were all elsewhere.

In the long term, ten years or more since he realised he'd have to consider threats other than Doflamingo, reality came crashing down on them as they became a source of scrutiny. He managed to shield his crew from the worst of it, their anonymity working to their advantage, but any Supernova was going to garner more attention. The Grand Line hadn't been so kind as to let Law stay under the radar, below the threshold of a hundred million beri, and when he arrived at Sabaody he was firmly central within the ranks of the Supernovas.

Of course, that made the other ten his rivals, and it took Law seconds after meeting Eustass Kid to realise that at least some of them took that rivalry seriously. Mugiwara, on the other end of the scale, seemed content to ignore him, but no-one else offered him that courtesy. But in the end, it wasn't one of his fellow Supernovas that posed a threat to rival Doflamingo. Well, not exactly.

The sudden and dramatic rise of one Marshall D. Teach caught Law's attention; of course it did. He didn't think there was a single person in the Grand Line that didn't notice. First killing Whitebeard and indirectly causing Fire Fist's death, and then crushing the vaunted Whitebeard Pirates a year later to slip into the vacant Yonkou throne, Blackbeard was anything but subtle.

Law hadn't been keeping too close a tab on the man, though. At least, nothing beyond the basic tabs he was keeping on the rest of the Yonkou, so he could avoid their influence as much as possible. But Blackbeard had targets that he'd painted on people, targets they didn't know were there until he or one of his commanders suddenly appeared to collect, and the stories of such events were becoming more and more frequent.
He had yet to deal with the pleasure of one such visit, but Law was no fool. Blackbeard was not subtle in his desire to hoard Devil Fruits, and while Logia appeared to be his main interest, Law's fruit was called the 'Ultimate'. No Devil Fruit hoarder would pass up that temptation. He didn't know enough about Blackbeard, didn't know how he got his information, or what the information he had was, but for Law it was better to be safe than sorry.

Punk Hazard, and Zou, while being vital to Law's strategy to finally deal with Doflamingo once and for all, held a separate appeal for him, too. With no log poses capable of finding them, and no Mink known to be in Blackbeard's crew, both islands would be impossible for the man to hide.

Kaido was his target, but that was only because the man had been in a partnership with Doflamingo. Of the Yonkou, the one that concerned Law the most was this unknown man that had risen to his seat of power in only a year and hoarded Devil Fruits. Until he could get more information on the man, he intended to keep avoiding him.

Chapter End Notes

We don't know what Blackbeard's after at the moment, aside from Devil Fruits (mainly logia, I think?), but he was there to see Law rescue Luffy and considering the research we know he's done into Devil Fruits, I'd be surprised if he didn't have at least some idea of what the Ope Ope can do. Whether he ever intends on targeting it, I don't know, but I think Law would be aware of the possibility and responding accordingly.

On a different note, there won't be an update tomorrow as it's my birthday and I won't really be online at all (of all the One Piece characters to share a birthday with... why Blackbeard).
Disguise

Chapter Notes

Characters: Penguin, Kin'emon, Law
Rating: Gen
Warnings: SPOILERS for chapter 913
Tags: Wano, Weapons

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Penguin's first reaction was hell no. Shachi was being unhelpfully amused at his predicament, chuckling away as he finished tying his obi and slotting his katana into the fabric to keep it in place. Well, Penguin groused silently, glowering at Kin'emon, it wasn't like it was weird for him. The ginger had always liked swords.

Penguin did not like swords. The things were just glorified knives with twice the potential for trouble, as far as he was concerned, and he had no wish to carry one.

"I don't know how to use it!" he protested, catching himself at the last second before he found himself backing away from the samurai, who was towering over him with a katana in hand. "That's worse than useless to me!" He tightened his grip on his yagi defensively.

"In that case, allow me to teach you in the time we have left before we arrive!" Kin'emon declared, and Penguin almost fled on the spot. Shachi's inevitable raucous laughter and Law's disapproval were the only things keeping him in place.

"No, that's fine," he hedged, conceding a backwards step as the tall man crowded him. "Really, it's fine. I can fight unarmed." Kin'emon looked offended at the idea, but Penguin was not in the mood to attend to his every wish. Sending him in half trained with a weapon would be far worse than sending him in weaponless. He had his knife and his haki, he'd manage.

"Penguin," and there was the disapproving tone he'd been hoping wouldn't come.

"Yes, Captain?" he groaned, turning around to see Law dressed in his own kimono. Kikoku was still resting against his shoulder, like always, and if he wasn't about to get chewed out for something or other, Penguin would have been amused at the way he was totally ignoring Kanjuro, who was attempting to tell him that his sword needed to be carried on the hip. As it was, he assumed he was about to be subjected to a pile of hypocrisy.

"Carry the sword," Law said, predictably. "Your disguise will be incomplete without it." It was hardly a disguise when their jolly roger was plastered all over all of their kimono. The Straw Hats were in far better disguises, in Penguin's opinion, and he wondered at Law's decision. "You don't have to use it."

Penguin scowled, but this time stayed still long enough for Kin'emon to slide the katana into place. He immediately felt lop-sided as the weight tugged at his left hip…

"I'm left handed," he protested, looking down at the sword and tapping the hilt dubiously.
"If you're not going to be drawing it, that doesn't matter," Law pointed out. "Make sure your knife is in easy reach if you're that insistent on not learning the basics."

"When is it not?" Penguin demanded.

"Law-dono, you can't just carry your sword like that!" Kanjuro tried again, and in a spate of pettiness, Penguin was glad he wasn't the only one being harped on at about correct clothing. Then again, he supposed, looking around at the rest of his nakama, he wasn't the worst off.

At least he'd known how to dress himself; Ikkaku still looked mortified at having Raizo tugging her several layers of clothes into position before turning to attack her hair. Her bushy locks did not want to tie up into even the simplest of the hairstyles the ninja knew. Beside her, Nico Robin was waiting her turn with a look Penguin could only describe as dubious.

Penguin, Shachi and Law had all drawn the line at their hair, keeping their hats firmly on their heads. If they had to go out into the general public, they would have to put one of those ridiculous top knots on their head, but as long as they stayed in their base, that wouldn't be a problem.

"I feel like Master Nekomamushi," Bepo bemoaned from his own corner, picking at his robe. "Captain, do I have to carry a sword? I can't use one."

Normally, Penguin would feel sorry for the younger man, but as Law took a visibly deep breath and pinched the bridge of his nose in clear frustration, he couldn't quite manage it.

He hadn't let it on, he didn't think, but this whole take down Kaido thing? Penguin wanted nothing to do with it. His wounds from Jack – finally healed up enough to no longer need bandaging – started hurting the moment he remembered another confrontation with the monster was more than likely in their near future.

No, Penguin hated this whole thing. Constant undercover work with an almost guarantee of a confrontation with a man that had all too gleefully tortured them the last time they'd met? Definitely not. The only reason he hadn't protested out loud was because Law hadn't known, when he'd made the alliances – both of them – what Jack had done to them, and now he did the younger man's guilt was clear enough without Penguin adding to it.

He'd follow Law wherever he went, but a large part of him feared that they wouldn't all make it out alive a second time.

Chapter End Notes

Before I get the main A/N, I'm just going to put a note out here that I'm off on another dig as of tomorrow so updates may once again go on hold or be sporadic, depending on internet and my energy.

SPOILER WARNING CONTINUES FOR THE FOLLOWING A/N

Well, Oda just gave me the best possible birthday present yesterday! The characters I wanted to see The Most (yes, more than Law) finally reappeared... and with them gave me a whole pile of new questions. In particular this chapter, I'm addressing the fact that Penguin has a katana on his left hip, when until now we've only ever seen him unarm or using a spear of some kind in his left hand, but of course there are more to be asked...
(and hopefully answered next week), like what the Heart Pirates are up to, and where are the rest of them.

And a whole pile more, but for now I'm going to be patient and bask in the fact that they're here.
To say there was one thing Law really hated about his current situation would be an understatement. There were several things Law hated about it, from the fact his nakama were still recovering from their previous encounter with Kaido's crew to the kimono he'd been forced to wear in an attempt to not stand out too much.

However, the fact that currently had his teeth grinding together in frustration as he realised how wrong everything was about to go – that no matter how quickly they acted the situation was already unsalvageable but he was going to have to clean up anyway – was Wano's isolationism. He'd survived the past thirteen years by keeping an ear to the ground, getting the latest news from the News Coo while contacts and espionage gave him the missing links the World Government didn't want the world to know.

Not just him, he corrected, seeing the panicked faces of Penguin, Shachi and Bepo, who knew as well as he did that it was too late – if there had been a chance, any chance at all, they wouldn't have bothered coming back to report before acting. The four of them had eluded Doflamingo by luck and incessant information gathering ever since they'd met on Swallow Island, all those years ago.

Information gathering on Wano, about Wano affairs, was a simple task for them. Law knew all too well the current state of the land and the poison both Kaido and the Shogun were infecting the land with, as well as the names and ranks of anyone who was anyone. They were ready to make a move as soon as the time came, when Mugiwara-ya returned from his suicide mission into Big Mom's territory and roared into the country in that rubbery, irritating, manner he had.

The problem, it quickly transpired, was that with Wano cut off from the rest of the world, they didn't get the News Coo. That wasn't to say the birds didn't fly around the area – Law had seen them on several occasions during his time on Wano, all headed for the Shogun's palace where the hypocrite of a man was clearly keeping himself up to date on the state of the world even as he campaigned for continued isolation. But Law couldn't get any deliveries himself. A News Coo dropping off a paper somewhere that wasn't the palace would draw far too much attention, so Law had no choice but to grit his teeth, keep his ear to the ground, and hope against hope that Mugiwara-ya would be contained by his more sensible nakama long enough for them to rendezvous.

Law had thought it before, and it was no less true this time around: the world had never been particularly inclined to do what he wanted.

The result of his attempt to sneak into Totto Land would have been published in the newspaper. If Law had had that, he might have had a warning that Mugiwara-ya was on the way and sent the Tang out in an attempt to intercept them; after all, there was only one way they'd find their way to Wano.
and that was Bepo's vivre card. Sending the Mink out to meet them would have ensured success.

Law had not been willing to send Bepo and the Tang out for an undetermined amount of time, with no way of keeping in communication, nor even a guarantee that the Sunny would ever appear (no matter what insane luck the other captain held, Law couldn't logically say with certainty he'd succeed, although with the rubberman's vivre card doing little more than smoulder occasionally it seemed as though he was at least not dying).

He should have done, though, and he cursed himself in the sanctity of his own mind for not believing in the Will of D. just a little bit more, for being too clingy to his crew since the events of Zou, because Bepo would have been fine (most likely) and Mugiwara-ya was doing the worst possible thing in the way he always did because no-one had been there to stop him.

As he scrambled to put contingency plans and damage control into action, Law supposed he was going to have to hope that between them, they had enough of the Will of D.'s miracle-causing properties to not turn the whole thing into an entirely irredeemable disaster.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I don't like starting an A/N on a dour note but I can't find another way to resolve this:

I recently discovered that someone has been reposting this story on another site (not FFN; that is me crossposting). That other site has no contact us and no way for me to see who's doing it (it's under my name but I certainly didn't put it there) so I can't quietly ask for it to stop, so I have no choice but to make the request publicly: if you're the person that's been reposting this story, please take it down.

For my anime-only readers, I'll be going back to generic non-spoilery Hearts content tomorrow!
Jean Bart once thought that he could never love again. After the trauma of having his crew so brutally torn from him, and the subsequent years a slave, exposed to the worst humanity could offer, his heart was far too buried under the fear of failing again. That was okay, he'd thought, even as he'd accepted the offer to join a new crew if only so he could get away from the Tenryubito.

His new crew, the Heart Pirates, were having none of that.

He'd thought he'd be able to fade away into the background, pulling his weight in order to pay his debt but unimportant in the grand scheme of things. The Heart Pirates were a sizeable enough crew that it should have been possible not to get too attached, and certainly Trafalgar didn't give off the impression that he was at the centre of a tight-knit crew all too willing to shower all of their nakama with affection.

It had started with Shachi, curling up in his lap on night watch and admitting fears of loneliness and weakness. Then there had been Bepo, physically affectionate and unrelenting, and after him the rest of the crew followed. He was drawn into group hugs, nap piles in the recreation room where the previous night watch slept, only to be surrounded by other nakama.

It didn't happen overnight. It took months, a year, before his internal barriers crumbled, letting them in as he remembered how to love again.

And with love, came fear.

The fear that he'd lose them all, end up alone like he had the last time, helpless as they screamed and screamed before it was cut off with the finality that only one thing could bring. That they'd meet the same fate as his previous crew.

Jean Bart wouldn't let that happen. Protecting his nakama wasn't easy – he shared their captain's despair as they threw themselves head first into danger again and again just because they could – but Jean Bart's fears were stronger than anything the world could throw at them.

He was bigger than all of them, even Bepo. As Shachi had shown him, back in that first night watch, any of the crew could curl up in his lap, and he began to take advantage of that to reassure them. Or him. They all had moments when the lights dimmed in their eyes – none of them had had an easy life, but then again, if they had, would the pirate life have ever appealed? Bepo was the long-time go to for melancholy moments, and Jean Bart refused to step on toes, but the Mink wasn't always there the moment their mood fell apart. Normally a hand on their shoulder, covering most of their arm in the process, was enough to hold them together. Other times, that wouldn't be enough, and he'd end up with a ball-shaped nakama tucked in his lap. He couldn't protect them from their nightmares, but he could help them stay together after them.
What he could protect them from was the outside world. He was strong – had been strong even before, and life as a slave had only strengthened parts of his body more – and if his nakama were in danger he stepped out in front of them every time, facing down the threat until it was no more.

Jean Bart had thought he'd never love again, but the Heart Pirates had proven him oh so wrong and he would fight with everything he had to keep them safe.
It should have been obvious, right from the start, but it hadn't been. With Law around, it didn't really matter what happened to them, because it was always going to be okay. Their captain could fix anything, right?

Maybe it was because he almost hadn't, that time. Law's abilities almost hadn't been enough, and the death they'd been dancing with for the last decade and then some came knocking on the door, determined to collect this time. It hadn't, Law having enough stamina, enough knowledge, to snatch them away from the snapping jaws of death, but it had been close.

It had been far too close.

That was a wake up call – that no matter how good Law was, he wasn't infallible. One day, his best wouldn't be enough.

One day, they'd die.

That realisation, and the conversation that had followed, had been one of the hardest things Penguin and Shachi had ever had to face.

"What would you do without me?" Penguin asked Shachi, alone in the dark of their room after lights' out, when they were supposed to be sleeping. Neither of them were asleep.

If it was the daytime, without the realisation looming over them like a heavy weight on their chest, Shachi would have laughed it off. A life without Penguin? Unthinkable. In the darkness, the stillness, the levity wouldn't come. He bit his lip, his teeth closing with more force than he'd intended and introducing a copper tang to the inside of his mouth.

"I don't know," he admitted instead, the quiet words still too loud in the night. "I don't know if I could. I'd try- I hope I'd try. The guys would help, Law and the others. Bepo. But I don't know… I don't know if it would be enough."

Silence stretched between them. Five seconds, ten. Twenty.

Thirty and then the bed creaked, bare feet pattering up the rungs of a ladder until Penguin rolled into Shachi's bunk, wrapping his arms around him firmly and pulling him close.

Shachi returned the gesture, burying his face in Penguin's shoulder.

"If I lost you," the older man said, hesitating and running a hand through untamed ginger locks. "I
I think I'd leave. No more piracy, and no more wars. I'd go home, back to Noona and Kaa-chan and Tou-chan. A life of piracy without you isn't worth it."

"I wouldn't want to leave Law," Shachi admitted. "He'd be too broken up for me to just… leave him. Or anyone. I couldn't do it."

"I know," Penguin reassured him, his voice thick with tears that weren't allowed to fall. Beside him, Shachi sniffled. "I wouldn't ask you to."

They gave up talking, then, too strained to continue. There was another possibility, one they didn't dare voice for fears they'd force it to reality.

If they went together, they wouldn't have to make the choice. It would hurt Law, Bepo, everyone, but it wouldn't hurt them. They were pirates; a bit of selfishness was fine.

Except, they couldn't seriously consider it a viable result, because then they'd start working towards it, and being killed was one thing, but taking their own life was another thing all together. They'd survived the worst the world had thrown their way until that point, twenty years of pain and heartbreak. They were fighters, and it had been going on too long for them to consider ever giving up now.

Chapter End Notes

Someone wondered if Penguin and Shachi ever had a conversation about losing each other. Well, they tried.
Overall, Shachi thought they were being very mature about the whole thing. Bepo seemed a bit confused, but the cub's reluctance to ask questions of them was, in this situation, useful, and while he admitted that both he and Penguin could sometimes be, well, not mature, they somehow didn't laugh the first time Law's voice cracked.

The speed at which a blotchy hand – the marks were fading but Law's skin still wasn't one smooth colour all over – clapped over his mouth almost drew laughter. For someone so determined to act way older than he was, the reaction was so refreshingly child-like that it put them at ease in a way they hadn't realised they'd needed until it happened.

Shachi received a glower that promised death and pain as he reached for the smaller boy's wrist, and refused to let it deter him from pulling the hand away from the mouth.

"Easy there," he said, as Law jerked his hand back furiously. "No need to hit yourself." The glower had increased in intensity – something Shachi hadn't realised was possible – before Law spun on his heel and left the room in what seemed suspiciously like a temper tantrum.

Or embarrassment.

Penguin and Shachi shared a look and shrugged before settling back down to the controls. There was no point in chasing their captain down. If he wanted to hide away in embarrassment, then, well...

They'd both been there already. Were still there, really, although it wasn't often that their own voices cracked any more as their new pitches finished settling in.

"Is Captain okay?" Bepo finally found his voice, looking at the closed door in open concern.

"He's fine," Penguin reassured him with a grin, ruffling his fur. "It's a growing up thing." Bepo didn't seem convinced, but let it slide.

Law didn't reappear for several hours, finally materialising when Shachi went and pounded on his door to tell him dinner was ready. He was pleasantly surprised when the younger boy opened the door and silently headed up to the mess hall, where Penguin and Bepo were waiting.

"You're going to have to talk at some point," Penguin pointed out after Law swiped his serving without a word. "You can't spend a year or so not talking."

"Watch me," Law's eyes seemed to say as he began to eat, pointedly ignoring their attempts at conversation.

"Seriously?" Shachi complained, flopping over the table and narrowly missing the crockery in the
process. "You laugh at me and Penguin, but when it's your turn you just hide?"

"I don't laugh at you," Law protested, breaking his vow of silence, and Shachi wanted to correct him because he'd definitely seen some smirks when his voice had cracked, but he didn't know how well Law would take that. He was still sore from the last time Law had thrown him around, 'for training', never mind the memory that would probably never fade of being utterly defeated the first time they'd met.

So for once, Shachi swallowed a retort, seeing Penguin hold a presumably similar one back himself, and carried on eating.
Sometimes Law wished the two older men were just a little bit more responsible. If they were going
to act like his older brothers, they could at least do it when he needed it, and not egg on some
stupidity that, well…

Thank fuck for Bepo, was all Law could really bring himself to think as he let out a groan and rolled
over onto his front, crashing in to something in the process. The something made a noise of
complaint, and over the pounding inside his skull he could just about identify it as Shachi.

"Captain?" Bepo asked, a paw resting on his back gently, and Law groaned again. Damn Penguin
and Shachi for not stopping him – or themselves – from drinking far more alcohol than any one
person had any business pumping into their body. "Captain?"

"Get me some water," he groaned, deciding that as he was half on top of Shachi already he might as
well use the older teen to ease his discomfort, pressing his face into the fabric under him to shut out
the light and try and ignore the way his stomach was churning.

He was never drinking alcohol again, and certainly not with Penguin and Shachi for 'supervision'.
His hazy memories suggested that they’d had even more to drink than he had, and Law had certainly
stopped paying attention to what number pint he was on after about six. That, he thought ruefully,
was probably when he should have stopped drinking all together.

He'd let himself get too wild, ecstatic about actually reaching adulthood when the world had
conspired against him in a determination to not let him reach his eighteenth birthday. Raising a glass,
or several, to mock the world for failing to off him before then had seemed like such a good idea
twenty four hours ago.

Now, he was just glad that Bepo – still underage even if he was a gigantic Mink that most humans in
their right mind wouldn't argue with – had decided to stick to water and subsequently manhandled all
three of them back to the Tang eventually. If he hadn't, Law wouldn't have been surprised to wake
up in some holding cell somewhere as Marines tried to work out what to do with a bountiless pirate
crew.

The body he was half lying on shifted and made another groan before trying to roll over. Law clung
to him in protest at the movement. If Shachi was going to be that irresponsible, he could deal with the
morning after's consequences.

Bepo returned with his requested water, and Law found himself giving Shachi a reprieve as Bepo
pulled him up enough for him to be able to drink it.

"Is there anything else, Captain?" Bepo asked, and after determining that Shachi had rolled over and
would no longer make a decent pillow, Law simply flopped into the furred arms. Bepo let out a small noise of concern, his paws gently checking for injury or signs of illness and only stilling after he seemed reassured that Law was otherwise fine. "Are you still drunk?"

"Hungover," Law corrected. "Going back to sleep."

If he was more coherent, he might have recognised Bepo's next noise as being disappointed. Clearly, the Mink did not approve of his human nakama's ideas of a night out. As it was, Law ignored the noise as if it didn't happen, closing his eyes and willing his brain back to sleep until the headache had passed.

The world gleefully took its revenge for his attempt at rebellion by denying him sleep, leaving him a pitiful groaning mess in his navigator's lap for several hours, until it felt like he could move without either throwing up, exuberating his headache, or plain falling over.

That was when he finally returned his attention to Penguin and Shachi, who both seemed utterly miserable themselves. Law had no pity for them, and watched them shamble around the Tang like a pair of zombies. If they'd looked after him the previous night, as per agreement, then he might have been inclined to help them out a little.

Flashes of standing up on a table and singing off key dashed through his mind, and Law buried his face back in Bepo's fur.

No, they could suffer.
"We should surface now."

Penguin looked over at Bepo, who in turn was looking at something on the sonar blankly. It had been bleeping intermittently for the past few minutes, as if confused about what it was detecting, and as Penguin glanced down at it, a shape appeared briefly before flickering away again.

"Bepo?" he asked, because the Mink had been subdued – like the rest of them – since they'd left Law on Punk Hazard, and while he didn't blame him he didn't want the Tang resurfacing if Bepo wasn't certain.

The Mink shook himself once, tearing his eyes away from the sonar and looking directly at Penguin. His eyes focused and he gave a sharp nod.

"Surface," Bepo repeated, his face unreadable. "We're here."

That was the voice Penguin had been waiting for, their navigator's confident declaration that he knew exactly where they were.

"Jean Bart," he said, and the huge man made an affirmative noise before flicking the controls with a dexterity most of the crew had never achieved. It was a regular ascent, none of that nerve-wracking emergency manoeuvring, and Penguin didn't even have to think to adjust to the slight incline of the floor beneath his feet.

"You ready?" he asked Bepo, stepping closer and resting a hand on the white fur lightly. Bepo pressed against him more firmly.

"I wish Captain was here, too," the Mink admitted, although that was of no surprise to Penguin. He couldn't say he didn't feel the same way – for Law to be absent at such an important moment for Bepo… He understood why, but that didn't stop the absence aching.

"I know," he said, listening to the tell-tale hiss of the pipes as they broke the surface and the pressure adapted to its new equilibrium before the external doors unlocked. "Let's go see your home."

"The Tang is my home," Bepo mumbled under his breath, but he followed Penguin as he headed for the main door, pushing it open and stepping out onto the wet wood of the deck. The sight that greeted him took his breath away.

He'd heard the stories – Bepo's own vague retellings, other information they'd picked up over the years – but he still hadn't expected the elephant to be quite so big. Bobbing along in Zunisha's wake, the Tang hadn't felt so small and insignificant in a long time. He had to crane his neck to see the top
of the closest leg and wondered how they were supposed to get up there.

"Wow," Shachi breathed from behind him, and he glanced back to see the ginger at the head of a group of their nakama, staring up at the elephant in open-mouthed wonder. "This is where you were born, Bepo?"

Bepo nodded, and Penguin couldn't help but smile at the delight on his face, even if the whole thing was marred by their captain's conspicuous absence. Still, he realised as a wave crashed past them, stirred up by Zunisha's far leg, they weren't there yet.

"Secure the Tang to the nearest leg," he ordered the crowd gathered behind him, watching another of the legs start to move and suddenly realising they didn't have long before the nearest leg would move and send a similar wave to submerge them. The Tang might be a submarine, but she worked best when submerged of her own accord.

They sprung into action, releasing the mooring line and beginning the difficult operation of looping it around the large leg. It was nothing like a regular dock, where someone could just jump onto the jetty with rope in hand. In the control room, Jean Bart held her steady, and with ropes tied to their waists, Penguin and Shachi made the dive into the cold water, spluttering at the waves and striking out to swim a circuit around their target leg.

The mooring line itself wasn't long enough, so they'd had to improvise with thinner but longer ropes, conscious of the rapidly narrowing time frame they had to tie the knots before the leg moved, washing them away in the wake. They barely made it, clinging to the freshly tied ropes as they were dragged through the water and spluttering as water rushed into their mouths, up their noses. Their grips didn't hold out, but the additional lines tying them back to their own ship did, leaving them bobbing helplessly in the water until the leg had settled again, dragging the Tang with it.

Immediately, other ropes were thrown overboard, for them to haul themselves up with. Years of practice had them scurrying up it with ease, to be pulled back over the railings by their reaching nakama as soon as they could cling to their arms.

"We made it," someone said, several people clapping Bepo on the back as the Mink looked up at his childhood home. "We're here."

Bepo nodded slowly, deep in thought for several long moments, before his shoulders slumped and he found his feet far more fascinating.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "I don't remember how to get up."

The sudden silence that dropped over them was tense as they all looked up at the elephant again, registering just how tall it was.

How were they supposed to climb that?
Taking the night watch that night was simply routine to them by that point. Years ago, back when it had started, Law had protested, attempting to send them to bed, but it had taken less than an hour for his mind to change. After all, if they weren't getting any sleep then, what was the point of trying?

If the rest of the crew thought a two-man night watch on just one night of the year was odd, they didn't question it. Penguin and Shachi just grinned at them and shooed them off to sleep with smiles that didn't reach their eyes – not that anyone could see that – before barricading themselves in the control for the night, wedged together in a single chair.

What wasn't expected was for the well-established routine of ten years to be broken by a simple knock on the door before it slid open soundlessly to reveal a sandy mop of hair on a half asleep Clione.

"You should be asleep," Shachi scolded, arms crossed and the darkness hiding tear tracks running down his face. Besides him, Penguin shifted, his own arms tightly around the other man's waist, holding him in position.

"I'm not the only one," Clione retorted, seeming to gain confidence at an unspoken cue and striding into the room. The pair watched his silhouette silently as he approached, only to let out simultaneous oofs as a weight settled on top of them. "I don't know what tonight means to you two," he continued, wrapping an arm awkwardly around the pair of them, "but Penguin, you once told me you never sleep well on this date, and I can see that's the same for Shachi."

"Hence us being on watch tonight," Shachi pointed out, although he made no move to escape the awkward embrace.

"It's no problem if I stay too, right?" Clione asked, hands finding themselves under hats and fingers buried in hair seemingly of their own accords.

"You should be sleeping," Penguin echoed Shachi's earlier statement, but his body betrayed him as it moved into the touches.

"I'm not leaving two nakama to face their demons alone in the middle of the night," Clione declared with a finality neither could bring themselves to contest. Instead, they wordlessly shuffled in the chair until he was wedged in alongside them, the arms of the furniture whining in protest.

Clione didn't let go of either of them, settling into the silence and looking at the monitors blinking away in front of them. Everything was quiet, nothing triggering any of the Tang's sensors, but he stayed watching blankly. Eyes forward was easier than looking at the nakama clutched in his arms,
especially when they began to tremble.

There was nothing quiet about Penguin and Shachi. Wherever they went, whoever they were with, they always managed to be the centre of attention with their high spirits and senses of humour. At least, that was the Penguin and Shachi Clione had come to know in the months since he'd joined the crew. The nakama clutching at him ever-tighter in the darkness of the night were nothing like that.

Quiet hiccupping breaths on one side, choked up sniffling on the other, there was nothing for Clione to do except hold them close and run his fingers through their hair. Their hats had disappeared at some point, and neither of the faces pressing against his shoulders damply had anything sharp, so Shachi's shades had vanished too.

They didn't speak again that night, but when the morning came and the lights turned on to reveal a half-asleep Clione with the curled up forms of his nakama practically in his lap – fast asleep and faces stained with tear tracks – Law smiled faintly before leaving three steaming mugs in reach for when they eventually got up.

The next year, Clione teamed up with several of the crew to drag the pair away from their attempt to take the night watch and instead piled up in a nest of blankets in the recreation room. No questions were asked – whatever the cause was was none of their business – but the Heart Pirates wholeheartedly threw themselves into making sure Penguin and Shachi stopped suffering alone.

The smiles they received the next day was all the reward they needed.

Chapter End Notes

So that was a longer break than I'd planned on taking, whoops. Updates may no longer be daily, but I still plan on writing more for this yet.
SMASH.

Instincts honed from years of piracy had Law jumping up and turning to face the source of the noise in an instant, hand hovering in front of him in preparation of a Room before he registered what it was he was seeing and froze up on the spot.

Nothing, not even his heightened paranoia and overactive imagination, could have prepared him for the sight of his beloved loyal ship shattering as if a bomb had exploded inside her. Metal plates bent out of shape from the force flew up into the air, glinting in the sunlight before falling into the water with a loud splash. With each one, Law's gut felt like he was the one crashing into the waves.

The Polar Tang, his loyal ship for the past ten years, was gone in the blink of an eye, leaving behind an open husk – he could make out what had once been a bunkroom, and thanked whatever was listening that it was an unused one. No doubt all of them had been shaken up with the blast, but it didn't seem like any of his nakama's belongings – or worse, his nakama themselves – had been lost. Just the ship herself.

Half his crew had been in her when she'd exploded, though, and a headcount was still coming up nine short. The cannonball responsible slammed into the ground behind him, only to be revealed as none other than Mugiwara no Luffy, and Law was sorely tempted to undo all his work on principle, because how dare the other captain do that to his ship after everything the Heart Pirates had done for him. The insufferable rubberman owed Law his life, and this was how he repaid him?

He was barely listening to Jinbei's questions about the vandal's condition, throwing out words like "he's going to die" less because it was the truth, and more because that was what was going to happen if Mugiwara-ya showed his face in front of Law again within the next year. Maybe more. Law was still working that one out. It would depend on the damage.

Shachi's unmistakable ginger hair emerged from the wreckage, the older man looking as upset as Law felt, and he relaxed slightly as the missing count reduced to eight. Penguin's emergence two minutes later, after Mugiwara-ya vanished into the woods – and good riddance if the Kuja killed him although Law doubted they would, unfortunately – eased his mind further, especially after the update on the remaining seven left all of the crew accounted for.

Seeing the damage for himself, after Penguin's nervous report, and Law almost broke down. The Tang had suffered catastrophic damage, the one saving grace being that her hull was intact so at least she could still sail (and thank goodness for kairoseki because anything weaker would not have withstood that blow). His pride and joy, the infirmary, was unrecognisable as anything other than a
collection of junk as extortionately expensive machines spat sparks pathetically or smouldered away. It would take months to restore it, although Law couldn't help but try and find something – anything – he could repair. He had no such luck and traipsed dejectedly back towards the deck.

Someone had rallied the uninjured members of the crew together, probably Shachi, because they were all hard at work patching up the damage. Dripping wet metal panels piled high on the deck and Jean Bart surfaced again, another panel in his huge hands. Inspecting them, Law determined that the damage perhaps wasn't as hideous as he'd first though; while bent out of shape, it had been the rivets that had failed rather than the panelling itself. Bending them back into shape and applying fresh rivets would deal with all but the worst of the damage.

Still, Law couldn't rest until the Tang looked something like her old self again, joining in the repair efforts for a time before his stamina gave out (saving the lives of both Mugiwara-ya and Jinbei had sapped his energy considerably). Penguin shooed him inside to check on their injured nakama, all of whom at least seemed to be recovering well. With the infirmary destroyed, Law couldn't give them any painkillers for their headaches, but they all shook off apologies as they waited impatiently for him to give them the all clear to go out and help repair the Tang.

Selfishly, Law didn't, basking in the comfort of their company for as long as he could get away with, because Mugiwaraya had come far too close to destroying his ship completely and possibly killing some of his nakama in the process. If he just wanted to make sure they were definitely fine, well that was perfectly reasonable, right?

Chapter End Notes

I saw a screenshot of the moment Luffy exploded his way out of the Polar Tang yesterday and almost burst into tears because I hadn't realised just how bad it was. So of course I had to explore Law's PoV. This is also Law's take on Broken, chapter 29.
Shachi thought he'd got used to Law's odd moods by now. It had been nearly a year since he and Penguin had met the grumpy kid, and during that time they'd never parted company for more than a few hours at a time. He wouldn't say he was the most observant person in the world, but he'd noticed plenty about the younger boy and thought he had him sussed. There was one day fast approaching that he expected Law to go full sulk mode for, but that was still a little way off, unless he was misremembering.

This didn't seem like a day of mourning for his captain, though. Law wasn't hiding away or sulking or any of his other tells for "really not in the mood for your nonsense today, Shachi" days. He was a little quieter than usual – an impressive feat – and seemed lost in his own head more often than not, needing Penguin to snap his fingers more than once when his attention was required.

Patience was not one of Shachi's stronger suits.

"What is it?" he demanded, crouching in front of where Law was supposedly looking through notes on the floor of their library. The younger boy jumped and looked up from his arm – a regular draw for his eyes since he'd woken up that morning. Shachi had caught him running his fingers up and down the skin more than once, like he'd done back when the white was obvious.

It wasn't obvious now; the casual eye would never see it and Shachi could only spot the faintest of decolouration because he knew it was there. Law hadn't messed with it in months.

"What is what?" Law asked, a genuine curiosity in his voice that told Shachi he hadn't realised his unusual mood was obvious. Asking the question could go one of two ways – either his captain would clam up and get sulky, or he'd answer. Whether the possible answer would be truthful was another matter entirely. Still, Shachi bit the proverbial bullet. Not asking meant a sleepless night later – he'd learnt that one that hard way.

"You've been acting off all day," he said bluntly. "What's eating you?"

"I have not!" Law protested, and there were the hackles. He was on the verge of clamping up and Shachi really didn't want that. Some sleep later would be much appreciated.

He reached out and caught Law's arm, catching the other off guard as he carefully but firmly pulled it towards him and ran his own finger lightly over the skin, mimicking Law's earlier movements.

"You haven't turned a page the entire time I've been here," he began, feeling Law stiffen. "You didn't notice me arrive, either. Penguin keeps having to make noise to get your attention at all, and I don't think you've so much as glanced at Bepo all day. I've never seen you this unaware of your
surroundings."

"It's nothing," Law claimed, turning his head away, and Shachi rolled his eyes. Did Law not know that it's nothing was an admission that there was something and that it was bothering him? He tightened his hold on the arm in his hand as Law tried to pull away.

"So what is it that it's distracting you constantly?" he challenged. "I'd ask if your arm was bothering you, what with the way you can't stop looking at it, except I know full well that if it's playing up you'd have shut yourself away in the infirmary hours ago, so don't you try and pull that one on me."

"It's none of your concern," Law countered, and Shachi chuckled because every denial was getting weaker. If Law was caving that easily, then victory was already his. "Don't try," his captain added, narrowing his eyes in clear suspicion.

Shachi tugged on his arm sharply, catching him off balance so that he fell forwards, across his notes, and landed firmly against Shachi's braced body. Wrapping his arms firmly around him so that he couldn't wriggle away, he rested his cheek on the smaller boy's head.

"If it's bothering you and you haven't found a solution yet I'm making it my concern," he declared, feeling smaller hands pushing against his chest with far less strength than he knew Law was capable of, and waited for him to crack.

"There isn't a solution," Law grumbled. "There isn't a problem. Everything will be normal tomorrow."

"Well if there isn't a problem and this mysterious thing only lasts a day…" Shachi trailed off, feeling a smirk against his neck as Law seemed to sense victory. He was quick to correct him. "Then you'd better tell me today while it's active." Law started to struggle again.

"I just told you it's not a problem!" he complained, and Shachi shrugged, unconcerned.

"Problem or not, it's got you acting weird and now you're telling me it's something that just lasts a day… You seem very certain on that but you also said there isn't a solution, so that sounds like it's the date that's got you in a twist, am I right?"

Law was a good liar, but his resounding no was betrayed by the way his body stiffened in Shachi's hold. Confident he was on the right track, the ginger continued.

"Well you're not sad or shutting yourself away," unlike that day a several weeks ago when you got really angsty and refused to say a word, "so you're not grieving. But this is the anniversary of something for you, right?"

Law was a good liar, but his resounding no was betrayed by the way his body stiffened in Shachi's hold. Confident he was on the right track, the ginger continued.

"Well you're not sad or happy about it, but you're not quite neutral either," he carried on as if Law hadn't said anything. He noted with interest that the younger boy had stopped squirming to escape and seemed resigned to his fate. Not as bothered as he pretended about Shachi figuring him out? Shachi sat in silence for a moment, thinking things over before the puzzle slot itself together.

"Hey, Law," he started. "It's not your birthday, is it?"

Law let out a breath in clear defeat before nodding – headbutting Shachi in the chin as he did so, and the ginger was certain that wasn't wholly unintentional.
"You could have just said so," he huffed, finally loosening his grip on Law. The younger boy didn't pull away. "Did you want to celebrate?" They'd celebrated both his and Penguin's birthdays when they'd passed, after all. Law shook his head, and Shachi frowned, now confused. His deductions had got him so far, but now Law had him stumped. "Then…"

"I was supposed to die when I was thirteen," Law said suddenly, his voice still muffled in Shachi's neck. "I should never have reached my fourteenth birthday."

That explained a lot – both the obsession with his arm, or more accurately the reminder of his old disease, and his lost countenance.

"Well," he said, refusing to let Law slip back into that lost state now that he was dragging him out of it. "You have. What are you going to do about it?"

"Huh?" Law's head shot up in surprise, once again clipping Shachi's chin sharply on the way. Shachi pouted and rubbed the afflicted spot. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Exactly what I said," he replied. "You're fourteen. What are you going to do now?"

Law's mouth opened and closed a few times soundlessly, and Shachi shook his head before standing up, pulling the smaller boy with him.

"Well as you can't decide, I'm going to decide for you," he said firmly, cutting Law off as he opened his mouth again – this time clearly to protest. "You're coming with me into the kitchen, where I am making you a hot chocolate with all the trimmings, then tonight we're having one of those sleepovers because I know you like them more than you admit. Today is a day of celebrating that you beat whatever stupid thing decided you were gonna die a kid, got it? And tomorrow, you can go back to planning that feathered bastard's demise."

Law's open jaw shut with an audible clack and Shachi grinned victoriously when he allowed himself to be led out of the library, and straight into the kitchen.

"Oh, and Law?" he said, gaining a noise of acknowledgement. "Happy birthday."

Chapter End Notes

How can I do a collection on the Heart Pirates and not do something for Law's birthday? The implied timeline here is based on my assumptions from what little we can infer from canon - Law was 10 when Flevance fell, left the Donquixote Family with Cora-san when he was 12, and met Bepo, Penguin and Shachi when he was 13. Based on that, I figure Law was only just 13 when he ate the Ope Ope no Mi (a matter of a week or two, probably), making that maybe mid-late October? November at the latest. Bepo's birthday (20th November) was missed because that was still in the early days when they barely knew each other, whereas Shachi and Penguin's birthdays are close together in April, so enough time has passed that they'd have no issues bringing it up. This also makes it almost a year after the formation of the Heart Pirates before Law has his first birthday with them.
Thanks for reading!

Tsari

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!