Defiance (Original Y/N Version)

by SilverSiren1101

Summary

You are an ill-tempered assassin not shy about breaking some fingers to get what you want. You love poking and prodding at your boss, the once-shichibukai Crocodile, but you knew it was only a matter of time until the croc's jaws slammed shut around you and ate you alive. He finally gives you your most interpersonal mission yet and it fails spectacularly, but the consequences of what happens next are far from what either of you could have expected.

As a note, this takes place about a year and a few months after the events of Marineford.

The only appearance constant is physical-build (athletic) and eerie yellow eyes.

Most chapters are "Teen" to "Mature", I've marked the Explicit ones below.

CHEAT SHEET FOR SMUT:
*LAST 2/3RDS OF CHAPTER 16
*ALL OF CHAPTER 18
*LAST HALF OF CHAPTER 19

This is the original version of my now OC-converted fic, Defiance. I've decided to leave it up for those who've enjoyed it thus far!
A Great Start

Chapter Summary

Standing between your enraged boss and some poor butler definitely wasn't the first mistake in your life...but it may be your last.

Chapter Notes

This is my first fic in almost a decade (toast to the rough middle school years!) So critique and comments are appreciated. I thrive off of your attentions so please comment (feed me feed me).

Needless to say I love the big gator man and there's not nearly enough fics featuring him. Smut comes way later! Fair warning, this will not be a submissive female reader situation. Reader can be just as pushy and possessive as Croc and most certainly hold her own.

There is a "canonical" version of Y/N, her name is Shrike and you can read about her here: https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/post/17960769965/one-piece-oc-shrike-lania. Stop reading at the Spoiler mark if you don't want to be spoiled for the rest of this fic!

Also! If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is it—the moment you know he's finally going to kill you. You'd been wondering when this would happen, ever since he had hired you onto his ship. Over a year ago, now? A year spent poking and prodding. A year spent testing the nerves of the man you had come to call 'Captain'. Certainly it's just been a matter of time before the gator's jaws came snapping down around you.

And now, as you stand between him and the whimpering man behind you, it's clear they've begun to snap indeed. You're about to be eaten alive.

“...Miss L/N”. His voice sounds disturbingly cool, but you had spent enough time with him to pick up its underlying edge.

Very rarely did his expression betray any hint of what he was actually feeling. With the way he usually defaulted to a flat scowl—surely to match his general disgust for the world around him—he could be hard to read. Sure, events could occasionally force a smug grin from him from time to time, and he never was one to pass up a gloating victory laugh. That was about the extent of the emotional range you had seen from him: smug and gloating to disgust and displeasure.

Except, that is, until now.

As faint as it was, you would have to have been blind to not recognize the expression beginning to
creep into his features. The crinkling at the corner of his dark eyes...how the ends of his scar tilted ever so slightly upward...the grit jaw...the predatory focus in his gaze...

The once shichibukai, would-be king slayer and usurper, dreaded pirate captain of the seas, Sir Crocodile...was absolutely pissed.

From the moment you entered his employment—willingly or no—you knew this would be your fate. Deference to authority had never been a part of your character. Nearly every word out of your mouth was ill-mannered in some way, with your actions being equally impertinent. Crass, crude, and rebellious. That was you tried and true.

This was only fitting, seeing as how your very existence was an act of defiance to life itself. Only pure luck had allowed you to make it this far what with the cards you had been dealt. Only luck had allowed you to develop the skills you needed to survive, and only just barely at that.

Every moment of your life had been spent just trying to outrun the creeping specter of death nipping at your heels, trying to reclaim the soul it was promised.

Today, death was the lucky one.

Your time had run out.

Not that you wouldn't be going down without a fight. He at least deserved one last, double-fingered 'fuck you' before you could comfortably pass on. Death could wait until then.

You meet your captain's glare with an almost bored expression on your face. “Yeah, Cap’?” You drawl, knowing full well that using such a blasé tone would only piss him off even more. Every nickname you had come up with only seemed to have annoyed him. Of course, that was all the more reason to use them then.

As if on cue, his scowl deepens just a hint more. “Out of the way. Now.” The callous tone of his voice rakes down your spine in a way that nearly makes you shiver. You resist. Showing such weakness would only give him more to work with.

It's moments like these that remind you of just how very large he is. Easily two feet higher than you, at the very least. So large you have to blatantly crane your neck up at him like some tiny child just to look into his face. His frustratingly handsome face. 'Not the time, Y/N!'

You quickly banish those thoughts from your mind. Handsome as it was, that face was just on the verge of killing you right here and now.

"I gave you an order, agent." The last word is near spat through his teeth, anger growing all the more apparent as this debacle continued.

You internally grimace and mentally down one last shot of liquid courage. Would that you could will it into existence with desperation alone. You sure as hell needed one right about now 'Here we go.'

“Or what...” You flash him a warm smile, mockingly insolent. "...you going to kill me?"

“...You know the answer to that, Miss L/N.”

Of course you did. You knew he was going to kill you if you kept up this blatant disobedience. If only you could go back in time and kill him in his sleep like you had initially planned. How foolish of you to give him the benefit of the doubt.
This past year as part of his crew...you knew it meant nothing to him. Rare, candid moments had tempted you to think otherwise. Like how he had begun to react to your wry humor, the occasional lip twitch. Maybe even a puff that might be construed as laughter. Or how he'd taken an interest in your training, giving suggestions and the once in a blue moon acknowledgement of any improvement. He'd started to look at you, *really* look at you, and sometimes even ask for your input like he thought of you as a person and not just a body attached to a weapon. It had been moments like those that tricked you into thinking he may have thought more of you than just another paycheck to write.

Those moments had made you had think that maybe someone actually *wanted* you around for once. That you weren't just more trash to kick down the road for the next person to find. You had thought that you'd proven yourself useful enough that he had maybe come to like you, even just a little bit.

And you had foolishly come to like him too.

How naive it was to think otherwise.

Like everyone else in his life, you were yet another pawn to be used. He had made that very clear to you from the moment you fell under his banner. The wrenching in your chest and gut only make you angry at yourself. To think someone like you could ever make him care about you as a person? That you were even *worth* that much in the first place?

So, so, naive.

This feeling of betrayal was yours to blame and yours alone. You had gotten too comfortable around him. Let your walls down. *Trusted* him like a fucking idiot.

A soon to be dead idiot.

You could never have meant anything more to him than 'disposable'.

The words he had spoken to you the night of your contract come back in full force.

> "In this world it is used or be used, but the weak don’t get the luxury of that choice. You, Miss LN, get to make a different choice entirely. You are just strong enough to dictate how you get to be used, and there is a spot on my ship for someone with your… talents…”

'Talents' meaning that you were exceptionally good at killing people. Having spent the past decade on the streets of a sprawling city, you found it easy to move about without being seen. In fact, you could make it so others couldn't 'see' you at all. Instead of having an oppressive presence, yours was such that you could diminish it to a point that others would look right over you. As if where you were standing was nothing but empty, dead air. If you didn’t want to be seen then you weren’t going to be seen.

Too bad it didn’t work on someone already focused on you, making it utterly useless in this situation. Hell, even if you could slip away there was nothing stopping him from blasting the whole area. Not to mention doing so would just doom the sniveling man behind you...the entire reason this situation was happening to begin with.

No. You couldn't run and hide from this, cheat your way out like you always did.

With a sigh you draw the saber at your side from its scabbard. Ironically enough, the one he gave to you. Now pointed at him in defiance instead of deference.
You give it a flourish, resisting the urge to smile in satisfaction as it perfectly rests in your grip. Its basket-hit glints a lustrous silver in the sunlight of the courtyard, the feather pattern forming its shape strikingly accentuated. Truly a beautiful blade. A gift you had come to cherish and appreciate more than any other, one of the main reasons you hoped he really had thought more of you than he let on.

The saber slashes through the air as you quickly cross it over the terrified butler behind you. The man you've foolishly thrown your life away to protect. Your left hand comes to rest on your hip, a casual pose suggesting just how resigned to this you were.

In a fair fight you would never win, but you didn’t doubt your ability to at least ruin his day. Your speed should grant you more than enough time to give yourself a quick cut-create enough wetness to deal with his logia-and gift him a nasty new scar. Nothing lethal, he would be expecting an attack to the vitals. Just something for him to remember you by.

Your quarry always doubt your speed-your finesse-and you counted on that. Your ability to go unseen meant you never had to worry about witnesses. Being a hidden blade, no one could properly credit you for your work. To the eyes of the world, you didn't really exist, and someone that doesn't exist doesn't exactly have a bounty. You were just another unknown in this world. Most of your targets saw you as just another weak woman trying to play at being a warrior. Not that you complained. It was much easier to kill them this way.

Luckily, your captain had never fought the same foe with you side-by-side. He hadn't actually seen you in action, and you were betting on him underestimating you just everyone else. It wouldn't be the first time he had...Just like that very first night you had met. Even choking on the filth in your lungs and starving on breadcrumbs you had managed to draw blood. Impressed him enough to want you on his ship.

'Focus, idiot.'

You mentally shake the bitter memories from your head, snapping your attention back to the undeniably terrifying man before you.

His eyes had narrowed, mouth now curved into an almost snarling grimace. “Y/N you would dare t-”

“Oh, shut the fuck up.” You couldn’t help it. The words push themselves from your mouth before you can consciously realize what they’re doing.

'Oh well, you're really in it now, Y/N. Might as well go out with a bang.'

If you were going to die because you pissed off the wrong person, you certainly weren’t going to half-ass it.

"Just, shut the fuck up. This is pathetic."

For the first time since you've known him, you get to see his expression abandon any hint of subtlety. First, a flicker of surprise. Barely perceptible. You can tell by the minute movement of his throat almost choking on a gasp. The way his jaw relaxes, letting his mouth ever so slightly open.

And then it's quickly overwritten by pure, undiluted rage.

There's but a single twinge of movement, but you quickly cut him off before he can respond with either words or-far more likely-a hook through your gut. "You think I'm going to just stand here and watch you murder this guy?!!"
He stiffens, the menacing aura now roiling off him in waves. You can tell he's just barely containing himself. Barely. The weeds and brick beneath his heels have already started wilting. So angry the world around him was steadily being robbed of any moisture.

"C'mon, control yourself!" You gesture at the patch of death slowly creeping out from beneath his shadow. He doesn't look, never once breaking eye contact. Those impossibly dark eyes watch you as steadily as a predator eyeing its soon-to-be dinner. "I know you're pissed off from getting your ass handed to you in that deal. I totally fucked up, I know. I get that"

You try not to notice the way his hook shifts, now perfectly catching the sunlight with a menacing glint. Hopefully your blood would at least stain his clothes. Anything to make your death more of a hassle. 'So cheery.'

But while your internal thoughts remain sardonic and dry, the words falling from your take on a mind of their own. "But this guy-" You suddenly realize you're walking towards him with each word. "-this guy had nothing to do with that!" Whereas your tone before had been mocking, now you were practically spitting, each word dripping with venom distilled from the pent-up frustrations of the past year. "He's just some butler that happens to work for them!"

And now you're as worked up as the towering pillar of pure rage you'd just marched right up to. Your own anger grants you a burst of unexpected courage, and you glare right up into his seething expression. There's not more than a single footfall between the two of you. Not near enough space to react to the killing blow. But you don't even care anymore.

If he was going to kill you, you just want to make sure he damn well remembers it for the rest of his days.

The woman that stood up to him. Infuriated him. Humiliated him.

"Will killing this guy make you feel better, big guy? For someone who usually acts so emotionless you're certainly acting like a Big. Fucking. Bitch." His eyes widen in shock. This level of brazen disrespect was a surprise, even coming from you.

A faint voice wonders if you're pushing a little too hard. 'Maybe a bit much.'

But your brain can't quite catch up with your actions.

You jab his chest with a finger from your free hand for punctuation, saber still held tight in your right. "Why don't you just go punch a wall or find a good fuck to get your frustrations out, like any other adult?"

There's a short grinding noise as you plunge your saber down into the dirt between the brick flagstones. It wouldn't be much help this close anyway.

Instead, you plant both your hands on your hips. Your back arches backward, and you lean back on your heels to look up at his face to fix him with the hardest glare you can muster. "God forbid you stop and take a deep breath before resorting to a temper tantrum, you arrogant manchild!"

'Definitely too much. Now he's going to make it hurt.'

Out of all the things you were prepared for, a low and rumbling growl was not one of them. Sir Crocodile was not a man to make outward displays of emotion aside from 'smug' or 'displeased'. For him to vocalize something as primal as a growl? He wasn't just angry, he was smoldering with a now uncontainable fury.
it was only then that you felt the fear that had sneakily wound its way inside you.

This was going to hurt.

From your periphery you see him begin to raise his hand.

Was he going to grab and impale you?

Desiccate you right then and there?

Your mind begins to race, illustrating hundreds of scenarios each more gruesome than the last. You realize you can't move. That fear has you gripped tight, an invisible chain keeping you rooted in place. Every muscle fiber strains against the sudden paralysis but it's all in vain. Even if you could move he would catch you easily, hold you still and tortuously blast your limbs away like an industrial sand blaster.

Not that you'd ever seen him do that to anyone, but as ruthless as he was you wouldn't put torture past him.

A shadow casts over you face as he raises his hand higher.

All you can do is close your eyes, resign to this fate with grace. The faint taste of blood fills your mouth as you bite your lips, forcing them to stay closed. You wouldn't give him the satisfaction of hearing you scream.

Instinctively you began to count the seconds until impact.

'\textit{One}…'

You feel yourself begin to tremble. An utterly involuntary reaction, yet you curse yourself for it nonetheless.

'\textit{Two}…'

There's a fierce sting as your nails dig into your palms.

'\textit{…Three}?'

Why was he prolonging this? '\textit{Just get this over with please}!'  

'\textit{..Four}…?'

You crack an eye open only for both to shoot open wide in unison.

Crocodile is gone.

Where before you had been certain death was now nothing but empty space.

'\textit{…From behind}?!' You make a rapid pivot, simultaneously yanking your saber from the dirt. It comes up in a defensive position across your midsection as you drop to a more reactive stance.

He's not there either. There's nothing and no one besides the now sobbing butler. You continue to whirl around, survival instincts still running hot. He could be anywhere around you just waiting for you to drop your guard.

But he never shows.
“What…in the actual fuck?” You choke out to no one in particular.

You briefly consider turning on your perception haki to see if he’s around. You'd only ‘awoken’ it a few weeks ago, during a particularly dangerous mission. Ever since then it's been nigh uncontrollable. Turning it on in an environment like this would just leave your senses overwhelmed and shorting out. You quickly decide against it.

A sudden burst of nervous laughter pushes from your throat, carrying with it the acrid taste of bile. All at once the ground comes rushing up to greet you. Your knees crack hard against the ground followed by the clang of your saber, but you barely even register the pain. It feels like you’ve taken a punch to the gut, stomach both impossibly tight and roiling at the same time. Each breath feels stolen from the air around you as your chest heaves.

You really had been terrified. As much as you had lied to yourself about it.

And then you feel the prickling of tears at your eyes, and it all turns into rage.

There were few things more than you hated, than tears.

Before had felt like a mocking anger. Now? This was the genuine thing. Both at yourself and with him. How dare he act like a child! How dare you cry like a child!?

With a snarl, you grab the blade next to you and rise to your feet. You hold the saber aloft to get a look at your face in its reflection. The brass colored eyes you normally consider rather outputting have lost much of their effect given they were now semi-bloodshot and ringed in tears. The bags beneath your eyes were also more egregious than normal.

Frankly, you looked like shit. You couldn’t remember the last time you had an actual restful night of sleep. One that hadn’t been plagued by nightmares or restlessness. Tonight would be no different.

‘I’m so fucking tired…’

A weight suddenly drops into your stomach. Tonight.

Where would you go?!

You couldn’t just return to the ship, could you? He had let you go, but…that didn't mean he wouldn't just kill you next time he sees you! The crew wouldn't vouch for or protect you from their Captain. Most had an openly antagonistic relationship with you anyway, though that was mostly your fault. They'd probably just be happy to see you gone.

‘Good riddance. They never wanted me anyway. No one has.’

All of your belongings are still in your bunk. ‘Shit.’

You sigh. A long, exhausting sigh that feels more like your soul leaving your body than just air. You had taunted him so bad because you had fully expected him to kill you, and now…Well, you weren't dead. An odd feeling settles into your chest. Almost like you were...disappointed?

To have been so ready to die only for nothing to happen? You were somehow both relieved and indescribably frustrated at the same time. 'Do I want to die? Do I want to live? I don't even know…'

No, you did know. You just didn't really want to exist anymore. This was exhausting. Life was exhausting, always on the run and fighting. Never any time to just stop and take a breath. You were so very tired of being tired. It's not that you want to die so much as you just want rest.
But you couldn't ever rest. Death would catch up.

A particularly loud sob behind you brings you back to your senses.

"Hooooo..hoooo god. Auuhh...!" 'Oh right…the butler.'

You turn to get a better look at the man you had been so ready to die for. He is so...unbutler-like.

The stereotypical monkey suit he has on is so poorly fitted, you struggle not to break out into laughter. It's practically tearing at the seams. How he ever forced himself into it, you will never know.

His blonde hair is poorly groomed, like he tried to slick it back with a product he'd never touched before. Not to mention he appears to be quite young for a job that typically attracts the old or infirm, looking to be in his twenties. Definitely younger than you.

But aside from the undeniably beautiful blue hue-so pale, almost like ice-of his eyes, there was nothing special about him.

He quickly scrambles to his knees, prostrating himself before you.

'Oh god, please don't.'

“TH-THANK YOU VERY MUCH MA’AM.” He manages to choke out in between his gross sobbing. 'Eugh.'

You groan, rolling your eyes in an obvious show of distaste. "Get up. I don't have the patience for groveling."

It's not lost on your how very much like your Captain you sound. The realization makes you a bit more uncomfortable than you'd like to admit.

“SORRY MA’AM SORRY!” He nearly face plants into the brick as he rushes to scramble to his feet.

You turn away, eyeing a small bird as it hops around the area instead. Animals were simple. Much better than people.

"Just get out of here, maybe find a different boss. Your current one is a shady piece of work." You almost laugh as you say it, nothing the hypocrisy in your advice. *Telling a glorified maid his boss sucks? What the hell does that make me then?*

What *did* that make you? Returning to the ship most definitely meant walking right into your certain death. But it's not like you had much of a choice. There was nowhere else for you to go.

Maybe, just maybe...he'd give you another chance?

You puff a short laugh to yourself as soon as the thought crosses your mind. *I really am crazy.*

“Wait! Where are you going? That guy could be anywhere!” You hadn’t realized you had begun walking away until the butler calls out.

“Yeah, yeah I know. Don’t worry about me. Just worry about yourself, you need to find a better job.” You toss your hand into the air in a mocking sign of farewell. “I have a date with death.”

Death.
The man that *didn’t* kill you.

Your captain…Sir Crocodile.

Chapter End Notes

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/ I love talking with you all
Mistakes were Made

Chapter Summary

Things aren't as obvious as they had seemed, and a million questions fly through your head. Why didn't he kill you? Why had he blown up at just a butler?

Could it possibly be the only thing wrong here is you?

Chapter Notes

**Polished and rewritten as of Nov. 7th 2018**

Still with me? Good! Glad you're here! Comments of all kinds appreciated, no matter the date ;)

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

'I am nobody. Always was and always will be.'

This is your mantra, what you repeat to yourself before slipping into the unseen side of the world.

It's entirely psychological, you know, but there's no denying the reliance you have upon the phrase. It's far easier to become invisible when you remind yourself just how truly invisible to the world you actually are. Not that it bothers you at all, in fact, you tend to prefer it this way. It's simpler to hide-easier to get the job done-when you can make yourself just another overlooked passerby on the street. A flicker at the edge of one's vision, no more pertinent than a gnat.

You repeat the phrase in your head, willing yourself out of wandering eyes. A soft smile plays on your lips as the familiar feeling of your shroud tingles along your body. It dances feather-light along your skin, an impossibly thin, silk-like cowl of nothingness. You could never quite explain it, this ability of yours. When you want to hide, you can will it into happening. Almost as if it were an inverse conqueror's haki, granting you a negative presence instead of an overwhelming one.

Regardless of what it is, all you care is that it works.

You slip into a crowd of people, joining a throng of civilians making their way to the port. The actual name of this town has long since slipped your mind. Utterly inconsequential. This place is just yet another stop for business, run by yet another corrupt cabal of businessmen and pirates. So, of course, just the right kind of place for a man like your captain-'can I still call him that?'-to want to stop at. This is always how it goes. While he works to drum up some negotiations, make a power play, whatever, you conduct his real 'business' behind the scenes.

'Business' just being code for something he wanted and inevitably expected you to go fetch for him.
Whether that be fodder for blackmail or something more grim like a life, you know better than to ask questions. All he cares is whether you get the job done, and all you care is whether you get dinner that night. There's really no room for questions between those two.

Unfortunately after that little stint in Alabasta, former shichibukai Crocodile's name doesn't quite carry as much weight as it used to. The climb back up to his former status would be a long crawl, one he'd have to fight tooth and nail-'hook?'-for.

You're not exactly envious of the situation he's in, but you certainly don't pity him for it either. It was entirely his fault and damn if it isn't about time he learned to be responsible for his actions. Men, _users_, like him always think themselves untouchable. Immune to consequences. To have his plans blow up in his face like they did earlier today...you almost find a sense of glee in it. Schadenfreude.

...Even if it had been almost entirely your fault...

A frown tugs at your lips as something begins to constrict about your gut. Something...

_No!_ Your expression quickly turns to an infuriated grimace, pace increasing as your self-directed anger drives you forward. _I do not feel guilty about this!_

But try as you might to ignore the weight settling into your stomach, there's simply no denying it. You'd been so excited to work with him-together-when he first pulled you into his office for the mission briefing this morning. It was the first time he'd ever asked for your direct presence during one of his 'business' meetings, and you'd been more than thrilled to accompany him. He had practically handed you a one way ticket to getting in his good graces.

You had to go and fuck it all up, of course.

_What the hell, Y/N. Since when did you go from hating him to dogging after his approval?_

The heat of hypocrisy burns in your chest. You used to hunt people like him for sport. Sneaking into their homes, slitting their throats before they even realized what was going on. Everyone from corrupt marines to slavers to raiding pirate lords. So long as they were black hearted and cruel, they were all fair game in your hunt. Hell, that was how the two of you had even met!

And now you were so desperately trying to make him like you. Loathe as you are to acknowledge it, there's a none too small part of you that admires the man. _Greatly_, admires him.

You sigh, shoulders easing as some of the anger slips out between your lips. For all that Crocodile got on your nerves, filled you with indignation, made you feel so very insignificant...you really did like him. His combat strength and prowess are matched by but only a few, and the sheer destructive power granted to him by his logia is to be both feared and awed in equal measure. Yet he wields it with such a refined grace-such absolute control-that you can't help but regard him with a sense of _reverence_.

But what you respect of him most of all is his cunning.

He hadn't made it as far as he had in this world on power alone. No, most of his success had been due to his frighteningly sharp intellect. The kind of intelligence so lethal and intense you can see it in the light behind his eyes. He's somehow always five steps ahead, and clever enough to let his prey
think it's only one or two. They're already dead by the time they find out.

And honestly? As a person, he really isn't *that* bad.

Despite having the reputation of being a ruthless monster, he really isn't one. Not entirely. He rarely kills in spite or in number, preferring to let his victims live as a reminder of what happens when they cross him. The ones he does kill are because they're either too stubborn or too stupid to learn, or simply too dangerous. Hell, the only reason you had been able to join his crew to begin with was because he chose to spare you.

Even when it comes to utilizing your talents as an assassin, he tends to err on the side of caution. He sends you on hits more selectively chosen than not, and with orders to minimize casualties as much as possible. Given that the targets he directs you to kill or rob are never good people to begin with, the world is-in a twisted kind of way-a little bit of a better place with each successful hit.

Yes, he's powerful and ruthless, but it's not like he's wantonly slaughtering innocents or razing cities to the ground. Still, you've heard of his crimes in Alabasta and know what he's capable of on a more...grand...scale. But from what you've experienced of him personally, he's honestly quite charming.

When not in a foul mood, he's almost friendly towards you. As close to 'friendly' as a man like him can be described as anyway. He'll slip into an easier tone, one that no longer rakes down your spine but lightly brushes up it. An almost casual aura that leaves you feeling at ease, more willing to let you guard down.

A few times you'd even seen him *smile*. It had been nothing like you'd expected-a disturbing, menacing sneer-but instead something honestly quite handsome. The way his eyes and scar crinkled had given you pause, and you've been chasing after that expression ever since. So alien it was on his face-so very unlike him-that of course you just had to do about everything in your power to make him do it more often. You succeed every once in a while, your scathing quips and sardonic humor he'd initially refused to acknowledge occasionally eliciting a suppressed grin, or even the quietest puff of a laugh.

Sometimes he invites you into his office, not for an impersonal briefing, but to discuss your assimilation into his crew or about your growth in combat. He always seems to be in a good mood for those, pouring you a cup of coffee and asking if you have everything you need to do your work properly.

Your employment with him guarantees quite a handsome paycheck, one you're free to use at your own discretion. Not to mention he often throws in bonuses for exceeding his expectations. That, you like the most. Not the bonus, but the exceeding his expectations part.

He routinely makes sure you have everything you need to perform your duties, providing you with any weapons, armor, device, poison, or any other gear you could possibly need. Anything for any situation you may find yourself getting into, not matter how improbable. Many times it's even unsolicited, with you finding a new toy and note in your quarters.

Sometimes he hands you the bundle himself-''*try this''*-giving you some tips on how to best use whatever he was pushing onto you. Most of the time, his intuition is right, having found a perfect new piece of equipment to add to your arsenal.

Hell, he was even the one who had recognized your innate talent for swordplay and given you the saber that now hung at your side. His right hand, Daz Bones, had then personally taken up your training on how to properly wield it, much to the captain's approval. It's almost like he cares, in a
way.

About you.

But then you had to go and mess it all up.

Made him so fuming mad he had just about killed you.

...Except... he hadn't.

Maybe... maybe you really did mean more to him after all.

In the heat of the moment, you had been all but sure your life was about to end right then and there.

But it hadn't.

In the end you were now walking down this street, lost in your head. Alive.

No, no. You shake the emotions from your head, clearing room for reason.

There's a way to rationalize this. Even in this act of defiance you were still useful to him, and he was always loathe to discard a perfectly good pawn. He's made too much of an investment in your skills and training just to toss you away over your first act of rebellion, as big as it was. That's all. You'll return to the ship and he'll either finish the job and actually kill you this time, or you'll be severely punished and killed the next time you do something like this.

It's as simple as that.

No ulterior motives or meanings...Nothing pointing at him feeling anything for you... That's just inane.

Still, you feel on edge. Your fingers pick at the hilt of your saber, dancing restlessly along the leather wrappings. There's still far too many questions left in this puzzle. That outburst of his with the butler was uncalled for...and completely unexpected.

The more you mull it over, the more you realize just how entirely out of character such an outburst was for him.

Crocodile is a man that always maintains an air of implacability, one that runs cool rather than hot. Being around him makes you feel as if your very presence is an inconvenience, but not like he'll explode at any second from a misplaced word or other slight. No, your boss is a predator of impeccable patience, always waiting for the opportune moment to strike. What happened earlier...that...wasn't him.

Either he had hit some sort of breaking point or something more was going on.

Judging by the sinking feeling in your stomach, you were betting it was the latter more than the former. You had definitely missed something. The only question was what.

The entirety of your day begins to play in your head, a steady stream of images and scenes stretching back all the way from early this morning until now.

Woke up.

Rolled out of bed.
Breakfast.

Called into his office: "...you will be attending to me in place of Daz today. I assume you will be on your best behavior..."

Though you had thought it a bit weird at the time-Daz cut such an intimidating figure that he was the perfect choice for playing the 'accompanying muscle' role-that hadn't stopped you from being almost giddy with excitement.

And also exceedingly proud.

This was the first time he had ever asked for something like this from you. As soon as the request had processed in your mind, you had gone slack jawed, mouth just about thudding to the floor. Such a request meant that he was trusting you, giving you far more responsibility than normal. And not only that, he wanted you at his side. Your presence, specifically.

Despite it being against your very nature, you had resolved to be as respectful and obedient as possible to ensure everything went smoothly. So desperate to prove that his trust in you hadn't been misplaced.

Then you cocked it all up.

'Stupid. How could you ever had expected yourself to play the part of the subservient 'muscle'?! You can't even control yourself!'

It really had been foolish to believe you could have lived up to his expectations. You were so unrefined, so rough around the edges compared to his classy composure that it really had been a fool's errand. He was the master chess player while you were just the pigeon kicking over the pieces and shitting all over the board. You had street smarts and a whole bunch of knives tucked up your sleeve, not high-brow rubbish like business etiquette or social customs. Staying out of sight and killing people were about the only two things you excelled at.

Yet, despite the disastrous altercation with the butler and the close of the meeting itself, everything up until that point had gone more or less okay. He had prepped you on his plans and what he expected from you, which was to just stand there looking as impassive as possible. Should he order it, you were to stealth away and ransack the manor for whatever he needed. He really should've just asked that of you in the first place, then this whole mess wouldn't have happened.

It was an 'easy' job, he said. Laughable now.

You grumble and kick at a can on the ground. Only now do you realize that you've practically been stomping along. Were you being too hard on yourself?

'Yes...? Maybe.'

Honestly, he should have known better than to expect anything else from you.

But that still didn't make the guilt sting any less.

The job really was supposed to have been an easy one. Crocodile had arranged to meet with the aging head of the D'Lore family at their estate in the center of town. The D'Lores-as he had informed you-were a well established and respected family in the black market trade for at least several islands out. D'Lore senior has been steering the family on the path of consistently great success, even snagging illicit trade deals with some of the more...morally grey... marine captains in the area. Unfortunate for the family's legacy, the young heir set to succeed is anything but the man his father
Known for both his cocky arrogance and unwarranted savagery, Hawken D'Lore is not the kind of person the other players in the game want among their ranks. He needs to be quickly leashed and tamed if the D'Lores want any chance to maintain their respected status and amicable relationships.

Crocodile had seen the opportunity to swoop in and rein the little shit in, hopefully winning over both the D'Lores and their allies alike. That business meeting today had been the first step of his plan.

A preliminary meeting with D'Lore senior on his sadistic asshole of a son...

"Wow." The word pushes dryly through your lips before you have time to catch it. It's just that bad.

The mansion is sprawling, stretching out in way too many directions at once like some cancerous growth. It's tacky and garish and such an obvious show of affluence, wasteful for the sake of being wasteful simply because they can. The exact kind of wanton wealth that sets your teeth on edge, makes you just a little bit more aware of the sharpness of your canines.

The white walls of the manor glow radiantly as they catch the sun's rays, almost blinding. All the more tacky given the surrounding manors—much more reasonable in size, too—are all tasteful brownstones. The front courtyard itself is the size of the neighboring building, and is accentuated with a long pool of water. The bottom of which shines in shimmering gold and turquoise from elaborate tile mosaics. There are marble fountains spewing pristine water spaced every few meters, each one topped with a gilded statuette more garish than the last.

The D'Lore's must have wanted the attention, obviously.

Each dormer and gable and trellis and arcade and whatever the hell other useless architecture this house apparently needed all catch your eye. Each and every one of them such an obvious point of infiltration. Stupid rich people always make your job so much easier for you, not realizing the more elaborate the house, the more parts they need to cover.

Tiny farmhouses with but a single floor and two windows were true challenges to break into. With mansions like these, it's practically like walking straight into a department store. Not to mention just looking like the family's Help generally makes the guards just let you strut right in.

This was the exact kind of place that used to be your hunting grounds.

"Your assessment? Miss L/N?" Crocodile's smooth voice startles you from the hyper-focus you had slipped into. You turn your chin to look up at him where he stands to your right. While the look on your captain's face is rather impassive, the way his eyes bore into you is anything but. He seems...rather invested in what you might have to say.

You try to ignore how that makes you feel. Which is pretty warm, by the way.

"What? On how much of an eyesore this place is, or the laughable security? I have choice words on both." You internally curse at yourself as soon as the words leave your mouth. 'Act professional, idiot. You're not going to impress him with stupid jokes.'

Nonetheless, the briefest hint of an amused smile tugs at the corner of his lips. "Security, Agent. The choice taste in this villa has hardly escaped my attention."

You blink, staring at him a little wide eyed before you realize what you're doing. 'Did he actually find that funny? Wait. Focus! He asked you a question.'
Clearing your throat a few times, you try to slip back into the steely composure you'd been practicing all morning. "Apologies, Sir. Ah, security wise... we haven't even stepped past the front gate and I've spotted no less than six infiltration points. It's rather trite, really. I can be in place before you even sit down at the negotiation table."

His eyes slip closed, and he makes a low, rumbling sound of acknowledgement. "An apt assessment..." You try not to jump as his hand falls to your shoulder, just as hard as you try not to flush from the unexpected physical contact. "...But you will be attending with me in person today, Miss L/N. I could use another pair of eyes."

Your mouth really does go slack jawed this time, not even bothering to disguise the surprise painted on your face. "R-Really? You're asking me to be in there with you?" You swallow, trying best as you can not to stammer. "Not to be disrespectful, Sir, but you really should reconsider."

This plan has 'bad outcome' written all over it. The only things subtle about you are your blades, with your mouth being as far from it as possible. Being thrust into a social situation? Where you were expected to remain stoic and polite? This would be nothing short of disastrous. What if this was a fine dining thing and you had to know the difference between inane drivel like a big fork versus a little fork? They both do the same thing!

But his dark eyes meet yours, glinting with an expression you really can't describe. He breaks into a charming grin that tells you he knows more to this than he was letting on. "I am quite sure, Miss L/N."

"...As you wish, Sir." Though you question his judgement, the promise you made to yourself earlier prevents you from sounding any further objections. He had expectations, and you so desperately want to meet them.

He gives you one last look from the corner of his eye before continuing towards the manor's gates. Themselves as garish and unnecessary as the rest of the place, they're needlessly high and formed of wrought iron bars. The tips of which-sharpened spades-have been gilded with some sort metallic enamel that makes them shine golden in the sunlight. Probably real gold, just going by the fact that the gatehouse appeared to have been carved from marble. It's such a disgusting misappropriation of wealth that really could have been put to far better use, you can't help but grumble. Who the hell needed a marble guardhouse? The D'Lores apparently.

All of it puts a foul taste in your mouth.

This is the exact type of 'rich' you hate the most: wasteful, arrogant, classless. The opposite of your captain; Crocodile was 'wealthy', not 'rich'. He actually does shit with his assets instead of shove them into useless, gilded doorknobs. Liquid assets are always worth more than gold leaf and gems tastelessly inlaid in garish balustrades, and he practices that school of economics with expert care.

Yet, you can't help the feeling of nostalgia settling into the back of your mind. This place is remarkably similar to where the two of you first met, when he tried to poach one of your kills. 'I wonder if he's thinking the same...Probably not.'

You don't have much time for reminiscence as a contingent guards quickly meets you at the gates. All of them are clearly armed, adorably dolled up in the same tacky uniform consisting of a scarlet mock of typical Marine attire-trimmed with gold lace, because of course it is-and a standard rifle slung across their backs with the matching pistol holstered at their sides. 'Small fry.'

A man who you can only assume to be the guard captain, given the silly cap on his head, steps
forward holding a neatly unfolded letter. He clears his throat before standing at attention, and you struggle not to roll your eyes.

"You must be Sir Crocodile. We've been informed of your scheduled visit today, but received no such notice of a plus one." The man's eyes shift over to settle on you, and it takes every bit of willpower not to stick your tongue out at him. Instead, you politely tilt your head forward, waiting for your captain to respond.

This was already so exhausting.

Crocodile makes a low noise-almost like a hum-clearly in amusement. "Please, do not mind my attendant. This is Miss Y/N L/N. She will be assisting in the affairs this afternoon."

At that, you bend forward in a slow, respectful bow, making sure to keep your eyes lowered and coy. "Pleased to meet your acquaintance. I assure you I am quite harmless."

Upon raising back to standing position, you make sure to flutter your eyes directly at the guard captain's face, giving him a warm and demure smile. You've played this game many times before, acting the role of the innocent servant girl to sneak inside. Only this time, you wouldn't be sneaking at all. They'd be letting you waltz right through the front door.

The man fidgets, a hint of red sneaking into his facial features. "Um, well. Ma'am, you are armed."

He gestures at the saber hanging to your side. 'Good thing he can't see the knives in my sleeves or boots...' Your expression remains warm as you quickly scramble to think of a response. Luckily, your captain already has one prepared.

"One can never be too careful, what with a reputation like mine." That charming grin splits across his lips, tilting the edges of his scar upwards in the way you'd come to find so very handsome. Somehow both charming and predatory at the same time, a grin that showed just how trite he found the skittering of the pitiful mouse before him. "Miss L/N is simply a pretty face. The blade is just for show. She's more like to trip over it than fell an opponent."

'Pretty?!' Your own beginnings of red start to lick at your face. You quickly stamp those thoughts down, knowing full well he's only putting on a show. Just as you are. As if someone like him thought of you that way.

He suddenly raises his hand, and you bite down a giggle as the man before him instinctively reaches for his gun, terror written clear on his face. "Even so, as if I need a weapon. I very much am one myself." His hand suddenly shifts into a stream of sand. He flicks it in a circle around him, and you watch in amused wonder as it strips the gold enamel off one of the gate's tips. 'Show off.'

Silence descends upon the encounter, the guards all squirming and looking at each other as their captain remains near frozen in fear.

You're this close to bursting into laughter when a new voice rings out across the courtyard. "Captain Reynald, are you inconveniencing my guest?"

Your gaze shifts past the gaggle of flustered guards. A rather dour looking man stands at top of the wide steps leading to the utterly massive front door, recessed within a marble archway. His grey hair still has hints of auburn, especially in his well-groomed and angular beard. He's quite a large man, burly and still trim despite his apparent age, which you put at being older than your captain given the excess grey. Even from this distance you can make out the piercing blue of his eyes, almost like ice.

This could only be D'Lore senior, Torin.
The guard captain—Reynald?—quickly snaps into a salute, struggling to stifle the fearful trembling wracking his limbs. "Apologies, Sir!" Though you're not quite sure which "Sir" he was currently addressing. He swiftly stands aside, to which the other guards follow in suit, allowing you to pass through.

Crocodile begins his casual saunter to the manor, but not before flashing Reynald a blink and you miss it look conveying nothing but pure contempt. You try not to laugh as you follow.

The pool with its fountains stretches along to your left as he chooses the right path to make his way to the door. You quickly step alongside him, your pace having to be one slightly more than comfortable to keep up with his long strides.

"Truly, the perfect picture of innocence, Miss L/N." His voice sounds low in your ear as he speaks under his breath, careful to keep his gaze focused forward.

You follow his lead despite the effort it takes not to break into a wide grin. One not too dissimilar from his one before. "I am to please, Sir."

He hums a low note in what you can only hope is amusement.

The two of you reach the stairs with no further incident, and D'Lore gruffs out an apology at the misunderstanding from his security.

"I understand, D'Lore. Good help is difficult to find." Crocodile puffs a short laugh, dark gaze meeting yours from the corner of his eye.

Your lip twitches before you can contain it. 'You ass.'

D'Lore merely laughs, stepping forward to take your hand. You offer it to him with a dainty bat of your lashes. "Now, now. This lady certainly appears to be capable." He brings your hand to his lips, and you struggle not to hurl as he kisses them. The beast inside you throws itself against its shackles, slavering with a thirst only this man's blood could satiate. You would've happily killed him back in the day. Back before you became professional.

Instead, you just laugh. A delicate little thing that makes you want to slap yourself. "I do try."

He releases your hand, but you freeze as you catch sight of your captain over his shoulder. His eyes have narrowed, sour scowl clear on his face. It disappears right as D'Lore turns around, quickly replaced by that charming grin.

'Shit, did I mess up? Too friendly with the enemy? I'm not good at this crap.' You flash him an exaggerated shrug from behind D'Lore's back. 'What do you want from me?!

He doesn't address it, continuing to chat with the D'Lore head of house. Though from the way his eyes meet yours for but a split second, it's clear he saw.

"Come, come. We have much to discuss." D'Lore beckons the two of your through the manor.

The interior is just as garish and obscenely opulent as the exterior. He takes you down the foyer, which stretches on for what looks like half a mile. As you pass room after pointless room the urge to knock over the occasional decorative urn rises. Everything is just so frustratingly wasteful. The amount of money that went into the gold leaf pressed into the wainscoting alone could probably feed the entirety of the city for weeks on end.

Yeah, this place definitely reminded you of the place the two of you had met.
"Stand down Daz...this one is interesting..." The scarred man orders, eyes flicking between the blood running down his wrist and the bladed claw pressed to your throat...

You're snapped out of your daydream as D'Lore shows the two of you into a parlor room of sorts.

From there, the two of them sit opposite of each other at a table. You chose to settle yourself against the wall close to the door, the one right behind your captain in order to keep an eye on the dealings at the table. Leaning back, you automatically cross your arms about your chest, resting a heel against the wall.

You're already drifting back into your head as soon as you see the bundle of papers Crocodile draws forth from his coat.

'Ugh, nap time. Boring.'

You're only dreaming for but a few minutes before your captain's voice drifts through the fog, his terse tone interfering with your dreams of what dinner tonight might be.

"Will D'Lore junior not be joining us this afternoon?"

D'Lore senior clears his throat, putting his fist to his mouth to suppress an uncomfortable laugh. "My son, yes. I'm afraid he won't be present. Pray forgive me for relaying the message he left." He reaches into his own coat, drawing forth an equally large stack of papers that nearly makes you sigh in exasperation. The very top most one is a small note, about the size of a postcard. D'Lore inhales a deep breath before reading it aloud:

"A waste of my time! Meeting with some washed up old hack like that reptile bastard."

It takes everything from you to not burst out laughing. The corner of your lips twitch aggressively, and you close your eyes to try and detach yourself from the rampant giggling building in your throat. Making fun of your captain is one of your favorite sports, one you're more than welcome to let others play too. Any chance to see your captain squirm was not one you wanted to miss.

You straighten up, eager to see the Croc's reaction. This suddenly got a lot more interesting. If only you could see his face.

Surprisingly, he chuckles, and the sound of it is like claws sinking into your chest. It's one of the most menacing sounds you have ever heard, dripping with honeyed aggression. "That arrogant attitude is exactly why I'm here, Torin. Do you really feel comfortable entrusting the family into his hands?"

From there, everything goes to shit.

Hawken had left with his father a list of demands that were downright outrageous.

You stand there, watching in rapt attention as your captain attempts to suavely orchestrate a financial alliance with the D'Lore head of house, only to be stonewalled at nearly every suggestion by the son who isn't even present. Every single concession he made in his original offer is rejected to the point you can tell Crocodile isn't just frustrated, but insulted.

And an insulted Crocodile is a dangerous one.

"I'm afraid my hands are tied, Croc'." Your captain bristles at that, radiating waves of hostility at the clear disrespect. "My son is taking over and if this is how he wants to see the family run, I will not interfere."
"So you're saying you don't care if your idiot of a son runs your family legacy into the ground?"

You straighten up, eyes widening. Your teeth begin to bite into your lower lip, desperate to contain any noises that may slip out. Every one of your senses flips into high alert, your fingers lightly beginning to fidget at the hilt of your saber. For your captain to begin dealing open handed insults meant this situation was quickly going from bad to worst.

"Once he takes over? No." This time you focus in on D'Lore, trying to get a feel for his disposition. You watch the way his jaw tenses, his nose twitching every so often. There's a rustling as his hands worry at a sheet of paper-'the demands list?'-beneath the table. And then you notice his eyes, with their occasional twitch, looking not just at your captain, but past him.

At the door.

As if he were worried someone was listening/

D'Lore senior, is speaking under duress.

You take a deep breath, letting your eyes slip close as you curse yourself for not having a better hold over your perception haki yet. Being able to sense if there was someone on the other side of the door would be immeasurably helpful right now.

But the fact of the matter is, you don't. Right now the best you can do is try and get you captain's attention. You tune back in just in time to hear your boss really going at it, his tone utterly dripping with venom.

"It's not the responsibility of your better to explain to you what you're too foolish to realize." His deep voice purrs with contempt.

'Shit shit shit. Please don't bite my head off.' You swallow, and then clear your throat.

"Sir."

He doesn't hear you. Neither of them do.

"Resorting to trite insults? Arrogance doesn't secure the holdings of my family." A bead of sweat rolls down D'Lore's forehead. Whether it's from fear of your captain or fear of the son strong arming him, it's impossible to say.

"Sir." You speak up a little louder, nervous yourself.

"And yet you seem so confident in your shithead son. Or have you mistaken his own arrogance for actual talent?"

"SIR!"

They both whirl to face you, D'Lore with a furious glare, Crocodile with a heated glower. Your captain hardly ever lets the true intensity of his emotions show on his face. The fact you can feel anger roiling beneath those eyes is a bad sign.

You can't help but flatten yourself against the wall under the intensity of that look, fear spiking cold down your spine. This is...this is bad.

But something strange happens. As you freeze beneath that predatory scowl, his brow twitches ever so slightly. A light of something you can't quite place flashes in those dark eyes as the scowl begins
to relax. The initial anger melts off his face as he begins to address yo-

"Your wench speaks out of turn, Crocodile."

And then it's back, burning with even more hostility than before.

But so are you.

"Says the piss-scared craven talking like there's a gun to his head." You're snapping at him before you even realize it. That cool composure having long since slipped away, leaving behind a blazing indignation. This man would not speak to you this way. You'd killed bigger men for less.

D'Lore rockets to a standing position, slapping his hands down on the table. His face has turned a bright crimson from the rage welling within. "Gun to my head-You dare threaten me in my own home?!" He sputters the words like he's spitting out seeds, but all the while you notice his eyes flitting between your face and the door. "Me, Torin D'Lore?! I run this city. You're nothing more than an unimportant harlot!"

You bristle furiously, barely keeping yourself from snarling at the man. "I'm not threatening you, you pompous fuck. But clearly someone else is."

"Y/N-Miss L/N. Stand. Down." Your captain's terse voice rolls from your side, hovering just on the edge of being a growl. Despite the tone, the fact he slipped your first name before correcting himself wavers your resolve.

It sounded good in his voice, even as angry as it sounded. It was rare that he ever used it, so... why had he used it?

You quickly shake your head and turn to look at him-standing now too-trying to gauge his current emotion. His expression has hardened into a bitter scowl, somehow aimed at both of you. Still furious at D'Lore's disrespect. Definitely now furious at yours. So mad he had defaulted to using your name, scolding you like some infuriated parent.

"Captain, Sir, D'Lore has been speaking under duress this entire time. His eyes keep flitting towards the door."

Crocodile's mouth begins to open, only to be cut off by a knock at the door.

You notice D'Lore stiffen out of the corner of your eye, his face turning a full shade paler. He swallows around a lump in his throat before addressing the knock. "Y-Yes. Come in."

As the door begins to swing open, you immediately drop into a defensive stance. Your hands fly to your saber's hilt and sheath as you prepare for the worst. From your periphery, you can tell your captain is also on edge, though not as outwardly tense as you are.

Your heart hammers in your chest. At this point you're fully expecting a gunman or, worse, a fruit user. What if D'Lore was nervous because he was waiting for another hitman to come and try to take out your captain? What if it was someone coming to take D'Lore out hims-

And of course it's just a fucking butler behind the door.

"Sir. Are things okay in here?"

D'Lore sighs behind you, and you hear the rustling of paper being gathered. The timbre of his voice remains just as nervous as before, but now tinged with relief. "No, these two are no longer welcome.
Escort them from the premises."

Your face goes red hot in utter humiliation. You had fucked up. *Big time.*

D'Lore had only been nervous because Croc was scaring the piss out of him, probably as intended. And he was only looking at the door so often because he had been hoping to call for security to get the two of you the hell out. There never were any assassins or threats. You had been so eager to impress your captain and do a good job that your mind had fabricated the whole situation.

All it did was make you look utterly incompetent.

You turn to look at Crocodile's face already dreading the expression you might find there.

But... it's not what you expect. Not at all. Rather than anger, he's intensely focused. His narrowed eyes are actively scrutinizing the butler's face, and from the tightening of his jaw you can tell he's not quite trusting what he sees. You've never seen him like this before. This... *predatory.* He's watching the butler like a beast does its prey, just waiting to pounce.

Was there something you missed? Did he truly think this sniveling boy an enemy?

You trace his line of vision back to the young butler's face, hoping to find any answers. Definitely a young man, early to mid twenties. Aside from his unruly blond hair and pretty eyes, he's rather unassuming. His outfit is a little tight on him, and he looks a bit nervous, but no alarm bells go off as you look at him.

"Master D'Lore has requested you leave at once. Come with me."

His tone is not quite right for a docile servant, nor is his choice in words, but you merely chalk that up to being nervous. It's hard not to be with a man as intimidating as Crocodile looking at you like his next kill.

"Of course." Your captain practically growls the words. He shoots one last look over his shoulder at D'Lore, but it's too quick for you to catch his expression.

And then he turns to you, looking just as sour as it was before. "Come, agent. Before you make a mess of things any further."

Your heart sinks to your gut like a stone. His disapproval somehow cutting deeper than any knife. He'd handed you your first real assignment—a chance to really prove yourself—and you went and blew it, a fact he's more than open to express.

But rather than making more of a scene, you merely nod, casting your eyes to the floor. "Of course, Sir. My sincere apologies."

The quietness of your voice makes you want to slap yourself. You can't help but think you sound like a dejected child, as if you weren't embarrassed enough already.

He turns and follows the butler out without another word.

You give one last look to D'Lore yourself, burning anger at him snuffed by your captain's disappointment. D'Lore looks at you with an uneasy light in his eyes. Definitely still quite flustered himself, insulted and threatened in his own home. You give him a deep, remorseful bow, keeping your eyes downcast. "I have insulted you greatly, Mr. D'Lore. I apologize."

He huffs, sinking back into his chair. His head falls into his hands as he falls, and you note just as
A frown tugs at your lips. His choice of words strikes you as...odd. 'Follow my captain's lead...?'

You're careful to avert your gaze, still too mortified to meet his directly. He stares at you, you can feel those dark eyes boring into you, but otherwise remains silent as you take your place a step behind him at his side.

"This way, then." The butler pipes up, beckoning the two of you down the hall back to the front door...

Crocodile had pounced on the man as soon as the two of you were down the front steps out the door.

So unprepared for his outburst, that you had quickly thrown yourself between him and the unsuspecting butler without thinking.

Without. Thinking.

You had definitely missed something.

The end of the meeting had been terse. D'Lore's parting words to you not just odd, but cryptic.

He had been trying to tell you something. All of it had gone out the window as you rashly reacted to your captain's hostility. Hostility at a seemingly innocent man. Seemingly.

You continue making your way down the road, careful not to brush up into any of the civilians in the throng about you. Your shroud is still active, but it can easily be dispelled by mistakenly drawing attention to yourself.

'Was that outburst really misdirected?' Your teeth worry into your lower lip, brain working overtime to process the images from your memories of the day. "The butler...Think!'"

A photo-perfect image of the butler solidifies in the forefront of your mind: He was a younger man, mid-twenties at most, with a thick, tousled mop of blonde hair. Bright blue eyes, closer to ice than sea water, that were undeniable gorgeous. He had been wearing an outfit appropriate for his job, but not for his body. It had been several sizes too small, clinging to rippling muscles you only just now realized he had. It hadn't occurred to you as anything interesting in the moment, but now was something quite noticeable as your pored over your mental image of him. Having such a physique was...odd...for a manservant.

'What about his face?'

His face had been above average, though not overly handsome. Rather squarish nose with a jutting bridge. Average jaw, neither weak or strong. Those pretty eyes. Immaculate teeth. No scars.

Wait.

One scar.

A short, clean line cutting through the right side of his lips arching down to this chi-
"AW FUCK!" Several people around you start and scream as you curse aloud. You seemingly having materialized out of nowhere.

The heel of your hand meets your forehead with a resounding smack. The combination of your humiliation induced self-doubt and the adrenaline of the moment had made you completely overlook what you now realize to be Hawken D'Lore's laughably weak disguise. The hair had obviously been a wig, disguising his natural auburn locks. His clothing had very clearly been borrowed from one of the family's actual servants. And the makeup attempting to cover the scar across his lips had been sloppily applied.

It had all been so obvious only an idiot could have fallen for it.

That idiot being you.

'I fucked up. I reaaalllllyyy fucked up. Ooohhhhhh no.' Your mind is racing a thousand miles a second as you piece together what happened.

D'Lore had been speaking under duress, terrified of slipping up and angering Hawken-disguised as a family servant-on the other side of the door. The father really was being held hostage in his own home, and your captain had realized it as soon as you tried to tip him off. Only, that disguise and your captain's show of disapproval had rattled your conviction. You had been so embarrassed and already self-conscious about meeting his expectations that you so readily accepted you had made a mistake.

Except you hadn't.

The only mistake you had made was not recognizing Hawken.

From the beginning, you had been right.

Crocodile had quickly put on an act in order to not tip off Hawken. pretending he was infuriated at your 'mistake'. You had been too hurt to pick that up, acting on emotion instead of reason. The look Croc had shared with D'Lore senior-the one you hadn't been able to see-must've been a show of recognition. And D'Lore's parting words? 'Follow your captain's lead...' He practically told you what was about to go down.

Before, you had felt a sense of pride in your strong morality, having protected a seemingly helpless man from the vindictive rage of your captain. Now? Now all you feel is a burning sense of shame and embarrassment. 'Some assassin I am! Not able to pick apart a disguise that looked like a child made it!'

A sense of deep unease suddenly settles over your shoulders. That shout of yours had dispelled your shroud, leaving you completely exposed.

This feeling...you're being watched.

Seeing as how you and your captain has just infuriated and undeniably dangerous man-young as he is-the realization that you're being watched has you quite unsettled. Your shroud didn't work on people already focusing on you, and you needed to get hidden again fast. You quickly dip into an alleyway, making sure to break the line of sight of whoever was watching you.

The brick is cool against your back as you lean against the side of a building. Your breathing slows, and you let the calming sensation wash over you as you repeat your mantra in your head. 'I am nobody...a foolish, stupid nobody.' Not quite the same, but it works nonetheless, rendering you all but invisible in the traditional sense.
The sense of being watched vanishes, quickly replaced by the light tingling on your skin as you slip unseen.

With one, last calming exhale, you peek your head out of the alleyway. Sure enough, a well-dressed pair of men sit hunched over in the cafe across the street. Their eyes are frantically scanning the crowd, and from their growing agitation you can tell they're looking for you. They're undoubtedly two of Hawken's hired thugs, on the watch for either you, your captain, or most likely both. So far they only seem to be keeping watch, but you didn't want to stick around and press it.

You quickly slip back into the crowd, making a beeline for the ship.

'I need to fix this. I... I... ' But the thought wouldn't finish. How could you even start to fix this?!
Prostrate yourself before your captain and beg for his forgiveness?

No. You would apologize. You would make this right. But you would not grovel. As much as you loathe begging, you equally loathe people who don't take responsibility for their actions. You had fucked up, there was no denying that. You would apologize and do everything to make this right.

But you would not beg.

You swallow as the ship comes into view, its masts flying his winged jolly roger high and proud. This had been your home for the past year, but now...now it feels like a trap.

All you can do is hope he's cooled down enough to not kill you as soon as you step foot on deck. If he does...well, then it's not your problem anymore.

Chapter End Notes

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
You return to the ship, but Crocodile isn't there. Your biggest critic is though, and he's plenty eager to hear just how you've messed it all up this time.

Chapter Notes

**REWRITTEN AS OF 11/19/18**

This has gotten significant rewrites from its first iteration! The characterization of big bro' Daz is much more on point, and so is our lovely reader's. I hope you enjoy this new version!

As always comments and criticism ever appreciated.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

"You're really sure he's not here." It's more of an affirmation than a question at this point. He'd more than made himself clear already.

"For the last time: no, he's not. But the longer you keep asking the more time he has to show up."

You don't have the best relationship with Daz Bones. He'd been the most vocal in his concerns about you joining the crew, thinking you'd just try to kill his captain in his sleep. Over the past year he'd taken to keeping a close eye over you. A wary, close eye.

Sure, he'd taken up most of your training-teaching you a variety of martial arts as well as swordplay-but his lessons were draconian. Downright grueling at best. He'd only just semi-warmed up to you recently in the past few months. Not quite 'friendly', but no longer active animosity either. He saw you as petulant, and you him as condescending...but the two of you are working on it.

Though right now, it's clear that your repeated badgering is just annoying him.

You groan, anxiety driving you to pace about the little sparring ring. This cleared out half of the cargo hold served as a perfectly adequate space for the crew to spar and train in. It's far enough down such that it muffles any noises that could annoy the Croc. When not loyally dogging at his captain's side, Daz spends much of his time down here working out or meditating as he was now.

That is, until you had barged in.

As soon as you had gotten back, you had scoured the ship searching for Crocodile. There had been nary a trace of him, though it did appear as if he had torn through his office in a hurry-even leaving the door ajar. You had stumbled upon Daz down here, searching the cargo hold in one last-ditch
effort to find your captain. Much to his annoyance.

He rolls his shoulders, but doesn't even bother to open an eye and look at you. "What happened? What did you do?"

"What did I do?! Why are you always so quick to assume that I did something?!" You whirl on your heel to glare at him, anger sparking through your chest. So prideful you can't help but grow defensive at his assumption that you'd fucked up somehow...even if he was completely right.

Because you had done something.

This time.

"You always do this! I've been pulling my weight around here for months now, and it's never good enough for you! I make one mistake and that's enough for you to pounce on me!??"

"A mistake?" A single, steely grey opens, and it looks at you full to the brim with smug judgement. "So you did do something."

He says it so matter of fact, you can feel what little patience you have left snap. A bowstring having been pulled so taut the frame itself has shattered into a thousand tiny splinters.

You take a few menacing steps towards him without thinking, reason completely overshadowed by your insulted fury. "I am so sick and tired of your shit, Daz! What makes you so special?! So unquestionable?! You think you're soooo infallible!"

His shoulders shift as his lungs push out a sigh. "As hot headed as usual. Lashing out at others for your own mistakes again? You never learn, kitty."

That nickname. You absolutely hate it. A reminder that he only thought of you as the dirty street cat the captain picked up. The stray he thought he could make into a loyal lap beast just like he did his fearsome pet gators.

All your frustrations over the past year come exploding out in the form of a roaring snarl. "DON'T CALL ME THAT!"

He rolls his eyes, and that's it.

Your hand flies to the hilt of your saber, anger boiling over. Everything in you wants to draw on him, wants to show him that you're more than just hissing, that you have claws too.

But that would only be proving him right.

All those assumptions. That you're just an arrogant brat incapable of learning, unable to leash herself and maintain control.

You'd rather die.

Your eyes slip closed as you forcibly swallow down the incensed bile bubbling in your throat. You can feel him looking at you. Judging you. Those steely eyes piercing straight into your soul, waiting for you to show him your true character.

The breath you take is so deep your head cocks to the side, neck popping from the strain of your muscles as you contain yourself. Whatever he thought of you, you were better than that.

Your hand falls away from your saber, fingers tensing into a fist before relaxing at your side. You
open your eyes to meet his own from where he still remained seated on the floor, yellow meeting silver. His face is no longer impassive, but now bears a tight-lipped smirk. "Well now. And here I was hoping to teach you another lesson."

His words stoke the fury still burning in your chest, but you know better than to take the bait. Lunging at him now would just leave you bloody and bruised. So you merely cross your arms, rocking back to recline on a heel. "I know I'm just one big joke to you. No matter what I do. The mangy stray trying to play at being a serious agent. Well I've disappointed one person today, might as well disappoint you too."

He frowns, expression suddenly turning serious. "The kitty is using her words instead of her claws? Whatever happened must've really humbled you."

You cluck your tongue, giving a noncommittal shrug of your shoulders. "Yeah, well. I don't want to talk about it. I'm sure he'll tell you all about it later."

With that, you turn and move to make your exit, heading to the stairs leading out of the cargo hold. You make it about halfway across the hull before your senses blare in high alert. Even as immature as your newly awakened perception haki is, you'd have to be completely comatose not to notice the object rocketing toward your head from behind.

Your hand dives up your sleeve at the same time you begin to pivot in place. Just as soon as the tips of your fingers brush against the blade hidden there, it's sliding into the palm of your hand. You flip it between your knuckles before snapping your wrist forward just as you complete your turn. It glides from between your fingers, smooth as silk, expertly slicing the thrown apple into two, perfect halves.

A thud echoes about the hold as the dagger embeds into the wood of the hull, just past Daz's head. You meet his tight-lipped frown with a fearsome scowl.

The two halves of the apple hit the floor with thuds of their own.

Daz pulls himself to his feet, making a show of stretching up to his full height. Even with your six foot two figure he towers over you, just as your captain does.

A fact you absolutely detest.

He cracks his neck, taking a casual step forward as he rolls his shoulders a few times. "Now now, kitty. I want to hear it from you. Tell me what happened."

"I don't have time for this, dog." You growl, sliding the dagger down from your other arm. It glints in the low, dusky light of the hold, catching the fire of a nearby lantern menacingly. You had no intention of starting a fight, but you sure as hell had no problems finishing one.

He crosses his arms about his chest before cocking a brow. "In a rush? Almost like you don't want to be here when he gets back? What you did was bad, wasn't it."

You bite your cheek, relying on the sting to keep you grounded. This was just him testing you even harder. You know he just wants to see how long you can hold out before he gets another rise out of you. Well, he won't get it.

Without a word you turn on your heel and resume your exit. Daz would hear all about it tonight, or whenever the boss got back. Whether that was before or after he'd killed you...

From over your shoulder, Daz tsks his tongue behind you. "I always knew you'd be a disappointment, Y/N. Just a waste of our time."
Your vision goes red, flushed hot with rage. With a snarl, you whirl around and whip your other dagger straight to his head. A harsh, metallic clang echoes about the hold as he deflects from with a bladed arm. Just as you knew he would.

Just as he knew you would cave in the end. You never could ever resist a challenge, no matter the size. And right now, he was challenging your pride.

He drops into a brawling stance, lightly bouncing on the balls of his feet. "That's it. There's the claws. C'mon, get it all out." His hand extends outwards, palm towards the sky as he makes a beckoning motion with his fingers.

_The only thing I need to get out is you from my life!_ But you don't say it, instead translating all of your rage and frustrations into a furious snarl that tears itself from your throat. You close the distance between the two of you in a single bound, simultaneously wrenching your saber free from her sheath.

But he moves quickly, far more quickly that you anticipated, and you're not thinking clearly enough to maintain your battle composure. His hand snaps out, chopping down at yours right at the wrist. It's unbladed, luckily, but the force of the strike forces your grip to relax.

Your saber falls to the ground with a rattling clang as you take a leap backwards.

"No weapons. No running away. You're going to get these childish frustrations out the old fashioned way." He kicks the blade across the floor with a frown, sending it away to rest against the sloped curve of the hull. The disrespect only has you seething even more, but before you can open your mouth he's driving forward with a punch aimed straight for your gut.

You pivot quickly to the side, his fist finding only air where your torso once was. But he's far too experienced for something like that to have upset his balance. He corrects his movement gracefully, leg sweeping up for a roundhouse kick targeted at your upper arm.

His leg soaring over your head as you drop to a crouch just in time. Before he can follow up with another blow you quickly throw yourself forward. The world blurs into a whorl as you roll beneath Daz's outswung leg, deftly maneuvering behind him.

You land in a crouch on the other side, and you hurriedly rush to spring backwards. To put some space between you. Right as you kick off the ground, he whirls around disturbingly quick-a reminder that his training sessions were always just him toying with you.

But now? Now he's taking this seriously.

His fingers wraps around your ankle right as you begin to spring away. It halts all your forward movement, whiplash tearing the world out from under you. Your chin hits the ground with a tinny click of your teeth and a resounding thud. Everything flashes white from the shock of it, your hands immediately flying up to paw at your jaw.

Through the stunned haze you can dimly make out the clucking of a tongue. "I said no running, kitty."

He's utterly incensed you at this point, and you roll onto your back to glare up at the arrogant jackass with a rolling snarl. "Fuck you!"

"The yowling isn't necessary either. Now, how about you tell me what you did out there, hm?"

Like hell you would, not after all this. He didn't deserve to here a single word of it from your lips.
Things had progressed beyond mean words and harsh glares. He was going to have to work for any answers from you.

He sighs, head lolling backward from the force of his eye roll. "Stubborn as usual. Look, either you can tell me, now. Or I'm going to beat that pride out of you, and then you'll tell me."

Your continued silence tells him your answer.

Right as he begins to huff another exasperated sigh, you roll your legs upward and spring back to your feet right before him. The surprised look on his face quickly turns into an excited grin as you drop into a brawling stance none too dissimilar from the one he'd adopted earlier. "Fine. I'll play your stupid game."

Crocodile would never approve of the two of you going at each other seriously, but you have a feeling Daz cares about that as little as you do right now. The issues between you wouldn't be solved over well-placed words and a shared drink.

Daz was right about one thing: you need to get this out the old-fashioned way.

"You never were one to resist a challenge." He muses, all the while filling the hold with the cracking of his knuckles. "Beat down it is, then."

You had meant to take the initiative-try to keep him on his toes-but he surges forward with such a speed you don't have much of a choice.

The assault he launches on you is nothing short than overwhelming. It's all you can do to just look for an opening and attempt to make at least a glancing blow in return. But every iota of your focus is spent just on dodging and blocking, turning and weaving. You can't find a single spot for a counterstrike of your own, your forearms growing more battered by the second as you struggle to block his onslaught.

During training sessions, Daz is a diligent enough tutor to purposefully leave your openings.

But this isn't training.

As he so tactfully put, this is a 'beat down.'

"You were assigned a simple tag-along mission, you're first I might add!" He drops to his haunches, aiming to knock you to the ground with a leg sweep.

You clear it easily with short hop as you retract your legs upward, keeping your upper body stationary.

"-and instead of coming back successful-" The next blow, another punch, he aims right for your chin. A would-be fight ending hit. You're forced to block it with your forearms, and the radiating ache along your arms tells you there'll be nasty bruise. "-the boss tears back in here seething mad, near about to tear someone's head off-"

Amidst his onslaught of words and jabs you continue trying to find spots to retaliate, but his words are getting to you. His goading has you too rattled to slip into your honed battle focus.

'I'm better than this, dammit!' You grit your teeth as the fury within you builds. A raging frustration chewing away at your composure with each suffered blow. 'NO. Stop! Breathe! Focus!' You will yourself to even your breathing despite the tide of blow you were only just barely stemming. 'Look for your opening!'
And then you remember. One of the very first lessons he'd ever taught you: *know when to take a hit.*

He aims a jab right for your gut that has you awkwardly contorting your spine to dodge out of the way. You manage to avoid the worst of it, though a minor bout of pain flares up as his fist glances your right side.

All according to plan.

You strike before he can adjust. He stumbles on his feet as you yank him forward, both hands latched onto his outstretched arm. A harsh grunt fills the hold as your knee connects with his torso.

But you know not to celebrate too soon. His size and experience have him at far more of an advantage than you do.

His arms wrap around your thigh in a flash, locking you in tight. "Gonna' have to hit harder than that if you want it to hurt." He grins down at you, lips curled into a smug smile as he clucks his tongue.

'Shit!' You want to kick yourself, falling for the same type of trap you'd just used on him.

He grips about your leg tighter to let you know just how stuck you are. "Now, tell me what happened." The last of his words come out with the timbre of an aggressive growl.

"Fuck. Off!" You hurriedly kick your other foot off the ground, hoping to plant it against his chest and push him off balance.

It seems that's exactly what he was waiting for.

Right as your foot leaves the ground, he bends backwards, all the while pulling your leg with him. He doesn't stop at the halfway point either. His body fully contorts itself as if he were attempting to slam you into a suplex, but you're in the wrong position for that.

He instead lets you go right at the top of the arch, and your forward momentum sends you sailing across the hold.

You can't help but flail, desperately trying to correct your position and land on your feet, but the way he's thrown you has you spinning off center. The tip of your foot touches the ground a hair off balance. It's not enough to for friction to slow you down, your toes sliding right from underneath you.

Your knee makes contact next. A painful jolt vibrates all the way from cap to pelvis. The ricochet feels so strong you wonder if it's shook you apart, a doll that's had its limbs popped out. The other knee shortly follows with a shuddering crack of its own. Your momentum carries you forward a few feet, shins grinding across the rough wooden floor. The coarseness of the wood shreds the dark fabric of your leggings wide open, skin following after.

An agonized cry wells up in your throat, but you choke it down as if it were bitter medicine. Your teeth bite down into your lower lip so hard you taste blood trying to keep that noise in.

You'd never let him have the satisfaction of hearing you scream again.

That first night was already one time too many.

So instead you fold into yourself, forehead pressed against the floor as your hands desperately rub at the radiating ache so powerful it was making you tremble. Your knees would be mottled black and
blue for weeks.

Footsteps behind you reset your focus.

"I know that hurt, Y/N. Why don't you tell me what happened so we can get those cuts cleaned up?" His voice has lost some of the bite, now tinged with a hint of concern.

It utterly infuriates you.

"Don't. Pity. Me." Your nails bite hard enough into your thighs the sting cleaves right through the thudding ache from your fall. You push yourself off the floor with barely contained groans, only just now noticing the bloody less running down your shins. Your lip and chin are wet too, from what you can only assume to be more blood. The sting in your lip throbs under the pressure of your teeth.

"Y/N, swallow your pride for just this once. If you're this worked up, it has to be serious. Let me help."

The glare you level his way would make any lesser man shrink in fear. His eyes merely narrow with an expression you can't really place. Right now you don't even care about your problems with Crocodile, or Daz's incendiary comments.

Right now you just want to win. Solely for the sake of winning.

But a hand to hand brawl is not the way to do that. Your expertise lies in killing as quietly and efficiently as possible, all without the target even knowing you're there. Your close combat skills are thanks to Daz, and they're but a shadow of his full capabilities. Turning them back his way? Folly from the start. No, you'll need to pull out a different trick to turn the odds in your favor.

You only hope you can keep it under control.

The last you see is as you eyes slip closed is Daz cocking a brow. Your nostrils flare from the steadying exhale pushed from your lungs. What you were about to do would require absolute focus. Unshaken control.

His voice pierces through the darkness of your lids. "We both know you can't control your haki. You really want to try it on me?"

You tune him out, concentrating solely on evening your breathing. 'Focus.'

He huffs, yet makes no move to stop you. For as much as he has a head start in this fight, he knows you aren't a pushover. He's felt first hand what you're capable of when pushed, having suffered more than a few sobering blows over the past year as your tutor. What he has in strength and experience, you have in agility, guile, and a handful of tricks up your sleeve.

So far you've managed to deflect, dodge, or at least block near every blow he's aimed your way.

Now it's time to strike back.

On the next exhale, a low hum reverberates from your throat. An even, low note that somehow resonates with your entire being, awakening a level of sensory awareness that can only be described as supernatural. Your senses explode to life; hearing, vision, touch all more than tripling in sensitivity. So much so, that the darkness of your eyelids has taken on a level of sight you'd never before experienced. Streams of color dance around the blackness, each one roughly painting the shapes and locations of the objects around you.
It's almost too much. *Almost.*

Daz was right, as much you hate to admit it. Using your newly awakened observation haki in a fight was more than just a gamble. If you lost control, the resulting sensory overload would flood your mind and leave you a dazed mess on the floor. But you need it if you want to win.

And you really, really want to win.

Your eyes open to find the content of the hold in hyper-focus, so much so that everything appears edged. As if just touching the corner of one of the cargo crates would slice you open from wrist to elbow. The dim light from the electric lanterns has amplified to be nearly daylight levels, and even the shadows have lost their blackness.

Daz is still at the other side of the arena, arms crossed over his chest. On his face you spy the faintest of smirks.

"Have it your way, then." He breathes the words out more than speaks them, but you hear them as if they were uttered right into your ears.

Your breathing starts to waver a bit, focus already struggling trying to keep your senses from being overloaded. It's a battle to keep from absorbing too much sensory data. One slight mistake and your focus will shatter. You'll go crashing right to the floor as your conscious mind shorts out from the streams of sensory information filling it full to overflow.

"You know, I can see you struggling over there." Still, he drops into a defensive form. Cautious.

"Shut. Up." You choke the words out through gritted teeth. Your enhanced hearing is picking up far too many distractions, everything from the waves lapping against the ship's hull to the chattering of the crew gossiping about what was going on down in the hold.

You desperately shake your head in attempt to clear the distractions away.

'Focus. Calm. Breathe.'

The first move has to be yours if you want to win this. You have to strike before you lose focus again. End this before your senses white out.

You drop to your haunches, springing forward with a kick off the floor. He starts to move, and you can see his muscles twitch as he does so. His miniscule movement sends off more of those little colorful waves at each twitch. Each one streams in the direction of his motion, a prediction of his line of action.

Not exactly seeing the future, but a good enough approximation nonetheless.

You land at a crouch right in front of him, rolling to the left as he lifts his leg for kick. You're already striking before he can launch a remise. You feign a kick of your own to his left flank, immediately dropping your leg as soon as he's locked into the block.

This time, you're the one with the advantage. Someone of his size could never hope to match your speed.

With a small roar, your right fist hooks upward into the left side of his jaw. The forceful click of his teeth is music to your ear. One that you nearly dance away to as you quickly disengage to avoid any counters of his own.
Getting into a grapple with him would without a doubt end this fight, with him being the clear victor. While you can throw a punch-and take one too-his size would dwarf the speedy advantage you had over him should he be able to lock you into close quarters.

"What's the matter, dog? Can't take a punch from a kitty two-thirds your size?" You bounce on the balls of your feet in anticipation. Riling him up could either throw him off balance. Or, worse, it could just make him an even bigger threat.

You're gambling on it being the former.

Daz looks almost thoughtful as he rubs his jaw, head still left in the position you'd knocked it to. His eyes slip closed in what appears to be contemplation, like he's musing over the ache left behind from your fist. When he turns to look at you, those steely eyes are shaped with a mixture of both amusement and heated anger.

And a little bit of something else.

'Pride?'

In a split second he closes the distance between you. There's barely enough time to dart to the side, your brain struggling to process the haki streams in such a short amount of time.

You narrowly avoid a knee to your gut, but in doing so crash into a crate of cargo on the perimeter of the ring. It happens so quickly it's impossible to resist the urge to scream as your bloodied knee collides with the rough wood. You channel it into a growling curse instead, letting the frustration fuel your drive. Your focus wavers, though, the light of the hold suddenly growing a few hues brighter as you struggle to reign in the visual aspect of your haki.

He keeps pressing you back, forcing you to dive to the floor. You expertly roll right underneath him, springing to your feet at his backside. Your haki waves lead ahead of his actual movements, and you pivot to the left to get in position for another strike. Daz grunts painfully as he turns towards you, your elbow meeting him right in the chest.

You leap backwards right as he tries to grab you, still too quick despite the ragged breaths hurtling from your lungs. He seems entirely unfazed. His breathing as even as if he were taking a light stroll.

"Getting tired? Just tell me what happened and we can end this right now?"

"As if, bastard." You spit your words at his feet, vision going again white again as your hearing turns staticy. It was getting harder and harder to maintain control. One hit from him would be enough to disrupt the already tenuous control you have.

You need to end this. Now.

A quick dart forward, a pivot to the side, brings you to his right flank. 'Strike, before he can move!'

Your fist shoots forward.

A metallic clang resounds about the hold. Blistering pain shoots all the way up to your elbow from your elbow. Rather than striking the soft flesh of his cut, the flat edge of his bladed arm has stopped your fist in its tracks. You cry out from the pain of it, senses fizzling in and out of focus.

He clucks his tongue. "You should have just told me what happened, kitty."

Before you can gain the composure to pull yourself away, his hands begin to rise. With an almost
bored expression, he brings them both before your face and-

'NO NO NO-'

Your agonized scream echoes about the confines of the hold. You stumble backwards, flailing as you desperately try to somehow cover both your eyes and ears at the same time.

What should have been an innocuous clap was nothing short of devastating to your heightened senses. You're simple too tired and pain to brace yourself for the sensory overload. Each wave of sound bouncing about the narrow space of the sparring ring batters your ears. They drown out the world around you until there's nothing left but harsh ringing. A deafening clarion that consumes all.

Vision follows immediately. Upon losing control, your pupils blow completely. The once dim light of the hold becomes utterly blinding, and not even closing your eyes helps. Everything turning blazing white.

Your entire existence has been rendering to nothing but impossible noise and blinding light.

It's pure hell.

You feel a blow to the back of your legs, one that sends you tumbling into the air. The wind is knocked clean from your lungs as land roughly on your shoulders. Something pins you down, but you can barely even think let alone defend yourself. You're completely and utterly at the mercy of the dog that's disabled you with a mere clap.

But you don't have any room for pride. There's no room for anything besides the senses sundering you body and soul. Rather than defend yourself, your hands instinctively clamp down over your eyes, palms glued tight in attempt to drown out the light assailing you despite your closed lids.

The ringing continues in earnest, too, though slightly muffled. You're faintly aware of a pressure over your ears, though from what you can't tell. It's all you can do to just lie there gasping, trying to stay afloat amid the tidal wave of sensory input.

"...Turn...off." Words faintly reach you through the din in rocketing about your skull. "...haki...off."

The pressure over your ears loosens a bit."Y/N, relax"-before returning to its relieving levels once more.

You can do little else but obey, swallowing mouthfuls of air as you attempt to relax.

"Focus on...pressure..."

You do.

As your breathing finds a steadied rhythm, you direct all your heightened sensory input to focus on touch rather than sight and sound. The consistent pressure over your eyes and ears anchors you to reality among the rolling light and ringing ravaging your conscious. The aches and pains dotting your body, too, flare in intensity as you redirect your senses to touch, but they only help you ground yourself even more.

After what feels like a millennia, the world quiets.

Light and sound recede back to normal. The darkness returns to your eyelids, and all you can hear is the muted sound of your deep, gasping breaths.
With a groan, you pull your hands from your face, warily opening an eye. Daz is pinning you down, his large hands still pressed over your ears. The expression on his face is stern, yet concerned. A parent scolding a child after they've hurt themselves doing something stupid...but hurt themselves nonetheless. Such a look normally would've pissed you off, but as you are now, you're far too exhausted to care.

Opening your other eye, you give his hands a light tap. 'I'm fine now...'

His hands pull away, though he says nothing. Neither does he make a move to release you, nor do you attempt to push him off. Not like you had enough energy to anyways, the ordeal you'd just suffered through have sapped you of any fighting spirit.

Silence fills the hold as you look up at him, yellow eyes meeting his steely grey.

And then you're speaking.

"I...I fucked up, Daz." You manage to say, though each word shakely falls from your lips. The weak timbre of your voice disturbs you, how absolutely defeated you sound. Humiliated and beaten with a simple clap of all things. From the the way Daz's eyes narrow-not with anger, but with concern-you get the feeling he's just as disturbed as you are.

"Things went from bad to...to more bad. I...I... he was so mad... he growled at me."

He's off you with but a single, swift movement, leaning down to offer you a hand. You take it gladly, though groaning all the while as the soreness throughout your body makes itself known once more. The way he had pinned you-with his knees tightly digging into your sides-would leave you mottled black and blue in no time. That wasn't even considering the state of your knees, your forearms, your shoulders...

And all you have to show for it is light bruise beginning to blossom along his jawline.

"Bruises never killed anyone, kitty." Though he says it softly, not with the edge his jabs typically bear.

He's met with silence. You don't even have the energy to sass him back. It's just not there.

You grip onto your left forearm, nervously looking at the floor as you struggle to keep from sinking back down to the floor. Everything hurt more than expected.

He places a hand on your shoulder after a few minutes, where he gently guides you over to one of the crates in the hold. Before you can try and pull yourself up, he takes care of it for you. His arm quickly scoops about your waist, effortlessly depositing you on the crate's edge such that your legs dangle off the side. At this height you can look at him without straining you neck, making you feel just a little less small.

It's appreciated.

"Alright, Y/N. You need to tell me what happened."

And so you do. Sparing no details, you tell him everything that happened. From when you and Croc left the ship early that afternoon to your explosive confrontation, to even being watched after you had mistakenly dropped your cover, you tell Daz everything.

He has little to say during it, and even less after.
Your head slumps forward into your hands upon finishing, just the act of recounting your day exhausting you even further.

Not to mention leaving you burning with shame, the embarrassment of your failure made fresh once more.

'He thinks even worse of me now, I know it. My first big break and I blew it just as he expected. Like he wanted me to. He's probably ecstatic, he's always wanted me to fail.' Your thoughts race uncontrollably. Every ugly insecurity and self-doubt rear their ugly heads all at once.

Your breathing picks up, chest tightening in that tell-tale sign.

'NO. No way in hell will I let him see me like this!' It's been months upon months since you last had a panic attack. They had been common enough while you were still living on the streets, a hair's breath from starving to death or freezing in the snow. Even in the early days of joining the crew, you'd find yourself sneaking away below deck to freak out in private. As you healed, grown stronger and faster and smarter, their frequency had waned almost entirely save for the nigh constant nagging of your own self-doubt.

But today had shaken your hardened nerves... you needed to be alone and fast.

Without so much as a word you shove him out of your way, dropping to the floor. He stops you with a hand on your shoulder. "Wait."

You whip around, suppressed fury and indignation fully reignited. But, he's not looking at you with anger... but with reassurance? "I... I don't get it.... isn't this what you wanted?! To see me fail?! The 'waste of time', remember?" You damn near shout at him, words shaking every so slightly. Your teeth grit tight desperate to keep your jaw from wobbling at the tears threaten to build up in your eyes. 'Damn this. Damn all of this.'

He's silent for a few moment, as if choosing his words carefully.

"No. I... I only said that to get a reaction out of you. You're not a waste of time."

But you're already pushing past him. You didn't have the time or care to listen to his lies right now.

"Y/N, listen." His hand clamps down on your arm this time, keeping you from escaping. "I'd worried you'd carelessly tossed away the opportunity you'd been given. I needed answers."

His words hang in the air.

"...You thought me ungrateful?"

His lips press together into a thin line, silent a moment more before replying. "You have a lot of potential. We see it, especially the boss." You almost shiver at that, not exactly expecting such a compliment here and now. "He sees a lot in you. I'd rather you not disappoint him."

Your mind goes blank, mouth falling open.

Crocodile... Crocodile sees potential in you?

You feel yourself growing more and more flustered by the second.

"Learn from this, Y/N. This wasn't as big a failure as you fear it is. Use it to grow."

That sobers you up a bit, and you snap at him with barely restrained bitterness. "I'm sorry, but I
thought failure on this ship meant a one-way ticket overboard? Croc' may not have killed me earlier but he can still get rid of me later!"

What comes next just about kills you dead on your feet.

Daz laughs.

A short burst, but a laugh nonetheless. He shakes his head, planting his hands on his hips. "Like he could ever do such a thing to you. Everyone else, sure. But never you, Y/N... never to you." The last bit he says more to himself, under his breath.

His words have you stumbling backwards, stuttering and mouth agape. You're utterly unsure of how to react or reason, much less even begin to interpret just what he's saying.

"I... I... ahh... hahhhhh" Your chest tightens again, panic threatening to return. The burning in your chest shifts to your face, now how in embarrassment as the meaning of his words begins to dawn on you. Every fiber of your being screams at you: 'YOU NEED TO GO.'

You turn and run. Despite the thudding ache in your limbs, your hurtle yourself up the stairs, desperate to get out of this hold and into the safe confines of your room.

But you're met solely with despair.

The top of the stairs-the only exit-is blocked by a small gaggle of the crew excitedly trying to peek down into the hold.

"Look how beat up she is!"-"Looks like you finally got that pride tempered a bit!"-"Maybe you'll stop being so difficult now..."

They shout and laugh as you push past them, hurriedly running down the hall to the door to your quarters. They laughter chases you, echoing down the narrow walls.

Tears are already dripping down the corners of your eyes by the time you reach your door. Right as you slam it shut, the last you hear of them is Daz's deep voice abruptly cutting into their fun. "...That is enough!"

Your back slides down the closed door until you come to a rest on the floor, all the while loosing what felt like the longest sigh of your life. The tears roll down your heated cheeks in earnest now, and your chest stutters as the panic forces each breath out.

But eventually, it fades. It all fades. Just as they always do.

It fades until you're left sitting there feeling nothing but that cold emptiness. All feeling having been spilled from your lungs and tears. The events of the day wash over your in their absence, though you feel dissociated from them. Like they happened to something else.

Only one thing stirs something within you: a heavy thump in your chest.

It comes out, barely above a whisper: "...never... you..."

Chapter End Notes
Also! If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Golden Eyes and Blackened Hearts

Chapter Summary

Sweet dreams, little kit. The night reveals much.

Chapter Notes

**11/28/18: Finished construction! This is now like twice as long... wow**

This is a backstory/exposition of how Y/N managed to find a spot on Croc's ship. Sorry if reader-insert isn't as good of a person as you want her to be, there's a reason why he's so interested in her.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You never were a graceful sleeper.

The hunger is back.

How long has it been since it'd been properly satiated? How many years?

The emptiness twists and coils itself through your gut, a poison so potent it threatens to wither away what meager strength you have left, sap from you what little meat still clings to your brittling bones. It's the kind of hunger that brings on roiling waves of nausea, pointless in their existence. The only thing left in you to vomit is your life essence itself, as dwindling as it is.

There's nothing else left.

You have no choice.

The time to act is now.

It's a cold night, one accompanied by a low, rolling fog. The mist snakes about your lower half, dancing around your knees and chilling you so deep the marrow in your bones would shiver if it could. Your ragged coat does little to stave off the biting chill, letting body heat escape through the threadbare fabric and poorly mended patches.

You pull the hood down low, just above your pallid yellow eyes, and yank your coarse scarf upwards to cover your frigid features. The numbness of your nose and ears has long since lost its worrying effect on you, you're just far too used to it now.

This is the type of cold people die in, whose twisted, frozen corpses would only be found come the first snow melt in the much too distant spring. Cold, alone, and forgotten.
Much like you.

But you won't be going cold tonight. No, not this night.

The mansion will be warm. A sprawling estate that could house tens of families, with plenty of room to spare. But rather than sheltering the cold and hungry, its winding halls and massive rooms are no doubt filled to the brim with meaningless objects. Trite, tacky pieces whose sole purpose are to take up space in the absence of warm bodies.

All that space wasted on but one wretched being. A monster poorly disguised in the flesh of a man.

You know its kitchen to be large and amply stocked, certifiably capable of feeding the island's poor a hundred times over. Heaven knows they need it. You need it.

Again, wasted on just this one, insufferable creature.

And the wealth? The wealth opulently, wastefully sitting within the manor's vaults? Garishly decorating the walls in gaudy inlays crafted of jewels and gold leaf? It's more than enough to pay for the treatment of any lingering injury, any disease... to build homes and buy warm clothes... to save the very lives of those with no home but the alleys and sewers of this damnable city.

All of it... wasted on just this one man.

Wasted on waste.

You'll put a stop to it before the night is done.

The Butcher has come calling.

Your stomach gurgles loudly at the thought of eating, and a pained hiss tears from your brutally dry throat. Your mouth somehow floods with saliva at the prospect of food despite being so thirsty. Real food, and not the literal garbage you've been digging from trash cans, or what scraps people throw at you as they hurriedly passed by. The people who can't even bear to just look at you, rushing by with their eyes downcast.

How dare you ask for help. How dare you ask for what they have in plenty. How dare you even exist.

Rage bubbles inside you, the low roar of it filling your freezing ears. The pain of the hunger only adds fuel to the hatred burning through your chest, licking at your withered heart. This city doesn't care about you, just like it doesn't care about any of the other undesirables.

No one will care if you die. Your death will just be another chore for them. Yet another frozen corpse to pry off the street and dump into some hole to forget about until springtime. You're just an eyesore. Not a living, breathing human being. Your very existence is a blaze of defiance, in spite of it all. One big "fuck you" to the world.

Not even the others on the streets care. They can't afford to, not in this kind of life. People are lost too quickly, getting attached only puts yourself at risk of being lost yourself. Why form bonds, why care, when there's the ever present chance you'll wake up to a starved corpse next to you? Or having their back disappearing into the dark of a sewage canal being the last you ever see of them?

And yet... in spite of it all, this hellish existence... you do care.

You care about the injustice of all this. The fact that people let this type of suffering happen in the
first place and then do nothing about it. It's barbaric and savage and wrong and justice needs to brought to those that have the power to fix it all and yet do absolutely nothing.

The others-those empty and hungry faces-are content to sit and wait for oblivion. Waiting to die. It's the release they crave, but are too craven to bring it upon themselves sooner. Their cowardliness infuriates you and yet you understand it all the same, for the same fear lies deep within your own embittered heart.

With one exception.

Where their fear brings upon them nothing but helplessness and despair, yours... yours is the fuel to your ever raging fury. An unquenchable ire to fuel your vengeful reckoning.

If no one else was willing to get their hands dirty... then that duty fell to you. To play the monster that hunts the other monsters.

It's a duty you carry out judiciously.

A meager hum escapes from your throat, creating a warm cloud in the frigid night air. Simple as it is, the act of doing so makes your chest ache furiously. Your lungs hang like heavy weights in your sunken chest, sorely weakened from famine and illness. Just taking too deep a breath sets something in them rattling, splashing a wet warmth into the bottom of your throat.

The urgency of your mission does little to stave of the feeling of pure exhaustion weighing down your limbs. To say you're tired is an understatement. Between the cold, the nightmares, and the hunger, sleep is almost a luxury in this kind of life.

Like it'd stop you now, though. You've come too far to stop over something like this.

Maybe you'd take enough tonight to visit a doctor.

No.

Too dangerous.

Your mustn't be caught. What you're doing is too important to risk being caught. As if one would agree to see you anyway. Money or no, someone like you isn't worth their valuable time. Easier to just let you die.

The thought makes you snarl, a reaction you immediately regret.

A tickling in the back of your throat sets your teeth on edge, something kicked up from the pits of your lungs. Try as you might to resist, a scratching, tearing cough bursts forth in an explosion of pain. It's like a cat's been loosed in your throat, one that's shredded the sensitive flesh of your larynx as it clawed itself free. Each hacking cough threatens to send you crashing to your knees.

Yet you stand firm. You must.

There's work that needs to be done, and you're the only one either brave enough or foolish enough to do it.

So you wipe the back of your hand across your cracked lips, doing your best to ignore the ruddy streak left behind. You don't even want to know what the inside of your scarf looks like. Just imagining it makes you feel somehow even more exhausted.
This might be your last job. Might as well make it a good one.

The back perimeter of the estate comes into view as you round a bend in the alley. A high, wrought-iron fence, tipped in harsh spears, rings the edge of the property. Just one poorly measured leap would result in any would-be intruder being brutally impaled. It's impossible to tell if the browed flakes along the bars are rust or evidence of such failed attempts. An unnerving effect to be sure, though it does little to dissuade you. Not like you'll be going over the fence anyway.

Men patrol the grounds only half-looking for any signs of intrusion. They're all armed physically-their weapons glinting in the pale moonlight-yet most appear all but checked out for the night. None of them seem to be expecting any sort of trouble, just as there hasn't been any night for the past few weeks.

It's not their fault, what's about to happen. Even had they been alert, you'd have slipped by them just as easily as you're about to do now.

Despite what his security seems to think, the owner of this estate does have good cause for such extreme measures. Three of the the city's elite-two men and a woman-have been found dead in their mansions over the past two weeks. Their physical assets had been barely touched. Only about as much as a single person could carry had gone missing from their vaults; never anything heavy, and nothing ever traceable.

Food had been taken as well. Nonperishables, nothing too rich. Things like loaves of bread and potatoes, and mysteriously enough, jars of peanut butter.

Mysterious of all, though, is that in each grisly murder there'd been absolutely no sign of struggle. The bodies had been found with their throats grimly slashed all the way across, inches deep. Yet, the looks on their faces had been frozen with expressions one could almost call placid. As if they'd been caught completely unaware, no idea as to the death creeping up.

But what strikes the most fear into the heart of these high-society folk is not the state of the bodies themselves, but the message left behind. A simple, yet powerful trio of words almost lovingly scrawled across the wall. A warning, painted bold and proud, painted above where the killer would prop up the victim, almost as if on display.

"EAT THE RICH."

So simple. So short. So terrifyingly effective at robbing those who fear they might be next of any sleep. Little do they realize, a tired mark is an easy mark.

And those are just the high-profile murders. In their wake, numerous rumors have shaken the whole isle over. Rumors of mysterious killings spanning the past several years, with victims that appear not to have struggled even in the slightest. Whose glassy eyes and faces had froze not in horror, but confusion. No one knows who, or maybe what has been responsible. The only hint being that witnesses have reported seeing yellow eyes in the dark, so bright as to almost be glowing.

Eyes filled to the brim with pure malice.

This Gilded Butcher strikes fear into the heart of every greedy businessman, noble, pirate, corrupt marine, and crime boss the whole island over. Many suspect it to be a vengeful ghost, given how effortlessly it seems to slip past any defense. Not to mention how frugally it stole, almost as if it were taking mementos rather than loot. Others think the Butcher may simply be a professional assassin, so skilled as to be supernatural. Someone sent by a rival to scare the competition into abandoning their holdings and flee.
All wrong of course, because how could they ever guess the true answer? That the Gilded Butcher is but a sickly, malnourished waif of a woman? One of the many nameless and faceless they trod underfoot each and every day? They'd first have to admit that one of the undesirables was capable of possessing such agency, and that just be unthinkable.

And yet, this Butcher, their bogeyman, is nothing more than just hungry, sickly little ol' you.

Hungry. The gnawing void in your gut screams in protest again, feebly attempting to digest itself in search of anything of substance. Your hand folds over your sunken belly. 'Soon. We'll eat well tonight.'

You don't feel bad for killing these people, if you could even call them that. Monsters disguised as men, more like. All those you've killed were known to be wasteful or cruel, nothing but sadists or the unforgivably greedy. Those who hoarded wealth, who beat their servants, who contributed to the rampant crime and homelessness throughout the city. Slaving pirates who capture people like you to sell off or rape. Corrupt marines who let such crimes continue, lining their fat pockets with bundles of bribe money.

The kind of people who others want dead. Whose deaths would make the world a better place. All them and more are fair game in your hunt.

Hell, you feel more guilt about stealing from them than you do about actually killing them. As hungry and desperate as you are, others need the food and money more than you do. What little you take you do your best to discreetly spread about to the others in the slums. Even if they wouldn't have done the same for you, you'd never be able to live with yourself if you didn't at least try.

This crusade of yours may not be justice in the eyes of the law, but it's the only justice you can afford to give when no one else was willing to do what needed to be done.

Since when had the marines last cared for you, anyway? Not since the night you had to leave your childhood home...

The wind whips through the air, fluttering the threadbare rags on your figure. So cold it cuts right to the bone. Not like you had much body mass to ward against it, though. At some point these rags must have been clothing, long before you'd dug them out of the trash and done your best to mend them. To make them functional.

An apt metaphor for your meager existence: just struggling to remain functional. Survival in the most fundamental sense of the word, doing all you can to ensure your body continued to operate. Even if it means subsisting off just garbage and blood lust.

Another cough tears itself from your lungs, searingly hot. Disturbingly wet. A frown tugs at your lips as the taste of iron fills your mouth.

You sigh, sinking down to the ground to catch your breath before you begin the hunt. How long have you been at this now? Some years...

The way you felt after your first kill, you still remember it as clear as day. The feeling of his blood streaming down your face, the panic in his eyes as it sprayed from his throat. He'd pushed you too far that night, breaking something in you that had released a beast primal and feral and desperate for blood. His blood. It'd broke loose at the same time your ribs had, snapping as he rained down blow after blow along with every insult and obscenity under the moon.

The broken glass had been an accident. Slashing a broken shard across his throat had not been.
You'd brought it down on him just as purposefully as how you'd swept the tavern floors and polished the tables that very same night. Ever the polite and dutiful serving girl.

But that night had been the last straw to finally make you snap. Having suffered his abuse both physical and physical, you had so gladly sacrificed both his life and your humanity—such a pittance to pay—for your freedom. It was only the least he could do after the living hell he'd put you through, trying to eke out a life working for him. You had so naively trusted him, accepted food and lodging for working his inn, and he had thrown it all in your face just like he did the stale beer patrons left on the bar come closing time.

The only regret you have over the whole thing being that you hadn't bothered to kill him sooner, wasting years of your life with the abusive shit hole of a pig. The rage he had instilled in you that night has remained as much a part of you as the memory of his dying face has.

But you can wax poetic about it some other time. Right now, it's time to get to work.

You take the deepest breath you can muster, tuning out the upset rattling in your chest. Your mantra flits through your head: *'I am nothing. I am nobody.'*

The magic words to activate this special talent of yours. The one thing that's allowed you to be so successful in your crusade thus far.

The ability to hide in plain sight.

You'd discovered this talent some many, many years ago. Way back, before you'd even made that first kill. Just a terrified little girl, hiding in an alleyway praying the slaver wouldn't find her. She'd been chased for hours, too tired to run anymore, and resorted to prayers to keep her from being taken.

You still remember that first time the shroud settled on your skin, the lightest of silks. Almost as if a gentle breeze had danced over your skin. The man hadn't seen you. Even as he walked right past you, so close you could feel the heat radiating off his skin, his eyes passed right through you.

And he never saw you again.

This power, to slip into the realm of the unseen, to be able to pass right before someone's eyes without being noticed... you had thought it a cute little trick to have. It wasn't until recently, when the hunger and injustice had driven you to kill, that you'd realized its true power. It's the only thing that's gotten you as far as you have.

The meaning of the words? *'I am nothing. I am nobody'?* Well, it's what the island wants you to be, what with the way they make you starve and refuse to even look at you. So, you'd do them the favor. If it meant bringing righteous vengeance down upon the people who perpetuated this cycle of misery, then you'd gladly become their nobody and more. Their Gilded Butcher.

Your shroud settles upon your skin, and the familiar feeling of safety quiets any lingering unease. *'It's time to get moving.'*

You slip through the iron bars of the fence with ease. It's obvious their presence is intended to stop far more healthier bodies than yours. The jutting bone of your pelvis catches slightly, but it only takes a few adjustments before you're free. Anyone with a bit more meat on their bones would still be stuck on the other side of the fence, pondering if they could vault the top without getting impaled.

It's but a short stroll across the yard, one that takes you right past several patrols. Each remains completely unaware of your presence, and you do feel a bit bad for them. Despite their very purpose
being to prevent you from carrying out your just work, you know they're just doing their jobs. But come tomorrow, those jobs won't exist anymore. The dead don't need bodyguards. No matter, what with the furor you've been creating, you're sure they'll find new work foolishly attempting to guard someone else well within the week.

Two guards lean against the wall right next to the back door, blissfully unaware as you casually approach. One of them prattles on and on, a bit too quickly for you to pick up whatever the topic is. The other seems to barely care, only half listening.

"Isn't she just the cutest?" From the man's exuberance, and the photograph he's eagerly trying to show his more disinterested companion, you can only assume he must be talking about a darling family member. His daughter, perhaps?

"For the last time, Erik, I don't want to hear about you damn dog anymore."

You stop, fingers freezing just as they brush against the cool metal of the doorknob.

"Oh come on, look at her! Mimi is precious, you just don't want to admit it."

A warm smile gently tugs at the corner of your lips. You can't help but lean over and get a look at the photograph grasped firmly beneath the man's calloused thumb. The edges of the paper are well-worn, clearly loved. Sure enough, you have to agree with him: Mimi is, indeed, quite precious. She's a tiny spitz of some kind, snow white and as fluffy as a cloud.

You never could resist a cute face.

As much as you've always wanted a sweet lil' critter to call your own, trying to care for one in this kind of life would've just been cruel. This was no way to live, and you'd never forgive yourself for putting some innocent creature through this hell along with you. Still, that didn't stop you from sharing what scraps you found with the mongrels you'd come across on the street. Most of the stray beasts knew who you were by now, and, though they were loathe to stay in one place for too long, they occasionally returned your favors by snuggling up against you, doing their best to stave off the frigid night air.

The men continue their back and forth, and you take the cue to quietly open the door and slip inside the manor.

You find yourself in what appears to be the servants' quarters, given the more banal appearance of the decor. It's dimly lit, the only light being the moonbeams streaming through the open doorways to your left and right. You peek your head in to each one, finding rows of beds, each perfectly made and curiously empty. Nor are there any personal effects, the rooms so sparse and lifeless as to make you shiver. There's not a single soul to be seen or heard.

'As it should be.' The reason you're here is to kill the man that beat one of them so severely, she stumbled down the front door and promptly died in the street. It only makes sense the other servants have long since fled for their lives. You're quite glad for it, too.

You return to the short hallway you'd entered from, continuing down until you come to a common area of sorts. A ghastly splash of blood mars the far wall, obviously sprayed upon rough impact. You knew it to be from a meat tenderizer, if the stories you'd heard about the murder were to be believed.

Sure enough, the doorway immediately adjacent to the splatter of red leads to the kitchen. A rack of various cooking tools hangs from the wall just on the other side of the archway, and there's a conspicuously empty spot where something appears to be absent.
Shame. You'd kind of wanted to kill him with same tenderizer.

You flip off your hood and pull down the scarf wrapping your mouth to better bask in the warmth of the indoors. The air in here is nothing short of toasty, definitely warmed by more than just the barely glowing coals still smoldering in the hearth. This bastard is rich enough to afford powered heating. Thinking of all the people this warmth could keep from dying in the below freezing air tonight...

If this was going to be your last hit, you're at least glad it's this greedy son of a bitch.

You make a point not to approach the kitchen. In your current state, the leftover smells lingering from dinner service would set you rabid; a lesson you've learned the hard way before. The scents of roasted meat, warmly toasted bread-nostalgic and bittersweet-and aromatic, roasted veggies would be irresistible to you right now. Pure ambrosia to your famished body. A flood of saliva fills your mouth, almost running down your chin at the thought.

'Pathetic. Reduced to a slavering mongrel at the thought of some bread crumbs.'

There would always be time to feast after you'd done the deed and sent this monster back from whence he came. Even if it meant you'd be joining him shortly after...

Guess you'll be eating well tonight.

You take the hallway opposite the kitchen, sure it'll lead you to the main foyer. From there, to his bedroom where, given the hour, he should be soundly asleep. That, or he's positively restless with existential dread stemming from the fear that the Gilded Butcher may be coming.

Which she is.

Movement out the corner of your eye immediately snatches your attention. You're leaping backwards without so much as a second thought, readily dropping to a defensive position. Before the balls of your feet even touch back to floor you've deftly flipped a shiv out from the ragged sleeve of your coat, full well ready to snap it towards the source of the movement.

Yet, it's nothing but a mirror; the movement within having only been your reflection.

And what a ghastly thing it is, this reflection of yours. Though it's a creature you recognize only to be but yourself. With such a gaunt face, marked by the sallow pockets of your cheeks and the bruised-black bags beneath ghoulishly yellow eyes, there's simply no one else it could be.

It's no wonder the rumors have you pegged as a ghost. You certainly don't look fully human

The wan-yellowness of your irises does little to dispel the effect, yet somehow they're still so sharp despite the hunger. Not quite those of a mindless beast, but more of a starved predator calculating every chance to strike. The type of eyes that are the last thing you'd see in the shadows before having your throat torn out. Eyes lurking in the dark of long lost and forgotten places.

Long lost and forgotten, just like you.

Your ragged clothing barely clings to your frame. They give you a formless appearance in the darkness, as if you're nothing more than a sentient gathering of shadows. The way they drape so loosely over you only barely disguises the jutting bones of your half-starved state. You'd always been a tall, gangling thing, but now the hunger has twisted your form into a hunched and skulking ghoul.

It certainly doesn't help that with the sorry state of your short, ragged hair you look rather
androgynous. Nor do you currently have the body mass to fill out any typical feminine features aside from your naturally wide pelvis. Though in this state, all that feature does is serve to make you look frighteningly insect-like.

Monstrous.

The sudden sound of shattering glass makes you jump. Distant as it was-echoing from further down the hall-it immediately put you right back on edge. A single voice, shouting something you can't quite interpret, chases the noise.

A sour frown tugs at your chapped lips. Does he know you're here?

No, he can't. That'd be impossible.

You snap your hood and scarf back into place and pad down the hall, careful to maintain your shroud all the while. Sure enough, it leads out to the main foyer as you had expected. The front door lies directly before you, as garishly opulent, though stained with a few splashes of crimson about the knob and floor. Blood from the beaten servant girl. The spacious area is bathed in a faint, golden light, cast from a slightly ajar door to your right.

Through it streams not just light, but voices.

Voices.

The bastard isn't alone, and from the frantic, pleading tone of the sniveling voice coming from the room, it's not exactly his security detail that's accompanying him.

'Shit. Shit! Who the hell keeps guests at this time of night?!

You grip the handle of your knife so tight, you hear the bones in your fingers creak. This hit just got a whole lot more complicated. Should you postpone the deed for a few days? Would you even make it that long?

No. It has to be tonight. This is your last chance.

You take a few deep breaths, as deep as you can manage with the state of your lungs. You need calmness. Resolve.

The whining voice you heard suddenly escalates, now shouting. Something is clearly wrong given the man's tone. The golden light cast upon the far wall wavers, now partially obscured by the shadow of someone quickly rising from a seated position. It begins gesticulating wildly, panicked mannerisms now matching the tone the voice had taken on.

You creep closer, sure to make not a single noise as you pad over the intricate tile of the foyer. The wall creaks ever so slightly as you press yourself flat against it, and you struggle not to hiss in frustration. Any noise right now could tip whoever was in there off to your presence. That's the last thing you want right now.

Luckily, judging from the continued prattling of the man inside the room, it seems you yet remain undiscovered.

You sidle along the wall to get closer, and the specific words forming his maddened raving begin to take shape.

"I have money! Ships! Information and manpower! All that you want! Just give me
protection, please!" His weaselly voice sounds nothing short of desperate, the tone and substance of his words both indicating a plea for his life. Whoever he is, he's clearly terrified. Of what-or worse, who-you can only imagine. You kind of hope it's you.

'But what if it's not? Someone in there with him?'

Your skin tingles as you pause to reinforce your shroud. Only when your safety seems secured do you finally peek inside.

A man, skin flustered stark red, paces about the space before the room's hearth. He wrings his hands like he's trying to squeeze the very blood from them, all while running his mouth with various pleas and offerings. You recognize him to be none other than your intended target, the owner of this mansion and an utterly depraved worm. You'd recognize that midnight blue head of hair anywhere, even done up in a top knot as it is now.

And yet, he's not the most interesting in the room. Something-or rather someone-else has your rapt attention.

'Oh.'

A very, very large man sits reclined in a plush chair, opposite from where your mark struts around like a panicked chicken. Even sitting the way he is, you can tell he's, truly, a frighteningly large human being. If he even is one. Not just large either, but built. Muscular and fit, but not in the overly bulky kind of way. Svelte muscle. This is the kind of beast you hear tales about from the grand line.

Surely, with his dark, slicked back hair and warm, tanned skin, there's no way he could be from this dreary place. The sun rarely shines on this island without its rays having to punch through dense cloud cover. Most people here are pale and fair-haired because of it. His appearance strikes as you hailing from a warmer, sunnier place. Somewhere with deserts of sand rather than fields of snow.

Despite his foreign appearance, he's dressed quite well for the cold climate. A coat so thick and heavy it could keep you warm even through the most bitter of nights lies slung over the back of the chair. The fur collar flows so invitingly behind him you can't help but imagine how comfortable it'd be hung about your shoulders. He wears an expertly fitted suit of charcoal grey, and though the mustard yellow shirt he's chosen clashes, it does so in an almost tasteful kind of way. You can just tell he's the kind of rich bastard you despise more than anything else.

What draws your eye most of all is the long, jagged scar streaking across his face. It runs all the way across, each peak and divot roughly hewn into the flesh about the bridge of his nose. Though the initial injury has long since closed, it's obvious it had done so poorly. A permanent mark that would never fully heal. All it does is serve to make him all the more intimidating, as if his stature alone isn't enough.

It sits directly beneath his eyes, which themselves are impossibly dark, and deep set. Though they look on your panicked mark with an almost lazy expression, you can practically feel the malicious intelligence lying beneath. These are the eyes of a cold and patient predator. One playing with its food, at that.

But it's not just his appearance alone that screams 'danger!'. Just looking at him sets all your senses ablaze, every bell in your head ringing in alarm. The very presence he maintains tells you he's nothing short of an accomplished killer, but in a way entirely different from yourself. This is a monster tempered in the flames of battle, someone whose lethality has you far more than just outclassed.
You know not a single thing about this man, and yet you have no doubt he'd destroy you as easily as snapping his fingers.

Dread settles into your stomach like a dead weight. This is... this situation is... this monster is... you can't even think straight. Against this man, you wouldn't stand a chance. Every instinct screams at you to flee. Flee and never look back lest he notice you and turn those predatory eyes your way instead.

A beast like this is the exact kind of person you make a point to avoid hunting. The kind that's well and truly dangerous. Others could call you a coward for it, but you only see it as playing smart. There's no point in taking on a fight you couldn't ever hope to win.

Yet, something keeps you rooted to this doorway. Fear? Morbid curiosity? All you can do is stand frozen in place, watching the scene unfold. You only hope your shroud holds under the oppressive aura emanating from the room.

The scarred man sits in a plush chair to the left of the hearth, with your target pacing about in front of him before an equally plush couch. He's lazily bracing his cheek upon his right hand, left arm dangling over the other side of the chair. From the look in his eyes, he seems to be just waiting for a chance to strike. Whether that be with words or action, you can only imagine.

"You don't know what this Butcher is capable of! They say it's not even human!" Your mark all but squeals, his shrill tone making you wince as it assails your ears. Scar's eyes, too, narrow slightly, annoyance now growing plain on his face. His lip twitches trying to contain it.

Despite the anxiety you could only describe as existential instilled in you by this man, your target's words tug your lips into a smile. Knowing you've struck such a fear into this worm's heart so as to drive him to seek out a monster like this for protection? It brings you an almost manic joy. Especially as it seems the beast he's summoned is far more interested in devouring him rather than giving aid.

"Vigo," the dangerous-looking man purrs with a voice as deep as his predatory eyes. The rich tone spills from his lips, smooth as golden honey yet venomous all the same. It's a tone that dances down your spine a trail of blazing ice. "You seem to have mistaken my presence for sympathy."

Vigo—your victim's name apparently, you never bothered to learn it—attempts to stutter a response. "Wh-What?! You came all this way just to see me d-die? To see me slaughtered in my own home?!"

Scar coolly closes his eyes, lips curling slightly into an amused smirk. "So you're not such an idiot after all."

His words have an immediate effect on Vigo. He pales, mouth flapping open and shut uselessly. "S-Sir Crocodile?! You! You-!"

'Crocodile...? What a bizarre name.' But you have to admit, it's more than fitting. The scar on his face looks strikingly similar to the jagged maw of his namesake. 'His birth name? Or maybe a chosen name...'. The more you muse over it the more it seems familiar, though you can't quite place it anywhere in particular. Surely you would've heard of someone with such a strange name before?

A low, amused hum from this Crocodile pulls you out of your head.

"You see, Vigo... I don't give a damn about what happens to you. Honestly, I was hoping you'd already be dead by the time I got here." He purrs, that richly venomous voice rumbling out almost playfully.

It's only now, as he casually leans forward, do you notice the menacingly large, seemingly unwieldy
hook adorning what used to be his left hand. It had been obscured by the chair previously, but now that you've seen it you can hardly tear your eyes from it. You have a feeling Vigo can't either. He makes a point to draw attention to it, bringing his left arm across his lap so as to rest his hand upon it. You would've thought it hilariously melodramatic if you weren't so rooted in fear.

The implement catches the glow of the low flames still licking about the walls of fireplace, and it glints with a light that can only be described as sinister. There's not a single doubt in your mind that he's killed tens of dozens of people with the thing, your imagination readily supplying an image of the metallic gold dripping red with blood.

Vigo starts to back up, retreating from the man he now realizes is nothing short of hostile towards him. He raises his palms in a show of submission, inching ever closer to the door you're eavesdropping from. Even from here you can spy just how his legs have begun to tremble. "This is... you can't...why? Sir I have never wronged you! Why-"

Crocodile cuts him off with an arrogant bark of laughter. That scathing, derisive sound cuts as deep as any blade. The way it drips with undisguised malice chills you straight to the bone, setting you more on edge than you already are. And then, as quickly as it began, it stops dead in his throat. His eyes narrow, a sinister smirk twisting his lips. "Wronged? No, Vigo. Your very existence is a slight to me."

He suddenly snaps his fingers. You damn near jump out of your skin as a new body struts across the room. He must've been up against the same wall as the door, completely hidden from your current viewpoint. Even from his new position you can't really get a good look at him, save for the fact that he is also freakishly huge.

'Does something about the Grand Line just do this to people?! Make them into these monsters?!!'

"Sir?" This new man's voice is somehow even lower than this Crocodile guy's, though with an inflection far less refined.

"Daz, our host seems to be trying to end our meeting early." Vigo bristles at Crocodile's words, spine stiffening as he freezes mid what he must've thought to have been a sneaky retreat to the door. "We still have so much to discuss. Please-" The word rolls from his lips, mockingly warm. He gestures with his hand at the couch opposite him. "-help him get comfortable."

The new man-'Daz, is it?-'puffs a short noise of amusement before nodding. "Of course, sir."

He moves into the glowing light of the fire, and from here you can finally make out his features. His short, buzzed hair shines with a silvery glint, and his skin appears to be even more toned than the man who you can only assume to be his boss of sorts. 'Definitely not from here.'

Unlike Crocodile, this guy really is all bulky muscle. The kind of muscle useful not just for intimidation, but for beating the absolute paste out of anyone unfortunate enough to warrant it. They're only just barely contained by his well-tailored suit, an expensive looking one at that. The black fabric looks practically shrink wrapped to the muscles rippling along his limbs. A tie hanging loosely from his neck suggests a hint of apathy about his appearance. You have a feeling he hadn't chosen to dress this way so much as he was ordered to.

The thought would've made you laugh in any other situation.

Daz saunters across the room over to Vigo, now standing stock-still in fear. He practically screams in fright as Daz clamps a hand-intimidatingly massive-down on his shoulder. "Let's get you comfortable."
Vigo has no choice but to acquiesce, letting himself be pushed at the shoulder over to the couch Crocodile had gestured at. He's not-so-gently pushed down into the center cushion, a pathetic squeak fleeing his throat as he falls. "P-please! Don't hurt me! I'll do whatever you want, please!"

The white haired man rounds the couch, coming to a stop at the spot right behind your cowering, pleading mark. He lurks behind him, a menacing figure, before patting down on his shoulder again. Even from here you see the poorly contained smirk tugging at his lips as the action makes Vigo jump and tremble.

"Whatever I want?" Crocodile hums, leaning back in the chair with a self-satisfied grin. He casually reaches in the coat behind him and rummages about in a pocket. "Well then."

He pulls forth a cigar, and a lighter along with it.

"You see, Vigo. I don't care about you. All those things you mentioned earlier, though? Gold... Information...? Let's talk about those."

Crocodile pauses to slide the cigar between his lips. His hand brings the lighter up, and he expertly lights the cigar with but a single click of the wheel. Clearly he's done this enough to get it down to an exact science.

He takes a long inhale before breathing out a billowing cloud into the air above him. It settles around him nebulously, calling to mind the image of a predator lurking in the mists.

Ephemeral as it is, your throat immediately constricts itself in caution, completely halting the movement of air in your lungs. Even the slightest breath of the stuff would send you into a coughing fit in your current state. One that would undoubtedly be your last. There'd be no running or hiding once the barking sounds of your cough alerted them to your presence.

"I care about your assets, and how they can become my assets. So, you have two options." He pauses to take another long puff, deliberately drawing out the tension despite already having full control over the scene. You can tell he's played this game far too many times. 'What an insufferable prick.'

Regardless, the melodrama seems to be more than working its magic on Vigo. The twit's trembling so hard so you can hear the couch legs rumbling against the floor from all the way over here.

"One, you can surrender all that you own to me right now, then scurry off this shit-hole of an island as fast as you can before this... Butcher... ends your pathetic little life."'WHAT'?! How DARE you!' You grit your teeth, a bout of fury quickly beginning to broil in your core. That this... this... this ass thought he could use you?! This worm's death was intended to be an act of justice, not for some bastard like him to use it-you-as a power play!

He continues, as nonchalantly as though he were discussing dinner plans. "Or, two... I can just relax on my ship. Wait this out. This Butcher will make an example of you sooner rather than later, given the way you've drawn their eye with that spot of cruelty on that servant girl. You wouldn't have called me otherwise if you didn't think the same." He rests the cigar between his fingers, his arm now cockily propped up on the arm of the chair.

You want nothing more than to slap the arrogant sneer off his face, mouth and all. All of the fear has just about drained out of you, now about replaced entirely with seething rage. 'I am not your tool! I'm
Crocodile suddenly rises, pulling himself from the chair. It's only now that he's standing that you're forced to truly interpret just how impossibly tall this guy is. Even as starved and wilted as the hunger has made you, you aren't exactly short yourself at 6'2. Yet, somehow, this beast definitely has at least two additional feet on you.

Just like that, the fear comes creeping back in.

He saunters across the room, moving with a surprising amount of grace for someone of his size. The firelight strikes across his features just right as he approaches the hearth, somehow making him look handsome in the low light. He comes to a stop right in front of Vigo, but rather than leaning down to speak into his face, he cockily rocks backwards to rest on a heel. His hook crosses over his midsection, other arm holding the cigar aloft to the side.

"Just as you've asked, I'll come swooping in to save you. But it'll be just slightly too late. You'll already be dead. Tragic." He lifts the cigar back to his lips, taking another self-satisfied inhale of the sweetened smoke before puffing it down into Vigo's paled face. The sneer that twists his lips is insufferable. "And before your blood can dry on the walls, I'll take ev-e-ry-last-thing you own."

He finishes with a shrug, the movement of his hand drawing more trails of swirling smoke through the air. "It's your choice, Vigo. Either way, I leave this dump with what I want. The only variable here is your life."

The very air around him oozes with a sense of narcissistic malice that very nearly makes you retch. The only thing you despise more than corrupt bastards are smug corrupt bastards. The ones that think they're such hot shit. And boy, does this pompous fuck bask in the musk of his own ego.

In the few minutes you've been observing him, you know two things: that you both utterly despise him... and that you're in complete awe of him. This Crocodile is shrewd, clearly cunning. He commands the kind of presence you could only dream of, able to make a sniveling worm like Vigo grovel before him with nothing but melodrama. And yet you have no doubt as to the level of his killing prowess.

Without having even seen him in action, you are absolutely terrified of what he's capable of.

Everything tells you to run. Get the hell out of here. Your prey thus far has been weak, simpering mites like Vigo, not lethal killing machines like this Crocodile guy. With a body as sick and malnourished as yours, there's no way you can ever hope to fight back against someone of any real physical strength. A real monster like him would tear you apart himself, if he didn't order his manservant to do it for him so he could watch over a nice glass of wine.

'NO! No, this has to end tonight!' There's no promise you'll make it long enough to scout out another target, and like hell you'll let yourself drop dead without taking someone else with you. This called for a change in plans.

You may have come here to kill Vigo, but this Crocodile guy... Without even knowing who exactly he is or what he's done, you just know he's as bad as any other monster you've slain. If ever there was a better final kill, you can't think of one.

"...P-please. Please no." Vigo is beyond pale, paler than the cold moon hanging in the window across the room. He looks about to fall from the couch entirely, ready to sink to his knees in a terrified grovel.
You kind of hope he'll cry.

The hulking manservant lingering behind the couch suddenly clears his throat, seeking permission to speak.

"Do you have something to add, Daz?" Crocodile addresses him, a hint of excitement eating away at the arrogance on his face.

"Sir, we could just kill him now. Slit his throat, write that message on the wall. There's no need for the Butcher themselves to come and do it when we can do it ourselves. No one would ever know." Daz replies coolly. Too coolly, almost as if he were talking about a nice date and not the brutal murder of some man in his own home.

Vigo squeaks as he jerks upwards, spine straight and stiff with terror. You can see lines of sweat rolling down his forehead, the way his entire body quivers in fear.

Crocodile has the exact opposite reaction, almost melting into himself as he leans back more onto his heel. He takes a long draft of his cigar before tilting his head backwards and releasing a grey stream of the smoke upwards towards the ceiling. When he returns his gaze back to his companion, his grin is almost warm.

"This is exactly why I keep you around."

Daz returns that grin as he begins cracking his knuckles. "Would you like me to do the honors, Sir?"

Your target falls out of the couch with a panicked scream, loud crack sounding as his knees meet the floor. He begins to crawling towards the door, sobbing all the while in pure terror.

"By all means." Crocodile turns at that, heading to recline against the wall next to the hearth. A lovely space to watch the brutality about to unfold.

Without another word, Daz begins to advance on your target. Only, he's now their target too... and that pisses you right the hell off.

All the work you've been doing has been intended for the greater good, like scraping an infection from a rotting wound. It was ugly, painful, and gruesome, but an utter necessity before the damage caused by your victims could begin to heal. Now, these men intend to benefit off all your hard work; turn the blood you've spilled into their own gain. Seeing your virtuous mission twisted into just another means of profit by the very type of people you revile fills you with an indescribable fury. Your blood boils, turning into nothing but pure vitriol that burns you from the inside out.

The handle of your shiv digs roughly into your calloused palm. The other two strapped to your arm almost vibrate in excitement. With a few well-aimed throws you can end this before they even know what's happened. You have surprise on your side, just like you always do.

"N-NNO NO NO NO PLEASE WAIT!" Vigo flips onto his back, now scrambling backwards against the wall to the right of the room. His eyes shoot to the doorway, where you hide in the shadows. He's looking for an escape where you know there isn't one. Luckily for you, the position he's crawled to has made him a clear shot.

'What are you doing, me!? You need to move NOW before this guy steals your kill!'

But right as you're about to throw your blade, something weird happens. Where Daz's arm was once a normal-if not absurdly muscular-arm, it suddenly takes on a metallic sheen before transforming entirely. From the edge of his right forearm spawns a blade, as if he's grown a sword from wrist to
elbow. Its edge glints in the low light of the fire, a warning as to how gruesomely sharp it is.

The suddenness with which it happens—mind not able to process what you're seeing—makes you gasp.

**Audibly.**

Three sets of eyes whip to the doorway, now very aware this is no longer a private affair.

"H-help! Whoever you are, please! They're going to kill me!" Vigo cries out, his pleas desperate. Tears stream down his puffy face.

Crocodile's eyes narrow. His brow furrows, body language immediately tense. He tosses the cigar onto the lintel of the fireplace and glares intensely into the darkness of the doorway where you pray he can't see you.

"It seems one of your servants hasn't fled yet, Vigo. How unfortunate for them." He jerks his head over to where Daz stands, bladed arm still poised over Vigo, and barks an order. "Deal with the eavesdropper first."

'**FUCK. FUCK. SHIT FUCK.**' You're far too rattled for your shroud to take effect, heart thundering in your chest as the adrenaline takes over. You'd put this entire plan on being able to strike from your shroud, killing them from the shadows before they have the time to react. There's no way you'll be able to outrun them in your current condition. Running away to re-hide yourself isn't an option. He'd probably catch up at barely a jog.

No, there's only one option left.

You grasp you blade so tightly in your hand it feels like the skin of your palm might split open about the handle. You have three of them on you, each lovingly sharpened to slide through flesh and bone even when thrown from a distance. Theoretically, one for each person.

You'll at least take out Vigo: complete what you came here to do. If the last thing you'll ever see is his dying face, then that's mission accomplished. Once Vigo goes down, you'll use both the remaining knives on this Crocodile guy. The manservant, Daz, didn't give you nearly the same vibes as his boss did. Not to mention with his size, even should the first strike true, he'd probably need both to fully take him down anyways.

And yet, something in you tells you what a fool's errand this is. As much as you want it, as much as you need it, your entire body singing for it... you just know there's no way you'll be able to kill this man. But damn if you aren't going to try.

You'll throw your blades, praying to at least **scratch** him. And then they'll most undoubtedly catch you. **Hurt** you. If they do decide to interrogate-torture you—at least there's the solace your poor body would give out before too long.

You're going to die here, but at the very least you'll take **someone** down with you.

Daz crosses the room at a cautious pace, bladed arm held warily in front of him. You can tell now that he's far smarter than he initially appeared. His hulking frame belied a certain intelligence you hadn't expected, now only revealed by his undue caution. They may assume you to be a servant, but he has no way of knowing that with any certainty.

You wait for him to get closer. The tension has you gritting your teeth so hard you wonder if he can hear it from there. Adrenaline pumps through your system giving you a speed and clarity you've never before experienced. This is the first time you've ever needed it. The first time your prey has
ever been actively aware of your presence.

'This is it.'

He kicks the door fully open as he reaches the frame. The light of the room spills out into the once pitch hallway, but you're moving before he can get a good look at you. He moves to grab you as you spring forward, but you're faster than expected. You slip right through his fingers, the digits only finding loose fabric and air instead of the fuller body he'd expected.

A frustrated snarl sounds over your shoulder as you roll right beneath his outstretched leg. You flip two of the knives between your fingers mid-roll, one per hand. The way they lightly cut into the skin, nerves stinging in warning, tells you they're more than sharp enough to kill.

Vigo shrieks just as you complete your roll, landing right on the balls of your feet only a few feet before him. But your balance goes off-kilter, body not responding with the agility you need it to.

'No time to correct!'

The first of the blades leaves your fingers with a snap of your wrist, sent flying towards the quivering man.

You just hope your aim flies true.

It shoots across the gap between you and Vigo, and a sickening crunch fills the room as it buries itself in your mark.

But his agonized cry quickly quells the elated hope that had blossomed from what you thought to have been a bullseye.

Dead men don't scream like that.

Your aim had been off, the knife sinking deep into his right eye instead of between them as intended. Nor had it gone deep enough to cause more serious damage, several inches of the blade still visible between the hilt and his face.

He could easily survive this.

But you don't have time to change plans.

You pivot your body with a frustrated hiss, angling yourself to face your true prey. Crocodile has barely moved, save to use the lintel as a prop to rest his cheek on his fist again. The expression on his face is nothing short of bored.

The casualness of his demeanor only pisses you off even more.

'I'll wipe that dumb expression off your face!'

You channel that rage into your next throw, aiming straight for between the eyes again.

The blade slides from your fingers, straight and true. It's a perfect throw, and the realization rapidly fills you with glee. Had you done it? Really succeeded in killing this bastard? Killing Vigo may have been a failure, but he's small fry compared to this monster. You can't think of a more perfect final kill.

The knife passes right through him.
It thuds into the wall behind his head, and he is entirely unfazed.

"Wha-what?" you barely gasp out, utterly frozen in shock. He merely looks at you with that lazy expression, not even having flinched.

You don't get any time to process what in the hell's just happened, either. Daz finally catches up to you, and he's not gentle about it.

His hand clamps down on your right wrist, stretching your arm outwards before he punches straight upwards into the elbow joint. You hear the snap before your senses process it, a sickening sound that makes your stomach flip.

And then it comes.

Shooting, agonizing pain radiates all up and down your arm. It tears from your throat a ragged scream as you begin falling to your knees, your other arm desperately trying to cradle its brutalized sibling. A hard blow across your back sends you thudding downwards. It rips from you another cry, sounding strangled as the air vacates your lungs from the force of the blow.

Your face roughly skids across the floor on impact. It stops only when the force of his hand presses your head roughly down against the hardwood. His other hand, now adorned with bladed fingers, presses against your throat, ready to slit you open with but a single word from his boss.

And you kind of hope he does, if only the put you out of this misery.

This pain is way beyond anything you've felt in decades.

Each breath you take feels forcefully stolen from the air around you, like they're not meant for you anymore yet you're stealing them regardless. A god awful rattling fills the air with each gasping inhale, wet and sickening. Your chest is unbelievably tight, and an acrid, metallic tang has rapidly begun spilling into your mouth from the wetness in your throat. Everything is hot and cold somehow at the same time, like you're suffering from freezing chills and boiling fever both.

Your arm lies broken and twisted uselessly to the side, bent at a disturbing angle. It hurts so bad you can feel it everywhere, too much pain for just one limb to be able to contain. Your chest begins to shudder as your body tries to find energy to cough, doing its best to stave off the drowning death in your lungs. The hacking cough that comes is anything but relieving. Searing hot pain turns your vision white with stars as congealed globs of black and crimson spill onto the floor before you.

The existential panic sets in as you see the gruesome splatter. That blow had been far more fatal than probably intended, your assailant not knowing the condition you were in. A sense of wrongness begins to permeate your entire being, your conscious mind only now realizing what your body has already been aware of...

You are dying.

The realization makes you want to sob. In fear, in anger, in despair... Something you've been longing after for years, why are you suddenly so scared of it now?

The whole event had only lasted but a few seconds, but it felt as though the world itself had slowed to make it feel like hours. A few more of those agonizingly long seconds pass, the only sound being your wet, ragged breaths and Vigo's pained whimpers.

Crocodile's dry voice suddenly fills the air, breaking the almost silence. "Hrm. I think you broke it. Whatever it is."
His words echoes in a way they should not be. Your senses are already faltering.

In one fluid movement, Daz temporarily relieves the pressure from your head, his hand moving to forcibly tear the hood and scarf from your face. He roughly grabs your chin with thankfully-unbladed fingers, and tilts your face upwards to make sure his boss can get a good look at you.

And *you* can get a good look at *him*.

At some point in the scuffle Crocodile had picked the cigar back up, now casually puffing on it. He stares down at you, dark eyes unblinking, unwavering, not betraying a single emotion save maybe for amusement.

"Judging by your eyes, you must be this *Gilded Butcher*. Not a ghost, but a half-starved human being all along... and judging by your cries, a woman at that." He muses, eyes scanning over your battered frame where Daz has you pinned to the floor beneath him. "*Vigo*, you were scared of *this*?"

You spit a glob of disease onto the floor, trying to make room in your throat to just *breathe* dammit. 'Not yet... not yet...! I need... to know...!' 

The air rattles through your lungs as you struggle to take a breath deep enough to form words.

"H-how...the knife...through you..." Your voice is shaky. It's only just barely audible, laden with pain and choking blood.

He drops the cigar for good this time, stamping it out with his heel before closing the gap between the two of you with a few casual strides. He sinks to his haunches before you to get a better look at your face, using the blunt curve of his hook to hold your chin up higher. Whatever he sees makes him grimace. A look mixed between disgust and pity crosses his features.

It fills you with indignant rage.

"Don't... don't... pity me... jackass!" You try to shout but what comes out is nothing more than tired panting. The last thing you want as you drown here in your own lungs is to be pitied. Daz's fingers tighten about your throat in warning, lightly cutting into the skin. The sensation practically tickles in comparison to the pain radiating from your broken arm. Not to mention whatever's happening in your lungs.

He merely raises his brow in amusement. "Precious. Still a little fight left in you yet, *Butcher*." 

His other arm suddenly raises, his good hand coming up before your face, palm outstretched to face the ceiling. You look on blankly, rage making way for confusion.

"You wanted to know how?" He almost hums the words, each one suffused with his own smugness. The flesh of his hand ripples, and at first you wonder if it's just your senses now fading away completely. But then the appendage disappears entirely.

You blink your eyes, struggling to process what's happening. Lazy streams of particulate matter pass before your face, dancing through the air almost as if on their own accord.

'This color... sand!?'

His honeyed voice cuts through the confusion and pain. "I'm a logia, sweetheart. Nice try though, you do have good aim."

'...Logia...devil fruit...?'
He collects the particles back together, reforming his hand. It changes from coarsely textured tan back to his natural skin tone right before your eyes. Even then you can still hardly believe it. You're no stranger to devil fruits, but the time since you'd last seen one in action could be measured not in years, but decades.

He uses the reformed hand to pat your head before standing back up to full height, and the condescension forces from you a wet, rippling snarl. So many words, so many insults and obscenities flit through your head, but you don't trust yourself enough to speak them with the energy and vitriol the bastard deserves.

You spit at his feet instead, hocking a wet glob of disease onto the floor in the space between you.

Crocodile merely looks down at you, face initially blank before a hint of amusement flicks at his lips. He makes no other response before walking past you, heading over to where Vigo still lies whimpering on the floor. Daz lets you flop to the floor, tilting your head against the floorboards so you can watch what's about to unfold.

Your face is turned just as Crocodile crouches down before Vigo, clucking his tongue in mock pity. "Poor, poor Vigo. It seems the Butcher you've feared all along has come and done you in."

"P-Please. Help me. I'll give you everything. Please." He moans pleadingly, voice weak and trembling as his hands paw at the knife still embedded in his eye. Blood runs down his face a startling crimson in contrast to his pale complexion.

Crocodile only hums, cocking his head to the side. "Corpses don't speak, Vigo." His voice is eerily cool. It makes you shiver all the way over here.

Vigo suddenly jerks and screams, Crocodile's fingers wrapping about the hilt of the blade lodged in his face. In one swift motion he pulls it from the wounded man's eye socket before bringing it down across his throat.

The room fills with gurgling cries as Vigo chokes on the blood filling his throat and mouth, the sounds somehow even more sickening than the ones you'd been making thus far. He thrashes about for only a few moments, movements steadily dampening as the life oozes from his slit throat. And then he lies still.

Dead.

Crocodile waits a few moments more. His eyes pore over the body, checking for any hints of lingering life. When none seem apparently, he finally stands, satisfied grin on his face. He turns to face you and Daz once more, the bloodied knife dangling in his hand.

He casually tosses it in your direction, where it skids across the floor before coming to a rest in front of your nose.

"I would've let you do the honors, Butcher, but in your current state I doubt you can even grip the blade."

Though your vision had been graying-a sign of your oncoming demise-your rekindled fury makes you see red.

With a snarl, your unbroken arm darts forward to grab the bloodied knife. Your wrist is already snapping forward before Daz can stop you, and the blade is sent flying back Crocodile's way. It's more of a message than anything else, a release of this helpless frustration building up inside you. You don't exactly expect it to hit, knowing he can become incorporeal at will.
Yet it slashes him across his left forearm, on the wrist right before it connects to his hook.

He looks just as shocked as you do, eyes widening at the blood dripping down his arm, dying that golden hook red.

You have little time to celebrate. Daz yanks you upwards, bending you backwards against his chest as his claws dig tightly into your throat.

But it doesn't matter. You no longer have the strength to keep yourself lucid. The world around you steadily dims, the intricate details of things blurring into formless masses and grey shapes. Your body is freezing yet burning at the same time, everything trembling in a mixture of terror and sickness.

With the last strength you have left, your body instinctively tries to save itself.

"H-hide... hide..." The whispers fall from your bloodied mouth with a mind of their own.

Useless as it is, the feeling of your shroud settling over your feverish skin is comforting nonetheless. Like a blanket tucking you in to bed, one last time.

You manage to shoot Crocodile one more look, wanting to see him bleed a bit more before your body finally gives out. He's staring back, an expression on his face you hadn't expected.

Curiosity?

"It seems you have your own tricks up your sleeve..." He looks at you quizzically, expression tinged just a hint of awe. "How do you do that, I wonder? My eyes can't seem to focus on you."

"Stand down Daz...this one is interesting..." He orders, eyes flicking between the blood running down his wrist and the bladed claw Daz has pressed to your throat...

Except you barely hear it, static buzzing in your ears as your senses fizzle out. Each breath feels impossible to take, chest tightening in a vice as the blood rattles in your throat. It grows fainter and fainter with each ragged inhale.

And then your eyes are sliding shut for what you believed to be the last time, consciousness tumbling into the abyss.

You awake with a start, body and sheets slick with sweat.

At some point, you'd fallen asleep while mulling over the events of the day, tumbling right into a nightmare. You never were a graceful sleeper. The bags under the eyes say as much.

'But why dream that of all things...'

It was possible that what had happened this afternoon, what you had learned, had sent your consciousness on a desperate quest to reason just how you've ended up in this position. So much so, it had tapped into the memories of where this had all began. That one fateful evening over a full year ago...

Needless to say, they had managed to save you. Crocodile had dragged your broken, sickly body to his ship's doctor, a surprisingly warm and kind woman named Ellia. She somehow saved you, and you had woken a few days later strapped down in the medbay, hooked up to IVs pumping you full of military-grade antibiotics and supplements. You shouldn't have survived, certain it was only due to your own spite against the forces that be that you hadn't succumbed to your illness that night.
You groan and sit up, returning to the present. The bruises Daz dealt you earlier ache furiously, and you're sure your flesh is now mottled grisly shades of purple and blue. The back of your legs where he had swept them out from under you, your upper back and shoulders from how you landed, and, of course, the ragged mess of your knees... each site makes itself known as you stand and stretch.

'What time is it anyway?' You glance at the clock on your nightstand. 4 a.m.

'Great, might as well just stay up...'

Chapter End Notes

"I think you broke it. Whatever it is." RUDE Croco that's the love of your life.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Nightmares, Dreams, Reality (FLUFF)

Chapter Summary

You awake from the nightmare—a memory of a night that felt like forever ago. Long enough to question if the 'you' back then is the same as the 'you' now. But that doesn't matter right now. Not when Crocodile is back and making you wonder: did you ever wake up?

Chapter Notes

Your promised fluff is here! Dearest apologies if it's not terribly in-character for our scaly boy, I really tried! This also happens to be the very first fluff scene I've ever written in my life (hence why this chapter took so long...)

Other things to note: Body description here, I tried to be as racially/ethnically ambiguous as possible since it's self-insert. Sorry if I messed up. Other than that, thick thighs save lives y'all. Also totally non-casual jabs at the typical "Oda bodystyle" for his lady characters because they can be downright nightmarish sometimes. Canonically I see 'reader' being about 6'2, well-defined muscle tone (BUFF ladies give me life), about 32 years old, yeah. Feel free to fill in your own blanks or read it differently!

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

What time is it anyway? You glanced at the clock. 4 a.m.

Great, might as well just stay up...

You padded over to the bathroom adjoining your quarters, yawning as you did so. Making too much noise wasn't exactly a huge concern, seeing as the only one staying in what would be the 'women's' quarters was yourself. Dr. Ellia stayed in a private cabin attached to the med-bay, leaving the room entirely to yourself. It was a little lonely, you had to admit, and you partially blamed it for your inability to form closer relationships with the rest of the crew. That is, besides your naturally surly disposition and your inexplicable need to push everyone away that was simultaneously both compulsive and baffling to you. Aside from Croc who obviously had his own Captain's quarters attached to his office, the men had the benefit of rooming together giving them plenty of bonding time. It was just another one of the many things that kept you apart from everyone else. Another thing that kept you as an 'other' in their minds. That, and your attitude...

You didn't want to say you were lonely. No, ship life meant you were constantly surrounded by other people. Still, there was something missing that you couldn't really describe. Like you were living this new life in just as much isolation as in your prior one. There were times where you truly didn't want to be this way, so sharp and fiery and aggressive. Times where you wanted to greet people with a soft smile and gentleness rather than scathing words and defensive hostility. But your
prior years of solitude had hardened your exterior to such a point that you didn't know if it ever could be undone. You couldn't bring yourself to reveal any signs of weakness, any vulnerabilities, and when others did so themselves you were quick to pounce on them. You could try to play nice and be friendly with the other crew but given the state in which you had joined up and your current reputation you had a feeling it wouldn't go so well. You had dug this hole and left the shovel up top, no one to blame but yourself. Now you were too afraid to ask someone to throw it down, lest they abuse your weakness and throw you an adder instead.

No way to dig yourself out now.

Entering the bathroom you flicked on the light inside. Wearing nothing a pair of sleeping shorts and bralette--sleeping alone meant there was little need for modesty--you took stock of the damage. Bruises of shades varying blue to black mottled your body around the points of impact from your little tussle with Daz earlier. Your sides between your lower ribs and hip bones were darkened from where you had been pinned, and there were some equally ugly bruises spreading across your knee from its collision with the crate. Your forearms, too, were darkened from blocking that one kick aimed for your chest. A dull ache across your shoulders and upper back hinted at additional bruises you couldn't see, from where you had landed on the floor.

And, of course, your ego was bruised too. Daz had beaten you just by clapping in front of your face and it was utterly humiliating. Even then, your own attacks had barely fazed him save for the hook you landed to his jaw. Please let that bruise. Please.

You knew you shouldn't be too hard on yourself given you were barely a year out of almost starving to death, but you felt you had so much to prove. Much more than anyone else certainly did. The others had been more than vocal in voicing their doubts once Crocodile had voiced his intentions for you. A half-starved, diseased waif being hired as a personal assassin? The Gilded Butcher dutifully working for the type of person she had been regularly hunting, slaughtering? It was preposterous, madness even, and the crew was more than valid in thinking Croc had a death wish. But apparently he had seen something in you that night, something that piqued his curiosity even as you lay suffocating on the floor, drowning in your own lungs. You had fought against his offer at first, vehemently. Enraged that he had saved you, scum as he was. He had the gall to not only spare, but treat the beast that would've torn his throat out had it the strength to do so. But like any man who kept pets as dangerous and ferocious banana-gators, he offered the beast what he knew it really wanted. The promise of regular meals, a warm ship, and more gold a month than you had ever seen in your life quickly tamed you. That is, save for your mouth and attitude which remained as wild and disobedient as the evening he dragged your sickly half-corpse back to his ship. Even if it was in the employ of the type of man you usually hunted with glee and revulsion, being paid for what you had previously been doing for free was a nice change of pace.

Still, the hypocrisy of it all was not lost on you, and it had initially kept you awake and anxious with guilt as you recovered. A few months after though, thanks to the regular meals and being able to breathe deeper than you had been able to in years erased every last shred of lingering guilt still flaying your conscious. And as you rationed earlier, you were still bringing justice to those that deserved it. Just maybe not for the right reasons anymore, but at least you weren't doing it hungry and sick now. Not to mention there was no guilt in survival. Whatever, you weren't a good person and knew it. Justifying it was a waste of your time.

Your focus returned to the reflection in the mirror, so very different from the one in your dream. The athletic, toned woman you saw was definitely you, but as always you could scarcely believe it. This was not the image you had become accustomed to seeing up until a year ago.

It was not you.
It was not the hunger.

You reached up and lightly touched your face. As your fingers traced your cheekbones you half expected the full, healthy skin there to peel off and reveal the gaunt face you were more familiar with. Where your cheeks had once been sallow pockets, now they were full and round-pinchable even. The skin that had once clung tightly to your jaw, tracing out each and every divot, had been filled with much needed padding. Plumper, fuller lips sat where once only thin lines had, no longer chapped and bleeding. Your hair was healthier too, and as you reached back to tie it in a lazy bun you remembered how doing so back then would've cracked and broken each strand to dust. It was so long now, when had you ever let it get this length? More like when had it ever been healthy enough to survive to this length. When loose it cascaded past your shoulders, halfway down your back where it tickled the skin between your shoulder blades. The color had deepened too, hunger and disease having rendered it ashen instead of the true H/C it actually was. Likewise your skin had taken on a much healthier complexion, no longer ashy and sickly as it had been.

Your eyes were the only thing about your face that remained unchanged. They had always been deep-set, but the life you had suffered had not been kind to the tender flesh beneath them. The wan yellow of your irises did little to alleviate the unsettling effect they had on your appearance, always giving you an almost otherworldly aspect. Makeup could fix it, you knew, but you also had little desire to. In your previous life you had been no stranger to covering bruises and blemishes with concealer, making it look like nothing had happened. Now you had a job to do and if looking like you had just crawled out of a grave helped you in any way you weren't about to toss it aside.

You gave your reflection a tired smile, releasing a groan as your shoulders slumped and neck creaked.

Holy hell you looked tired.

You definitely were.

Said eyes wandered down to look at the rest of your body. Always you needed to pinch and pluck at yourself, needed to make sure this was real. That you were real. Every night was laden with the fear that you'd wake up cold and alone again. Hungry again. Each pinch served to confirm that your body was indeed the real thing, healthy and well fed. As much as they didn't feel like a part of you, the muscles that lined your once bony frame were definitely yours. You were still slim, but rather than being malnourished you were lithe and agile. A body built for speed but not exactly sacrificing raw power. Rubbing a hand over your stomach you still marveled at just how smooth it was compared to the sunken shell it used to be. You flexed for the show of it, feeling the smooth surface grow taut over the rigid, defined muscles that lie underneath. The scars that littered your body didn't bother you much, though you tended to trace them absentmindedly nonetheless. It was something for your hands to do.

The strongest part of you was your lower half, where you had built strong, thick, muscular thighs and powerful calf muscles. All of the squats, the running, the climbing, the everything you did to make sure you had the best physique to carry about your work had led to you sculpting one of the most magnificent asses you had ever seen. It was one of the few things you allowed yourself to be vain over. Proud about too, a product of nothing but hard work and physical exertion. It wasn't there to please the men and women you sometimes caught staring, but because you had quite literally worked your old ass off for it. It helped that you had a naturally wide pelvis with prominent hip bones which, even at your current fitness, jutted out sharply. They used to look so unnerving before you had put a healthy weight on, almost insect-like, and they had definitely contributed to your previous less-than-human appearance. Now though, you looked healthy and strong. Just as ready to chase down a fleeing target as kick their skull in.
It helped that it diverted attention away from what you lacked.

The fact that your breasts hadn't grown alongside the rest of your body was still a sore spot for you. And, as much as you pretended to not care about your appearance overall, you couldn't quite let this one go. At most they were a B cup and a small one at that. You didn't know if they had been permanently stunted from the malnourishment or if they were just meant to be this way. Regardless, you didn't care to know their exact size, opting instead to wear more amorphous bralettes and bandeaus than an actual fitted garb. Every time you looked through the wanted posters and newspapers and saw all of the infamous women within—Bonney, Alvida, Boa Hancock, Nami, Nico Robin—you were reminded that they all had something you didn't. You didn't really know how to describe how it made you feel, like something about you was lesser, as nonsensical and illogical as it was. You tried not to think about it too much, choosing to focus on the positives of your new body instead. It was pointless to fret over, not like you could do anything about it anyway.

Nico Robin. Especially compared to her there was no way Crocodile saw anything in you. You knew they had a long, long history together. One undoubtedly filled with trysts across the years. You and Robin were roughly the same height but that's where the similarities ended. Beautiful raven locks and the most gorgeous blue eyes on the sea. The gentlest of laughs and a calm demeanor tempered by an iron wit. She had a body carved by the gods from pure marble that she moved with indelible grace. Hell, you didn't even know exactly how old you were, though it was somewhere between your late twenties and early thirties if Ellia's examinations were correct. Robin also had a respectable bounty and was known for both her beauty and ferocity on the battlefield. A devil fruit that could both caress and break her opponent's back at the same time. A delicate breeze and a biting gale, a woman that could be both. You were all raging fire and explosive lightning, about as gentle and refined as a punch to the nose. Compared to Nico Robin you were a feral stray against an elegant snow-white lap cat.

There's no way he sees anything in me.

Wait. Why am I even thinking this? When did-why that-him? Really? REALLY, Y/N?

A flood of confusing thoughts coursed through your head and you blushed at yourself. Come on, what's wrong with you? Someone shows you a little attention and you're thinking about that. You instinctively reached up to massage the bottom half of the left side of your rib cage, a memento from the last man you had let touch you and what you had done to him immediately after. While most of it had healed, the bottom most rib had never settled back into place. It occasionally caused you minor pains but while Ellia had offered to perform the surgery needed to fix it, you had politely declined. You needed the constant reminder of what happens when you carelessly place your trust in others, and also what you were capable of when pushed far enough.

But why... when did I start thinking of him that way. I mean I thought he was going to kill me earlier! Not to mention I was just thinking about how much I used to hate him. And yet, sometime along the past year that hatred and disgust had fallen away. Being able to read people and faces, being able to lurk in the shadows when no one thought you were there, you had seen pieces of him that he worked so hard to hide away. Just hints and fragments of a hidden warmth that lurked underneath the public-facing persona of cold and ruthless pirate captain, former shichibukai, would be king slayer and usurper.

Apparently you liked what you had seen more than you initially thought.

Not to mention he was incredibly handsome. Well, to you anyway. Others might have found his scarred appearance jarring and off-putting, but you quite liked it. He was quite literally the definition of 'tall, dark, and handsome', and while his sense of fashion was sometimes questionable you found it
brought him some character besides 'intimidating crimelord'. Though he was loathe to show it often you had come to love his morbid sense of humor and how it meshed with yours almost perfectly. Sometimes he was so calculated as to almost be theatrical, which amused you to no end. You knew by now he reveled in that melodramatic persona of his, and that he would willingly die before admitting it. And of course there was that inexplicable attraction to the sense of danger he always exuded.

Your reflection in the mirror was flushed a shade redder than usual. You groaned at the sight of it, moving your hands to massage your temples.

*He sees a lot in you...I'd rather you not disappoint him.*

Daz’s words echoed in your mind with a reckoning, but all you felt was dread. You needed to kill these feelings before it was too late. These silly, girlish hopes that wanted to tame the sandstorm just as it had tamed the beast. What an impossible notion that was. You were way too old and wary to even entertain such idylls. All they would do is get you killed and you’d be dust on the salty ocean breeze, the only ones to remember you not caring in the least. Even so, you doubted you were capable of giving love...or even being loved anyway...that part of you died a long time ago. Starved to death on those frozen streets.

A none-too-small part of you was suspicious as well. *What if he's being doing it on purpose? What if he wants me lured into this false sense of security? ...Maybe the same had happened to Robin...?*

You were suddenly ripped from your brooding as the familiar pangs of hunger settled into your gut. As if on queue, a fierce blaze of anxiety flared in your chest and constricted about your stomach. Nothing put you on edge faster than being hungry. The crew liked to joke about your 'hangry' episodes, but they knew better than to come between you and your food. After all, it wasn't exactly a secret you were used to killing people for just a few loaves of bread.

You quickly washed the sleep from your eyes and splashed cool water on your face from the sink below the mirror, needing to bring yourself out of your head. Exiting the bathroom you walked back over to your bunk before dropping to a crouch next to it. There was a certain board you were looking for, against the wall beneath the head of your bed. Once loosened it revealed your true prize: a little stash of snacks. You knew it made sense logically given your past experiences, but you were still embarrassed by your food hoarding tendencies and did you best to keep it hidden. *Just in case...just in case...* You pored over the small store of chips, cookies, crackers...but nothing really jumped out at you. Not even the jar of peanut butter grabbed your attention, despite being your favorite. After getting your ass kicked earlier you had quickly retreated to your room to lick your wounds, promptly sleeping through dinner. The little snacks you had wouldn't cut it right now. You were Hungry. Capital 'H'-hungry.

As much as you didn’t feel like leaving the safety and privacy of your room, this hunger would require a trip to the galley. Luckily, besides Ellia who was friendly with *everyone*, the chef was the one person you could say you had a good relationship with. Even though it was long past dinner, he was more than understanding of your hunger spikes and wouldn't mind you rummaging about the larder. Something about being familiar with what real hunger was. Given the nature of your assignments he also knew to save your portion should you be absent. You loved food, he loved food. It was as simple as that. You smiled as your remembered his reaction as you ravenously tore into the first meal Ellia had cleared you to eat after getting stabilized. It was bar-none the best thing you had ever eaten until that point, and you had growled at her when she wouldn't let you have a second helping. Something about letting your stomach have time to adjust.

Pushing the board back into place you stood and grabbed the black hoodie draped over the foot of
the bed. Stretching, you pulled it on over your bralette. No need to put on a shirt when you were just
making a quick trip to the kitchen, especially at this hour. You also quickly threw on an oversized
pair of slate-grey sweatpants. It was a much more relaxed fit compared to the tight, high-waisted
black jeans and leggings you wore as part of your 'uniform'. Let's just say you hadn't been entirely
wrong when you assumed Daz hadn't dressed himself in that suit back on that fateful night.
Crocodile had certain airs to maintain, and part of that involved the look of those in his immediate
entourage. For you? On the job it was dark, high-waisted bottoms that accentuated your features and
a tucked-in crisp white blouse. A pair of knee-length boots with minimal heel so you wouldn't trip
over yourself in a fight, and often a bright sash about the waist for a splash of color. Form-fitting and
stylish, yet overall rather simple. It made you look good yet also unassuming. Perfect for an assassin.

Once dressed a bit more modestly you quietly stepped into the hall from your room, this time a bit
more wary about disturbing the others. You were also a bit worried about being spotted, still
embarrassed about the earlier affairs of the day and left too exhausted from them to activate your
shroud. It was extremely late and you doubted any one else was prowling the decks, but you were
cautious all the same. The kitchen was one deck up, and so you made your way to the stairs on the
right-aft side of the ship. Given how gently the ship was listing you could only assume you were still
docked at port. Knowing you were still at port was reassuring, it meant knowing you still had an exit
besides throwing yourself overboard and taking your chances swimming back to shore. And if you
were feeling particularly dramatic you could just let yourself drown. Give yourself to the heartless
and apathetic waters and let all your confused feelings and pointless infatuations be lost forever to the
deep.

Definitely an option. A perfectly reasonable one at that.

Climbing the stairs, you were accosted by faint voices as you reached the upper deck. You turned to
your right, facing the stern of the ship from where they were coming from. The door at the end of the
hall had been left slightly ajar, casting a thin sliver of golden light into the narrow hallway.

The door to his office.

Crocodile was back.

You could feel the color drain out of your face as your breath hitched. You were completely frozen,
the driving hunger in your gut now entirely forgotten. The contents of your dream were still fresh in
your mind and though you were mostly dressed you felt practically naked without a weapon tucked
within arm's reach. You could just turn away, grab your food and head back to your bunk, but...

...you wanted answers.

Not to mention you still felt a bit guilty for ruining his carefully laid plans. You had resolved yourself
to own up to your mistake when you had turned back to the ship earlier, and god dammit you
were not a coward. You were going to knock on that door, confidently plead your case, offer your
most sincerest apologies, and pray he didn't kill you right then and there. You knew he wouldn't.

Not you, never you.

You closed your eyes, steadying yourself with a deep breath, and padded over to the door before
what courage you had mustered petered out. Seconds away from knocking, your hand froze mid-
strike as you suddenly took note of the conversation going on within.

Your soul just about left your body.

"Dote? I do NOT dote."
Daz laugh in response. "She's not stupid, you'd never give anyone that level of attention who was."

"Your point being?" Crocodile sounded almost exasperated.

"Y/N notices the preferential treatment, Boss. The doting." Daz's voice took on a mocking tone, emphasizing the ridiculousness of what he was saying.

"It is NOT doting. I'm just interested in-"

"Oh I know you're interested in her. Bit putting it lightly." You could practically hear the smug expression on his face through the door.

Crocodile made an annoyed sound. "You're lucky you're irreplaceable."

They continued bickering a bit more but you had ceased being able to comprehend what was being said at this point. The blood rushing in your ears drowned out most everything, and you cheeks felt as though someone had set a match to them with how they burned. Breathing had since become a secondary function, all biological energy devoted to parsing the maelstrom of thoughts raging in your mind.

I, oh my go- what, is? They're talking about me- no way. No that- he said my name. They are talking about me. Doting? No he does no-yes he does. He totally does. interested. He's interested. HE'S INTERESTED. INTERESTED? He's INTERESTED in ME? The boss? Crocodile? Crocodile is interested in me. Me? INTERESTED? *$^#Q#$*

You were practically short circuiting here, only a thin wooden door separating you from the very real and currently happening conversation happening right at this moment about how much the man you maybe kind of liked was seemingly interested in you on a more than platonic level.

All mental faculties were currently devoted to processing what exactly that meant. You didn't have time to stop your hand as it fell from where it had frozen, poised to knock, and pushed the door right open.

Two pairs of eyes met yours, with two completely different and entirely opposite expressions. An almost smug elation...and panicked horror. You on the other hand, decided to stare straight ahead, choosing not to focus on anything but the woody brown texture of the cabin wall straight ahead of you.

Your attempt to play it cool was laughable at best.

"I, uh. Uh saw you were back. And, I uh fucked up earlier, yeah. Sorry, and-We-can we do this tomorrow? Let's talk tomorrow. I really should go back to bed. Imreallysorryfordisturbingyougoodnight-"

"Wait."

You had made to turn around and march right back downstairs, pretend nothing had happened, but the simple request had comically frozen you mid movement. Crocodile stood behind his desk, normally meticulously organized and but now haphazardly covered in all manner of documents and things. The man himself was dressed down considerably more than earlier. His vest and coat had been thrown over the back of the chair, leaving him in a well-fitted sunflower yellow button-down of which he had undone the top few buttons. The events of the day had left it slightly ruffled and the rest of his appearance matched. His normally tight black pants sat lower than usual, belt also tossed
onto the back of the chair. He was hunched over the uncharacteristically messy desk where he kneaded his forehead in what looked to be a mixture of exhaustion and frustration. His hair was also a bit unkempt, no longer entirely slicked backwards with strands coming forward to frame the sides of his face.

"Daz, you are dismissed. Next time, I advise you to consider what you say when the person in question can become invisible." As Crocodile lowered his hand and made a shooing motion at Daz, you noted how tired he looked. Not just tired, almost defeated. He also seemed to be trying to look anywhere but at you.

Daz, on the other hand, looked right at you with a wry smile and shrugged. "Enjoy your chat." He chipped, before pushing past you out of the now very claustrophobic feeling room. You almost didn't notice the light purple bruising that was blossoming along his jawline.

You looked back at Croc, who now had his eyes firmly closed and eyebrows tightly knitted in what appeared to be concentration as he braced himself against the desk. He let loose a long sigh, tension dropping from his shoulders as he straightened up and finally looked at you. His eyes had drained of all previous emotion, now the cool and calculating expression you had grown used to seeing in them, though usually aimed at others. He gestured at the chair on the forward side of the desk-the one intended for visitors-and moved to straighten up the mess of papers.

"Sit. We need to discuss your...insubordination, from earlier this afternoon." He said coolly, too coolly. It was the way he talked to his business rivals.

His enemies.

You were still frozen in place. Though now in confusion rather than fear. Seconds passed in complete silence save for the shuffling of paperwork and folders. Just moments before he and Daz were bickering over his less than professional interest towards you and now he was treating you with just as much cool hostility as he did the D'lores earlier this afternoon? It was one thing for him to just sigh it all away, take a moment of collection and bury it all underneath his professional persona, but for him to expect you to do the same? He had put on one of his masks to deal with you just as he did the same to his enemies and it filled you with a myriad of emotions that left your chest aching.

Anger? Sadness? Disappointment? Fear?

It was unacceptable.

And you were acceptably pissed.

"You...you expect me to just...to just ignore wh-"

"I expect you to sit as you were ordered to, Miss Y/N." He trained his dark eyes on you, as if daring you to say more. Such a look would normally cow anyone else into submission. Force them to bend the knee and offer their necks in deference. Unfortunately for him you always were one to rise to a challenge. Especially if it was from him.

"Take your order and stuff. it." Your fists were balled at your side, shoulders tense as you defiantly met his piercing glare with your own. "You will not treat me like this. Like one of your enemies, just because you-"

"Do you really think it wise to defy my orders yet again?" His glare turned even more predatory at your continued disobedience and the tone of his voice had taken on an almost venomous timbre.

"Or what? You'll kill me? We saw how well that went earlier." You snapped right back as you
paced into the middle of the room. He had tensed right up again, the moment he had taken to compose himself earlier now all but wasted. Instead of horror, now he was stiffened with that same rage you had instilled in him earlier as you stood between him and Hawken. The way he was braced, near motionless on the other side of the table reminded you of one of his beloved banana-gators, poised beneath the water ready to strike. Lesser men and women would have thrown themselves at his feet just by the sight of his glower alone.

But you were not lesser. You would not be cowed into submission by him. You were far too incensed by his callous demeanor to dutifully kneel in obeisance at this point. Definitely now that you knew he was toothless towards you.

"Just because you're too much of a fucking coward to talk about anything even remotely adult like your feelings doesn't mean...UFHH" But you didn't get the finish your rant. Just as you passed in front of the chair he had gestured at earlier, he morphed over the desk with brutal speed. His hand clamped down roughly over your mouth as he pushed you downwards, forcing you into the chair. Your rear stung with the force of the impact but the shock of it kept you from immediately fighting back. He snarled, the sound of it suffused with frustration and annoyance, as he glared down at you with a look that contained far too many conflicting emotions to classify.

"Y/N L/N for ONCE in your life will you just LISTEN!?!" he just about shouted, tone laced with exasperation. "I ask you to shut your mouth and sit but you're so STUBBORN and I have to physically do it FOR. YOU."

You were still too shocked to respond, regardless of whether or not you even could given his hand. He huffed and turned away though kept your mouth firmly covered. "You are single-handedly the most exhausting woman I have ever met." Though he said it more to himself. He looked back towards you and screwed his eyes shut, taking yet another moment to calm himself.

"I am going to remove my hand, and you are going to stay silent." He said much more evenly this time, opening his eyes and shooting you a stern look. "You are going to listen to me like a good girl. and only, ONLY. answer my questions."

Instantaneously the shock melted away. Only now it was replaced by a blazing inferno of indignation. You would NOT be spoken to like this and you sure as hell were done sitting here quietly taking orders like some dutiful princess.

"Now. Do you underst-"

You answered him by biting his hand. Hard.

He flinched though otherwise remained motionless, falling silent mid-sentence. Given the slight metallic tang in your mouth you guessed you had broken the skin, but the cool stare he fixed you with suggested he was completely unfazed. You had expected another tantrum but were met with silence and a blank look instead. A few seconds passed, little communicated between your stubborn glare his otherwise impassive stare. Finally, he released a sigh, slumping his shoulders seemingly defeated.

And then he filled your mouth with sand.

You coughed and sputtered, falling out of the chair to your knees as your palmed your tongue. Wet globs of the stuff fell out of your mouth onto the floor as you desperately tried to spit it out. Grains clung underneath your tongue and about your gums, your frantic rubbing and picking only making it stick in worse. All attention now focused on just how absolutely pissed you were. At both him and
yourself. He had asked one thing of you and you couldn't even do that. Yes you were mad he had sandblasted your mouth but you also knew you completely deserved it. Yours fists were balled so tightly you felt your palms sting, but the sound of approaching footfalls quickly distracted you. You growled and looked upwards from where you were still camped on your knees, hoping he wouldn't notice the frustrated tears gathering at the corners of your eyes.

A glass of water.

Crocodile held it before you, leaning down slightly to hold it level with your face. "Rinse." His eyes no longer conveyed that sense of angry desperation he had flashed you earlier. Instead, they just looked tired.

You met his gaze for a few seconds before gratefully taking the glass, noting the raised red lines you had bitten into his palm. The sight of it caused your anger to melt right away, leaving you instead with just a cold feeling of shame. He stepped backwards to lean back against the desk, hand coming up to pinch the bridge of his nose. "I don't even know why I bother" he muttered.

You looked to the floor as you swished the water about your mouth, too embarrassed to look at him. For as much as you were quick to label him a child, your own antics were no better. He had invested so much time and resources into you, a sick and starving street urchin who just happened to be good at killing people, and your continued obstinacy and temper only served to throw it all back in his face.

The reason why you had come here suddenly floated to the forefront of your mind. Pulling yourself to your feet you finally looked at him where he still held his face in exhaustion.

"I'm sorry, Captain. Boss." His eyes snapped open, meeting yours. "You were expecting...a lot from me earlier and I...I couldn't deliver. You gave me orders and I disobeyed or broke each and every one of them."

He lowered his hand, bringing his arms up to cross in front of his chest as he continued to lean against the desk. You took that as a sign to continue.

"I couldn't recognize Hawken. I stood between him and you. I, I...showed you the utmost disrespect and insulted you. Said a lot of things I really shouldn't have."

He continued to just look at you. That somehow made it worse.

"And, and what happened just now. I eavesdropped. I disobeyed your orders...again. Couldn't even keep my mouth shut for two seconds. Fuck, I bit you."

*Great, here is comes...*

"Because I'm just so defensive and stubborn and don't know how to turn it off. I have no sense of humility and my temper is out of control an-" At this point the words were just tumbling out of your mouth. A flood of apologies and insecurities and doubts filled the air as your face grew hotter and hotter in embarrassment because you just couldn't. *stop. talking.*

After a few moments of this he uncrossed his arms, taking a few steps to close the gap between you. You were suddenly shooshed by a single finger pressed against your lips, much more gentle than the palm earlier yet just as insistent. He paused you, letting the silence fill the cabin. You looked up at him, pallid gold eyes meeting his dark ones, so dark you couldn't quite tell their color.
"You know, Y/N. Half the time I don't know whether I want to kill you or kiss you."

If you thought your cheeks had felt hot before you had no way to describe the level of heat welling up beneath them now. Your eyes shot open wide, flicking between looking at the finger pressed against your lips to the now very warm look Crocodile was giving now. A faint trace of a smile, eyes just barely crinkled, eyebrows knitted together. It looked downright alien on him yet sent shivers down your spine and butterflies fluttering in your gut.

_Oh fuck._

He gently removed his finger, instead maneuvering his hand to lightly cup your left cheek.

_Ohhh fuck. fuck._

Your breath hitched as you suddenly remembered to breathe. "O-oh."

You began to stammer. "Do...do I get a choice...between the killing... and the...yeah..."

'Do I get a choice?' !? Oh my god what are you SAYING.

You would've laughed had it been happening to anyone else, but unfortunately for you, it wasn't, and you were left standing shock-still in awe of how incredibly cringe-inducing it was. The heat beneath your cheeks raged hot, your own personal purgatory burning wild off the mortification of your own embarrassment and awkwardness. Your eyes were now firmly trained on the floor, finding it impossible to look anywhere near the man you were now without a doubt completely smitten with. A few beats passed in total silence, save for your heart hammering in your ears. Your flight or fight instinct abruptly kicked into overdrive, and it was telling you to "RUN". Run far and fast away from this room lest you die of embarrassment right here and now.

Just as you were about to run out as fast as you were physically capable of and thrown yourself overboard, you felt his hand shift as he tilted your face back upwards.

You had no time to react as his lips crashed into yours. Your eyes remained open at first, a mix of panic and shock, heart now hammering in your chest at worrying speed. This was really happening and goddammit you were way too overwhelmed to just sit back and enjoy it. It was everything you wanted it to be and more. Passionate and raw. Rough yet refined. Tender but insistent. Your eyes fluttered shut after a few moments as you tried to relax, feel, and just let your instincts take over. Honestly you couldn't remember the last time you'd been kissed, willingly that is. None of them had ever been as incredible as this, of that you were sure of. How such a simple thing could convey so many ideas and feelings at once, it swept you like a hurricane and it was all you could do just to stay standing.

After a few moments he pulled back, eyes slowly opening to shoot you a smug grin. "Not when you make a face as cute as that, you don't."

You giggled like an idiot.

Chapter End Notes

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All Dreams End (FLUFF & ANGST)

Chapter Summary

It's time for you to wake up, Y\!\N, all dreams must end come morning.

Chapter Notes

Shorter chapter, I wanted to keep this moment contained in one chapter without other things overshadowing it. Also this was supposed to be longer and better, but guess who lost a ton of work! No seriously I almost died from heartbreak, and the stuff I had to rewrite is not nearly as good.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

You grabbed him by the collar, pulling him down to your height. Seeking more leverage before kissing him back. Compared to his initiative you were clumsy, a mixture of being out of practice and semi-inexperienced. He had made it feel so natural, practically effortless, and here you were floundering like a little girl that's never been kissed. At least he couldn't fault you for your enthusiasm? You felt him smile through it, clearly amused at your fumbling attempt to return a kiss as skillfully as the one he had delivered.

"That bad, huh?" you mumbled, looking away. Anywhere but at him, knowing he'd be wearing that stupid, smug, admittedly handsome grin of his. You could feel the warm heat of embarrassment tinging your cheeks a rosy hue.

Supposedly in my thirties and I kiss like I've never been touched...! Sure, that will definitely get him going.

He made an amused hum, once again guiding your cheek back so he could look you in the face, much to your chagrin. Rather than what you expected he was beaming at you uncharacteristically warmly, a foreign softness in his gaze and smile. "It was...charming." Croc replied, raising his eyebrows.

At the very least he got a laugh out of you. "Oh it was 'charming', huh? No need to spare my feelings." Your lips pursed as you crossed your arms, suddenly feeling rather self-conscious. You weren't exactly new to this but what you had done wouldn't have been what you would've called 'pleasant'. It had been also literal years since you had any kind of physical...intimacy with anyone. Not to mention the last person you had brutally murdered. "Haven't really done this in...in a long time" you managed to choke out.

"No need to get defensive." His tone was soft, encouraging. Knuckles tracing your jawline. "Just need some practice is all."
"Oh ho, you offering?" You flirted right back, fluttering your eyelids playfully. The flirting you could do no problem. Your mouth being more than skilled in meting out witty lines as the situation demanded it, though right now you wished it was just as skilled when it came to making out...

Crocodile flashed you a quick grin in response. "EEK-!" you had little time to react as he suddenly scooped you up. His hand pressed against the small of your back as he supported you with his other arm and kissed you roughly. If you thought the previous kiss was overwhelming this was nearly devastating to what little composure you had managed to scrape together since the last one. This time he took your lips with bruising force, demanding and insistent. Your legs came up to rest about his waist as he turned and sat you down on the edge of his desk. Now neither of you had to stretch up or down particularly far to reach each other, and he took the opportunity to press you up via the small of your back into yet another kiss. Your own hands were pressed into chest, grabbing onto his shirt desperately attempting to find purchase against his onslaught.

He was way too good at this.

You gasped for breath when he finally pulled back, lips tingling, almost numb from the pressure exerted on them. He fixed you with a downright smouldering gaze, half-lidded eyes deeply focused on your own as he also gasped heavily. You spent a few moments like this, just staring into the other's eyes waiting for your breath to return. The butterflies in your stomach were fluttering out of control at this point, their tiny wings kicking up a hurricane making you tremble head to toe. It was making you feel both nauseous and absolutely alive, terrible and wonderful, way too many conflicting feelings all at once that was turning your mind to a quivering pile of jelly. This whole situation was positively saccharine, tooth-rottingly so. The kind that normally would've made you gag but in this moment it was everything you wanted and more. Everything you needed and more.

His hand came up to brush against your cheek once more before carding his fingers through the strands of hair that had fallen loose from your bun. You felt a slight pain as you unconsciously started to chew on your bottom lip, suddenly very self-conscious at how close you were. And how you most definitely weren't wearing a shirt underneath your hoodie.

He hadn't attempted to make any move in that direction. Not yet. Given how you were blushing like a virgin-of which you were most certainly not-at some admittedly hot and heavy making out, you doubted whether you were even capable of making it that far right now. Your heart might give out from stress before then.

Crocodile seemed to pick up on your apprehension. He tilted his head at you, smirking. "Why Y/N..." You shivered at the way he drew out your name, like it was some precious thing. "How you love to act so tough...so fierce...but suffer a few kisses and you're left blushing like some school girl."

You huffed indignantly and immediately grabbed him by the collar again, aggressively shoving your mouth against his. Given the muffled noise he made he clearly wasn't expecting it which only spurned you on. For good measure you lightly bit into his bottom lip, and he growled back in pleasure. You released him and lightly shoved him backwards only for him to come right back, bracing himself against the desk on either side of you. There was a fire in his eyes, a new spark seemingly ignited by your passionate retaliation.

"That. That, is what I like about you. What drives me absolutely crazy."

You met his ardent gaze quizzically. "My...what?"

"That fire, Y/N. That defiance to all the world. So earnest in your intensity in every single thing you do, no matter how slight."
You scoffed and leaned back, looking at him incredulously.

"You...you like that about me? Does it not...How does it not annoy the absolute shit out of you?"

At that he laughed. A short laugh, but a laugh nonetheless. Rare as it was coming from him, it just about caused your stomach to somersault over. "Oh it does. It might single-handedly be the most infuriating, frustrating thing in the whole world. And yet..." His fingers traced along your jaw and you caught his eyes moving along those lines in kind. "It is so incredibly endearing."

"I'm sorry, but that makes absolutely no sense." And it didn't. It really didn't. Your hotheadedness frustrated even yourself at times and yet a man like Crocodile-cold, ruthless, supposedly heartless monster-found it 'endearing' or all things? You wondered if he had maybe suffered a psychotic break earlier.

"I know. I've since stopped trying to make sense of it." So blunt. Something about the tone of his voice made you sense the irrationality of it irked him a bit too. For a man who loves to be the master of his psyche, you knew having even just one single emotion escape from his control would be enough to drive him batty. And for him to give up on wrangling that stray feeling implied it must have been a rather hopeless task to begin with.

He closed his eyes, seemingly choosing his next words carefully before continuing. "This afternoon...I wasn't mad at you per se."

"The confusion with Hawken..." Your heart sank, fearing the incoming topic would ruin the moment.

"I wasn't mad at you, but the situation." Those dark eyes opened and looked at you softly. A look that did things to you that you couldn't even begin to describe. "No, Y/N. More than anything I was proud of you."

"P-Proud?!" You sputtered, jerking backwards. "You were proud of me?! Sir-Croc are you feeling alright? You aren't making any sense right now."

"I meant what I said."

You stared at him in exasperation, slack jawed and a bit unnerved. "I straight up defied your orders. Stood between you and your enemy. Called you a...a lot of pretty insulting things. Shit, I drew my sword on you!"

"Yes, you did. To all those things. I was enraged that Hawken took advantage of that heroism of yours. Disappointed you failed to recognize him despite making you memorize his photograph this morning...and also how bad his disguise was..." Heat rushed back into your face at that. It wasn't often you failed to recognize someone, and to have your near-photographic memory fail you at the worst possible time was more than mortifying. In the moment your emotions had taken over, causing you to only see the situation skin-deep, missing the obvious signs. For someone of your supposed skill it was amateurish and an embarrassment.

If I just had better control over my emotions, if I wasn't such a stupid hothead and seen the situation logically!

His hand caught your cheek again, forcing your face up again to look him in the eyes. It seemed he preferred looking into your eyes as you talked, much as you preferred to hide your flushed face in your chest.

"But I was proud that you took a stand, as misguided as it was." He responded quietly, staring down
into your yellow irises with a renewed intensity. "You didn't realize it was him, all you saw was me-
your boss-turning on who you assumed was a defenseless civilian and you did what your pride
dictated you do. You stood in the face of what should've been certain death and were willing to die
for what you believed in, how can I not admire that? After being on my ship for a year you haven't
sacrificed that stubbornly noble pride of yours... as frustrating and charming as it is." He...he
sounded sad, a melancholic tone coloring his voice in a way that made your chest ache. His gaze
wavered, shifting focus as if he were looking at something in his thoughts.

A few moments passed in silence, him idly stroking your cheek as you worried on your lip. He was
looking downwards now and you noticed that spark in his eyes had since guttered out. A cold
feeling settled into your gut, and you understood. With a sighed you leaned forward, resting your
forehead against his chest. His hand slid behind you to slowly stroke your back.

The silence hung in the stillness between you, neither one of you wanting to break it.

Because you knew.

And he knew it too.

"You won't do this. Will you?" you finally broke the silence, voice just shy of trembling. Meek, not
wanting to say what needed to be said.

He could only exhale deeply in response. What felt like minutes passed before he finally spoke up.
"Y/N, more than anything I admire you. You came from nothing, worse than nothing, and kept
yourself out of Hell through sheer spite alone." He pulled away to arm's length and rested his hand
on your shoulder. "Even in the state you were in you made powerful people fear you, fear just
the idea of you. You were such a force to be reckoned with they thought you couldn't be human."
His hand fell from your shoulder, sweeping over you. "And now look at you. In a short time you've
managed to drag yourself from death's door and claim what you've deserved all along."

He took a few seconds before continuing, now seeming to struggle to find the right words to
say. "Y/N, it wasn't just pride I felt earlier, but relief. Relieved that I hadn't...broken...you yet. And I
want it to stay that way."

"Then don-"

"It doesn't work that way. I know how I am, Y/N. I can't be like this from behind closed doors." He
said through his teeth. "There will be no affection, no sweet words, no gentleness. I will push and
push you, grinding you down until there is nothing left." He suddenly surged back towards you,
grabbing your cheek once more. "Y/N there is something in you that is truly
wonderful. A realness that makes everything around you seem fake with its intensity. A spirit that
drives me up the wall in a way that makes me want to kill and kiss you both and I can't afford that
former half to win out."

You wanted to argue, say there was no way he would break you, but the words wouldn't come. You
knew him to be true. A relationship with him would only result in your eventual demise, though
whether that be physically or spiritually was impossible to say. Most likely both.

But you didn't know what was worse: him destroying you or you not even caring.

"Now of all times...why is it now of all times you decide to be selfless?" You were trying so hard to
keep your voice steady. To make it as easy on the both of you as possible. You don't know how he'd
react to tears. You didn't know how your heart would survive walking away after finding out. "You
always take what you want and now you decide to be the bigger person? Why?"
Instead of words he leaned down and kissed you once more. Far softer and gentler than any of the others before, an apology delivered straight to your lips. One final moment of indulgence.

He took a few steps backward, locking his hand with yours and sliding you down off the desk. "You're going to forget everything that happened here tonight, Y/N, an-

You shoved him away from you, roughly. "How can you even ask that?! How you can expect that from me?" A mixture of indignation and anguish flooded your system. Hands balled at your sides as you glared up at him, internally cursing as you felt the first sign of tears wet the corner of your eyes. The look he gave you in response just about shattered your heart, just as horrified at your tears as you were.

"Because you have to, Y/N." He crossed his arms, fidgety, trying to keep himself from reaching out. "You're-...you'll get over this."

"I don't WANT to get over this!" You stamped your foot. It was childish and certainly wasn't winning you any favors but logic and reason had long since abandoned you to make way for the venom burning in your heart. "You can't just-you can't whisk me into your arms like that, tell me those things, kiss me like I'm the most important thing in the world, and expect me to forget about it."

He met your pleas with silence, eyes turned down and away in guilt.

"Why couldn't you have just done NOTHING. Why did you have to TORTURE me like this?! WHY?!!"

You pushed past him roughly, desperately seeking to put distance between the two of you. The need to get physically hostile was growing rapidly and there was still enough sense of control in you to know that was the last thing this situation needed right now. Even as badly as you wanted to punch his stupid face in. Even as badly as he deserved it. You stood facing the door, the promise of sweet escape washed over you but the anger and torment burning inside kept you rooted to the spot. The breaths coming out of your chest were heavy and frantic, like an irate bull's about to charge. The sheer amount of rage roiling through your system elevated you to such a point that you began to feel almost calm again. The eye of calm amidst the maelstrom of rage swirling inside you.

You flash a look over your shoulder to look back at where you had left him.

He was quiet, eyes closed, breathing far too evenly metered trying to maintain his composure. Upon opening them, absolute despair settled in your gut at what you saw.

They were empty again.

Cold and callous and empty.

He fixed you with that just above impassive stare, and his words twisted like a knife in your chest. "It's late, Y/N. Retire to your quarters. We have work to do in the morning."

You stood there, mouth falling open and shut a few times. Shocked that he could hide it all away so easily. Like it meant nothing to him. Like you meant nothing to him.

"No. I get it." You said, far more evenly than you thought possible in your current state. "You don't want to want me. You want me to be just another pawn to toss aside." You turned slowly to face him, fixing him with a frigid glare of your own, accusatory and filled with poison. "You want to be able to kill me when you need to. Not like a repeat of this morning. Be able to kill me Just like you did with Robin when she was with you."
He flinched, almost as if he'd been slapped. A bolt of shock flashing in his eyes.

*How dare you play with me like this.* You thought bitterly. If you were going to suffer, then he sure as hell was going to suffer too.

"Well, I'd like to see you try. You couldn't kill me today, you won't be able to do it in the future. Those renegade *feelings* of yours will hinder you every step of the way. It will drive you absolutely insane, and I will *relish* it the entire time. You can't kill me, and you never will. All because for once in your life you *care* about something and it will *ruin* you."

His mouth opened, eyes briefly flashing in a mix of anger, shock, and sorrow, momentarily shattering the ruse of self-control he'd thrown on. But you never heard what he said, or even if he said anything at all.

You quickly headed for the door. There was no point arguing, and you weren't in the mental space to do it effectively anyways. It was over, unilaterally decided on his part. Maybe he was right, maybe you would get over it. But for right now you couldn't, and being around him with that callous persona of his donned was not something you could handle at the moment. And so you made for the door before he could see the single tear that had managed to escape its corner. Solemnly rolling down the cheek he had just spent the night stroking, almost lovingly so. You breathed in deeply, desperately seeking any modicum of composure that would prevent you from breaking into the gross sobs lurking just inches deep in your chest.

No, he would *not* see how he affected you. *Not* see how he had ruined you already. Especially when he could just hide it all away so easily.

You quickly passed into the darkness of the hallway, letting the blackness swallow your form whole.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry. But also not really. This was awful and wonderful to write. But don't worry! You'll get a happy end, eventually.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
You won't say you're heartbroken, no. You're pissed and hurting, but not heartbroken. Maybe he was right. Maybe you will get over it. Eventually. But for right now? What you need right now is a fight.

Welcome back! Fast update this time, I've been thinking of this moment for weeks now. Let the suffering continue!

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You were looking for a fight. *Needing* a fight.

Hunger flared through your gut and you channeled the following bolt of anxiety into your rage. You had left the ship hungry, never making it to the galley like you had originally intended upon venturing from your room. Now you were using it to your advantage, using it to fuel the hunt you were on.

But the streets were empty, not a single soul to be seen. No beggars, no homeless, no sick. Hell, not even a *body* to be seen. The first fingers of sunlight crept through the alleyways, signaling the quickly approaching dawn. Soon there would be plenty of people out as the market and businesses reopened for the day.

Not the kind of people you were looking for.

No, you were looking for trouble. Looking for ruffians and riffraff itching for a fight just like you were. Looking for men with bad intent stalking the poorly lit streets for defenseless, weak women like the kind you were currently pretending to be. You had even dressed for the occasion, making sure to accentuate your feminine features while disguising the toned muscles that could snap a man's neck with ease. The tightest pair of black leggings you could find to perfectly silhouette your thick curves. Same baggy hoodie as earlier to disguise your muscular arms and, of course, the knife holsters on your biceps. A fitted white tank was hidden underneath, something that wouldn't get in your way once the hoodie was off and the fight was on. Knee length dark leather boots, also hiding knives within.

Knives, knives, and more knives. Plenty of knives, more than enough to keep you safe. More than enough to make up for the absence of the saber you left tossed in front of *his* door. You wouldn't be using it anymore. Never. Again.

From now on it was just you and your own devices. Gear you purchased yourself, no gifts. Nothing
that he had given you.

You wouldn't say you were heartbroken, no. You're pissed and hurting, but not heartbroken.

Like you could ever care about a selfish jackass like him.

Like he could ever care about an unlovable mongrel like yourself.

 Fuck. Him.

Your thoughts were a bitter stream of venom poisoning your view of the world. Everything was awful right now. Absolutely everything. A sweet little kitten could roll out of a pile of garbage right now, chirping into your arms, and you'd still find a way to see the situation as something utterly terrible. The only cure you could think of to douse the blackened flames licking at your not broken heart was blood. And lots of it. While you would never hurt an innocent civilian, you had no qualms about putting down the criminals that lurked the streets at night. Especially if they started the fight first. Okay maybe you wouldn't kill them, not if they weren't truly evil, but you didn't see a problem in leaving them bloody and crying on the ground. A painful lesson in the consequences of treating crime like a game. Your heart may be bruised and aching but it wasn't missing.

Not like him.

But the streets were empty. Utterly and completely empty, not even stray cats or vermin to be seen. You almost expected a tumbleweed to roll out from between an alley at this point, had the wind not been entirely dead as well. It's not like you were trying to hide either. Here you were in plain sight, un-shrouded. Hell with the amount of raw emotion burning through you right now you should practically be radiating a presence.

And yet, there was no one here.

Had you been in a clearer state of mind you would have felt something was wrong. No city has streets this safe and empty at night unless there were some nigh-omniscient force out there tasked with ensuring such orderliness.

Good. Let them try and arrest or some shit.

You paced those backstreets relentlessly, a stir-crazy tiger looking for the opportunity to lash out. Desperately trying to avoid the thoughts in your head. The self-doubt and hatred cancerously eating away at your resolve. You needed a distraction, needed one before you returned to that claustrophobic ship and had to see him again. Before you did something you would regret.

"ARRRRG GGGGGGHHHHHHH!" You kicked a trash can in frustration. Deep, angry breaths almost like growls escaped from your lungs as you stood with your fists balled at your sides. You knew you should have just left for good. Packed the biggest bag you could find and abandon ship without so much as a goodbye. But the hotheaded side of you saw that as quitting.

And you were no quitter.

You wouldn't let him have the easy way out, for you to just disappear into the night forever, never to be seen again. No, you needed to stick around and see him suffer like you were. You'd keep up all those things he said he loved about you and relish as he squirmed. Maybe even drag another man or woman back to your room and see how he reacted.

...Okay maybe not that. That idea making you feel more than a little uncomfortable. Unnerved and exhausted by your own thoughts you sat down on the toppled trashcan, letting your head fall into
your hands. You were so very tired, exhausted from the whirlwind of emotions tearing you apart and also because you had effectively stayed up through the night.

Please just make these feelings go away. Make the hurt go away.

The stubborn, vindictive side of you was calling to put him to the torch. To grind that stupid face of his into the dirt under your heel. But the vulnerable side? The one that had become exposed as he kissed you so passionately? It was hurting bad and the idea of hurting him back only made it feel worse. You remembered how soft and warmly he had looked at you, causing your heart to twist and flutter. He had revealed a tenderness you never would've guessed lie underneath that callous exterior. The idea of making that version of him hurt...making him suffer...it made you feel sick and awful and all kinds of terrible things. But then that image morphed into the cold visage he had so easily slipped on, those emotionless eyes locked into a steely glare. Callous and bleak. It reignited the anguish and anger he had set alight and left you wanting to rip his throat out all over again.

Clearly he cared about you, but he didn't want to care about you. You were Just another liability, another hurdle to cross in his quest for god knows what.

How could I have ever expecting anything better of him...

And yet you did. The way he swept you off your feet, beamed you that wonderful smile, lauded you with more praise than you could remember... it had given you a brief glimpse of hope that he would reciprocate the confusing affection you had for him lying deep in your heart.

But he didn't want it, and that's what hurt the most. That he cared about you and admitted it, felt such intense feelings for you...and just wanted it all to fade away. To pretend like they didn't exist and never did. He didn't want to want you and it made you feel like the most undesirable creature in the whole world.

Worse than when you mother-NO. We do NOT think of that.

You banished the thought from you mind but the panic was already starting to set in. You grabbed at your upper arms, nails biting into the flesh there hoping the pain would drag you away from that dark pit in your mind. The memories you had worked so hard to bury away forever. Your breaths were quickly turning ragged as you attempted to steel yourself against the oncoming panic attack.

NoNoNoNON-

A shrill scream tore through the air, immediately ripping you away from your thoughts. A woman's scream, colored by pure terror. You sat up and stared in the direction it seemed to have come from, all mental processes now solely focused on listening. This was the trouble you had been hoping for, but the fire driving your need to fight had been woefully snuffed under the weight of your beginning panic.

That didn't matter right now though.

Someone needed your help.

Your eyes narrowed, all senses on high alert trying to discern where the cry had come from.

"PLEASE!! SOMEONE HEEEEEELLPPP!!" you leapt to your feet, hands instinctively going to your side to grab the blade that no longer hung there. You looked down in mild alarm before remembering how you had so gratefully returned it to its rightful owner. Cursing under your breath you reached up under your hoodie to grab two of the knives from the holsters strapped to your sides before breaking off into a dead sprint. You charged down an alleyway that seemed to have funneled
the sound of the woman's cries towards you, only to have to come stop in the middle of an intersection, not knowing where to turn next. These alleys were far too narrow, a junction between what looked to be several large warehouses. If a fight broke out here it would be uncomfortably close quarters, one that would be hard to walk away from unscathed.

Another scream ricocheted from down the path to your right. "STOP! PLEASE PLEASE STOP!" She sounded frantic, voice ragged in what could be pure terror or even pain. You quickly sprinted towards the sound of her cries which, to your relief, seemed to be getting louder. You prayed it meant you were getting closer. The alley suddenly turned sharply and you came face to face with a wide open door. Some type of side entrance for one of the many warehouses or factories here in the port.

Normally you would've stopped, taken the time to scout out the location, but another pained cry tore out from the darkness of the doorway. There wasn't any time, it sounded like she was dying and you would not just stand by and do nothing.

**Hold on! I'm coming!**

You swiftly flew into the door, tightening your grip on the daggers in your hands. The hallway was dark, too dark, and had there not been the screaming of the poor woman being assailed you would've assumed it to be completely empty. You burst through another door leading into what you assumed was the main warehouse space, the layout drastically opened up into a wide space dimly lit by the early light of the dawn streaming in through the murky windows. Only a few boxes and crates lay piled haphazardly around the floor.

You almost tripped over your feet trying to come to a stop.

Upon one of those crates, right in front of the door you had come from, sat the woman. An objectively beautiful thing with golden honey hair that cascaded in wavy curls about her pale, cream-colored shoulders. She batted her deep blue eyes at you, like sapphires inlaid into her cherubic face. Her dress was a deep crimson that barely covered her upper thigh, perfectly matching the shade of lipstick on her thick, plump lips. Those lips slightly opened as she beheld you revealing perfectly white teeth. She looked almost doll-like in how perfect she was.

At how perfectly unharmed she was.

You stood there confused for a few moments, looking at this decidedly untouched woman. She stared back before flashing you a delighted look, those plump lips breaking out into the most sickeningly sweet smile you had ever seen. Her hands clapped together, fingers twining together in excitement. "Oh good! You came!"

You heard a faint whizzing in the air from behind you, turning just in time to catch the blow across your left temple instead of the back of your skull. Stars exploded in your vision as you were sent sprawling onto the ground, knives skittering out of your hands across the warehouse floor. It was all you could do to not immediately start vomiting from the intense waves of nausea and dizziness rolling over you, and ragged, heavy breaths escaped from your throat in between sharp gasps timed with the throbbing of your head. You were faintly aware of a hot stickiness coating your face on the side you had been struck.

**IDIOT IDIOT IDIOT!** You screamed at yourself internally. Cringing as the intensity of your own thoughts worsened the already blinding pain searing through your head. As soon as you had seen her you should've known. Should've known it was a setup! But you could only stare dumbly at this broad when you hadn't found what you expected. **Such a fucking idiot!!** You snarled and attempted to rise, dragging yourself onto your forearms and knees. Fresh waves of nausea threatened to send
A voice suddenly caught your attention. "Uhhhhhhhh, boss...? She's still awake."

You managed to crack open an eye, greeted to the sight of one of the biggest and dumbest looking goons you'd ever seen. He stared down at you blankly, slack jawed and doe-eyed. He held some type of blackjack or club at his side, the length of it splattered crimson with blood.

"Hmmm, so she is. It seems we have a tough one on our hands." A voice purred, deep and enriched with honeyed venom. He stepped into your line of sight, a well-built man with impressive ice blue eyes. He was dressed immaculately in a sharp white suit. It would've looked ridiculous on anyone else but paired with his now well-groomed auburn hair and confident expression it looked downright intimidating. The scar across his lips contorted the condescending sneer he was beaming down at you. "Unsurprising, given her employer."

Absolute rage flushed through your system.

"Hawken, you son of a bitch!" You spit from between clenched teeth. You tried to push yourself to your feet only for your hand to slip on some of the blood that had rolled down your face. It sent you crashing back down to the floor and you roared in frustration.

"Oh! You finally recognize me!" Hawken looked mildly surprised, amusement sneaking into his features. "Looks like I don't have to put on that stupid monkey suit again." He knelt down in front of you as you struggled, coolly resting on his haunches. That ugly sneer never left his face and seeing it so closely filled with another burst of rage-fueled energy. "I really must apologize for this...distasteful affair. You know I was quite smitten with you earlier today, so heroic trying to protect me. So heroic trying to save my lovely Amanda." He brought up his hand and came to rest it on your cheek, stroking the sticky rivulets of blood rolling down its side.

Your vision went red. Such an action was far too uncomfortably similar to the tender moments you had suffered earlier this evening, reviving the no small amount of hurt lurking in your heart. You snarled as a different fury reignited within you, and spat a glob of blood onto his face. It landed right in one of those beautiful eyes causing him to fall backwards with a cry of disgust. He wiped it off his face, taking the sneer with it and as he moved his hand aside he revealed a visage of pure anger and hatred.

"You. Stupid. BITCH!" His foot caught you right in the ribs, choking from you a sharp yelp. You vision exploded into sparks again, blinding pain radiating from where he had kicked you. From where you lay you couldn't tell if he had broken anything, worry spreading like a disease as you thought of your floating rib. The pain made you cough and groan, and kept you from taking a satisfying breath. You curled into yourself, attempting to protect your vulnerable midsection from his wrath.

He leaned down and roughly grabbed you by the hair. "Yeah, that's right." The jerking motion forced a pained whimper from your lips as your bruised ribs and battered temple cried out in protest. You hated how pitiful it sounded, and you could only look on in despair as the horrible sneer returned to Hawken's face. "Weak little cunt can't take a single hit. I guess he really does keep you around just to look pretty." He growled in your face. Somehow you managed to keep yourself from flinching, meeting his eyes straight on with a defiant glare. You could feel the fear and pain tainting it but maintained it nonetheless.

Your focus shifted as you saw the woman, Amanda, hop down off her crate and take a place at his side. There was an indignant light in her eyes as she glared down at you, lips formed into a pout.
"How dare you touch my prince!" She leaned down and slapped you, an open-palmed strike catching you across your right eye. The sound echoed throughout the open space of the warehouse, thankfully covering the sound of your pained gasp. You were still being held up by your hair and the way the slap jerked your face made your scalp sting. "Know your place, filth!"

You tried to fix them with the steadiest, most impassive face you could, though your right eye was already beginning to swell shut. "Weak, huh? So weak you... you had to ambush...and jump me from behind." You choked out from between ragged breaths. "Such...such a brave man." Looking between them you managed to crack a wry smile. This wasn't looking good, but you weren't going to just roll over for them. Hawken and his bitch were going to have to kick you hissing and spitting into Hell.

He frowned and dropped you roughly back onto the ground. It was all you could do not to cry out in pain again, muffling it by biting your lip. "Seems like that scaley bastard didn't teach you any fucking manners, either."

"Eww, how unsightly. Let's get out of here, sweetie." Amanda quipped in response.

"I agree." Hawken quickly turned on his heel and walked away, the woman spritely skipping alongside him. Snapping his fingers at the big brute that had attempted to knock you out, he barked out a command that set a cold fear into your gut: "Drug the bitch. You know where to take her."

You scrambled trying to get to your feet, to fight back. It was futile, Hawken's hired lackey strode over and easily pinned you to the ground. His huge hand steadily held your head to the cold cement floor and you could only watch as he reached into his jacket and pulled a syringe from a pocket within. "ARGH!" the cry tore from your lips as your flailed and struggled, desperately trying to break free. To get back to your feet and run out of here as fast as you could. Your nails clawed at his arms, finding no purchase against the thick material clothing him, and you were far too exhausted and pained to physically force him off.

Oh no nono nonono NO!

He uncapped the syringe with his teeth before bringing it down to your neck. As he brushed the hair away to expose the sensitive flesh there the absolute terror of the situation kicked in. Instead of granting you the adrenaline needed to break free it left you frozen in place save for the trembling now rattling your body. You could only whimper as you felt the needle tip pierce your skin, tears rolling down your face and mixing with the blood. As he pushed the plunger, injecting whatever liquid contained inside directly to your bloodstream, a choked sob escaped from your lips.

It took only seconds for it to kick in.

Your head lolled to the ground as the tension in your muscles gave out. Fear firmly took hold in the absence of hatred and rage, no longer having the energy to maintain the fire that sustained them. You futilely attempted to struggle but the strength was bleeding from your limbs rapidly, whatever drug he had injected you with eating its fill of your energy. The world started to blend together, a grotesque and muddled oil painting, paint strokes only vaguely suggesting the outline of shapes. The pain in your head flared to life with a renewed vigor and your breathing became long and drawn out. Rough and heavy panting coming more from your gut than your lungs. Your mouth flooded with saliva, drooling out of your mouth in strings.

Suddenly the world was spinning, the brute having picked you up and tossing you over his shoulder. You were little more than a ragdoll physically and your mind was quickly approaching that state too. Thoughts unraveled at the seams, breaking off into random threads, lucidity fraying in swathes.
Your last coherent thought was of his face, a moment of weakness.

*I'm sorry...!*

Tears rolled down your face to drop into the footstep of the brute hauling you off to whatever fate Hawken had in store for you.

The last little bit of clarity left you, leaving you limp in a catatonic stupor.

Chapter End Notes

Oh shit how are we going to get out of this one now?

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Little Things

Chapter Summary

You had left in such a hurry, leaving Crocodile with only his own thoughts. "You'll get over it" he had said, but had he meant it more for you or himself?

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! Still don't feel very confident about this chapter, but oh well! Let's see how it matures in the wild. Definitely a different experience trying to write from his perspective, sorry if it sounds a little stilted.

Comments always appreciated! Comment and let me know who you are so I can read your stuff too!

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Crocodile had not slept that night, and now the first rays of dawn were streaking across his desk. Attempting to do so would've been a useless venture anyway. He knew if he had tried, your face would've just tortured his thoughts until the sun rose. Lying there, left remembering the hurt and fury in your eyes. Tears welling up in their corners from the pain of his sudden betrayal. A cold wave of shame washed over him and he gritted his teeth to keep from cringing. Once such an alien feeling, shame, something he hardly ever felt. Now in the last few hours it was something he could say he was intimately familiar with.

It disgusted him.

He groaned and kneaded the dark spots beneath his eyes. The lack of sleep and stress from the night's events had left them stinging in exhaustion. After you had stormed out he had paced his office for hours, forced to replay the moment over and over again. A single, impulsive moment of weakness. A mistake that had let his traitorous feelings become known. You were right, he should've done nothing. Should've remained content to watch from afar and just be grateful to be in your presence. But you had stood there in his office, words falling out of your mouth on the verge of tears as you drowned in self-doubt and he had moved towards you before even realizing what was happening. He had said far too much, done far too much. Spoiled himself in your eagerness he could never return.

You had been right about many things this night.

His feelings for you were a burden that would only distract him, unwelcome invaders in the otherwise callous crucible that was his heart. Yet they existed nonetheless. You did things to him he couldn't begin to describe. Things as completely inexplicable as they were hopeless to resist. All fire and lightning, a veritable storm that had surged in from nowhere and taken him without warning. Far
too quickly to realize what was happening and ward it off. He had waited too long to reject you before he did something stupid, and now you were both suffering because of it. But, as much as he didn't want to, he cared about you regardless. So stubborn and brave and clever, a toughened no-bullshit exterior hiding a rare radiant and compassionate spirit. So many little things about you that built up to be an unstoppable force of hopeless desire.

Little things like the way your features softened when you thought no one was looking, letting the fatigue you tried so hard to hide creep in. You weren't a good sleeper, often troubled by intense dreams and even worse nightmares. Restful sleep ever eluded you no matter what remedy you tried, and yet you tackled every assignment with a vigor and energy that suggested otherwise. You'd drag yourself into his office to report in no matter how tired or hurt you were, so eager to hear his praise and thanks for a job well done. Late at night he'd hear you skulking about topside, walking the deck sleepless and restless. Sometimes he'd come up to check on you, and the sight of the moonlight accentuating your features as you stargazed, light catching your irises in a way that made them shine like pure gold...

He admired how you weren't all bark, perfectly capable of following up any threat with a nasty bite. You were clever and resourceful beyond any of his constituents, save for Daz of course. He felt no apprehension in giving you a target, fully confident you'd take care of the details yourself, no hand holding or intricate plans required. While rough around the edges, a work in progress, your skills were still to be feared. Maybe not the best in a fair fight, but since when had Crocodile ever worried about what was fair. He cared about results and that was what you got. However you did it was of no concern to him. You were a mercilessly efficient blade in the dark, a lingering shadow of death who the very mention of struck fear into the hearts of the corrupt and powerful back on that dump of an island he had found you on. And that was while you were a frail little waif, barely able to breathe under the weight of disease in your lungs. How they would shudder now that you were healthy and hale, what kind of reckoning you could bring down on them.

Your wild, untamable mouth used to drive him absolutely insane, but now he found himself looking forward to just how brutally you could proverbially skewer whatever target you set your eyes on. He had eventually picked up on the fact it was yet another weapon in your arsenal: far easier to take down an opponent who was rattled by a few words than one who was mentally resolute. Funny, given how your easily wounded pride made you so easy to fluster yourself. Always looking to prove yourself. Never content to suffer a single slight. Ready and willing to answer a challenge no matter how grand or trite.

Little things like how you stopped to pet every dog and cat you saw no matter how clean. How you'd gasp upon seeing some critter whether it be furry, feathery, scaly or god-forbid a mix of all three. Your hands would fly up to your face, squishing your cheeks in pure delight before running over to touch whatever the hell it was. He'd sigh when Ellia reported to his office, telling him how you'd been bitten by something again. Yet it never bothered you, always blaming yourself instead of whatever animal had sunk its teeth or claws into you. Even the bananagators weren't immune to your attentions. Beasts so fearsome men would hurl themselves off cliffs to avoid and you approached them so readily, smothering them with kisses and scale-scratches as easily as if they were no scarier than a ten pound lap cat. They almost preferred you at this point.

"But all animals are cute! Each and every one of them. And they all deserve love and treats like the girl boys and girls they are. Isn't that right~"

You had said so matter of factly, lips tucking into a slight pout before cooing at the beast writhing in joy beneath your fingers. His heart had almost stopped the first time he had caught you lavishing your affection onto one of his gators, so sure you were about to lose an arm or worse. Instead it had rolled over and exposed its belly for easier access, clearly loving the attention. A playfulness had
shined in those golden eyes of yours and it was at that moment he had begun to fall.

So many little things...

When docked at port he'd sometimes see you using your own paycheck to buy medicine and food, stealthily distributing it around to those that needed it. So empathetic to those that hadn't the power or tenacity to pull themselves out of their wretched existence. Not wanting or needing any recognition for your selflessness. The one time he'd 'caught' you, your cheeks had flushed so intensely, eyes blown wide in mortification. So embarrassed over something others would've called you a hero for. That was the first time he'd caught himself wondering if your entire body flushed like that...if you'd burn up as your clothing was stripped off...

Was that when he realized he was too far gone?

No, it was today that had done it. How you had stood in front of him, glorious eyes focused so intensely. Resolution strong as the cold steel wielded in your hand, so ready to die for a complete stranger. The wind had caught your hair just right, throwing it behind you in the perfect picture of bravery as the light glinted off your blade. A noble hero staring down a known villain. You had commanded such a presence that demanded his recognition, challenging all the authority he had. How could a blade for hire, more comfortable in the shadows than daylight, shine so intensely?

It should have disgusted him. Such displays of valiance normally did. He lived his life as if it were him versus the world, no room for vulnerabilities like kindness and pity. But he looked at you, saw your fury and self-righteousness, saw your compassion and empathy, and it left him wanting more. Left him grasping for a light he could never hope to keep lest he only snuff it out. Corrode it like everything else he touched. Something he would never forgive himself for.

But he had ruined it all.

Now you hated him.

Your furious glare flashed through his thoughts once more, eyes suffused with anguish at how he had shown you a glimpse of something he could never give and then tore it all away. His jaw clenched and chest ached upon seeing those beautiful eyes drowning in pain. He was used to seeing them angry, frustrated, disgusted, filled with vehemence. But not when they were aimed at him. Not since the night you had met...

But you had hurt him back. Hurt him when you had somehow found the perfect words to say to slap him in the face. How he didn't want to get attached because it would be harder to kill you. Not if, but when. Words said hastily in your vindictive wrath, but had you really meant them? Did you really see so little in him that you thought he'd kill you just to get you out of the way? The idea of the light fading from your eyes, life abandoning your broken body...it made him feel sick and cold like nothing had ever done before. Even remembering the agonizing cry you had made when Daz snapped your arm that night filled him with a sickening unease. He didn't want to feel about you the way he did, but he didn't want you dead. No, never dead. If he could ensure he'd never see your lifeless body he'd do it in a heartbeat. The insinuation that you thought otherwise...that stung more than he cared to admit.

You had brought up Robin, too, and made him remember all his failings with her all over again. She and he had mutually betrayed one another but he still found the entire affair both distasteful and regrettable, as inevitable as it was. Knowing she had joined up with Straw-Hat brought at least some small relief. She deserved so much better than the lot life had given her, just like you did. But bringing her up had clued him in to some insecurities he hadn't foreseen you having. Robin was undeniably beautiful, but she had never affected him in the way you did. He had admired her
strength and resourcefulness, her feminine charms and grace, but there was always an underlying sense of deceit about her that he found off putting. Hypocritical as it was he disliked how it always seemed he was talking to a mask, an artificially constructed personality, when he was with her. But you? There were feelings and emotions you tried to hide, yes, but there was something about you that felt so real. An authenticity that Robin had lacked. Talking to you always felt like talking to you, not some crafted persona hiding the real person underneath. Your actions weren’t motivated by how others expected you to be, but because that was how you truly were. Genuine.

That’s not to say he didn’t find you lovely to look at as well. As you had healed your facial features had recovered their definition, revealing you to be quite pretty. Your eyes, something others saw to be so unsettling, he found to be nothing short of dazzling. A color he had never seen before in another. Not a rich amber like Mihawk’s, but more of a metallic sheen. Like pale gold coins or brass. He loved the faces you made, indignant pouting, sad smiles, defiant glares and all. Your laugh was so pure, yet so hard to coax out. When had he started paying attention to what would entice it out? And, of course, you had sculpted your once frail body to be the perfect instrument of strength and speed that caught the eye of both men and women alike. It certainly caught his.

A pretty face he could resist no problem. But you were something more, something else entirely. You...were trouble. For the two of you both.

"You’ll get over this."

Had he meant it for you or more for himself? He regretted he had waited too long to cut these feelings off, regretted it because his indecision up to this point led to him hurting you, something he had never intended. But It was for your own good and his too. You would never receive the emotional stability or happiness you wanted from him, that was a weakness he could never show from behind closed doors. He would’ve hurt you sooner or later, and it was folly to have given in and hoped otherwise. Better to hurt you now, like tearing off a bandage, before the emotional blow become devastating rather than just painful. Your hateful glare flashed through his mind again, making him flinch. As much as he was sparing the two of you any future pain, that didn’t stop it from stinging right at this moment. Not to mention being with him would’ve just made you a target, and as mighty as you were there were some monsters out there you could never hope to slay.

You deserved better...

...but the thought of you being with another filled him with a stinging and bitter jealousy.

He tsked and shook his head, trying to clear the thoughts crowded him head. The movement made him wince, exhaustion from the sleepless night giving him a none too small headache. He needed to stop thinking about you, dissociate himself from these frustrating, unwelcome feelings you commanded over him. Coffee and painkillers would help.

And a shower.

He decided to start with the coffee.

Striding over to the door he pushed it open and paused, a loud clattering echoing throughout the hall. On the floor, previously leaning against the door, was your saber. Dawn’s light streaked through the window behind him, catching the hilt's pattern such that it scattered silver feathers onto the floor and wall. The blackened leather of its scabbard was worn, but otherwise in good condition. A sign that you had been treating it with the care and respect typical of a natural swordsman. He had originally found it in the hold of a young upstart pirate's ship that dared to attack him, thinking that since he was now a former shichibukai he was easy prey. It had been haphazardly thrown into a pile of
treasure and other loot the ship had 'salvaged' from more unsuspecting victims. The blade had been tarnished and in disrepair, but the craftsmanship hidden beneath the built up grime had caught his eye and after some quick polishing he was glad to have noticed it. It wasn't until you had joined up and he watched you struggle with using a typical straight sword against Daz that he remembered he had it tucked away in his room. You had taken it warily, still new and suspicious of anything that could be construed as generosity. But once it was in your hand you wielded it with such ferocity, the elegantly curved blade lending itself much better to your natural leanings as a duelist than the straight sword ever did. Ever since, you had treated it like the greatest of treasures, devoting many hours learning how to keep it perfectly sharp and polished. He wondered if you had named it yet...

A beat dropped, before he scooped it up and held it aloft. A cold bolt of fear struck his heart.

Had you left already?!

Was this your 'goodbye'? Returning the blade you had graciously accepted as a gift?

_Ah! Not yet!_ He thought in a panic, disintegrating, speeding down to the lower decks before rematerializing in front of your door. He threw it open, fully expecting to find nothing. Knowing that you had already packed what you could carry and left without so much as a real goodbye. He had crossed a line that the two of you couldn't come back from and now you were gone, no room for forgiveness in your shattered heart. The door opened and revealed...a mess. Things had been thrown all around the room, clothing and linens and other miscellaneous items. Way too many things for you to have just upped and left. Your travel bag was still hanging on the door leading to your closet.

A breath he had no idea he had been holding escaped from Crocodile's lungs. You were still here. Well, not _here_ here. Clearly you had gone out despite the hour, needing some fresh air after what had happened. The relief in him was cut short as the saber in his hand suddenly grew heavier. Had you gone out unarmed? No, you would've brought _something_. Your anger had probably left you rattled but you had enough sense to never go anywhere without a few backup weapons. He let out another sigh of relief as his eyes scanned over the empty knife rack on your dresser. Good, not defenseless.

He turned as a loud thudding came from the stairway leading to the upper decks. Someone was coming down, and in a hurry. His eyes narrowed quizzically as Daz leapt down the stairs, the man clearly flustered. He stood panting, rare for him to be winded by anything. Rare for him to look so alarmed.

Something was wrong.

Very, very wrong.

Daz's eyes flicked downwards to look at the blade-your blade- in Croc's hand, and his eyes widened even more. "Shit! ShitShitShit Why did she go out unarmed!?” Daz hissed. He looked back up into his boss's eyes, expression dead serious. "Sir you need to get topside. Now."

Crocodile's mouth tightened into a thin frown, and he nodded. Something was wrong, and without it needing to be said he knew it was about you. Without a word he dissolved and soared up the stairs, rematerializing top deck. Dawn had fully broken at this point, and the deck was lit by a warm yellow light. A gentle breeze swept across the ship, and the cool early morning temperature indicated a temperate day. The weather was perfect, cool and lovely, but the tense atmosphere on deck said otherwise. A few of the other men were up and about, and each paled in fear as Crocodile appeared. Their eyes immediately averted from both him...and the main mast. He strode up to it quickly, yanking down the note that had been pinned there by a rather unique knife.

One of your knives.
In hastily scrawled cursive, it read:

"Hey, Scaley Bastard, I've borrowed one of your toys. I hope you don't mind sharing. But...I like to play rough. You might want to come get it before it gets damaged. Good luck finding us! You have until next dawn.

...Love, Hawken <3"

The note disintegrated in his hand, dessicated to such a degree that it turned to dust. His teeth grit so hard they might crack under the pressure, and a cold fear gripped him with an unparalleled intensity. He reached forward, taking the pouch also being held aloft by your knife. Its contents were light, pliable as the pouch shifted. Silently, he opened it, heart stopping as he saw what it contained.

Inside was a lock of H/C hair, matted with blood.

Chapter End Notes

The hunt is on! Will he find you in time?

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Burning Daylight

Chapter Summary

You finally wake up but...where the hell are you? No birdsong, no sounds of people, no city hum. The only hum right now is the throbbing of your head.

You have no idea where you are, some place no one will ever accidentally stumble upon you for sure.

Would anyone even come looking?

Chapter Notes

Not quite happy with this...sorry it took so long and there's a whole lot of nothing that happens.

I haven't been in the right headspace to write grim stuff like this because...

...I just got engaged!! My now fiance of 7 years together proposed earlier this week and I've been bubbly ever since!

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was as if you had fallen into the sea from some great height, swept tumbling away by a maelstrom and dragged to the depths. Sunk to a league no light could ever reach. Swallowed by the unforgiving abyss. No sense of coherence in what little thoughts you could scrape together. Occasional flashes of ideas or images that lasted mere seconds before melting away.

The only thing of permanence being the dread. A frigid ball of anxiety and fear weighing heavily in your gut, the only thing keeping you semi-anchored to the truth that was reality. Lucidity came and went, leaving behind a paralyzing fog in its wake. One moment you'd be floating in a haze, no idea which way was up or down or even if there were such things at all. The next you'd come to lying on the floor, curled on your side as your head and ribs throbbed painfully. You had no idea where you were. You hadn't been conscious for the journey here, and for all you knew they could have taken you straight to Hell. That's what it felt like anyway...

The first time you came to was sometime early morning.

Or at least that's when you thought it was. Your only judge being the warm yellow light licking at the edge of the room, streaming in through the tiny, narrow windows high up on the wall.

Consciousness came back slowly, your first real thoughts being of how much your body ached. The throbbing coming from your ribs and head timed to the beating of your heart, each pulse making you
flinch in pain. You tried to stretch your tender body, sore from the unyielding surface you had been deposited on. The movement made you gasp as pain arched up your side from what you feared were broken ribs. You could only hope none of your organs had been punctured, though you would've been dead already had any internal injuries been serious. Too much time had passed otherwise.

As for the rest of your external injuries, your left temple was home to the acute pain currently sundering your thoughts. The bone there had most likely fractured from how you had been struck. There was a general pain all over, too, like someone had shoved a stinging nettle inside your skull. The little hairy leaves rubbed against each and every thought, leaving your mind feeling itchy and inflamed. There was no way to tell if this was a side effect as the drug wore off, or a symptom of a serious concussion. There was no doubt as to whether or not you had a concussion at all, it was just a matter of its severity. You tentatively reached up to touch the site of the blow, scared as to what you might find. Much to your relief you found it to be crusty rather than sticky. The wound had clotted at some point, hopefully before too much blood had been lost. With no small amount of pain you managed to scoot back an inch or so, trying to see how much blood had spilled onto the floor beneath your head. There were a few rust-colored streaks, now dry, but not too much blood that was out of the ordinary for a forehead wound; such injuries tended to bleed quite a bit.

With a sigh of relief you relaxed your head back down onto the stone floor, but something felt...amiss. Reaching back up to skim the area, an unexpected texture made you frown in confusion. The hair there felt odd, prickly yet sparse. You tried to grab at the hair there, or the hair that should have been there. A lock was missing right underneath the wound, cut right down to the skin. Strange, but your mind was still far too hazy to try and reason why it was gone. 'At least... it stopped bleeding...’ The words made you wince as they took form in your head. Even your thoughts hurt.

Aside from your temple your right eye was swollen shut, undoubtedly blackened from the slap the woman had given you. She must've caught you right on the edge of the eye itself given the severity of the swelling. It hadn't hurt so bad in the moment and it still didn't in comparison to the other pains you were feeling, but you still feared any permanent damage she may have caused. Touching it, there was no sign of bleeding or more serious injury beyond the swelling itself. You sighed in relief. As much as you loved a good eye-patch you weren't exactly ready to be maimed just for an intimidating fashion statement. The relief didn't last long, however, fading to rage as you remembered that woman, that blasted fucking woman. 'How dare that shrew...they knew I'd be a sucker and try to help some poor woman crying for help...not like I told them I'm a huge bleeding heart when I tried to save that bastard earlier...had to go a be a big dumb hero like a fucking moron!'

The rage tried to choke out a growl only for the sound to catch on the brutally dry flesh of your throat. The ensuing coughing fit wracked your body, each hack leaving you blinded and curled nearly doubled over in pain. Your ribs sent bolts of pure lightning arching along your side with each spasm, bolts that seemed to strike straight into your battered skull. By the time it was over you were left trembling, beads of sweat rolling down your face despite how cold you now felt. Involuntary tears were rolling down your cheeks from the severity of the pain.

And your fury had only intensified.

You didn't know who or what you were more angry about: Hawken taking advantage of your would-be kindness or yourself for at how big of a colossal fuck up you had made. 'Try to do some good for once and this is what happens! Drugged up and swindled away like some defenseless, bloody princess.' This was undoubtedly your fault, and now you were very much at risk of dying because of it. It made you seethe with a boiling anger that was laden with both regret over your foolishness alongside a blistering malice for the man who had humiliated you like this. But lying here, wallowing in your self-pity was not helping. Not in the least. You couldn't afford to give in to
your emotions right now, that's how you had gotten into this mess in the first place. Now was the
time for calm, the time for composure. Your hotheadedness would not be helping you here.

"Stop. Breathe. Observe. Distance yourself from the problem, whether it be an enemy or
otherwise. The answers will come to you."

Daz's words came floating into your thoughts none too gently, little bolts of static prickling your
throbbing head. It was one of the first 'lessons' he had taught you, and one you hadn't been too keen
on heeding at the time. With your strength quickly growing you had gotten cocky, impatient. He had
swiftly beat that fledgling arrogance out of you as you threw yourself against him again and again,
easily countered each time. You had picked up on the lesson, eventually. Now was the time to make
good on it.

Taking a deep breath you cleared your head of your current thoughts, pushing the distracting anger
out and away. 'Breathe. Observe. What's in my favor right now?' For one, your hands were
surprisingly free. They hadn't even bothered to tie them, assuming you'd be too dazed to even
attempt to escape. Knowing you weren't actively bleeding was a major relief, too, but not the largest.
No, the biggest relief was that you were still clothed, save for your hoodie. Hawken or his men
hadn't done anything of that nature to you...yet. They'd have to kill you before they put their hands
on you like that, and they'd never get out of it unscathed themselves. You licked at your canines,
fully confident they could tear a man's throat out if it came to that point. The thought of it made you
feel cold, anxiety and fear gripping you hard before you breathed and pushed them back out. 'Focus,
finish observing.'

The rest of your body appeared to be okay. Compared to your head and ribs you couldn't even feel
the bruises Daz had given you yesterday afternoon. It gave you some hope that you'd gather the
strength to make an escape attempt as the fog in your mind and limbs receded. Hawken and his
lackey hadn't been stupid though: your knives were long gone. They had left the holsters strapped to
your arms and torso but now they sat woefully empty. They had left you unbound, but clearly they
weren't stupid enough to leave you armed as well.

Except...

...your boots were still on.

You couldn't quite reach down to check for sure but...wiggling your knee about...looking for a
certain feeling...'yes!' A quick assessment of the other leg revealed a similar discovery. You could
just barely make out the pressure of two of your smaller blades along the back of your calves.
Hawken hadn't been quite thorough enough to disarm you completely. Regardless, as relieving as it
was to realize you were both unbound and still armed, that didn't mean you were actually able to
make use of this discovery. Your limbs still felt like dead weight, feeling even weaker than when you
had been half-starved and rife with disease. Given enough time, you might muster enough strength to
be able to cut your way out of here. As for how much time you needed, it was too soon to say. Little
had changed in the power you could exert in your limbs since you had awoke, though it had only
been about a half-hour at most. 'Patience.'

Confident you had finished your self-assessment, you took the time to look about the room you had
been thrown in. It was dark save for the natural lighting streaking in through the dirtied windows.
Though calling them windows was a bit of an overstatement. They were more like grates, and
from how they sat high up on the bare stone walls you figured you were in a room below ground
level...a dungeon. The floor and walls were completely bare with the exception of copious amounts
of dust. 'Room must not get much use'. It was small, maybe no wider across than eight feet, leading
you to believe it was a cell of some sort. The style of the only door, which sat right in front of you,
confirmed your theory. It looked to be of thick, heavy wood, and was reinforced with metal braces
and rivets. Not the kind of thing you could kick down right now and you doubted they had left it
unlocked. A single barred window, the size of a letterbox, was built into the upper half. *If I can get
up I can see outside this cell...*

But you knew that to be hopeless. Even the most minuscule of movements sent a fresh bolt of pain
arching across your head. The ache in your ribs was paltry in comparison. *Hopefully it's just the
drug...I'll wait for it to wear off and then try...*

You started as foot steps suddenly echoed into your cell, sounding as if they were rebounding
towards you from a long hallway. You immediately tensed, pain forgotten as a tendril of anxiety
reared up with each echoed step. *Should I pretend to be unconscious...?* The footfalls were
approaching quickly, giving you little time to make up your mind. Just as quickly as they had started,
they stopped. Somewhere on the other side of the door you could faintly feel the presence of
someone, like a tickling on the back of your neck. You gritted your teeth, wary of who it would
be...wary of more pain. Hawken was a sadistic son of a bitch. Torture was not below him.

A mixture of relief and annoyance hit you as the face of the nameless man who had carried you here
peered in from the tiny window high in the door.

"Care to tell me what's going on?" You rasped, anger giving you some small modicum of strength.
Seeing his face pissed you off all over again. *No, calm. Don't let him faze you.* Right now he held
all the cards, what with him being gigantic and you being a helpless ragdoll on the floor. His
eyebrows knitted into a frown upon seeing you before his face vanished from the window. There
was a jangling of metal, 'keys?', before the oafish man pushed the door in.

He looked at you quizzically. "You shouldn't be awake yet." His deep voice rolled out slowly, as if
his tongue was numb to the words in his confusion.

You replied with a short, frustrated sound before rolling your eyes. There would be no answers from
this goon, attempting to get any would just be a waste of what little strength you had gathered.

Without a word he reached into his jacket, the movement sparking a fresh jolt of fear. You curled
into yourself defensively, knowing what he was reaching for without even needing to see it. He
walked over, fresh syringe in hand, uncapped by the time he reached your tense form. This time you
tried to bite him as he reached for your neck, teeth snapping in the air just short. It was a primal
reaction, instinctively acted upon in spite of the composure you had been gathering. He frowned, as
if confused as to why you would do such a thing.

"If you struggle I have to hurt you again."

You stared at him with your one good eye, fixing him with a piercing gaze through narrowed lid. He
was right, you knew. Had you been in better shape you could have easily taken him one on one.
You had used men's size against them in the past, a quick learner of the various throws and sweeps
Daz had taught you before he had even let you touch a sword. But in your current state the most you
could do was nip at his ankles, or maybe vomit on his shoes. It was best to avoid any additional
injuries right now. You needed to save up your strength for any opportunities to make an escape.

Your pride made it almost impossible, but somehow you managed to sigh in resignation before tilting
your head and offering your neck.

"Huh, and the boss said you were a stupid one." There were so many ways you wanted to respond
to that: 'Sure he wasn't talking about you, big guy?' But you held your tongue, knowing it would
only get you in trouble right now. *Calm, just relax into it.*
The light prick as the needle pierced your skin for a second time made you hiss. 'Damn, why's it so thick?' It stung, both in your neck and in your pride, for as much as you preferred to fight to the last, this surrender was a necessary one. One that would ensure you to fight on later, at least let you die on your feet instead of pitifully curled up in this cell. You would cooperate until you saw your chance to show them you weren't some fragile little doll, a useless pretty face. You'd break free and make every single one of them pay for this transgression, pay for underestimating your fight and fury. Crocodile kept you around for a reason and they were going to learn that the hard wa-'Crocodile!'

Would he even realize you had been taken?

Worst, would he even come looking for you if he did?

A wave of anguish washed over you, but the thoughts in your mind had already started fraying at a rapid pace. The fresh dose sent you reeling, but not as hard as last time. You managed to hold on for a few moments, but soon you were drowning again. Not a plunge like before, but a quiet submersion dragging you down beneath the waves. The light of the surface faded slowly, before you finally slipped into darkness with a groan.

Afternoon.

This time the world came back into focus lit with the cool white light of a cloudless afternoon. The rays shined through the dirty windows, bathing your limp body in warmth. It was welcome, as the dusty stone floor was freezing. Your thin leggings and tank did little to stave off the cold seeping in from the stone. 'Must be...afternoon...' Your thoughts came sluggishly, but more numbed instead of pained this time. The stinging nettle had been removed, but it had left behind a prickling itchiness along the edges of your skull. 'Repeated doses impacting effectiveness?' From daybreak to late morning, and now late morning to afternoon. Assuming he hadn't used a smaller dose, the duration you were out for seemed to have decreased along with the side effects.

You made sure not to make a sound, careful not to alert the guard that could be loafing somewhere nearby. Resisting the urge to stretch in spite of the now roaring ache along the side you were lying on took every bit of willpower. You couldn't risk squeezing out a groan. You were sure your hip in particular was bruised at this point, bone digging roughly into the floor. At least the pain in your ribs and head had slightly receded, not feeling quite as fresh and raw as it had upon waking this morning. The swelling about your eye had started to go down, a thin sliver of the world now making it to your pupil. You practiced tensing your fingers to get a feel of what strength had returned to your body. Enough to grapple...or close about a throat.

But for now you would just have to lie here, motionless.

Waiting.

Alone.

With your thoughts.

You watched the line of daylight slowly creep towards you as time passed. Everything was silent, not even creaking of floorboards or clacking on stone to indicate footsteps. The world outside was still as well, no voices or even birdsong to be heard. No bustling town hum. Had they left you completely alone? The goon must be lurking somewhere near by, but far or still enough such that you couldn't detect him. Your mouth was unbound, should you try and scream for help? No, they had left it ungagged because they knew no one would hear you...or those that did wouldn't care. That meant you were in one of two kinds of places: remote, entirely removed from the town which
seemed unlikely given the absence of animal sounds and rustling leaves; or, so far tucked away in the labyrinthine sprawl of the port warehouses as to not get foot traffic. You definitely weren’t being held at his garish manor, that was far too cocky. Even for him.

He had made sure you were somewhere where no one would accidentally stumble upon you.

Where no one would find you.

Assuming anyone was looking...Would anyone even be looking? Had anyone even noticed you were gone gone? Had Crocodile noticed? Thinking about him made you want to growl and cry and scream but now was not the time for that. You could wrestle with those feelings after you figured out what was going on. 'Think. Think. Hawken took me for a reason...’ You lay there, thoughts roiling furiously as you considered each and every scenario as to why Hawken—who thought himself a big shot—would want an unknown blade like yourself. You had no reputation, no excess wealth, no physical assets. You quickly ruled out the personal aspect of it: as sadistic as he seemed, he would be here actively torturing you if his only motivation was to see you suffer. There was no reason Hawken would want you in particular...

...because he didn't want you.

He wanted someone else.

The missing lock of hair? A message. Crocodile definitely knew you had been taken because Hawken would've told him by sending him a lovely lock of your bloodied hair. You were sure he had snipped off a particularly matted tangle for better effect. The realization made you roll your eyes, and you gritted your teeth in frustration. Knowing you had been reduced to a mere hostage was insulting to say the least. Hawken must've pieced together that when Crocodile hadn't killed you for your little mutiny earlier that you meant more to him than just some random sellsword. 'Stupid scaley ass pushed me away because he didn't want me getting "broken" but now look what's happened.' The irony of the situation was not lost on you, and you bit your tongue smugly. As much as you loy-'don't use that word'-harbored affections for the bastard, you relished every bit of comeuppance thrown upon him.

But...Just because he knew you were gone...it didn't mean he would do anything about it. The smugness quickly faded, making room for the dread and hurt that had been rending you ever since he had spurned you the night before. You tried to stem the tide, but the sheer intensity of the angst could not be denied. Crocodile may not have been able to kill you himself—and he may never be able to—but that didn't mean he wasn't capable of letting you die. It would be and easy out for him. He'd be free of those unwanted feelings for you and also eliminate you as a loose end. It would hurt him, at first, but eventually you knew he would be over it. Tears threatened to well at the corners of your eyes, and all you felt was a cold emptiness.

A fear that he wouldn't come for you.

That he would leave you here to die.

'NO. I am NOT dying here!' The despair made way for a sudden bout of determined fury. ’And neither will I let myself be rescued by HIM.’ No, you were going to get yourself out of here, dammit! Regardless of whether or not he was even trying to find you, you were going to make every attempt you could to rescue yourself. There was no well in Hell you were going to let him hurt you like that and then have the gall to heroically swoop in and save you. He had saved you once before, with how he had spared your life that night you met. You would not let him have the satisfaction of doing it again, of letting him think you needed him. Because—...because...
...You didn't know if your wounded heart could handle being saved by the same person that had hurt it...

...Even if deep down you truly wanted it. You could only lie to yourself so much, before all the lies came undone. Whether or not you would be found was the real question, not whether Crocodile was looking for you in the first place. He definitely was, you were sure of it, and he would have ordered Daz and the rest to help him. It was still far too soon for him to have been able to abandon you, guilt from the night before still fresh. The other question was whether or not you should really try to escape on your own. It was dangerous and most certainly crazy, but you couldn't put all your bets on him making it to you in time. 'In time for what? Before Hawken kills me? Tortures me to death?'

There had to be some aspect to this chase to make it more fun for the twisted fuck. It was probably only a matter of time before other bits of you were lobbed off...little bits of encouragement to make Croc look for you harder. The thought made you shudder, but the fact you were able to do so without groaning in pain let you know you had gathered a little bit more strength. A small relief.

With a quiet sigh you gingerly rolled yourself onto your back, careful not to make much noise. Your side thanked you for it, and you used the growing strength in your hands to massage the numbness out of the spots that had received the brunt of the floor's pressure. A particularly bright ray of yellowing sunlight caught you across the eyes. As the minutes had turned to hours the shadows being cast by the grates across the windows had grown. The cell you were in must've been west-facing, and the now setting sun was throwing its dwindling light across the room. You swallowed grimly, imagining the level of darkness about to descend upon you. Or at least you tried to swallow. At this point your throat and mouth were painfully dry, each breath feeling like desert air against the parched tissue. Given the quickly approaching dusk, it had been almost a full day since you'd had any water, and you didn't expect them to give you any sometime soon.

A pitiful whine suddenly broke the silence, a sharp noise emanating from your midsection. You were hungry, quickly reminded that you had never eaten last night and you had woken up feeling starved even then. As your strength was returning, some of it had gone right to your stomach which now felt painfully tight, constricting every which way searching for any food to digest. 'No wonder my arms feel so heavy, I haven't eaten in almost a full day.' Your past life of near constant starvation had left you prone to bouts of weakness after fasting, something Ellia said you would just have to learn to manage. You worried at your bottom lip, 'Why now of all times!?' An escape attempt just became a whole lot more dangerous.

You continued to lie there, alternating between tensing your muscles and stretching your tendons. The light was fading quickly, light no longer cast across your prone body but against the wall with the door.

Fortunately you didn't have to wait much longer, as the familiar sounds of approaching footsteps echoed into your cell. It was only a few moments before that same dopey-ass face peered in, frowning once again in confusion upon noticing you were awake.

And, of course, soon your heard the keys jangling and he was marching in syringe already in hand.

"C'mon, really? Not like I'm doing anything, can't I just lie here in peace?" You rolled your eyes.

"Boss says you need to be asleep."

"God forbid you have a single original thought in your life."

He looked at you impassively, as if you were no more interesting than a mote of dust upon the floor.
Sarcasm flying straight over his towering head.

"Ugh, get it over with." You huffed and crossed your arms, only slightly tilting your head to the side to give the syringe access.

This dose was gentle in comparison, yet still a command that was utterly impossible to resist. Warm water slowly rising, lapping at the edges of your mind until you were sinking under. Not far enough for the surface's light to fade to total darkness.

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Late night.

The cell was swamped in pitch-darkness, and it took you a few seconds to realize you were actually awake. Waking up was almost as gentle an experience as rousing from a refreshing afternoon nap. Less of a catatonic haze and more of a normal rest, one that left you feeling stronger. In fact you almost felt rested now, such a rare feeling you had no idea this is what waking up should feel like. You couldn't remember the last time you had ever felt so refreshed. 'Hmm. Might have to get some of this stuff for later.'

It took a few minutes for your eyes to adjust. There was very little light making its way into the cell, indicating no nearby street lights. Given the date you knew the moon to be waning, about to enter the new moon phase. You couldn't rely on moonlight to drive out the shadows either.

Leaving you in near total darkness.

You'd have to do this by touch. With only a little groaning you managed to sit up, the pain in your side far less urgent than it was earlier. The ensuing wave of dizziness was also far more minor than expected, enough to make your vision tilt but not so much you wanted to hurl. You stretched and fluttered your fingers to ensure they were all accounted for, making sure Hawken hadn't started to carve you up while you were still under. Both ears were still here, and you could feel each toe as you wiggled them in your boots. Much to your relief you were still whole.

Your fingers tentatively poked at the site of the pain along your left side, trying to isolate the exact injury. You hissed as you prodded it a bit too forcefully, but was relieved to find it was more minor than expected. 'Single broken rib. The already bad one. I can work with that.' Next your fingers worked over your right eye. Not being able to see in the current darkness, a more physical assessment was necessary to determine its current swelling. It remained about the same as earlier, leaving you a thin sliver of usable sight. The area itself was quite sore, more noticeable now that the other pain in your head has quieted.

You metered out a few deep breaths, calming your nerves as your fingers massaged the sore muscles in your thighs and calves. As you exhaled you slowly stretched along their length, fingers grabbing at the toes of your boots. The sparks jolting up from your rib hurt like hell, but nothing you couldn't manage. The stretch itself felt like bliss, a wonderful, burning sensation that soothed the ache in your limbs that had settled in from their disuse today. After a few beats you brought your legs inward, moving into a butterfly stretch while you tensed your arms and shoulders. You spent some time trying to rouse each muscle, dormant from the day you had been forced to spend vegetating on the floor. The responses from your body were promising, definitely stronger than you had been hoping for.

But now was the moment of truth.

Could you actually stand?
You leaned forward onto the palms of your hands as your legs untangled to rest you on your knees. Gritting your teeth, prepared to cut off any cry of pain, you kicked off with the balls of your feet and rose. You wobbled a bit as the sudden rush of blood revived the throbbing along the side of your head. The wave of dizziness that you had been expected earlier finally crashed over you, and you threw your hands to the sides of your head to steady yourself as you bent over a bit. It was a few moments of this before the dizzying tide receded and you felt confident enough to stand completely. With no small amount of apprehension you reached down, a pike stretch towards your toes again. Only a small amount of dizziness returned and you smirked, suddenly far more confident than earlier. Reaching your hands around your calves you plunged them into the back of your boots. The knives were still there.

You could fight like this.

Testing your stability you strode over to the wall housing the grates. Despite your height you had to stand tippy-toe to look out, and even then your eyes couldn't see at ground level. Looking up and around you could faintly discern the outlines of neighboring buildings against the black backdrop of the night sky. 'Definitely part of the port area. Warehouses and stock yards galore.'

You had planned to walk to the door and investigate that next, but the sudden sound of approaching footsteps made you jump. A faint orange light drifted in, growing brighter as the footsteps approached. 'Shit! Not ready yet!' You had to think fast, a plan that would give you a bit more time.

Quickly you dropped to your knees and rolled to roughly where you had been lying before, careful to be as absolutely silent as possible. It took all the willpower you had to keep from yelping in pain as you curled into your bruised side. You splayed out on your back, head tossed to the side facing away from the door. 'Still asleep still asleep.' The footsteps came to and you heard the key rattle as you forcefully drained the expression from your face. Your body came to a standstill just as the door opened. The orange glow of candlelight was thrown into the cell, casting long shadows from your prone form. A rather peculiar sound caught your attention.

'Is that...a sloshing sound?' There was the creak of metal on metal, a rusty grating sound, and a whoosh before you were suddenly doused in freezing water. You gasped and thrashed, air having quickly vacated your lungs in shock. There was no time to react before you were being tossed into the air, over the brute's shoulder in the same manner he had brought you here.

You heard his rumbling voice in your ear even as you continued to huff and sputter. "Time to wake up, kitten. The boss wants to play."

A trembling took hold in your body as you squirmed in his meaty paw. Whether it was from the cold or new found fear was impossible to say.

Chapter End Notes

Here comes the 'fun'

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Serrated Lightning (HEAVY GORE)

Chapter Summary

Hawken wants to play, let's hope you can keep up.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: LOT'S OF GORE. BAD STUFF. GROSS STUFF. EVERY VIOLENT TRIGGER WARNING YOU CAN THINK OF I PROLLY COVERED IT

I had way too much fun writing this. Action scenes always seem to write themselves. As you can tell this one ran away from me a bit, it's quite a long one.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I sure do like the sight of a woman on her knees."

You only rewarded the comment with a cold scowl.

But on your knees you most certainly were, having been deposited in some crudely assembled 'throne room' overlooking the building proper. From what you had seen as you had been manhandled through the building-some kind of warehouse or factory as suspected-you were deep within the complex in a type of managerial area. An observation deck, a medium sized room with numerous windows overlooking the warehouse where an overseer could look out upon the workforce. A door along the shorter side wall opened up to a balcony of sorts that wrapped around the room's exterior, constructed of industrial metal welded into a grate. As the room was now, Hawken had ordered a massive, grossly ornate chair dragged up here to serve as a throne. Its back sat against the empty wall such that it faced the main observation windows, with the balcony door to the side. An equally garish throw rug, scarlet-hued, had been placed in the center of the room, rather welcome under your knees compared to what would've been the same rough stone as your cell. The walls were lined with banal oil paintings of landscapes, the type of unoriginal art little kids imagined rich people kept in their homes...or those self-conscious about their wealth bought to attempt to 'fit in'.

Aside from the decor, the bastard himself sat before you in his stupid throne. He was looking at you with a shit-eating grin that made you want to tear it right off, lips and all. To either side of him stood the woman, Amanda, now wearing a short, white, frilly thing, and the oafish manservant that had none too gently dragged you up here. Much to your annoyance, the brute had quickly tied your hands in front of you, trussing them up by the wrists with a length of rope before roughly pushing you to the position you were in now. That position being on your knees, bound hands resting on your thighs with calves pressing uncomfortably flat against the floor as you glared daggers at your kidnappers.
"Aw don't give me that look, kitten. You might look pretty if you smile." Hawken purred, flashing you a brilliantly white smile of his own in encouragement.

Nothing like a man telling you to smile to piss you off even more than you already were. Oh, how you wanted to kick those teeth in, send them so far down his throat they'd rocket out his ass. Or maybe even hard enough they'd blast right through the back of his head. You bit into your bottom lip, trying to keep your tongue from exacerbating the situation. 'You can NOT let him faze you, Y/N. Just keep up the game. Help is coming.' But was it? You had been sure of it earlier. Hours had passed since then and there was still no sign of a rescue.

Crocodile wouldn't really have abandoned you, would he?

'No don't focus on that. Don't focus on the what ifs. What's happening right in front of you is the only thing important.' You mentally shook your head, chasing the previous thoughts out. Staying in your head was dangerous, and you were in enough danger right now as is.

You closed your eyes for but a moment, not too long so as to tip Hawken off about your doubts. Not enough to let him know just how scared you were deep down. 'Stay. Calm.'

Your eyes flashed open, fluttering at him as your lips curved into a thin smile. Or, you did your best to, partially swollen eye hindering the effect a bit more than intended. It would have to do. "Hawken D'Lore. Let's skip the pleasantries and just talk about business, if you please." Your voice was still raspy from thirst, but you did your best to keep the pitch level. Keeping your unease disguised was critical.

Those beautiful, icy blue eyes closed as he tossed back his head. A mocking laughter echoed about the room, joined by a quiet giggle from Amanda. He mimed a motion to wipe tears from his eyes before resting his cheek upon his knuckles and reclining deeper into the chair. The look he shot you was the most frustratingly condescending grin you'd ever suffered, and it took every bit of willpower to keep you from leaping at him in rage. "Oh, I was wrong. Smiling does nothing you.

Amanda brought her hand to her mouth and looked away, averting her eyes as if she couldn't bear to look at you but a moment longer. "Tell her to stop, honey. It's unnerving." The giggle that chased the end of her request made you want to tear her throat out. Your tongue licked at your canines, suddenly aware at their sharpness at the thought. You flexed your wrists, testing the tensile strength of the rope binding them together. There was just enough give you could maybe tease out enough length to strangle the two of them with.

Your overly saccharine smile pressed itself into a thin frown, eyes suffused with a smug venom as you glared at the unbearable couple.

"Cut the shit, Hawken. You've only brought me up here because Croc isn't playing your stupid little game like you expected him to. He hasn't come looking for me, has he? You chose a poor bargaining chip and now you want to get at least some entertainment from me." You snapped at him, only to instantly regret your lack of control as the words flicked off your tongue. Tiny daggers tearing little holes in Hawken's ego.

The smile fell off Hawken's face as if you had slapped it right off. Clearly, he didn't take too kindly to be talked to in such a manner. You bit at your lip again, and a faint, iron tang teased your taste buds as your canines pierced the soft tissue. 'I said focus! Stay fucking CALM you impatient nitwit!'

Hawken scowled, and the pit in your stomach widened, fearing his expression was the confirmation you had been dreading: that Crocodile really hadn't been looking for you. He leaned forward and rose, lazily sauntering over to where you knelt. His hand shot out, a lunging viper, and grabbed you
roughly by the hair as he had done the night before. You instinctively yelped before you could contain the noise, a pitiful noise that made you flare hot with indignity. With an aggressive tug that made your scalp burn he wrenched you upwards to your feet to look him square in the face. His eyes were laden with disgust and contempt, but somehow you found the courage to meet them defiantly with your own. He looked you over, piercing icicles scanning your face, lingering on the bruising about your eye and crusted blood along your temple. That infuriatingly smug grin returned to his scarred lips, and he barked an arrogant laugh right in your face. Little bits of spittle making you flinch as they splashed into your eyes.

"You have such little faith in him!" He roared and jerked you upwards even higher. His voice dropped to a more teasing whisper as he brought his lips to your ear. "Oh no, he is looking for you, kitten."

Your heart soared. 'He...he is?! Why is he taking so long?! This is why we should have vivre cards dammit!' Of course he had denied the suggestion at the time. Something about if you weren't able to report in on time or failed in your mission there was no point in having one because he wouldn't bother to come looking for a failure. How he was probably regretting that decision right now you could only imagine.

Hawken tore you back to reality with a hard yank that forced your head backwards, chin pointed upwards. Chills raced down your spine as he leaned uncomfortably close into your exposed neck. "The report my men gave me this morning, how they described his reaction when he found out I'd borrowed you, they said they could feel the rage emanating off him from a half mile away! Your comrades looked downright terrified." Each breath of his tickled your sensitive skin, motes of filthy air that felt as though they were irrevocably corrupting the flesh it touched. Resisting the urge to squirm took nearly everything from you, the sensation filling you with a nigh unbearable level of disgust. You'd have to be flayed alive before you ever felt clean again. "I told him I'd be borrowing his little toy, that he had a whole day to come take it back before it's mine forever."

He suddenly licked a swathe beneath your ear and you jerked backwards. The disgusted noise you had unconsciously attempted to make was cut off by a pained squeak as his grip on your hair held firm. You'd never felt so violated in your life, and you were damn near shaking from the monstrous fury gnashing its teeth beneath your breast. Hawken otherwise looked unfazed, save for the smug amusement playing upon his pretty-boy features. He licked his scarred lips, eyes scanning over your face once more now that he wasn't buried in your neck. A cocky titter flew from his infuriating grin as he beheld your infuriated grimace.

Your eyes flicked downwards as you heard a rustling, seeing his hand reaching within his white suit jacket. His hand withdrew, and your breath hitched upon noticing the knife he now held. Your knife. He exhaled a small chuckle, bringing it up to your throat to lightly tease the sensitive skin there. Its proximity set your nerves afire. Each and every cell screamed and cried out 'danger!' but Hawken was holding you firm. There was nowhere to run and no way to fight back. The only thing you could do was mentally brace yourself for the torture he was undeniably about to inflict upon you.

He must have noticed your unease as it increased to the crescendo of silent panic it was now, and he only beamed at you even wider. His perfectly white teeth caught the light like blades of their own. Ever so slowly, ever so lightly, he dragged the knife upwards to trace along the contours of your face. "Unfortunately for you, kitten." His voice set to a low murmur, sound waves crawling down your spine like horrifying little spiders. "I don't think he's going to make it in time. You see..."
away with your bound hands. His grip on your hair held firm, forced to stay right where he wanted you to. Hot blood rolled down your lacerated cheek, spilling onto your tank and Hawken's suit both. Little red beads dying once snow-white fabric crimson. He suddenly wrenched you upwards, forcing your face before his again. A finger curled beneath your chin as he admired his handiwork. "I don't play very nice. So sorry, kitten."

"DON'T-don't fucking call me that!" You snarled, spitting the blood that had dripped into your mouth into the air. Hearing him use the nickname Daz used for you filled you with an indescribable rage. It sounded wrong coming from him, a total perversion of the pet-name you supposedly hated. At this point you just hoped you lived long enough to hear it from Daz again, even if it was just one more time. Hell, if he showed up to rescue you right now you'd listen to him call you 'kitten' as many times as he pleased.

Hawken merely tossed his head back, barking out a cruel laugh at your outburst. You fell to the floor as he released his grip on your hair to toss his arms outward, palms facing the ceiling as he continued his twisted laugh. You landed on your side roughly, right side of your face pressed down into the carpet as your hands came up to clutch the gash. It was only now that you were eye-level with the rug did you notice your blood wasn't the first to have stained it. Though the threads were dyed red, from this distance you could make out darker, undeniable shades that could only have been dried blood. You weren't the first to have been 'played' with in here.

'God dammit, boys! Hurry up, please!' If they took any longer the only thing they'd find would be your mangled corpse. Your pride from earlier had all but sputtered out, a fire suffocated to but a meager pile of ash. The plans of you staging your own heroic rescue dissolved in the rising tide of fear. Fear that you were going to fucking die here, painfully, broken bodied and broken hearted. Right now all you wanted was to go home, to wake up in your bed and for all this to have been a bad dream. Just another crazy nightmare to internalize and never talk to anyone about ever. But that in and of itself was a pipedream. A naive child's fantasy. This was all real. Very, very real. Nothing making that more clear as Hawken leaned down to sneer right in your bloody face: this was more real than any nightmare could ever be.

"Fine! How about 'piss-eyed whore', then?" Flecks of spittle splashed into your face from the force with which the words flew from his mouth. "Given they look like the inside of my toilet bowl after a long night of drinking!"

He reached a hand down to forcefully pry your swollen eye open, looking at it both 'piss-colored' pupils with disgust as you whimpered beneath him. "You're certainly not useful enough to keep around for your talent! What kind of operative gets ambushed and kidnapped so easily!?" His guffaw was joined by both Amanda's delicate giggle and a low rumbling that could only have been a laugh from his overly-muscled goon.

"No. No. He keeps you around because you're a good fuck, right?" He laughed again before straightening back up to full height. Before you could react, he lifted his shoe and ever so lightly rested a heel against your fractured temple. Your good eye widened in panic, breath and pulse reaching a fever pitch. "What's it like being the personal whore of a washed up, failed shichibukai like him? I bet you like being tossed around, smacked a bit. Choked and degraded?" With each statement he slowly increased the pressure from his heel, grinding it into your skull as you moaned and then keened in pain. The agony emanating from your temple was blinding and you writhed helplessly on the floor beneath him. "Oh, careful. With noises like those I might think you were getting off on this!"

"You--...you're a bastard, you know that Hawken?" You managed to gasp, rage burning within from the indignity of the situation. It gave you just enough vigor to take the edge off the pain. To return a
bit of bite to your tongue. "But look at you! One whole man and woman to call your own, where is everyone Mr. D'Lore?" You looked up at him, fixing him with the most piercing, confident gaze you could muster from your position. "What? All the men still following daddy? Spoiled little wannabe crime lord still trying to escape daddy D'lore's shado-" you were cut off into a strangled wheeze as his foot moved from your head to your throat.

The expression on his face turned downright venomous. If ever there was a look that could kill, this was it.

"You know, I was going to wait for Crocodile to get here. Make the scaley bitch beg for me to spare you. He thought he could cow me into submission, come in and take what is MINE by birthright! All under the guise of generosity! 'Save' the legacy of my family from myself!" He twisted his heel, grinding it down harder against your throat. Your vision began to swim from lack of oxygen as the last bit of air squeaked out of your throat.

"He's going to see what happens to those that-

FUCK.

WITH.

ME."

He enunciated each pause with another aggressive twist of his heel. Tears rolled down your cheeks to mix with the blood as the world darkened, only to aggressively gasp for air as he suddenly released the pressure against your throat. Your immediately rolled onto your back, spine arching into the air as the force of your heaving lifted you upwards. The darkness retreated from the edge of your vision only to explode into blinding stars as Hawken stomped down into your gut. There was no screaming this time. Just a short, pained, whimper. Without missing a beat he crouched down next to your head. He raised a hand and you flinched, preemptively attempting to shield yourself from the blow. Instead he merely moved to stroke your cheek, completely unfazed. A gentle movement that only made you want to curl up and fall into a bottomless void, disappear from reality and time itself.

"And he's going to learn it over your broken, bloody body. All because you had to go and piss me off."

'I'm going to fucking die here.' The realization felt like a drop into a pool of frigid water, and it took every bit of willpower to keep you from choking out a sob, to still the trembling invading your limbs. 'At the very least I'm going down fighting. I'll take this bastard with me!' You grit your teeth and clenched your fists. 'Just look for a sign, wait for the time to be right!' "Oh still so much fight left in you! Most would've started begging by now." In one swift movement he swung a leg over you before dropping to straddle your midsection. Your knife glinted in the air menacingly as he held it aloft, twisting it about to admire it from various angles. "It truly is a superb blade, I really must commend your impeccable taste." His gaze shifted from the blade back to your face, unblinking eyes meeting yours as his tongue snaked out from behind his sneer. He licked your blood from the knife, swirling the scarlet liquid about his lips like some macabre lipstick. "Want a taste?"

Without so much as a warning he bent forward, forcing a kiss against your painfully dry lips. They parted in shock, golden eyes going wide as every part of your body, each every fiber of your mortal being screamed out in horror. So utterly violated you felt, so disgusted, that you could only lie there and suffer as a panicked paralysis held you corpse-still. All signals in your body at a complete and utter halt as his tongue defiled your mouth. Memories shooting through you head of your old life
back at that inn...head down against the bar...

And then you felt a hand grope at your breast.

Almost as if he had simply flicked a switch, your 'flight' instinct instantaneously swapped to 'fight'. With a rumbling growl you bit down hard on the intruding muscle probing your mouth. The taste of blood filled your mouth as your sharp canines pierced the sensitive flesh. Hawken growled back, his hand coming up to wrap about your throat again. A tight squeeze made you gasp, releasing his tongue from your bite and allowing him to rear back. Blood trailed from the corner his mouth as looked down at you with those freezing blue eyes, now clouded with fury and *lust*.

Before you could raise your hands to block the blow his knuckles caught you on the left corner of your mouth. The force of the blow turned your head flush against the floor, and your already cracked lips split wide open. Blood flowed into your mouth as you lay there, momentarily dazed as your body tried to process the additional pain. 'It has to stop hurting...eventually...right...?'

"I see that spitfire only lasts for so long!" He snarled, suddenly bringing the knife down across your right clavicle. Not a deep cut, as the blade deflected upwards as it collided with your collar bone. It was painful nonetheless, drawing from you yet another pained gasp. Blood welled up from the wound, your neck feeling hot and sticky as gravity pulled the fluids down to pool in the wells formed by your throat and sternum. He brought the reddened blade up to your face again. "This red is such a good color for you." He purred, pursing his lips. You cringed but resisted the urge to close your eyes. You were scared, terrified even. But you were no coward, and you would meet this entire ordeal head on. With a deranged giggle he moved the blade upwards, resting the point just below your right eye. "I could give you a matching scar, straight across your face. Maybe he'd like that. What do you thin-"

Before he could finish the door crashed open. Your heart soared, thinking it was your rescue team. It only crashed lower than it had been before upon realizing it was just another one of Hawken's men. He stood halfway in the door, frozen upon seeing what scene he had just walked into. Hawken roared in fury, throwing the knife such that it embedded in the door next to the now terrified lackey. "WHAT. IS. IT?!

The man stood trembling, eyes flicking between your reddened faces-his tinged with rage and yours dyed with blood. His mouth fluttered opened and shut a few times, struggling to find the message he had barged in here to deliver. "S-sir. D'Lore Senior is calling. On the Den-Den. He...he wants to know where you are." He managed to stammer, sweat rolling down his brow to stain the ill-fitting suit practically draped upon his shoulders.

A few beats dropped, silence passing between all parties involved save for your ragged panting. It was broken as a giggle escaped from your bloodied lips, a giddy and sudden noise fueled by the panicked adrenaline coursing through your veins. "Daddy doesn't know what you've done, does he?" His eyes rolled down to look at you, anger-flushed face unmoving. "Little Hawken's gonna be in so much trouble." At the snide comment, he snarled and backhanded you. The blow hit you where Amanda had slapped you the night before. You yelped and bucked underneath him, the area still sensitive from the damage it had already suffered. He barely seemed to notice.

With much grumbling Hawken hauled himself off you and walked to the door. He stopped mid-exit, turning to look at the woman that had been standing silently next to the throne he had started this encounter in. "Amanda, darling. Please, continue the fun without me." He placed a finger on the hilt of the blade now embedded in the wood, flicking it with just enough pressure to make it *sproing*. "I shan't be too long." He flashed that smile he thought to be so charming before marching out the door, dragging the quivering goon along with him via a firm grasp about his necktie.
You watched them go before relaxing your head backwards onto the rug, exhaling a gasping sigh. Everything above the waist hurt. You didn't know when you had ever felt pain like this before. Even when Daz had damn near killed you that night a year ago it hadn't hurt nearly as bad as this. But now was not the time to focus on the pain. This was the time to form a plan. Quickly, before Hawken came back. *This is your chance.* Somehow you managed to will each escaping breath to be calmer. Then calmer. Then calm. You opened your eyes slowly, staring straight upwards at the ceiling as you thought. And planned.

Amanda's heels clicked against the bare floor as she walked over to the door. You didn't bother to look. Too busy. She grunted, small breathy noises, as she attempted to wrest the knife from where it had come to rest in the wood. "Argh! Rive! Do your job for once!"

"Uhhh, yes ma'am." You heard the low, rolling voice of the manservant respond, on a delay as if it took him a few moments to realize it was him she was talking to. He footsteps were loud as he crossed the floor, the same familiar noise as the one that had signaled his arrival at various times throughout the day to put you back under. They came to a rest and you heard the splintering of wood. "Here you go, ma'am." She merely *tsked* at him in response.

'Rive. Fitting name.'

The clicking of her heels starting again before being muffled by the plush rug as she approached. Your view of the ceiling was suddenly obscured as a face framed with blonde curls loomed over you. Amanda looked down at you with disgust. She held the knife loosely in her right hand away from her body, as if she were uncomfortable with it being so close to her. *Disgusted with me...or disgusted with the idea of getting intimate with violence herself...?*

The sight brought a smirk to your face. *Perfect. Have to make this quick.*

"You don't look so sure of yourself, doll." You rasped, split lips curving into a playful smile. "Not comfortable with getting blood on your own hands?"

She huffed and straightened up, bringing the knife up against her chest, tip pointed downwards toward the floor. The slicked blade left streaks of red across her pale-white dress. "Got a little something on ya...don't want to ruin your pretty lil' dress." You chuckled weakly, good eye narrowing in amusement. She look down at her chest and made a disgusted shriek, throwing her hand out to hold the blade as far away from her person as possible.

With a groan you managed to roll yourself onto your front. Pushing off your bound hands you made it back to a sitting position, knees pressed into the floor as you rested on your calves. She jumped back a little ways, eyes suddenly filled with terror. *She's a nasty piece of work...but not a violent one.* Though they stung horribly at the movement, you curved your lips into a sad smile and looked at her with your now one good eye."You don't want to do this, do you?"

Amanda's expression turned sour, anger perverting her cute, cherubic features. "Shut! Up!" She yipped, stomping her foot as she looked down at you. "You can't talk to me like this!"

'Ooh my god.' Looking at her expression, everything suddenly clicked. A short gasp of a laugh flew from your lips. The realization was so absolutely ridiculous you couldn't not laugh. How you hadn't noticed it earlier when it was just so obvious was beyond you.

"What? What is it! What's so funny!?” Amanda crossed her arms, looking very uncomfortable all of a sudden. "Have you cracked? Gone mad??"

Another quiet giggle forced its way up your throat, rocking your shoulders as you leaned your head
forward. "Oh...Oh it's nothing..." You shook your head, still looking down at the floor. "It's just...Hawken is just trying so, damn, hard." You looked up at the blonde, blood rolling down your chin. All your smiling was aggravating your split lips. "He wants to be respected as a big, bad crime lord so much that...he's copying us!"

She looked at you quizzically, so disturbed by your sudden outburst she was practically clutching the knife to her chest. It was comical how both hands vied for space along the hilt. Her eyes darted between you and Rive who stood a few feet to the right, searching for reassurance. Their deep sea blue depths were wracked with confusion...and fear. 'Perfect, too easy.'

You pounced upon her unease, urging her closer and closer to the one mistake she needed to make to tip the tides in your favor. "You see, your lovely boytoy is trying to be what he thinks is a cooler, younger version of my boss. He's even got himself the muscleman...the useless mooks...the femme fatale..."

Amanda took a step towards you in what she must have thought to have been in a threatening manner. It made her look more like a tiny bird songbird puffing its feathers and less like the raptor she was hoping to be. She stood just before you and raised the knife threateningly, a move that betrayed just how inexperienced she was as she clumsily attempted to wield the tiny weapon with two hands. "What...what are you talking about?"

You shook your head again, tittering under your breath before looking back up with a wry smile. "Don't you get it? You're the knockoff versions of us! Stupid kids playing at being the dangerous pirates they wish they could be!" You met her deep blue eyes confidently with your own, daring her to respond. "Which means you're meant to be little ole me." 'C'mon. React. Do it, bitch.'

Her mouth flapped open, face contorting as it was consumed by an indignant rage that turned her cheeks a cherry-red. "OH. OHHH! OH-" She huffed and sputtered, nigh stomping her feet as the stepped closer and grabbed you by tank. Nearly spitting into your face as she held the knife point at your bloodied chin, you almost broke out laughing all over again. With her childlike face her rage was very hard to take seriously. She attempted to shake you, though with her delicate frame it translated to more of a gentle jostling instead.

"YOU! You WISHED you were half as pretty as I am!" Her shrieking was cacophonous as it echoed off the cement walls.

Your split grin merely widened as you shrugged...and then pounced. You lifted your bound hands up and forcefully dragged the rope across the knife she was so helpfully holding aloft for you. Before she could even so much as blink your hands came free, binding dropping to the floor as you smacked her wrist and reclaimed the knife. Your knife. You rose, quick as greased lightning, and grabbed hold of that delicate wrist before twisting her round such that her back was flush against yours. She yowled in a mixture of surprise and pain as you wrenched her arm upwards, hyperextending her joints to firmly lock her into submission.

Rive quickly lunged forward, concern and anger plain on his face at the sight of his employer's mistress taken hostage. You looked him square in the face and tittered, twisting the knife held at Amanda's throat such that it caught the light. "Don't. Fucking. Move." Flashing him a sly smirk you applied just enough pressure that her breath hitched, enough that you knew a single bead of crimson liquid was now rolling down her lovely cream-colored skin. "I doubt your boss will be so forgiving if you let his eye candy get killed." She was a little over a head shorter than you, and you had to lean down to whisper through those honeyed-curls into her ear. "And for the record, I was talking about skill, not looks, you vapid little tramp."

"You are so dead!" She hissed, pale skin flushing a deeper shade of red. Whether it was in anger or
embarrassment, you had no idea. It was delicious either way.

"As if I wasn't already? If I'm dying here, someone is going to join me. Whether it's you or your ass of a lover, frankly I don't give a fuck, princess."

"I'll scream! He'll come running back in here and be so mad! There will be nothing left for your friends to fi-" A shrill shriek cut off her tirade as you wrenched her arm up tighter.

"Nnnnnggg stop!" She half panted, half cried. "It's going to break!" Hot tears splashed against the arm holding the knife to her throat. How you wished to see what he face looked like right now. To see her eyeliner run black streaks down those round cheeks...deep blue eyes puffy and red, ringed with tears...

"Hate to break it to you, but you try to play tough then..." You twisted her wrist, relishing her pained mewling. "...you get treated tough." You purred, whirling the two of you such that you were now facing the door proper. "Play dangerous games, win dangerous prizes."

As if on cue the door was thrown open. Hawken paused mid-step, hand on the doorknob, excited grin still on his face. He looked at the lovely picture you had set up for him, Amanda's soft face streaked with tears as you held her at knife point, Rive standing adjacent to the door helpless to do fuck all. If only you could take a photo of the stupid, surprised look plastered on his awful face. Something you could cherish forever.

"Glad you could rejoin us, darling." Your gravelly voiced broke the silence. "I've borrowed something of yours, I hope you don't mind."

Without so much as a word he straightened up, crossing his arms before him as the smile fell from his face. His icy blue eyes narrowed, piercing as icicles as his scarred lips pressed together into a tight frown. 

"Awww, don't give me that look, Hawken. Try smiling, it might do something for you."

His only response was to tap his foot, shaking his head as he did so. He looked at you, expression something between disgust and disbelief, before turning to look at his bewildered manservant. "You are beyond useless. You know that, right?" The tone of his voice: pure exasperation and annoyance.

Amanda squirmed in your grip, mewling and gasping as you threatened to tear his arm from its socket. "H-honey please. She's hurting me!"

With a heavy exhale, one absolutely dripping with impatience and annoyance, Hawken turned to look back at the two of you. He had a stony look on his face, probably the most serious you had seen from him. No hint of amusement or condescension. Just pure, undiluted displeasure. "Absolutely useless. You both are."

Before you could react Hawken reached into his suit jacket with a speed you had not expected from someone built like him. The light caught the tip of a-

'SHIT.' Your eyes instinctively slammed shut.

The deafening sound of gunfire filled the room, echoing off every corner to assail your ears. You grunted and bit into your tongue to steady yourself amidst the ringing throttling your head, concussion threatening to topple you over. Your eyes were still screwed shut, afraid at what you might find upon opening them. Save for the ringing fading from your ears, there was total silence. You didn't dare move. A few moment passed like this before you found the courage to crack an eye open. Hawken stood in front of you, face still locked in a hard grimace as the pistol in his hand cast smoke from its barrel.
Suddenly, the charge in your arms began to slump forward. Amanda's knees slammed into the floor as you released her, gravity turning her small frame into dead weight as the strength left legs. A crimson blossom was quickly spreading outwards across her midsection, and her breath hitched as her hands moved to grasp at the area.

"S-sweetums...?" She managed to gasp, a weak and breathless noise. One of her arms stretched outwards, trying in vain to reach for her lover.

The man that had just killed her.

She fell forward. Hard. Her quiet, pained gasps filling the room as blood quickly spread outwards from her body, soaking into the already red fibres of the rug. Hawken merely looked down at her, making no move to catch or comfort her as she lay dying in agony.

And then he shrugged, features contorting into disgust as he did so. As if what he had done was no more serious than spilling a glass upon the floor. "Look what you did, now where am I going to find me another broad like that?"

Panic. Sheer internal panic. You gulped and attempted to step backwards, put as much space between the two of you as possible. Mid-step your right leg crumpled beneath you, sending you down onto your knee with a confused cry as the knife clattered to the floor beside you. The fabric along your left thigh felt hot, a sticky and wet heat. Everything went cold as you looked down. An indescribable horror, incomparable to anything you had ever felt before.

The black fabric of your leggings was torn, ripped open to expose the S/C skin beneath that was now stained a bright crimson. In the confusion you hadn't felt the bullet hit, hadn't realized it had pierced right through the woman in your arms to embed itself in your upper left thigh. The only thing keeping you from feeling the pain as it tore through skin and muscle was shock.

Your nervous laughter broke the silence as you realized what had just happened, 'Holy shit. I've been shot.'

An ominous click resounded about the room, cutting your laughter short. You slowly raised your head, looking straight down the barrel of the gun now pointed level with your face. "Now here's where the fun really begins, kitten." Hawken was looking down at you, expression conveying nothing but pure malice. Madness had taken root in his eyes, an unnerving sense of bloodlust that just about killed you right then and there as your heart rocketed inside your chest. "I'm going to shoot every single one your limbs. But nothing fatal, oh no. I want you to suffer. I want you to beg me to finally kill you. And in the end, I'm just going to watch as you bleed to death. A slow, painful, lonely death."

You couldn't move, utterly paralyzed in fear. Only able to watch in despair as his finger moved to pull down on the trigger once more.

"B-boss. You...shot...Lady Amanda..." Rive's low voice came from over Hawken's shoulder. He was looking down at Amanda's now still corpse, mouth slacked open in disbelief. "How...why...?"

Hawken huffed aggressively and nigh doubled over backward with the force with which he rolled his eyes. "Why oh why is good help so hard to find!?" He roared as he turned to face the man.

Another gunshot echoed off the walls.

The floor nigh shook as Rive's massive body hit the floor. Pieces of skull splattered outward upon impact, grey matter and cranial viscera spilling out onto the floor. The bullet had hit him square in the
forehead, utterly destroying any semblance of his head's previous shape.

The sight made you almost retch on the spot. Nausea reared up as you stared at the mess, the mess. Oh god, you couldn't stop staring. You couldn't not stare. A cold sweat broke out as your trembling grew to full on shaking. You have killed a lot of people. A lot of people. Not once have you killed anyone in such a deeply unsettling manner as this. Never. You preferred quick kills, to get in and out as quickly and discreetly as possible. Blood was easy, blood was normal. Organs, brains, the pieces meant to stay on the inside...that was wrong. This was wrong.

The air was frozen in your chest, unable to breathe in the fear gripping you body and soul...blood pulsing rapidly in your veins...heartbeat thudding in your skull...the image of the gun barrel that had been aimed at your own head just seconds before...the absolutely terrifying realization that Rive's headless corpse on the floor could have been you.

Something primal in you suddenly awoke. Something beyond your fight or flight instinct that was telling you one thing and one thing only. Crocodile, Daz, they weren't here right now. The only one left to save you was yourself.

It was time to fight for your fucking life.

Your body was moving faster than you could from thoughts, operating on survival instinct alone. The pain from your various wounds melted away, entirely forgotten as your other senses sprang to life. The knife quickly returned to your hand, blade gracefully spinning along your palm to slot between your fingers. Your arm swung, wrist snapping, blade sliding outwards to pierce the air. Hawken reacted as expected, head and core jerking backwards. But you hadn't aimed for the vitals at all. The blade collided with his hand, skidding across his knuckles and sending a fine mist of blood across his white suit. It had hit off-mark, but the damage was done: the gun fell from his hand to clatter onto the floor.

Before he could respond you sprung at him, right hand diving down your boot to pull the stiletto free from its sheath. His eyes went wide upon seeing the new blade in your hand, and he scrambled quickly to reach for the pistol. He grunted as you dove at his torso and you both went tumbling to the floor. Deliberately away from where the gun has fallen. It was a clumsy maneuver, dangerous, but you had to do anything and everything to keep him away from that thing. You both rolled, grappling with each other until you hit the windowed wall overlooking the shop floor. He roughly grabbed at your wrist, doing everything in his power to keep you from stabbing him as you pinned him to the floor beneath your knees. Sweat rolled down your face. It mixed with the blood from your injuries, dropping salty beads of red into Hawken's manical face below you.

"Hah...hah...there's that fight!" He panted upwards, the look on his face unhinged. Psychotic. He was enjoying this.

You wrapped both hands along the blade's hilt, pressing down with all your might to try and drive it into the fiend's heart. There was nothing more you wanted in the world right now than to kill this son of a bitch. Not even wanting to be saved. Not even going home. You wanted to kill.

Hawken merely laughed, a deranged and unnerving sound. "Gonna have to try a bit harder than that, kitten." He cocked his head to the side, mocking you as still managed to stop the blade's advance with but a single hand. You cursed at yourself internally, angry you weren't stronger. All the work you had put in the last year only felt wasted as you struggled to find the power to drive this blade down just a single inch further. If only you weren't so weakened. If only you weren't concussed. If only your perception haki weren't so unpredictable. If only you had trained harder. Harder. HARDER!
"Do the world a favor and just die!" He only returned your outburst with a wicked smile.

He shifted suddenly beneath you, and before you could react he rolled you both to the side such that he was now pinning you instead. "Let's switch things up!" He snarled, moving his right hand from behind his back to reveal he had been holding on to the original knife all along. The one you had so helpfully tossed his way when you disarmed his gun. He quickly chopped at your right wrist with the flat of his hand, triggering the reflex to relax your grip and drop your weapon to the floor next to you. You quickly tried to grab it but Hawken was already moving. The blade was coming down quickly, aimed straight downwards to plunge between your eyes. You couldn't move to stop his wrists in time. There was nowhere to go.

Your hands were already moving to intercept blade on instinct and you couldn't stop them.

You 'caught' the knife with your hands.

A shower of blood splashed downwards into your face as the blade cut through the tender flesh and tendons. You cried out in agony, razor sharp edges of the blade opening deep lines across your palms and fingers like butter. Somehow you managed to stop its advance just short of plunging into one of your eyes, close enough to cut lightly into the skin of your eyelid were you to blink. The pain caused another adrenaline spike, and you reared underneath him to wrench your knee up and deliver a kick straight to his face. His nose crumpled beneath the force of your boot with a sickening crunch. He sailed backward and hit the windowed wall before sliding down on his rear, momentarily dazed as he clutched at his shattered nose.

You barely noticed, attention focused solely on the agonizing pain radiating from your shredded hands. You rolled onto your knees, hunched forward desperately applying pressure to the jagged wounds crossing your palms and fingers. Seeing the bone and tendon beneath the ragged flesh made you feel nauseous all over again. Again with the insides not meaning to be seen on the outside. Your left hand took the worst of the damage, the first to have wrapped about the weapon as it plunged downwards. All digits remained attached but the lines cut into the butt of your palm and fingers were worryingly deep. Nerve damage deep, given the way the fingers were now twitching wildly. The wounds on your right hand weren't as severe, though not much of a comfort as you sat there shaking in pain and fear. Both hands bled freely, steady streams of crimson spilling onto the floor. The pain was enough to choke from you gasping sobs as you began to hyperventilate.

Movement caught your attention, and you looked up just in time to watch Hawken close the gap between you in a single bound. A demon leaping from the gates of Hell itself. You tried to spring backwards but your blood-slick hands only slid across the floor as you tried to brace on them. Hawken's hand caught you by the top hem of your tank, wrenching you upward with a sneer. A blunt pain shook you as his fist thudded into your right side, knocking the wind clear out of you. You tried to push him away, hands smearing trails of red all along his white suit but he merely laughed and grabbed you tighter, lifting you into the air above his shoulders. With an almost whimsical twirl he turned and full-body threw you towards the windows overlooking the factory proper.

The pane gave out instantly and you crashed through the shattered glass, only thoughts being of just how high up you were compared to the floor below. High enough to snap your spine upon impact, to shatter your head like the bullet did to Rive. You had just barely begun to scream when instead you thudded onto the balcony ringing the exterior of the room. The impact left you breathless and blinded in pain as you flailed in a panic, inertia sending you rolling towards the edge. You desperately hooked claws into the grated metal floor of the balcony, stopping yourself just short from tumbling into oblivion. Close enough your face was jutting half off, and you watched as a few beads of blood dripped off your cheek to splash on the on the shop floor below.
Far, far below.

You lie there panting, torn hands gripping the bars with as much strength as you could muster. Anything to keep you from tumbling towards certain death. You whirled your head about as a door behind you kicked open. Hawken near skipped out, terrifying grin plastered on his face. White teeth sharply contrasted by the red streaming from his broken nose. You attempted to rise, to push yourself to your feet and prepare to fight back, dammit.

Your body refused to listen.

Arms feebly pressed against the grated floor, shaking with exertion as you attempted to force yourself upwards. Your right side felt like a knot, as if someone had grabbed the skin there and twisted it like thin fabric. It emanated a numbness that had begun to infect the rest of your body, sapping what little strength you had left.

Something was very wrong. The same feeling you had when Daz had delivered the kick that had accelerated your condition to critical levels that night long ago. Your mouth went completely dry, breath hitching as the realization dawned on you. You looked down. And paled.

Hawken hadn't punched you.

Down to the hilt, your stiletto lie embedded in your side. Not a single sliver of the three-inch long blade to be seen. A wound with the potential to kill in its own right. A wound that was dangerously fatal alongside the rest of your injuries.

Your trembling arms gave out and you thudded back to the floor with a sob. 'Fuck, fuck, FUCK!'

But while your thoughts were screaming in frustration and rage, in reality you were whimpering in despair.

You really were going to die here.

Hawken's shoes stopped in front of your head. You slowly tilted your face upwards to look death in the face. Your death. The smile had fallen from his lips, and he merely looked down at you with contempt. As if you were but an ant to squish beneath his heel. His voice was cold, impassive. "And now naught is left but smoldering ash. How the fiery have fallen."

He rolled you over, almost gently, to lie you on your back. Straddling your torso once more, he brought a hand up to stroke your cheek. His fingers smeared blood and tears around your battered face, a gruesome canvas evidence of his sadism.

"Do you know what my favorite way to kill someone is?" He spoke at nearly a whisper, lips twitching into an almost sad smile. Without even giving you the chance to respond, his hands wrapped about your throat. His thumbs pressed into your windpipe forcefully, choking from you a panicky squeak as your own hands came up to claw at his forearms. He leaned forward to whisper into your ear, not letting up the pressure even the tiniest amount. "With my own, bare, hands."

His eyes met yours, unblinking ice into teary brass. "Because I get to feel you die. Feel your lungs constrict and stutter. Your pulse accelerate in panic before it slows...and slows...and slows...until it stops completely." He released a low growl as the pressure about your throat increased.

"I get to watch as the life drains from your eyes. I get to hear every last whimper as I choke the very life from you." You flailed at his wrists, his forearms, whatever you could reach. Your blood-slickened hands only slid uselessly as you tried to find purchase, to push him away. Crimson streaks smeared across his skin and suit, not even flinching as you dragged a bloody palm over his eyes. He
only continued to look down at you, expression unfazed, resolute.

His grip about your throat somehow tightened even more, windpipe dangerously close to collapsing from the pressure. You bucked even harder, desperately attempting to pry him off. To be able to breathe. You tried to twist and kick but to no avail. Blood loss and exhaustion was sapping your strength quickly, the fight draining out of you at a frightening pace. The darkness ringing your vision grew more by the second, lungs fit to burst.

There was only one option left.

It would kill you.

But doing nothing and letting Hawken choke the life from you would too.

The only difference being you'd take the bastard down with you. It would have to be one movement. Fast enough before the reality of what you'd done hit. Before your body realized you had just killed yourself. You grit your teeth, biting into your cheeks and lips so hard the taste of blood filled your mouth. Your right hand curled around the hilt of the knife embedded in your side as you closed your eyes.

'I'm sorry...!'

You wrenched the blade free with a sickening crack. In one fluid movement you crossed your arm over your chest, aligning the blade just right. Droplets of blood splashed down onto your face as it arched through the air. Using the last bit of strength you had left, you pushed upwards against Hawken's choking grip and grabbed him by the suit collar. With near surgical precision the blade slammed into the side of his neck with such force the tip breached the other side.

He reared backwards immediately, and you cried out in relief as air fought its way back into your lungs. You lie there gasping, bloody hands grasping at your bruised throat, just breathing. There was a clang as he collided with the safety railing at the edge of the platform. He backpedaled into with such force he fell right over it, gurgling noises fading as he fell away. The sound of his body hitting the floor echoed throughout the warehouse. An almost banal thump if you had no idea what it really was.

You didn't bother to even look. Hawken D'Lore was as good as dead.

But so were you.

You lie there, breath slowing from hitching gasps to more even wheezing as a calm descended upon you. One of your hands found its way to the gaping wound the knife had left in your side. Each heartbeat sent another stream of blood gushing out of the hole. It slipped through the grate, joining Hawken's body to splash onto the warehouse floor below. There was no point trying to stop it. You were no medic. You had no trauma supplies. It would just be a wasted effort.

Instead you just focused on breathing. Deep calming breaths. The sound of your blood slipping between the bars of the metal grate to splash onto the warehouse floor below was almost rhythmic. A comforting lullaby as you fell into the forever sleep. Too tired to be scared. To be angry.

Maybe this was for the best. One last service to the world: ridding the world of two villains with but a single thrust. The world didn't need you. No one did. You were just a murderer trying to play hero. Too dangerous to let live. Still, tears rolled down your face. Consumed in an all-consuming sorrow. To have come this far and die like this...heart and body broken both. 'Pitiful...so...fuck...'

Your thoughts grew fuzzier by the minute. Eclectic. Random.
When Crocodile finally found you, how would he react? Seeing your abused body covered in blood...shot and stabbed and beaten to death...What if he never found you? Some unsolved mystery as to what ever happened to you. Would you be missed? Remembered? How would Daz feel? The rest of the crew? Would the gators be sad? Could they even be sad?

Oh God, everything felt cold. So cold. The darkness that had been swimming at the edge of your vision steadily surged inwards. A ringing filled your ears, reverberating about your head. Your breath hitched, each and every breath a fight to take. You were faintly aware of a banging noise amidst the din in your head, a crash.

The first fingers of dawn crept their way through the murky glass panes along the factory roof, casting a warm and golden light to chase out the gloom. You tilted your head to the side, letting it bathe your face in warmth. The twenty-four hours had passed.

They didn't make it in time.

'I'm...so sorry-' 

The darkness pulsed inward, choking from you one final gasp as you tumbled into oblivion.

Chapter End Notes

Spoiler alert: nah you ain't dead. Time for more angst, though! (The happiness will come eventually...)

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
A Red Dawn (HEAVY ANGST)

Chapter Summary

It's dawn: Hawken's time limit has come to an end. They've entered damn near every single warehouse in this harbor and not seen a single sign of you...until now.

Chapter Notes

Behold! Tons of OOC angst and sad times! Sorry for the wait.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were guards just past the entrance. Were. Only bodies remained.

Meaning this had to be the right place. Had to be.

Hawken's time limit was almost at its end. Dawn was approaching. Quickly.

You had to be here. You had to be alive.

He had no idea what he would do if you weren't. Burn the whole damn island to the ground. Turn it all into a barren wasteland, nothing left but sand and ash. Or worse, what if you were here, but... No. He couldn't finish that thought.

Crocodile soared down the hallway cutting down each and every person that dared stand in his way. They fell instantly, sheared near in half as their midsections dissolved. Let them try and stop him, he'd kill them all. Anyone that dared stand between him and you right now was going to die.

Daz lagged several paces behind, exhaustion from the nigh-constant running throughout the day having worn even him down. He didn't have the convenience of flight given by a logia. That wasn't to say Crocodile wasn't exhausted too. Running on two nights of no sleep at this point had left him jittery, emotions loose and irritable. He hadn't slept when you had run out on him, and he sure as hell hadn't slept at all tonight. The lack of sleep was getting to him, making him sloppy, and he had damn near tore Daz's head off multiple times in past few hours. Not one of the men wanted to get anywhere near him, and even Daz was keeping a few feet away at all times. His patience had worn thin as they entered warehouse, after empty warehouse, after empty-ware-house.

Not a single sign of you, until now. Just at the break of dawn.

The door exploded off of its hinges as he plowed into it. Another warehouse, big surprise. But this one was occupied. There was resistance here.

Meaning you had to be here. Had to be.
He blew through the door with such speed he damn near tumbled over himself trying to come to a stop. A body lay crumpled on the floor just a few meters from the door. This wasn't one of his. It couldn't be.

No.

This was him. The monster that dared touch you. Steal you away in some sick game of cat and mouse. Hurt you. A rage boiled over as he looked down at Hawken's pathetic, broken corpse, his pale blue eyes locked open wide, forever frozen in fear. His white suit was splattered red with a gruesome amount of blood, both fresh and dried, and a long, narrow blade had been stabbed deep into the side of his neck. The light glinted crimson off the tip puncturing clear out of the other side. Crocodile should've been happy to see him dead, ecstatic. But it only enraged him. He had wanted to kill this piece of shit himself. Painfully. Personally. Slowly. Show him what happens when stupid, sick kids try to play at being big shots.

But here he was. Very clearly dead. Freshly dead.

Hawken's corpse was so fresh that his skin retained traces of color, face still flushed a faint red. His body had yet to stiffen, easily jostled as Crocodile reached down to grab the hilt of the knife, a stiletto. One that he recognized. He pulled it free with a slick, wet noise, confirming his suspicions as he inspected the blade. Hawken was dead, and by your weapon. But where the hell were you?

A chill descended on him, rage dying out as something else took its place. Fear. There was far too much blood on Hawken for him to still be the lively shade he was, and from the streaks on his arms and chest he knew it couldn't have all been his. Wherever you were, you were bleeding. A lot.

He had to find you, fast.

"Y/N!!" Crocodile's voice echoed throughout the open floor of the warehouse, calling out and begging for an answer. But there was none, and the building fell silent once more as the echoes of his voice stilled. Silent save for Daz's ragged panting as he finally caught up, coming to a stop a few feet behind.

He looked down at Hawken's corpse before his eyes flicked upwards to look at the knife. The look in his eyes showing he had come to the same conclusion. "Shit! Where is she?!!" Daz wheezed, voice scratchy and thin from exhaustion.

Crocodile turned to look back at him, and it was only then that he noticed it. Several feet to his left was a small puddle of blood. Maybe half a foot in diameter. It was nowhere near Hawken's corpse, and he looked on in confusion before a drop fell from above to splatter into it. And then he heard it. A dripping. Rhythmic, like a leaking pipe. So mundane that he had automatically tuned it out.

His breath caught in his throat as he stared at that bloody puddle, too afraid to look up and confront what he knew would be there. If he didn't look, didn't acknowledge it...

Maybe you were fine, heading back to the ship on your own. Victorious in killing your captor and ready to head home and crawl into bed. Not a scratch on you. Not injured in the slightest. Not lying above them motionless as you bled out onto the floor...

He swallowed roughly, tilting his head upwards hoping beyond hope it was just some nameless guard. He had barely looked before he was moving, all conscious thought leaving him as he surrendered to pure emotion for one of the few times of his life. A loud clang sounded as he dropped onto the balcony, dropping to his knees to pull you up to his chest. "No! No no no no! Come on, dammit! I'm here now, Y/N. I'm here, please please wake up...please" His voice was hoarse,
cracking as he cried out for you to wake up. To open your eyes and be okay. Be alive.

"Y/N...Please, it's going to be okay. I've got you now, you're going to be okay. Please, please wake up. You're safe now...Come back to me..." He whispered into your hair as he clutched you tight, hugging you into his chest.

There was no response. You lay limply against his chest. No movement. No noise. No warmth.

He pulled back to look down at you, heart near stopping in his chest. You looked so fragile, so broken. Covered in blood and bruises. Clothing dirtied and shredded. The sheen of dried tears on your face. There was so much blood. Too much. You were covered in it, smeared all over your face and torso, barely any hint of white left in your top. Most of it was still sticky, leaving streaks on his arms and chest as he held you. Your skin was pale, so much more pale than the corpse on the floor below. His hand moved to cradle your face and he felt sick at how cold you felt, warmth flowing from your wounds to spill out onto the floor.

Your face was battered all to hell, right eye badly bruised and swollen shut. A nasty gash had been carved down your left cheek, and the beginnings of another bruise shone purple about the left side of your mouth. Your bottom lip had split wide open from where he must've struck you. A torn hole in your leggings revealed a gunshot wound on your thigh, sticky globs of blood matting the area a red so dark as to almost be black. Even your hands had been sliced all to shreds. Deep, jagged lines crisscrossed your palms and fingers, wounds inflicted solely to cause pain. Solely to make you scream. Hawken had tortured you.

But the worst of all were the marks about your throat. Deep indentations of the thumbs that had dug into your windpipe, of the fingers that had constricted about your delicate neck. He could only imagine your tear-stricken face as Hawken strangled you, bloody hands helplessly clawing at his arms, desperate to escape. It filled him with a mindless, bloodthirsty rage.

And when Hawken had gotten tired of playing with you...there was a deep puncture wound on your right side, even now spilling a thin trickle of blood as you lay in his arms. Not enough to kill you instantly. No, you had lain here alone, suffering in absolute agony. Helpless and terrified as you bled out, waiting in vain for the help that wouldn't make it in time.

And it was all his fault.

His fault he had made you run out. His fault he had pushed you away into the danger he had hoped to spare you. His fault he hadn't trained you enough. His fault he hadn't made it in time. His fault he had made you a target in the first place. His fault he hadn't owned up to his feelings for you and made you stay, safe with him.

His fault you were dead.

He wanted to howl and rage, destroy each and every thing around him for miles around. They were too late and you had died painfully, scared and alone, because of it. Died thinking you were unwanted...unloved... So many regrets flew through his mind, so many things he wanted to say and unsay to you. An intense self-loathing filled him, spreading outwards from his core like venom as he helplessly looked down at you, stroking your hair.

So consumed in his grief he hadn't heard Daz approach, who had taken the stairs and passed through the room where two of Hawken's people lay. Dead from bullet wounds in the gut and head. Daz paled and paused in his tracks upon exiting the room, temporarily unable to process the gruesome sight of your battered body. He had long wanted to see that stubborn pride beaten out of you, take a lesson in humility. Not like this. Never like this. But as a thin trickle of blood ran down your side his
medic instincts kicked in. Blood couldn't flow out of a wound without something driving it. Active bleeding meant a heartbeat.

Crocodile barely looked up as Daz quickly approached, eyes disturbingly empty. But even if he had already given up hope, Daz sure as hell hadn't. He dropped to his knees before the two of you, eyes screwing shut in focus as he pushed two fingers against your carotid artery. He looked for a sign, any sign there was life in you yet, that the blood flow hadn't just been from gravity. Fleeting hope flashed in Crocodile's dark eyes, knowing Daz had noticed something he had not. A few seconds passed, the two of them sitting motionless. Waiting.

Daz's eyes suddenly flashed open, looking down at you in shock before hastily unclipping the trauma kit strapped to his outer thigh.

"You mean...?" Crocodile stared at him in disbelief, voice near breathless.

"It's faint. Very faint. But it's there." Daz didn't even look up, too busy wrestling the kit open and finding what he was looking for. A spring-loaded syringe containing a stimulant that should give you enough energy to jumpstart your heart. Buy you enough time until they could get you to Ellia. He uncapped it with his teeth and rolled your head to the side, clearing enough space to jam the needle straight into the vein. Its contents deployed with a *click* and he tossed it away. His fingers came up to massage the vein, helping the liquid make its way to your heart.

The seconds passed, agonizingly long, as they waited for a reason. Any response.

And then you twitched, a faint inhale sounding in the space between them.

Both of their eyes met, despair making way for determination. This wasn't over yet, they could still save you.

"Come on...come on...wake up...come back to us..." Crocodile rocked you slightly, running a hand down your cheek.

Daz moved quickly, rooting around in the trauma kit. There was no time to waste, he needed to get you safe to move before you could crash. He pulled out a foil packet, lined with the words **HYPERCLOT** in large red font. "Hold her still, this shit hurts so she may squirm. It needs a few seconds to set." Crocodile only had a few seconds to brace you tightly before Daz was tearing the packet open between his teeth. He yanked your top upwards before dumping the contents of the package, a fine white powder, into the puncture wound on your side. It reacted almost instantly, fizzing and bubbling as the powder expanded and morphed together to form a plug in the wound.

You twitched again, breath hitching as the pain ramped up. A soft, faint moan pushed past your lips and you writhed in his arms. "L...let me...hurts. Sleep..." Your voice sounded so weak, so heart-wrenchingly broken.

"Oh no. No. Don't you dare. Wake up, Y/N. You need to wake up." Crocodile gripped you tightly, voice desperate. They were so close, you couldn't just give up now.

You merely whined in response, a pained frustrated noise. Somehow you mustered up enough strength to raise an arm, hand lightly smacking into the side of his face. It slid, leaving behind a sticky streak of blood from cheekbone to jaw line.

"Nnn. S..top...I don't..." You whimpered. Tired, weak, voice suffused with pain. He shushed you, stroking your face, trying to comfort you in any way he could.

Daz looked over his shoulder from where he was preparing some emergency bandages, soaking
gauze in a hemostatic agent. "You need to keep her still."

Crocodile looked down at you, feeling completely and utterly helpless as you squirmed and writhed in his grip. And then he was moving, leaning down to do the one thing he could think of to get your attention right now.

The darkness was your friend. A friendly, safe bubble in which you floated about, no cares in all the world. No fear. No pain.

Why you would even be in pain anyway, you had no idea. Hell, you couldn't even remember how you had even gotten here. Couldn't remember any of the events leading up to where you were now. Not like it mattered. You were perfectly happy floating through this endless expanse of black. Drifting downwards into the void in a sleepy, lazy euphoria.

You looked downwards at your body, slightly confused. There were bits of you missing, little pockets of numbful nothingness that had been lost in the void. Like some bored creator had erased random bits of a sketch they were none too pleased with. You looked at your hands, flexing and twisting your fingers. There were stripes of nothingness across your hands, leaving your fingers disembodied in space. You giggled as you wiggled them about, the black expanse stretching on endless as you peeked through them.

Your face felt funny too, odd pieces of it similarly numbed. More pits of numbness sat in your side and thigh, null chunks utterly devoid of feeling and mass. The edges left behind in their absence were ragged, and actively fraying at a leisurely rate. Filaments broke off as you watched, particulate matter breaking off to float into the void like sand in the wind.

'Sand...? I thought the saying was "dust"...'

Hrm. There was a thought just keeping out of reach, words on the tip of your tongue. With utterly no explanation, you suddenly felt sad. A deep mournful sorrow hooked itself into your heart and you had no idea why...despair tinged with guilt and regret. It was frustrating and you didn't want to feel frustrated right now. Not when everything was so calm and peaceful. You let the confusing, unforming thought float away...tried to. It hung around, a lingering malaise casting a pall over your relaxing little utopia.

You started when you heard a yelling in the distance. So faint as to have sounded like it had traveled miles to deliver you the last of its dying sound waves. Unintelligible, impossible to distinguish words from noise. No sense of where or even when it was coming from.

'Dying...'

Why did that word make you feel so anxious? And had you always felt so cold? No, no this was bad. You didn't want this. This bubble was supposed to be safe. Carefree and happy. You just wanted to keep floating here calm and relaxed for the rest of time until space itself collapsed. But yelling meant something bad, and this cold was unnatural. Your body knew something was wrong even if your mind did not.

You hissed and swatted at your neck as you felt a sharp sting. Great, now even the bugs were invading your private sanctum and one had the gall to bite you. But it felt weird. A tingling sensation coursed down through your body, setting your nerves buzzing and crackling. Like every limb had fallen asleep at once and the pins and needles were settling in. You suddenly felt hyper-aware of your heart sitting in your chest. Heavy, beating uneven and languorously. Your lungs were aching. Breathing was hard.
Something was definitely wrong.

Your breath hitched as a stinging took hold in your side. But rather than fading away like the one in your neck it only increased, growing from an uncomfortable pinch to a nigh unbearable burning that soon had you gasping and writhing. Where there had been a missing chunk there, it was now coming back into focus. A bloodied disembodied lump of your side that was steadily turning from translucent to opaque as it reconnected to your body. The rest of your body was coming back into focus, other missing pieces joining in the painful chorus shattering the illusion of safety and calm you had been enjoying.

Everything was still black, but the void had changed from beloved friend to traitorous foe as invisible hands gripped you tight, pinned you down, revived the pain fresh and raw. Something was holding you against a wall, left side pressed flush against it. A wall that practically radiated heat compared to how cold you felt. You tried to flail, push against it and fall back into that lovely abyss, enticingly peaceful and painless. But it held you firm, keeping you locked down helpless to flee from the pain sundering your body and mind.

"L-...let me...hurts. Sleep..." Why was your tongue so heavy? It felt almost numb, your mouth stuffed with cotton. Fuzzy and painfully dry, words slurred and sloppy.

"...don't you dare..." A man's voice. Angry. Desperate. Familiar? It came to you slowly, echoing about the black expanse from no clear direction.

You whined and tried to strike at the voice, but all the strength in your body had suddenly vanished. Your entire being felt heavy, flattened, held down by a oppressively suffocating lead blanket. Limbs like dead weights, it took every bit of energy still coursing in your veins just to raise your arm. Pain radiated down your arm as your hand managed to hit something. Even your goddamn hands were hurting.

"Nnn. S..top...I don't..."

'Suffocating...' Why was it so hard to breathe? Your throat felt constricted, sides pinched together in a vise grip. Fuck, why couldn't you just breathe?!

"...you have to keep her still..." Another voice, a different man. Stern. Focused. As familiar as the one before.


But this was different, this pressure was forceful but gentle.

You knew this feeling.

Recognized these lips.

The darkness faded to a warm yellow tinged with pink as your good eye cracked open. The world looked painted in watercolor. Smudgy, edges lacking definition. Objects left a trail behind them as you looked around, lazily drifting back to their correct positions. Your vision was ringed with darkness, as if it hadn't fully retreated but merely pulled back a few inches. There was a dull, constant ringing in your ears, and everything sounded muffled. Like sounds were traveling to you
from down an endless tunnel, becoming discordant as it bounced and echoed.


You moaned and screwed your eye back shut as a particularly strong wave of pain radiated from your side.

"No. No, no no. Stay with me." The wall you were held against rumbled and something lightly smacked against your cheek.

Things looked a bit clearer this time, a little sharper, as you opened your eye again.

Crocodile was looking down at you. You'd never seen an expression like that from him, so concerned. Desperate. He looked so tired and vulnerable. The bags under his eyes rivaled yours, dark and carved deep, a clear sign of how truly exhausted he must've been. His hair was disheveled with strands falling all over the face. There was a red streak running down the side of his face. A dragged handprint, trailing bloody fingerprints. Now you know what you your hand had struck when you flailed in the dark.

When you awoke he exhaled a massive sigh, shoulders drooping in relief. "There you are. Stay awake. We're here." His voice was husky, throat sounding almost raw and so very tired. He stroked your hair back, up and out of your bloodied face, before dropping his hand back down to stroke against your right cheek. You were cradled against his chest, body draped across his lap as he held you still. Not that you had the strength to move much more anyway. His right arm was wrapped about your shoulders to hold you semi-upright, while your lower half was thrown over his left leg. The left side of your face was pressed up against his chest, and you could hear his pulse: heavy and frantic. There were streaks of blood smeared across his olive green shirt, left behind by the deep gash on your cheek. He felt blistering hot, a welcome warmth given how cold you felt. A mortal chill had sunk into your bones, down to the marrow and past that to penetrate even your soul. Colder than surviving the frigid winters of years ago on the streets with but threadbare rags.

As you looked up at him there were so many things you wanted to say. The beginnings of hundreds of words vying for space on the tip of your tongue. 'You found me...I'm sorry...This really hurts...You're late...Please make it stop...I'm sorry...I want to go home...I fucked up...I'm sorry...I'm so tired...Help...It's so cold...I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I'm sorry...' Each died out before they could even begin, simply too weak to form the words.

Breathing was so very hard, each breath a separate battle on its own to take. Wheezing, gasping breaths so weak they couldn't snuff a candle. A faint whistling noise sounded from your throat as each breath forced its way through your constricted windpipe.

Tears ringed your eyes, rolling down your face as a reedy whimper pushed past your split lips.

He winced, dark eyes heart wrenchingly despondent. Helpless. His fingers moved away from your cheek to clasp you about the shoulder, giving you a firm squeeze, trying his best to comfort you as you bled out in his arms. "Just hold on." He suddenly looked upwards, to whatever was directly in front of him. "We need to get her out of here. Now."

"Not until I'm sure she's not going to hemorrhage as soon as we move her." The other voice you had heard in the darkness spoke. With what little strength you had left, you managed to slightly tilt your head to the right. Daz was there, kneeling next to a trauma kit and hastily opened package of some whitish powder. A used syringe had been tossed to the side, contents unknown. He was quickly unraveling a spool of gauze, leaving splotchy red fingerprints along its length. Hands soaked red
with blood.

Your gaze lazily traveled to look at your side. Rather than gushing blood, the tip of a weird foam-like plug jut out from the puncture wound the stiletto had left behind. You recognized it to be the quick-clotting hemostatic agent Ellia had been so excited to order. The very, very expensive kind she had said not to use unless it was an absolute emergency. If any there ever were one, this was probably it. Right now, it was the only reason you weren't dead yet.

Daz draped the prepared gauze across his knee before leaning forward to investigate your leg. "I need you to turn her, carefully."

Crocodile did his best to carefully angle you such that your back was now pressed flush against him. You would've screamed had you the strength. Another whimpering moan escaped from your bruised throat instead, and you head lolled backwards as a wave of intense agony rolled down your spine.

You watched, eye half-lidded, as Daz leaned forwards to investigate your leg. The bullet hole was still-just barely-oozing thin rivulets of blood with each pitiful beat of your heart. His eyes flicked to your weak gaze when you twitched, leg attempting to recoil away as his fingers scanned over the wound. "Hang in there. Almost done, and then we're taking you home. Okay?" He flashed you a quick, reassuring smile, though his eyes remained stiff and focused. They looked upwards, over your head, as his hands worked at tearing the fabric of your leggings away from the wound. "Hold her still. I'm going to plug her leg."

Crocodile's grip on you tightened, left arm wrapped around your chest pulling you even closer. His hand curled under your chin, gently tilting your face upwards to look up at him. "Look at me, we're going to patch you up and get you out of here. It's going to be fine. You're going to be fine." You wanted to nod, believe him that everything was going to be okay and you'd wake up safe and cared for back on the ship. You hadn't even enough strength left to just nod.

There was a rustling and then tearing noise and suddenly your leg was on fire. The same pain as what brought you out of the darkness only so much more intense now that you were awake. The darkness pulsed a few inches inwards, tunnel vision increasing as your head rolled back. "Haaah..." you panted, feeling yourself turn a shade even paler, as impossible as it seemed. The ringing in your ears became deafening as your extremities grew numb. 'No...no I don't...please...help...'

Through the ringing, Crocodile's voice came to you, faint. "Breathe, Y/N. Just focus on breathing for me, please. You have to hold on." And you tried, you really tried, as Daz hurriedly tied the bandage about your thigh. The seconds passed your breath continued to falter, growing weaker...and weaker...and weaker... You desperately tried to listen for your own heartbeat, hone in on the rhythmic, steady pulse that should've been emanating from your chest. It was so faint, so uneven, you could only hear a beat every few seconds. Feeble and muted. The gap between those seconds increased with each pitiful beat.

Suddenly you were moving upwards, Crocodile rising to his feet as he held you in a princess carry, legs dangling over his left forearm. The motion entreated the darkness a few more inches, and only a small circle of your vision remained, steadily draining of color. A single tear managed to work its way out of your eye. You were scared, so very scared. Scared and tired and cold and suffering. Just wanting to go home...realizing you might not make it there. Even after all the work they did, desperately trying to find you. Desperately trying to save you.

It might not have been enough.
And as you were sliding into the abyss once more, there was one thing you had to say. One thing he had to hear. Because this was all your fault.

"I...I...’m...so-...rry", you managed to whisper. Not even knowing if he had heard it. *I'm sorry I couldn't...be what you wanted me to be...'*

And then you were falling again, consciousness sliding clear through his arms to tumble back into the abyss.

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Crocodile landed on deck not five minutes later. He had moved faster than he ever had before, feeling near electrified as he rushed to get you to the ship. Ellia was waiting for him, anxiety plastered on her face as she paced about the deck. Daz had called ahead on the Den-Den as soon as you had passed out, told her to be ready. They had bought you time but it was cutting it close.

Too close.

You were a deadweight in his arms, lying so limply against him like a broken doll. He could barely feel your pulse, uneven and drawn out. An uncomfortably long gap between beats. The rise and fall of your chest was imperceptible, only indication of your breathing being the heart-wrenching wheezing noise. So quiet he had to focus to hear it.

Ellia was already rushing forward as he touched down on deck. She took one look at the bloody mess in his arms before that nervous, anxious look fell away. Cold, hard determination replaced it as she looked up into his face and nodded. No reassuring words, no promises or comforting smile, no gentle touches. There was work to do and not a single iota of time to waste. She spun on her heel and made a beeline for the medbay, throwing up a hand and beckoning him along as she sped away.

He pushed through the door, Ellia already snapping on gloves and surgical mask. She gestured at the table before turning away to grab an assortment of tools, the cold metal glinting in the light. He had barely lain you down before she was shooting him out the door. "Out, out. There's nothing more you can do and I need you out of the way." Her eyes flashed up at him over the mask, a stern glare. The severity of the situation having stripped her usual deference and respectful demeanor clean away.

Her tone should have left him infuriated at the disrespect, but as the door slammed in his face he only felt frustrated and useless. His back met the wall facing the door, and he slid down it to the floor, head falling into his hand. He was painfully aware of the throbbing in his head, the burning beneath his eyes. Light and sound sensitivity amplified. When had he ever felt so tired before?

But it was nothing compared to what you were suffering.

You were his little hero, mighty and fierce and hotheaded. The temperament and ferocity of a badger barely contained in human form. So prideful, so stubborn, yet more earnest and dedicated than anyone else. To see that pride forcefully beaten from you...To see the light fade from your eyes...To see you reduced to this: bruised and bloody and broken, barely clinging to life...

He swallowed down a frustrated sob. Hell, when had he ever felt so intensely before. Not anger but absolute despair. Sorrow. Helplessness...

But you were suffering and there was absolutely nothing he could do about it. He hated this feeling, like he wasn't a feared warlord anymore but a scared little kid. Utterly powerless to do anything. He was capable of unparalleled levels of destruction, island-leveling devastation...but that was all. The power to destroy could not heal your wounds or wipe your fear away. It couldn't bring a smile back to your broken lips. His strength meant nothing if it couldn't protect you. Right now he was useless. Worse
than useless, a *hindrance*, and it filled him with an intense self-loathing and disgust. This was all his fault, and there was nothing he could do to fix it. To fix *you*.

All reservations about his feelings for you had since been cast aside, the events of the past twenty-four hours forcing him to recognize just how much you affected him. How much losing you would utterly destroy him...

But right now, all he could do was wait.

Chapter End Notes

Oh no, he has the feelings™. Also you're going to be fine. Ellia's good at her job.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
At some point you stopped falling.

You don't know just how long you had been falling for, nor when exactly you had stopped. One minute you were tumbling through the inky darkness of space, the next you were lying on a bed of clouds. The transition had been lost somewhere in the middle, or maybe both states had existed simultaneously at some point. You didn't have the energy to think too deeply about it.

Your body felt terribly heavy and thoughts moved through your mind sluggishly. As if gravity had increased so much as to not just weigh you down, but alter the flow of time itself. Not that you minded, seeing as how you felt so very comfortable right now. The cloud bed was warm and plush, safe. It cradled you, and kept you from slipping even further into the yawning abyss stretching endlessly below you. You had absolutely no desire to pull yourself out of it, lest you tumble right out and start falling all over again.

The weird thing was, you felt like you had been here before. Both not too long ago and also eons in the past. But, you didn't know if that was a good thing. In fact you were positively sure it wasn't. Something was telling you that you weren't supposed to be here, like your presence was only tolerated rather than welcome. Underneath the superficial comfort and peace underlay a nagging anxiety. A restlessness. You didn't want to go...but you needed to. When you could.

Time passed oddly, like it was both whizzing by and crawling slowly at the same time. You had been here for but a minute, but also for centuries. In this world, time itself was a meaningless abstraction.

Every now and then the vestiges of whispers would trickle out of the darkness. Nothing you could ever interpret, but enough to catch your attention. The echoes seemed to come from nowhere in particular, and you'd try to twist about to find the source. All in vain, as your limbs felt utterly numbed by an impossible exhaustion that left you weary down to even your soul. Sometimes you'd try to call out, but your mouth felt filled with mothballs, your lips glued shut. Alongside the voices came the occasional touch. Light, feathery sensations tracing along your arm, your face, your hair. A gentle squeeze about your fingers. It should have freaked you out, being touched by disembodied
hands in the darkness. It was comforting. You weren't *alone*.

You had been lying there, not knowing how long, when suddenly you became aware of a tiny speck of light. Floating a few feet up and to the left, just a tiny pinpoint of white in the otherwise endless expanse of black. It started off faint, so faint you thought you might've imagined it. You observed it for what felt like years, and the more you stared the brighter it grew. Nothing more than a firefly at first, but soon it grew bright enough your eyes cringed from its intensity. You frowned and rolled your head to the side, trying to shield your eyes from the glare. All in vain, as the light was now permeating every square inch of the now *not* darkness. The expanse had changed from inky blackness to hues of warm yellow and orange and red. The change of scenery would have been nice had it not been making your eyes sting.

The light brought along with it a warmth, too. Just enough to make you no longer comfortable, body now just a tad too hot such that your limbs had begun to sweat. With the uncomfortable warmth you became aware of a gentle yet constant pressure draped over your body. It was soft and plush, but had the unwelcome effect of keeping the heat trapped in against your feverish limbs. There was also something wrapped tight around parts of your body. A constant pressure about your midsection and thigh, and even your hands. The heat of the light and whatever was lying over top of you made you feel anxiously claustrophobic. You groaned and attempted to shift, fighting against the unwavering pull weighing your body down.

Your hearing came back into focus with a ramping crackle, ending with a sharp pop that made you wince. A soft gasp sounded to your right followed by a thud as something fell to the floor. Someone was there, floating with you but also not. Just on the other side of whatever veil separated you from *here* and *there*. The timer was up, and you knew it was time for you to leave this peaceful space.

You groaned again, attempting to work yourself free. Against what felt like the weight of the whole world you managed to raise your left arm. Barely. Just enough to shield your tired eyes from the irritatingly harsh light. With the shade you were finally able to open your eyes, fully tearing away the veil keeping you from rejoining the living. You cringed immediately against the harsh light of the sun, which cast its light directly onto your face from the porthole next to the bed you were laid up in. It took a few moments and blinks for your eyes to focus and adjust to seeing again.

Footsteps approached quickly from your right, and it took way more energy than it should have to roll your head over to look. A woman hovered at your side, big green eyes wide with anticipation. Her brown hair tickled at her chin, cut into a springy bob, as she brought a slender hand to her mouth. "Are...are you coming back to us?" Her voice was gentle and familiar, one of the comforting voices that had whispered nonsense to you during your stay in the void. You stared at her in confusion a few moments, brain still taking its time kicking back on. You knew this face, this soft sweet smile and kind eyes. Knew her from before...before...

And then it came back. The pain. The fear. The adrenaline. The despair. It *all* came back.

"NO!" Your eyes blew wide as you inhaled a rough, sucking gasp. Panic surged through your veins, driving you to sit up, get up, *fight*. Pain knocked the air clean from your lungs, and you fell back into the pillow with a weak cry. Your side spasmed, radiating a blinding pain outwards that left you panting, back arched and muscles tensed.

"Woah woah woah woah! You're safe. Lie still." Ellia's hands moved to your shoulders, gentle yet insistent as she kept you from further moving about. Not like you were about to try again anyway, intensity of the pain having quickly shown what a horrible mistake that was. Your eyes screwed shut, waiting for the spasms to pass as you grunted through gritted teeth. Your right hand
rushed to clutch at your side. Another mistake, the movement making it tense with its own pain as soon as you tried to flex the tendons there.

She shushed and cooed at you reassuringly, massaging her fingers into your shoulders. "Deep breaths, everything is okay."

You lie there panting, trying to heed her orders and will your breathing into more metered, even breaths. In the meantime you curled your thumbs inward, running them over the bandages and patches firmly wrapped about the wounds on your hands. Right, you had tried to catch a fucking knife...with you hands. The split second decision had saved one of your eyes, as reckless as it was. Given the thickness of the bandages on your left hand and how numb it felt, you weren't so sure if the trade had been worth it.

After a few of the longest minutes of your life, the pain began to fade back to a dull, aching numbness. You cracked your eyes open again. "E...Ellia...?" Your voice was ragged, both feeling and sounding like you had gargled a mouthful of glass. Your throat was incredibly sore. Bruised. The entire area stretching from your jaw to collarbone felt like it had been beaten black. Memories of hands wrapped about your throat, joined by a gruesome bloodied sneer, flashed through your mind. Your hands tentatively moved to your neck, fingers poking the tender flesh there.

"Mm, speaking may hurt for a few more days. Your throat was badly crushed." Ellia leaned over you with a soft, almost sad smile on her lovely face. Her eyes shone wet beneath their lids, crinkled in an exhausted relief. "Welcome back, Y/N." A ring of wetness lined her eyes, and she moved a hand up to wipe away a tear as it rolled down her cheek. Stifling a sniffle, she reached her arms forward, gently threading them underneath your shoulders to pull herself down into a hug. Her soft sniffling echoed in your ear and fat tears splashed hotly onto the shoulder she buried her face into as she cried.

You felt unbearably guilty. Practically burning with shame knowing that you had distressed her so. As much as you yourself hated crying, undeservedly making someone else cry was infinitely worse. Especially someone like Ellia. Kind, sweet, caring Ellia. You raised a hand and rested it gently against the back of her head, fingers lightly brushing through her hair as she quietly cried into your shoulder. She stiffened and choked on a laugh before pulling away. Her eyes were red and puffy from the tears, but the smile remained on her face as bright as ever. "Please, I should be the one comforting you." A heavy sigh fell from her lips as her shoulders relaxed. "I won't ask how you're feeling, I know it's bad. I have you on the highest dose of painkillers within safety, but given the severity of your wounds it will only do so much. So just relax, heaven knows you've earned it."

Your lips moved to curl into a tired smile, but winced as a flash of pain seared outwards. 'Ugh, the split lip."

"You're lucky that one didn't need stitches. It'll leave a faint scar that should fade with time, nothing like the mess across your hands though. You'll be sporting those stripes until the day you die." She paused and crossed her arms, rocking backwards onto her heel. "Which, thankfully, is another day."

'Die...' Her words sent a chill down your spine, and the panic crept its way back into your gut. You had come so close to death, and in the end you had accepted it bitterly as you lay bleeding out in that warehouse. To wake up alive after being so intimate with your mortality left you shaken.

"I...I almost...died..." you voice came out trembling, barely above a whisper.

"Oh, no. You did. Die, that is. The Captain brought you back and it was...you were in such a bad state. I was working on you and you just...you just...shut off...it was only for about a minute, but...I thought..." Her hand came up to cover her mouth, the sound of sniffling filling the small medbay
once more. "I thought you were going to be my first loss..."

And then you were crying too. The kind of emotional overflow so intense it left you completely silent. No weeping. No sobbing. No whimpering. Pure, raw, silent emotion. You just lay there, jaw wobbling as fat, hot tears streamed down your face. Your facial wounds stung as the salty droplets met their edges, but right now you couldn't care less. You brought up your hand to lie across your eyes, too overwhelmed as your mind finally processed just how close to death you had come. A million thoughts flew through you mind at once, highlights of each and every regret you would've died holding. Each and every word that still needed to be said. Of the potential never realized, and the effort wasted.

A heart left unmended.

To say you had come out of this experience with a new perspective was a sorry understatement.

The sound of Ellia's footsteps let you know she had walked away, and soon the splashing of running water filled the room as she clicked on the sink. 'Ellia...oh god' the image of her face, flushed with stress and soaked with tears as she screamed at you to respond, begged you to not give up, not now, not after coming so far. You were almost the first patient she ever would've lost. Imagining the crushing defeat, the absolute despair she would've suffered had you failed to pull through...

And then you thought of everyone else. How they sought you out those twenty-four hours, growing more and more desperate as the hours passed. How bitter they must've felt, searching for this stupid, hostile woman they didn't want around. How very like you it was to run off recklessly into the night and get kidnapped. How disappointed Daz must've felt when he saw all his work on you was for nothing, because you had fallen pitifully in the end. How Crocodile would realize what a waste you were and he never should've saved you the first time. And worse, how it was all your fault.

You couldn't bear it.

A choked, whining sob pushed itself from your throat as you began to cry in earnest. "I...I'm so sorry-! I put you through so much-I'm just-I'm so-so usele-" Your trembling words halted as you felt her slender fingers on your lips. In your distress you hadn't even heard her come back.

"Shhhh, no don't even start on that. No one is blaming you for any of this, Y/N. No one." Her words were gentle and soothing, a cool balm for the burning shame raging in your core. "I know you doubt yourself, doubt you're appreciated and cared for, that you're enough. Those thoughts couldn't be further from the truth." She lifted her fingers from your lips and reached over to grab a tissue from the box she had brought over from the sink. Mindful of the irritated cuts, she got to work dabbing the tears away from your cheeks. "So please, Y/N, don't apologize. You are not a burden. You are more than enough. None of this was your fault."

Her hand moved away to discard the soiled tissue before returning, now gently holding your cheek. "There was not a single man on this ship that didn't spend all day and night looking for you, and not just because of the captain's orders. Not a single person wanted to see you like that, when you were finally found and brought back. Alright? Everyone has missed you terribly and has anxiously been waiting for you to get better and butt heads as usual." She smiled brightly at you, and it was so pure and sweet you almost felt better. Almost. That insidious feeling of self-doubt and loathing lingered, though far more diminished in light of Ellia's kind words. Getting captured had been your fault, all because you had acted rashly. Emotionally....Stupidly. And all of the worry and stress and suffering that had followed...that was all on you too. Nothing she could say could change you feelings on that.

Before you could respond, she reached an arm behind your shoulders and lifted you up a bit before pulling the glass of water to your lips. "You've been out for three days, and I doubt your captors
gave you any water. Drink. It'll soothe your throat a bit." You blinked in confusion, before taking a
tentative sip. It was the most delicious, refreshing water you'd ever tasted. You drank it greedily, cool
water absorbing almost instantly into the dry flesh of your mouth and throat. "Easy, tiger. The last
thing you want right now is to cough." Still, you finished the glass within seconds, and it barely put a
dent in your thirst. "Hold on, I'll get you some more."

She walked away, towards the small sink by her desk. The sound of running water filled the small
cabin again as she refilled the glass. In the meantime you mused over her words, something about
them had given you pause. "Captain's orders..." The words came to your lips unbidden, a whisper
more to yourself than anyone else.

Captain. Crocodile. Your mind was suddenly flooded with images...audio...sensations. Way too
many at once. His distraught face when you had come to in his arms. The sound of his voice begging
you to wake up, husky and fraught with despair. A ghost of a pressure on your lips. You hadn't
remembered any of this until now, your mind trying to shield you from the trauma of the moment. It
made you feel...You don't really know how it made you feel...Conflicted. 'Auuuurrrrgihhh' You
hated how little control you had over your emotions right now, and it was giving you some nasty
whiplash. One minute you were crucifying yourself for being such a colossal failure the next you
were pining over the asshole that had broken your heart. You wanted him to come in and make it all
okay, sweep you into his arms and start over. At the same time you couldn't bear to let him touch
you, still bitter over his rejection. It left you feeling confused and frustrated, as if you weren't already
stressed enough as is.

"Oh! Honey, you look like you're burning up." Reality came back into focus as Ellia pressed a cool
hand against your forehand. You hadn't even heard her approach, too wrapped up in the maelstrom
of confused feelings swirling about your head. Only now did you notice how hotly your cheeks had
flushed. "Mmmm, you are a bit heated. Let's cool you down."

She pulled back the downy blanket covering you, releasing the built-up heat trapped against your
body underneath. It was immediately relieving, so much so a soft sigh fell from your lips. In your
emotional turbulence upon waking you had totally forgotten about the oppressive heat that had
dragged you from the darkness to begin with.

Now that you were free, your eyes traveled downwards to assess the damage. You were completely
naked, save for the bandages wrapped about your wounds. Which was a lot, truly a frightful amount
of bindings and wrappings and patches. Given the severity of your wounds, it wasn't too
surprising. The ones about your torso were the thickest, and they stretched all the way from below
your breasts to your hips to secure your battered ribs. There was extra padding on your right side,
layers of gauze placed over the stab wound to prove some extra protection. What seemed to be
hundreds of little adhesive bandages lined your limbs almost haphazardly. So many little cuts, not so
severe as to require stitches but just as worrisome given their sheer number. The majority of them
must've come from when you crashed through that window. Hundreds of little, itchy cuts picked up
from rolling about in the broken glass shards as you struggled to fight back. Aside from the wounds
on your head and face, which you couldn't see, the last set of bandages were wrapped about your
thigh. The skin around the area, peeking out from under the wrappings, was almost black in how
bruised it was. You sheer blunt force of the bullet had been like taking a sledgehammer to your leg,
and you could only hope the damage was more superficial than not.

Ellia seemed to notice your lingering stare. "The bullet didn't make it to the bone, nor did it come in
contact with the artery." She leaned over the bed and pulled a shade partly down over the porthole,
enough to keep the glare from your eyes but still fill the cabin with natural sunlight. "Your leg is
expected to make a full recovery. Your left hand though..."
Your frown turned to a grimace as you tried to flex the fingers there. Compared to your right, your left hand felt impossibly stiff. Practically numb. You could barely, just barely, bend the tips inwards. Maybe about a centimeter, before your tendons locked up completely. 'Nerve damage…'

"Now, I have been applying some localized anesthetic so some of the numbness can be attributed to that, but…with proper care and physical therapy we can expect a recovery of about seventy-five percent of your pre-injury strength."

That was...actually some good news. "Seventy-five...that's...better than I was expecting." Which was true. Given how pathetically little power you had in your fingers right now it was hard to believe you'd ever be able to move them again, period.

"That's with therapy and training, I said. It'll be some time before you build back up to that." She shook her head, brown locks swirling about her thin face as she planted her hands on her hips. "No need to worry about that right now, though. Please, just relax. I won't make you go back to sleep—even if you really should—but I won't have you stressing your wounds either."

The sense of exhaustion slowly creeping in suddenly reared its ugly head. A wave of intense drowsiness washed over you, and you eyelids suddenly felt excessively heavy. Now that the light wasn't bothering your eyes and the suffocating blanket removed, the cool allure of sleep seemed impossible to resist.

Just as you were about to drift off, Ellia's voice cut through the sleepy haze. "The Captain is going to be so relieved you've come to…"

Your eyes flew back open as a bolt of panic jolted you awake. "NO!" Ellia looked down at you, cheeks flushed with the sheer confusion instilled by your outburst. A hand had come up to fold over her chest.

You groaned and crossed an arm over your eyes. "I...I mean...I can't...I can't see him. Not right now." Your heart was racing at the thought of seeing him again. Excitement...anxiety...fear. No, you couldn't handle seeing him right now, not while you were still so vulnerable. Never before had you both wanted and not-wanted something with such intensity.

God, you wanted to throw yourself in his arms, let him sweep you off your feet all over again. At the same time...

"You don't want to want me. You want me to be just another pawn to toss aside."

'I'm sorry I couldn't be what you wanted me to be.'

He had made a choice, to let you go and cut things off before he got entrenched. You couldn't just let him off the hook, no matter how much he regretted it. No matter how badly your near-death devastated him. He had hurt you and you couldn't just forgive him so easily. You still had some amount pride, even if it meant hurting yourself too.

"I...Y/N, I don't know what happened between the two of you. I won't try and change your mind, but...honey, he cried over you. He cares about you. A lot. Most likely more than he's ever cared about anything, or anyone else."

"That's exactly the problem." You whined. "Ellia, he...we said some awful things to each other. Just because this happened…it doesn't take those things away."

Silence filled the room as Ellia pondered over your words. You hated this position you were putting her in, keeping her patient and friend from her clearly distraught boss. But, you really couldn't handle seeing him yet. Not when you were still so weak, not able to trust yourself to make the right
decisions. You needed to be able to let your brain do the talking, not your heart. Right now...you would just crumple, let him sweep everything under the rug and start over like nothing happened. Like he hadn't brought you up so high before pulling the floor out beneath you. Like he hadn't left your heart bruised and hurting.

The sound of footsteps, followed by the cabin door opening brought you back into focus. Ellia paused before looking back at you. "I said I won't change your mind... I'll keep him away for now, but...you can't avoid this, him, forever. Personally I'd think you'd feel much better if you talked sooner rather than later." She sighed and shook her head again. "For now, please sleep on it. You need to rest." And with that she slipped out of the room, lightly closing the door behind her.

You groaned and pressed the forearm into your eyes. She was right, and you couldn't deny it. There was no way you could avoid him forever, the two of you would talk sooner or later. Preferably later, much much much later when your heart wasn't still crying out for affection loud enough to drown out all reason. He needed to know he couldn't hurt you and get away with it, that everything would be okay between you just because you almost died.

'Dying would've been easier.'

"She...doesn't want to see me..."

Dr. Ellia stood before him in his office, eyes cast downwards, clearly uncomfortable with the news she brought. Her hands wrung themselves before her anxiously.

"She seemed hurt, Sir. Conflicted."

Crocodile huffed, looking towards the side at no one in particular. He had been anxiously waiting for you to recover, to finally wake up so he could say all the things he should've said in the first place. To apologize. But now all you wanted from him was space. He shouldn't have been surprised, he had left you badly hurting and bitter the night you were taken. That didn't make his own hurt sting any less.

All because for once in your life you care about something it will ruin you.

The angry words you had spat at him before running out echoed in his mind. How so very right you had been.

"Sir?" He snapped back into focus, having completely forgotten about the Doctor's presence.

"Apologies. You are dismissed."

She curtly nodded and retreated from the office.

Once the door closed behind her he let loose a massive sigh, letting his head fall into his hand. He was so impossibly tired, having barely slept a single night since you'd been taken. Two nights without sleep between when you had run out and when they had finally found you, followed by three restless, anxious nights waiting for you to recover. He should've been relieved to hear you had finally awoken, and he was. But hearing you didn't want to see him left him feeling even more ragged than before.

When he had found you, lying there so broken and soaked with blood, it had destroyed every safeguard he had installed to keep his feelings for you at bay. Never had he felt such a level of fear and despair as when he looked upon you saw you as 'dead'. But you hadn't been dead, they had managed to save you against all odds, and now he was left on his own to wrangle these wild
feelings. He had since stopped trying to suppress them, letting them coil about him every which way as he tried to understand them better. The ache and worry he felt for you left him feeling sick, and your request for space only made it so much worse. He had opened up and let it all run loose, but...was it all for nothing? What if you rejected him, like he had rejected you? There would only be himself to blame...for assuming you'd accept him back and for him hurting you in the first place.

But he couldn't force this, force you. He'd mess it up all over again just like before, leave you both hurting worse and even more bitter. No, he would give you space. Let you decide when you were ready to talk...

And hope beyond hope you still wanted him as much as he wanted you.

Chapter End Notes

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Feelings are Hard

Chapter Summary

It's over and behind you, the incident. The one everyone keeps talking about, keeps asking about. The one you just want to move on from and forget about forever.

Chapter Notes

So writing this was weird, I actually wrote an entirely different chapter first that has now been moved to be the NEXT chapter. So technically the next chapter is halfway done!

Oh yeah, and enjoy the chapter!

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next few days were Hell on earth.

Building your muscle strength back up left you shaking from both pain and exhaustion. Progress was gradually made, feeling a little more steady each day, but at a pace slower and far more painful than you pushed for. Ellia insisted patience, that recovery should be a slow and methodical process. But by the second day of being stuck in bed you were already stir-crazy and claustrophobic. You longed to be up and about, to return to any semblance of normalcy. Being able to get up and move about was the first step to putting this whole mess behind you, and once your wounds had fully healed it'd be like it hadn't ever happened at all. The scars would eventually fade, blend in with new ones from future fights.

Yet everyone insisted on talking about it. Asking about it.

The incident.

"What happened in there? How did they find you? Why were you out alone so late? How did they capture you? Who were the other two people in that room? Did you kill them too? Are you okay? Why aren't you talking to us? Is there anything we can do to help? Why are you avoiding the Boss?"

Every damn time someone would drop by to visit, the barrage of questions would come. And every damn time you'd grit your teeth and stare straight ahead, biting into your bottom lip so hard it'd start bleeding again. So many annoying questions, all making the scenes in your mind fresh again, the anxiety and pain and fear raw again. You wanted to scream at them, tell them to shut the hell up because they were just making it worse and keeping you from moving on. There was no point in talking about it. It was over and done with, and nothing could make it unhappen or make it turn out any differently than it had. Talking about it just made it harder to forget. Kept the images of blood and ice vivid whenever you closed your eyes.

Worse was the humiliation. It felt like you were being treated with kid gloves, like you were too
delicate, too broken, to be treated like normal. Not just Ellia, but everyone that came to visit you spoke in soft tones, hasty to apologize if anything that could offend slipped out. None of the usual banter. No playful teasing. Just gentle voices and stupid, probing questions you refused to acknowledge. It drove you crazy, a blistering frustration that had you roaring and throwing a glass at the last crewmate that had stopped in. You had been hopeful when he stepped in, some of your nastiest spats having been with him and he had always been ready to fire the venom back. In the medbay? He was just as spineless and needlessly patronizing as the rest.

"They're not being patronizing or condescending, Y/N. I told you, everyone has been worried about you." Ellia had said, quiet voice tinged with disappointment as she swept the shattered glass into a dustpan.

"Why!? They never cared about me before! They just see a broken, battered woman and all of a sudden their chivalry kicks in." You spat at her, bad mood only exacerbated by the nigh constant pain assailing you body.

She had merely sighed, straightening up to shoot you a stern gaze. "That's not true and you know it, Y/N. They care, and I do too. The insinuation that otherwise..." But she cut herself off, casting her eyes to the side before quickly leaving the room.

Her exit left you mouth agape. Shamed, frustrated tears building at the corners of your eyes. You grabbed one of the pillows, letting loose a long, raw scream into plush material as you shoved it into your face. When your throat finally gave out, you sat alone in the silence disrupted only by your haggard breathing. Anxiety and frustration coiled about your gut, burning you from the inside out. What torture, to want nothing more than to run as fast and far away as possible when you couldn't even walk on your own.

A soft whine keened from your ragged throat. "I just want everything to go back to normal..."

But the only audience for your plea was silence.

That had been a few hours ago. No one had come to see you since, the ambient sounds of the crew moving about the ship only making you feel more lonely. It was too early to sleep, still a few more hours of daylight left before the sun set. Not like you wanted to sleep anyway, you couldn't protect yourself when you were asleep. Couldn't ward off the memories and how they twisted your dreams into horrible nightmares of torture and pain. Being alone didn't help much to keep them at bay either, making the medbay feel more like a prison than a place of healing. The traces of conversation you could pick up around you only helped so much.

You started as someone knocked on the door, a firm double thump telling you they were coming in rather than asking for permission. The door opened quickly, not exactly giving you much time to answer but it didn't seem like you had a choice to begin win. Daz strode into the room, forcefully shutting the door behind him. Not quite a slam, but enough to let you know he wasn't exactly in a friendly mood. The fact the first time you'd seen each other since waking up was for an imminent scolding was more relieving that anything.

It was normal.

He crossed the room, choosing to settle against the wall at the foot of the bed. His arms crossed over his chest as he channeled a stern glare where you sat up in bed, nostrils flaring yet otherwise silent. You spent a few moments like this, just staring at each other, waiting for the other to make the first move. Either that or Daz was thinking of what exactly to say. No, you had a feeling he knew exactly
what he wanted to tell you off on. Right now he was looking for *how* to say it.

But as his mulled over his words, his gaze wavered. Steely eyes scanned over you, lingering over the sets of bandages hiding your wounds. When they returned to look back into your own they had softened a bit, some of the edge having whittled away by your sorry state.

All it did was rekindle the ire burning through your veins. The last person you expected to baby you was Daz of all people.

A heavy sigh broke the silence as he closed his eyes, shaking his head. "Look. I know you're hurting. I know you're struggling. But your outbursts are wearing even Ms. Ellia's patience thin."

You flashed him a nasty glare, but as soon as you opened your mouth to snap back he cut you off. "No. Shut up." He raised a hand, flashing you his palm in a halting motion. "Just because you're hurt and scared it doesn't mean you get to take it out on everyone else. Especially when they're trying to help you."

Your eyes widened, both shocked and infuriated by his response.

"You may not believe it, however many times you're told, but you *are* cared about. We wouldn't have chased you all over the damn city for a straight day and night otherwise." His eyes reopened, steel grey irises shooting daggers your way. "I know after so many years of being alone that's hard for you to process. You can scream at us, throw shit at us, keep us physically away, but as long as you are on this ship you are one of us and we care for our own. Do you understand?"

Silence filled the air between the two of you, his words leaving you more than just a bit flustered. You held his stern gaze for but a few moments before looking down at your lap, watching the fingers of your right hand twine about your left's.

That wasn't good enough for him. "I asked you a question, Y/N. Do you understand?"

The words fell from your lips almost unwittingly, barely above a whisper. "Yes, sir."

He sighed and pushed off the wall. Walking over to Ellia's desk to grab her chair and drag it over to where you sat seated in bed. He plopped down into it, hands firmly planted on his upper legs as he leaned forward. "Now. You need to talk to me. Ellia told me you're refusing painkillers. Do you want to tell me why?"

Your mouth immediately clamped shut, teeth worrying into your bottom lip as you continued looking down at your hands. 'Stupid question time.'

As soon as you saw the syringe in Ellia's hands you blanched, breaking out into a cold sweat as a trembling took hold in your limbs. The world went out of focus save for the small point of the needle's tip, and you eyes tracked it with surgical precision as it moved about. To her credit, Ellia noticed and hid it away immediately, quickly getting to work finding a substitute.

"Shoot, I'm sorry hun. I should've realized." She turned away and tucked the needle back into her long physician's coat. "I ran tests right after you stabilized, blood tests. There were traces of a rather potent tranquilizer. More than just traces, actually. There was still quite a bit in your system. That, and the signs of injection on your neck."

She said over her shoulder, back towards you as she rummaged about in the cabinet. "...Aha! Here, you can take these. They aren't nearly as effective, but they'll be better than nothing." A pill bottle rattled in her hands as she turned to face you. She filled a
glass of water before returning to your bedside, handing you two pills from the bottle. You took them gratefully, chasing them with water after tossing them in your mouth.

"If it helps...I can administer the IV in your sleep..."

The water almost sprayed from your mouth as you choked, quickly shaking your head 'NO.'

She sighed, not in impatience, but rather with a great sadness. "I won't force the issue, Y/N. But...you can talk to me, okay?"

You only looked away in silence.

"Yeah, she told me you're bottling everything up, too." Daz's eyebrows raised, giving you judgemental look that made your cheeks flush. "She's told me a lot of things. Like how you're needlessly picking fights with the crew. That you're trying to force yourself to get better and she's afraid you're just going to hurt yourself even more. Oh!" He leaned back, crossing his arms as his eyes narrowed. "She also told me that you're not eating."

The smell of dinner sent you salivating, stomach immediately filling the small cabin with hungry growls. It was only stew-Ellia had ordered mostly liquids until you had healed a bit more-but damn if it wasn't the best thing you had ever smelled. Hearty and rich, dark brown broth filled to the brim with veggies and meat finely chopped just for you.

That changed as soon as it entered your mouth. Gruesome images of shattered skulls, grey matter and cranial viscera scattered across the floor flashed through your mind. The once appetizing bowl of food turned repulsive and your stomach turned. You swallowed the mouthful quickly, fighting the urge to vomit as the chunky texture slid down your throat.

"Is everything alright?" Ellia asked, noticing the look on your face.

You merely shook your head and pushed the bowl away. "Just...not very hungry right now."

You'd only been able to stomach crackers since.

"Y/N. The fact you of all people are turning away meals? It's obvious you're not nearly okay as you're trying to seem. You need to talk to us."

Your mouth opened, but no response came. What could you even say? That even just thinking about what happened made you scared and ashamed? That talking about it would just make it so much more horrible so your only solution was to bury it all deep down to forget about forever? That you were terrified of seeming any weaker than you already were right now?

"Do you not trust us? Is that it?" His question cut you like a knife.

Your eyes went wide, hands flying up in a defensive gesture. "What!? No! It's just..." But you couldn't answer. The words died on your tongue before they could slip past your lips. 'I'm just scared.'

"You're afraid we think lesser of you for what happened." A statement, rather than a question. He knew the answer already. Your eyes met his, only able to hold his gaze for but a few moments before looking down and away.
"Y/N, I've seen some of the strongest, most dangerous people in the world humbled by things you never would've imagined to be a threat." He leaned back, crossing his arms over his chest. "They got the better of you somehow. Mistakes happened. That's okay. What's **not** okay is you bottling it all up and pretending like you're fine when you're really not."

He was right. Completely and utterly right, and you knew it. "I...You're right." You looked at him, suddenly drained as if he'd pulled the plug keeping all the fight from draining out of you. "I just..." You took a deep, shaky breath as the anxiety gripped your chest tight. "Every time...I think of what happened...it's like going through it all over again." Your hands came up, palms covering your eyes in weariness. It was a struggle just to keep your breathing level. "I just want to forget it all happened, Daz. I want everything to go back to normal."

In the darkness of your eyelids, you heard a relieved sigh from your right. "That's a good first step, kitty. We'll take it slow, no need to spill it all out at once."

A quiet whine tore from your throat. "...Kitty..." The word came out strained, barely holding back a tide of sniffles and crying as your hands flopped down to the bed. Your eyes fogged over almost immediately, a ring of wet collecting on your lashes.

He looked immediately uncomfortable, eyes going wide as his brows knitted together in concern. His hand raised as if to reach to wipe a tear away, but hastily retracted as he reconsidered. The movement made you snort a laugh, followed by an awfully wet sniffle. You held up your hands and flashed him a reassuring smile. "No, no! I'm just...I thought...When I was..." Dying, alone. "...I thought I'd never hear you call me that again..."

He seemed to pick up on your meaning immediately, body language shifting from worried to comforting as the tension left his shoulders. His eyes softened, wincing with just a hint of guilt. "But...I thought you hated this nickname?" He asked, voice soft but questioning.

"It sounds a lot better coming from your mouth than...than..." You shivered, mouth clamping shut again to keep the words from escaping. As if mentioning him would summon his ghost into the room straight from Hell. Even just thinking his name filled you with disgust, a sense of uncleanliness that needed to be purified in flame and ash.

Daz reeled back slightly, eyes widening. "...If it reminds you too much of what happened, I can sto-"

"No!" You hastily cut him off. "Please, just...pretend nothing's changed. I'm tired of being treated like...treated differently."

He looked at you almost pensively, like he was trying to get a feel for what you were **really** saying, before nodding. "Understood. The teasing continues then." He gave you a muted smile before leaning forward to ruffle your messy hair. "My apologies for not coming to visit you sooner. I've been meaning to check in on you. The Boss is kind of insufferable to be around right now." He leaned away again, settling against the chair's back once more. "What with you keeping the Boss away he's been trying to keep himself occupied in other ways. Meaning I've had to babysit and keep him from doing something stupid."

You looked at him a few seconds, mouth open as his offhand comments left you nigh dumbstruck, before breaking into a laugh that soon had you doubled over from the pain in your ribs. "Oooo, please. Don't make me laugh." You groaned, pained tears wetting your stinging eyes.

He shrugged, rather non committedly. "Truth be told, the Boss is kind of insufferable to be around right now." He said, laughing under his breath. "Never did I think I'd ever describe him as *mopey*, yet here we are."
You flushed at his words, suddenly embarrassed and more than a little guilty. "Sorry, it's kind of my fault..." Still, you kind of wondered what exactly a 'mopey' Crocodile entailed.

"Whatever your reasons for avoiding him, he probably deserves it." He huffed, pressing his lips into a tight frown as he looked to the side.

You looked at him quizzically, Daz having something negative to say about his boss? He laughed upon noticing the look in your eyes, lightly shaking his head left to right. "Don't look at me like that. You spend enough time with him, you know what he's like. He can be an ass even at the best of times." Suddenly he leaned forward, resting his hands on his upper legs again. "Look, I have a feeling I know what happened. You don't want to tell me, just nod 'yes' or 'no'."

You bit your lip nervously, though instantly regretting the movement as your split lip stung, still irritated from earlier. Regardless, you nodded. 'Yes'.

"Alright. Let's start with the night you were taken. So. You interrupted us, and I left. You two had a heated argument... that changed into something else."

Your cheeks instantly went hot, hands flying up to palm into your eyes. "Aaaaaa, I hate this already!" This was going to be so much worse than you thought.

There was a puff of amusement to your right. "Okay, that's not a nod, but given your reaction I'll take it as a 'yes'." His voice came to you in your self-imposed darkness of shame, voice tinged with more than a little amusement.

Flopping down onto the bed, you merely groaned an affirmative as you crossed an arm over your eyes.

"Carrying on. Immediately afterwards, he regretted it. Tried to talk himself out of his affections for you even though it was far too late/ Tried to make it seem like it was in your best interests, but only left you hurt and upset."

Nod. "You're very good at this." The words hissed through your clenched teeth.

"You be an assassin as long as I have, you get good at reading people. You'll get there someday, kitty." He paused a few seconds before continuing. "Anyways, after he pushed you away, you left. Needed to get your aggression out, so you went looking for a fight. Not unarmed, but you 'returned' your sword beforehand."

Nod. Your cheeks burned in shame. Hearing him say it like that made you feel foolish and regretful all over again. Looking for a fight right after pissing off one of the most powerful families in the local island range? "Not my brightest moment..." The words came out barely indistinguishable from a groan.

"You weren't thinking clearly. You know just as well as I do the easiest way to win a fight is to unsettle your opponent, and you were more than a little unsettled. So...you ran out and something happened, something you weren't expecting that led to them taking you captive. They wouldn't have been able to take you otherwise."

This one had you sitting up, knitting your eyebrows together as you gave him a soft, questioning look. "You... really think that?"

"I trained you myself. You're hot headed and impatient, but you're damn clever and a talented fighter. D'Lore"-You unconsciously shivered upon hearing his name-"may have been ruthless but he could never have taken you if something hadn't dulled your edge first."
You looked away again. "They...he..." but the words dissipated before they could be spoken aloud. Remembering how they had taken advantage of your desire to help people, so easily luring you into a trap...the shame burned bright hot on your face. Being a professional assassin on a ship of ruthless pirates, you doubted they'd be understanding of your foolish heroism regardless of all the assurances otherwise.

You felt a slight pressure as Daz extended a hand to rest reassuringly on your shoulder. "We don't have to talk about that right now, you've already given more in a few minutes than you have in days."

Your head whirled back to look at him. "No! No...I...you're going to think me really stupid..." You winced, already cringing from his suspected reaction.

He seemed unfazed, expression utterly impassive. "Just tell me what happened."

Your sigh turned into a groan as you butted your hand into your brow. "I went looking for a fight, yeah. Went to the port warehouse district, hoped to find some shitty low-rate punks to scrap with. The streets were empty, no sign of anyone for hours. " You paused, taking a deep, shakey breath. 

"And then I heard screaming. Horrible, horrible screaming. A woman calling for help, getting more scared and frantic the closer I got." You looked over to him, meeting his focused gaze. "It sounded like she was dying, Daz. I should have stopped, made a plan...I just ran in there like an idiot."

His expression stayed the same throughout. "Of course it was trap, the woman was...his lover, girlfriend, whatever... I just stood there in shock, and they came up behind me." Your hand came up alongside your face, fingers gently resting on the bandages around your temple. "They tried to knock me out. Didn't work, but with the concussion I couldn't fight back. They beat me up a little bit. Kicked me around." Your hand moved downward, fingers lightly probing your neck. "Then they drugged me...carried me away..." You finished, jaw beginning to tremble as a fresh wave of tears threatened to burst forth.

Daz was silent as he mulled over your story, back against the chair with his eyes closed. The silence was deafening, and you pulled into yourself bracing for the mocking laughter or condescending, disappointed lecture about to assail your ears. It never came. Instead his fingers pinched the bridge of his nose as he exhaled a long, drawn out breath."You're not stupid. Or naive. Maybe a bit reckless, but you didn't do anything anyone else on this ship wouldn't have done."

"Wha...I don't..." You spoke quietly, feeling both lost and uncomfortably small. Vulnerable.

"Y/N, we may be pirates but we're not heartless or needlessly cruel. Boss has rules minimizing civilian entanglement for good reason. You heard someone crying for help and rushed to save them. If there's anything I'm disappointed in, it's that they took advantage of your good nature, not that you fell for a trap relying on you doing what you thought was the right thing."

You sniffed, bringing a hand up to rub a tear rolling down your cheek. "It just made me feel so...so...so childish. And stupid." You hissed, tone taking on a sudden edge. "I was so angry at them. So angry at myself! Naive, reckless brat trying to play the hero only to be kidnapped like a defenseless child. And I'm still frustrated, so many if only's running through my head. 'If only I wasn't so rash. If only I wasn't so naive. If only I wasn't so weak'" You were near spitting at this point, voice dripping with venom as your self-loathing rant escalated to a boiling a point. But it was a climax that never came. You stopped yourself just short, exhaling the anger with a terse growl. You clenched your right hand, balling it up into the sheets covering your legs while your left barely twitched.

Closing your eyes, you focused on calming down as your hand twinged from the clenching. Near a full minute passed before you spoke up once more, voice even. Determined. "Teach me to fight,
"Is that not what I've been teachin-"

Your head snapped to look at him, eyes glinting with resolve. "No. Teach me to fight. Not just kill. We've been relying on my ability to go unseen for too long. It should be an asset, but right now it's nothing but a crutch." You leaned forward, meeting his questioning gaze resolutely. "Teach me to fight, Daz. Make me into a monster to match even you."

He held your stare for a few moments, piercing stare unwavering, before breaking out into a smirk. "When everything hurts and you're out of breath, rolling on the floor beneath my heel, don't forget you asked for it."

His response had you breaking into a wide grin of your own. "Hah. I'll hold you to it." That is, before you broke into a huge yawn.

Daz lifted a hand, flashing his palm in a gesture of deference. "Alright, alright. You still need rest, as much as you want to be up and about right now. But, before I leave we need to talk about one last thing." The look in his eyes changed, tone no longer jovial but stern.

Your stomach dropped as your cheeks flushed once more, immediately knowing what this was about. "Do we have to? This is between me an-"

"Yes, I have to talk about it because he's not going to make the first move, not while you want him to stay away. He's far too afraid of pushing you away forever to risk it. Look, Y/N. The way the Boss reacted when you were captured, and especially the way he's acting now, tells me everything I need to know about how he's currently handling his feelings for you. Which is...poorly."

You puffed a short laugh, again imagining him moping about his office. Like some sad dejected little puppy. A blush tinged your cheeks as a soft smile played on your lips.

"You still like him." No question. He knew.

Your cheeks flushed even harder as your eyes fell from his. You gave him a slow nod, mouth suddenly too numb to speak.

"You like him, but you're still hurting too much to try again."

Nod. Your chest twinged, heart aching all over again as it remembered the rejection.

"You're afraid he'll change his mind again."

Pause. Was...was that it? Was that why you were feeling so conflicted? You had been hesitant to see him because you were afraid you'd be too weak, accept him back like he had done nothing wrong. But Daz's words had struck a chord in you, a resonance that put words to a feeling you couldn't quite place. The truth of the matter was you wanted him badly. You wanted what he initially teased but then cruelly stole back, and you were terrified of what a second rejection would do to you.

"...Yes." No nod this time, a reedy whisper with a tone that sounded surprisingly hollow.

Daz grumbled, rolling his head back to look at the ceiling. "One too scared to give the other a second chance. The other too desperate to risk messing it up. Look, he'll respect your need for space until the sun burns out, so if you're waiting him to make the first move it's not going to happen. This one is all on you."
He got up and out of the chair, dragging it back over to its original place at Ellia's desk. Walking back over he tousled your hair again. "That's all I have to say on the matter. I don't deal with relationship drama, especially between friends." He moved his hand away, resting it on his hip. "Get some rest, kitty. Think about what I said when you wake up."

You merely groaned, falling back down into the pillows. "Yeah, yeah. Go deal with the big baby."

He puffed a short laugh, lightly rapping a few fingers against your forehead. "Just finished dealing with one, time to deal with the other."

"Oh shut up." You snorted, smiling into the pillow as you turned to face away. The sound of footsteps receding followed by the door opening let you know he had turned to leave. "Oh, and...Daz? Thanks..."

His footsteps stopped. "Of course, Y/N." He dimmed the light, and the door closed just as a wave of exhaustion forced your eyes closed.

Chapter End Notes

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Chapter Summary

A scream sounds in the night, gripped tight with panic. This time there's no saving yourself.

Chapter Notes

FLUFF! TAKE IT! YOU DESERVE IT! TOOTH-ROTting FLUFF.

This is kind of a more personal chapter. I suffer from chronic nightmares and terrible anxiety that I've only gotten under control in recent years. So let's just say I've had many nights similar to this.

As always, please leave feedback on what you liked or what needs improvement. Even if you just want to say "I like this thanks!" I appreciate every comment and kudos <3

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You landed on your back with a grunt, and a loud metal CLANG sounded upon thudding onto the floor. The grate bit deep into your spine, and you writhed around hissing in pain as little bolts of lightning danced up and down your nerves. "Ow ow ow ouch!" You moved to sit up and massage the bruised area, but halted as your eyes caught notice of the environment. You had absolutely no clue where the hell you were right now. Nor how you had even gotten here. You stiffly pulled yourself to your feet, biting back a groan as your spine realigned itself.

'What...where the hell am I?' Nothing looked familiar, just a seemingly endless corridor and a similarly impossibly high ceiling. So high it couldn't be seen. Just a yawning swath of blue-tinged darkness stretching up and away for all eternity. There was no sign of anyone, or anything in either direction. Just blue darkness expanding infinitely in either direction. Most troubling of all was this place-wherever you were-was freezing. You wore only a sleeveless tank and thin leggings, both of which did little to insulate what precious body heat you had. It had your teeth chattering in seconds, and you wrapped your arms tightly about yourself desperately trying to contain your shivering. Each exhale fogged the air, creating warm little clouds of breath that swirled around your head before disappearing into the inky darkness above.

You thought about calling out, a shaky "hello?" on the tip of your tongue before you decided against it. There was no way of telling if anything that actually was here would be friendly or not, and you weren't exactly armed.

Instead you continued to look around, attention suddenly drawn to the corridor walls on either side of you. They were industrial, like you were deep in some factory, and a metallic blue that seemed...off. You frowned, taking an apprehensive step forward to investigate. No, the walls themselves weren't
actually blue at all but coated in some thick substance that made them appear that way. You stretched an arm out to trace your fingers along the material to confirm your suspicions, only to yank them back with a hiss. The blue was a thick layer of ice, so intensely cold your fingertips had already turned a deathly shade of purple in the mere milliseconds of contact. 'What the hell?!' You quickly jumped backwards, more than a little nervous being so close to something so blisteringly cold as to instantly give you frostbite.

*THWUMP*

You started, falling onto your rear as the wall you had just touched shook violently. The force sent a shower of crystallized condensation into the air, and before you could catch yourself you inhaled. A cloud of the particles flew into your lungs, instantly freezing the sensitive flesh within. Chest seizing from the shock, you gasped, only sucking in more. Your hands desperately pawed at your throat trying to warm the air within. The skin above your heart and lungs had already turned the same shade of frostbite purple as your fingers.

*THWUMP*

Something thudded into the wall again, harder than before. A large crack spiderwebbed outward from the center of impact, lines snaking out along the wall in all directions. You hurriedly scrambled back to your feet but doubled over, crying out as your back spasmed in pain. You fell to your knee with a sharp gasp. Reaching around, your hand rubbed over something sharp. Lots of something sharps, embedded all up and down your backside. Your hand came back glittering with ice shards, hundreds of them, tinged pink with blood. Then you felt the pain, a horrible burning itchiness from the thousands of cuts dug into your back. The ice stuck in you like you had fallen through a sheet of glass.

*THWUMP*

Another thud. Again, harder. You looked up in a panic at the cracking wall before you, eyes wide as you panted in fear. The temperature dropped tens of degrees by the second, and it was only now that you noticed with horror the ice creeping up your legs. It grew from the floor, clinging to your body and encasing you in its frigid shackles. You couldn't run, couldn't even twist in place, as it steadily grew ever upward to your thighs. Then your hips. And soon your torso. You batted and punched at it uselessly, desperately trying to break yourself free to no avail. Your knuckles split open, cuts quickly freezing over as the wet blood touched the frozen air.

*THWUMP-CRACK*

The wall shattered in an icy explosion. Huge chunks of ice mixed with knife-sharp slivers rained down around you. You instinctively threw up your hands, desperately trying to protect your head. A sharp cry tore from your throat as shards rent through your hands, wounds on your fingers and palms freezing near instantly. Pained tears attempted to flow only to turn to ice instantly around your eyes, locking them open as you looked on helplessly.

A deep-throated growl rumbled in the air around you. So deep it created a rippling effect, bounding up and down the walls and vibrating the ice forming about your body. You looked upward, slowly with trembling eyes, utterly terrified of what could possibly make such a noise. Of what could survive in this freeze. Of what this freeze had heralded.

An utterly massive wolf stood in the cracked remnants of the wall. Its coat was the shock white of hoarfrost, and a fierce blaze of auburn adorned its spine. It snarled at you, revealing rows of icicles instead of teeth. Shards of razor sharp ice so cold the very air froze around its gaping maw. A long, black tongue lolled out of its jaws, glistening with ice in the dim light of the corridor.
But what had you terrified most of all were its eyes. The brightest shade of blue imaginable, barely distinguishable from the white of purest snow. Orbs of pristine ice polished smooth, revealing behind them an endless expanse of frozen tundra. Expressing nothing but cold malice. Nothing but death. It beheld you, those terrible and magnificent eyes glowing luminescent with inner light. They left trails of cold blue in the air behind as they moved, so otherworldly they warped reality itself.

So beautiful and terrible it was. So innately mighty and horrifying. It felt as though it was exerting a constant pressure of haki upon you, leaving you frozen in mind and spirit like the ice had your body. All synapses had long since dumped all commands, leaving your mind empty of thought. Filled instead with nothing but fear and awe.

You couldn't even scream, lips having since glued shut by a layer of ice. All you could do was stare wide-eyed in horror, legs frozen to the floor, as the beast loomed over you. It craned its massive head down to where you stood, too frozen to even shake with the fear sundering your very soul. And as its eyes met yours, ice into brass, you swore it smiled. A gruesome grin flashing rows of frozen fangs, each the size of a cutlass and twice as sharp. With a mighty howl it tossed its head backwards, creating a sound so piercing and intense the ice all around you shattered. Your eardrums did the same.

Without missing a beat you turn and ran. No hesitation. As soon as the ice had fallen from your limbs instinct had kicked into overdrive, sending you sprinting down the corridor as fast as you could. You hurtled yourself into the darkness, praying and hoping beyond hope you'd find a door or some window to escape through. Everywhere you looked the walls were smooth. Hope dying by the second. Still you ran on, the cold quickly wearing you down with each footfall. The only thing keeping you going was the sound of the massive beast's paws as they thudded behind you, gradually getting closer...and closer...and closer...

You looked over your shoulder just in time to see your left leg disappear into the beast's gaping maw. The flesh froze instantly upon coming into contact with its fangs, and as it clamped down your entire leg shattered. Frozen pieces of flesh fell down its gullet and rained onto the floor beneath you. You fell to the ground with a choked cry as the beast landed on top of you, paws pinning your arms into the frozen metal floor. You wanted to scream, cry out for help, anything, but your lips had frozen shut once more. You couldn't even close your eyes and wait for it to be over, as your eyelids had froze open in place, unable to blink. The beast's shadow loomed on the icy ground before you as you lay helplessly beneath it. Only the smallest of whimpers could escape from your sealed mouth as you watched that shadow bend down, watched its maw open and tongue snake out. With a lunge its teeth tore into your side, freezing the flesh and shattering a hole there just as it did your leg. Pain filled your entire being, but no scream could escape. No tears could fall. You could only silently pray for it to end soon, to grant you the release from this horrible pain that only death could provide.

Suddenly its massive paw batted at your other side, flipping you onto your back. But what you saw was not the wolf. Not anymore. His scarred lips sneered down at you as he wrapped his hands about your throat. Those icy eyes-the very same as the beast's-flared with a blinding light as he squeezed. Hard. You tried to flail, fight him off, but your body remained shattered and frozen underneath him. Your vision grew darker and darker as your lungs constricted, starved of air.

There was no knife to save you.

This time there was no escape.

He tossed his head back, a wolf's howl intermingled with cruel laugh harmonizing together in the frozen air. With a growling sneer, he cocked his head.
Your throat shattered.

You awoke with a shuddering gasp, hands flying up to your throat. You couldn't breathe, throat constricted tight in the panic attack spawned from your night terror. Tears rolled from your eyes as you desperately tried to take a breath. Heart racing. Chest shuddering. Lungs burning. Mouth sucking in air hopelessly, none of it making it down your throat.

With a flail you rolled from bed, landing directly on your bandaged side. The shock from the pain forced a gasp as you sharply inhaled. It barely helped. Each breath feeling more useless than the last as you lay there on the floor, hyperventilating amidst panicked sobs. The air couldn't enter your lungs fast enough. The oxygen was consumed instantly, only serving to fuel the flames of your panic burning you from the inside out. Holy shit, you felt like you were dying. Every shred of your being screaming you were in mortal danger. All rational thought eclipsed by the impending sense of doom wrapping itself about your psyche.

You needed to run, get up and get the hell away from...from...Terrifyingly pale eyes flashed through your mind. Impossibly sharp rows of frozen fangs.

That's right, he had found you. He was here to get his revenge and drag you down to that frozen Hell with him. A demon wolf eager to tear you limb from limb over and over again. Eager to reap his revenge.

The walls were closing in, once safe bedroom turning into that frozen hallway before your frantic eyes. Even the sheets, tangled about your sweat-soaked legs and torso, felt like ropes binding you down. Like his hands pinning you to the floor. 'RUN.'

The room tilted as you forced yourself to your feet, vision swaying from the tides of nausea washing through you. The taste of bile filled your mouth, salivary glands kicking into overdrive as the urge to vomit gripped your stomach like a vise.

'Notimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimenotimen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A cool blast of night air chilled your heated face as you stumbled out into the night. It reminded you too much of that frozen hellscape and another panicked sob forced its way from your chest. Your hands flew up to grasp either side of your head, grabbing fistfuls of hair. Looking around wildly, you desperately tried to find where to go. Where to run. Where to hide. Terrified little prey hopelessly running from the predator loping at your heels.

As fast as your throbbing leg could take you, you hobbled over to the side railing. Nothing but the inky blackness of the ocean as wide and far as the horizon. A frozen, drowned death. No escape. The other side faced the island’s port. Could you survive the short swim from ship to land? Had you even the strength to pull yourself out of the frigid water? You would have to. Staying here was certain death.

You pushed yourself from the railing to turn. Your leg locked up instantly, radiating an agonizing bolt that traveled all the way up your chest, needling into your heart. It sent you crashing down. Not to the floor. But into something. Something alive.

The beast found you. Nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide. It was all over. You were as good as dead. Your haki kicked on. Survival instincts doing anything, absolutely anything, to save you.

All it did was make the panic and fear worse. The once faint light of the moon grew blinding as your pupils blew wide. Your ears shorted out as the blood pounding in your ears became deafening. Like a flashbang was continuously going off in your face, a shrill ringing sundering your thoughts as you screwed your eyes shut from the light. Closing your eyes only heightened your sense of smell, the scent of your own fear acrid, choking the air around you.

In spite of it all you tried to fight back, to push the monster off you and try to get away. Drowning by choice was far better than being eaten alive.

"NO! NO! LET ME GO LET ME GO!" You begged, desperately trying to push yourself away. Your senses were so overloaded as to be useless. Unable to see. Unable to hear. Only able to feel the monster grip you tight and hold you in place as you tried to flail. It pulled you down to the floor, locking you firmly in place despite your pleas.

You sobbed, big choking gasps. "PLEASE Please please just let me go!" it didn't budge despite all your kicking and clawing. You fought for as long as you could, throbbing wounds quickly sapping your strength. Pain exacerbated by your flailing and the sheer, unrivaled terror throttling your system. All you could do was lie there, whimpering and trembling. Waiting for it to eat you. Waiting to die.

You waited.

And waited.

An eternity passed, you waiting for the end. Waiting to be torn limb from limb.

Time passed, with nothing happening. Just pinned in place as slowly, slowly, the fire fueling your panic attack petered out. Your heaving breaths calmed, growing more steady as time went on. Your pulse, too, returned to normal, relieving the constricting ache that had been gripping your chest. The static in your ears faded away, and you distantly heard the sound of waves lapping against the side of the ship. That is, you distantly heard it over the sound of the heartbeat thudding in your ear. The one coming from the chest you were currently being held against.

You didn't need to look up, see his face. You knew who it was.
You should've been scared, forced to finally confront him. Angry, that he'd violated the distance you requested. But a small part of you felt warm, relieved that he cared enough to step in and help even if it meant incurring your wrath. Right now, though, you just felt too completely drained to feel much of anything. Your panic had burned you from the inside out until naught but smoldering ash remained. It had left you bereft of all energy, leaving you oddly detached from the situation. A dissociative pall smothering the anxiety and fear that would've been eating through you otherwise. So you said nothing. Just continued lying there in his arms, taking long, languid breaths as he soothingly stroked your hair.

A breeze picked up, cool night air raking along your sweat-soaked skin. You had rushed out still in your sleepwear, a formlessly large shirt to let your bandages breathe and a pair of soft, sweatshorts that stopped just before the bindings on your upper thigh. What little you wore would've afforded you scant warmth in the first place, but your panic attack had soaked them with sweat, leaving you uncomfortably cold. The night breeze soon had you shivering despite the warmth emanating from the man you were huddled up against.

Without a word he wrapped himself about you a bit more, using his body to stave off the windchill. You had just enough energy to find the gesture sweet. Especially since he too had mostly bare arms, and that he absolutely despised the cold.

Minutes passed, the two of you like this. Silent saved for the ambient sounds of the nighttime port. The relaxing sound of crashing waves. Furled sailcloth rustling as the breeze picked up. Wooden hulls creaking, gently listing in the wind. Looking out over the ocean, watching the moon's reflection ripple over the waves.

You mulled over what to say. What could make him understand? Make him see how you were hurt and scared and didn't know if you could take such a betrayal again. That you wanted him, wanted to trust him, but couldn't until he'd proven himself deserving once more of what little softness you had. You needed to come out of this made whole.

And then you were speaking. Words falling from your lips without you having consciously placed them there. "What do you want?" You voice broke through the heavy silence, quiet, ragged. 

Hollow, conveying just how exhausted and empty you felt. Too numbed to really express much.

He tensed as you spoke, breath halting in his chest. "...I heard you crying...came out to make sure you were okay. You weren't." His deep voice rumbled in your ear from where it pressed up against his chest.

You sighed, a long and drawn out breath that clouded the cool air around you two. It was only then you finally turned your eyes upward. Crocodile was looking straight ahead, tired gaze trained out over the ocean. The thin crescent of the waxing moon reflected in his dark eyes. He looked terrible, like he hadn't slept in days. Eyes sunken, slightly reddened. Ringed deep and purple. He noticed your gaze, eyes moving downward to meet yours.

"That's not what you meant...was it?" He asked, wincing ever so slightly.

You stared at him intensely, waiting for him to answer the real question.

Now it was his turn to sigh, and so he did, tilting his head upwards to look up at the moon. He was quiet, eyes slipping closed as he thought of how to answer.

"To go back to that night. Do everything in my power to keep you from leaving...keep you safe..." He paused, head shifting downwards to look at you again. "Holding you like this...all I see is how you were when we found you. Soaked in blood, bleeding out in my arms. More than anything, I
want to go back. Spare you all the pain you had to endure."

His somber tone pulled at your chest. Yet...his answered left you confused. Not at all what you had been expecting. "That's...you...you don't want..." 'Me? You don't want me?'

"You seem puzzled. Expected me to say how much I want you, how much I want to go back and quiet all the doubts that drove me to push you away? I do. Of course I do. But..." He shifted, leaning back more against the mast he sat up against. His head tilted backwards, and he looked upwards almost wistfully at the night sky as his shoulders drooped. "I made a choice, Y/N. What I thought was the right choice, for both of us. I chose wrong. And I regret it, wish it had been different, but...It doesn't mean I can pretend what I did never happened." He paused, taking a shaky breath. "Nothing will ever make me forget the hurt in your eyes. How angry...betrayed...you were." His head rolled listlessly to the side. "But even if it had gone differently...I still would have sacrificed it all to keep you safe."

His answer had left you stunned silent. So he did want you, that was clear. And it was clear too he knew full well how badly he had hurt you, enough that he seemed to have given up on anything that could happen between you. It was all so...so... A soft smile played upon your lips. "When did you develop a conscious?"

"When someone came along that made me care." He said it so nonchalantly, answer nearly making you choke. Your chest seized as your stomach flipped. Oh no. He was giving you butterflies all over again.

You swallowed thickly, mouth suddenly feeling impossibly dry. "What if I said you could have what you want...what you really want? Then what would you say...?" You licked your lips, finding just enough energy to sustain the fluttering about your stomach.

His hand moved from your hair to cup your face, thumb stroking along your cheek. His eyes met yours, impossibly dark and shining with a newfound intensity that made you need to throw yourself overboard to cool down. "You, Y/N. I want you. I want what we could have had if that night had gone any differently. I want you and everything that comes with you. The danger, the worry, the fear, the frustration. All of it. Having you, only when it's convenient? Safe? That would be doing you an even greater disservice than foolishly pushing you away in the first place. I w-"

You cut him off, wrapping your arms around his neck and pulling him down into a kiss. He stiffened at first, surprised, before seamlessly relaxing into the kiss. Just like last time, your fumbling experience became clear, with him easily taking the lead. He pulled away to let you breathe, lingering close enough you could feel him smile against your lips. The moment had replenished some energy in your weary state, leaving your heart hammering in your chest as you leaned your forehead against his.

"Are you really okay with this...?" He asked, voice slightly breathless. "We should talk more about...this...when you're not coming down from a night terror."

You shushed him. "Stop trying to be so selfless and just let yourself have this." You pulled back to look into his eyes. "I may be a bit...Alright, I might be straight fucked right now. But I do know that I want this. I've been wanting this. You already talked yourself out of this once. Like hell I'm going to let you talk me out of this."

The breeze kicked up once more, triggering another shiver that had you pressing your face into his neck. "Let's get you inside. You're going to freeze out here like this." You didn't need to have him explain that what he meant by "this" was your less than modest attire, of which you were now embarrassingly aware of. Your face flushed with heat, and you meekly nodded an affirmation.
And then you were rising, him lifting you with ease. He gripped you with his right hand about the shoulder, arm threading underneath you, with your legs tossed over his left forearm. It was only then you really noticed he didn't have his hook on. He must have been winding down for the night before rushing out to calm you down, and you briefly wondered what time it even was. A yawn escaped as he carried you inside, only to catch in your throat as he walked right passed the stairs into his office instead.

He must have felt you tense. "I have no ill intentions. Figured you would sleep better, knowing someone was keeping watch." He walked around his desk, pushing past the door you had never once gone through. His room was modest, though far more spacious than yours despite intending for it to be for multiple people. To no surprise, it was impeccably clean, everything nice and tidy. Besides a few bookshelves-packed with logs and records, even a few pleasure reads-a dresser, and his admittedly large bed, there wasn't much else occupying the space.

Save for the workbench on the side of the room, of which your now very shiny and polished saber lay upon. No, not yours. Not anymore. You had returned it in a fit of heartbroken rage. He noticed your gaze lingering upon the blade. "It's been waiting for you. When you're ready."

"Y-you mean I can have it back?"

He turned, setting you down on the edge of the bed. "Hm? I'm sure you only left it with me for safe keeping, right?" He asked, raising an eyebrow. Daring you to answer any differently.

You wasted no time in verifying in question. "Right, right. Yeah, I just...uh...yeah..." You looked away, feeling more than a little ungrateful. "Thanks for taking care of it."

"Of course." He gently pushed your hair from your face. "Did you ever name it?"

You blushed, suddenly feeling a bit self-conscious about your choice. "It's...Garuda."

"The mythological protector of the skies. A legendary bird said to devour the corrupt, and protect the weak." He mused, his hand moving to cup your cheek. Leaning down he placed a kiss on your forehead. "It's fitting."

"You don't think it's...silly, or anything?"

He cocked his head, giving you a confused look. "Not at all. It suits you perfectly."

A soft smile spread across your lips, and you looked down and away. Suddenly another yawn shoved its way out of your throat. You instinctively moved to stretch, only to immediately yelp and cringe as your side twinged.

He winced, hand coming up to steady you. As his fingers brushed against your other side you shivered, face blushing bright hot. Now keenly aware of the fact you weren't wearing a bra under your incredibly loose, thin shirt. And of how small your shorts were. "I-I-I'm fine. Just...sometimes forget about the..." Your voice trailed off upon noticing the concern etched on his face. Bringing attention to your wounds right now wasn't the most romantic thing ever.

"You need rest. Please, get some sleep." He gestured at the bed before turning and moving over to his desk, stifling a yawn of his own as he did so.

"Hey, wait." Stretching out a hand, grabbing his arm before he could move further away. "What about you?" You asked, attention focused on the dark rings around his eyes.

He gave you small smile. "Don't worry about me. Just get some rest, I'll watch over you."
You frowned. "Don't take this the wrong way, but you seriously look like shit. You need sleep just as much as I do right now."

He looked at you, brow raising ever so slightly as an amused glint caught in his eyes. "And? What are you proposing?"

You stammered, cheeks flaming and flustered by his change of attitude. Smug bastard knew exactly what you were going to say. "Just-! Get in the damn bed!"

His eyes narrowed, lips pressing together trying to stifle a smug grin. "If you insist."

You scooted backwards, moving to the other side to allow him some room. And to dive under the covers, burying your burning face in a pillow. You pressed it over your face, curling up into a little ball burning hot with embarrassment. An amused puff of air sounded behind you. The bed dipped slightly as he climbed in. He kept his distance, maintaining an awkward space between you two.

'Really?! Do I really have to do everything?!' Your face somehow burned even hotter. Before you could think yourself out of it you rolled over, quickly latching onto his arm and settling into his side. He stiffened, but quickly relaxed as you settled your head on the crook of his arm. You were facing away from him, but you swore you could feel his sleepy grin from where you lay. He shifted slightly, and you heard the telltale rustling sound of his sand before the light turned off.

Leaving the two of you in the dark.

In bed together.

*Cuddling.*

"Haaaaaa-" You groaned, nuzzling your face into his arm. "Why are feelings so hard?"

A sleepy laugh sounded behind you. "Mmmm. You make it worth it, though."

Your mouth dropped open, his sweet words sending you reeling. "Oh my god, you can't just say stuff like that."

He hummed, the arm you were wrapped around squeezing you lightly. "Good night, Y/N." He drawled, voice thick with sleep.

"G-Good night!" You stammered, tucking into his side. 'How the Hell can I sleep when my heart's hammering like this?!' But the combination of dark and warm soon had you relaxed, eyelids heavy, burning with exhaustion. They slipped closed with a quiet sigh, sending you drifting into a much needed, deep slumber.

And sleep you did.

The wolf did not return that night.

Chapter End Notes

The amount of times I giggled like mad writing this... AAAAAAAA it's too sweet. So out of character. I don't care.
If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Fever Pitch (FLUFF)

Chapter Summary

Your recovery seemed all but smoothed out now that your heart wasn't aching so bad. Unfortunately that night terror affected you way worse than either of you realized.

Chapter Notes

Rather indulgent chapter, I have such a thing for this trope. Something about caring for a sick loved one is just so sweet.

Also the next chapter is smutty and already started. So excited.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

Crocodile awoke, more than a little uncomfortable. His arm having gone completely numb, no thanks to you, who spent the entire night clinging to it. Not like he was complaining, of course. Going from outright avoidance to sharing a bed together was more than he could of ever hoped for. He'd fallen asleep almost immediately, knowing you were in the safest place you could possibly be: literally right next to him.

Still, something felt...wrong. You were warm. Very, very warm. Warm enough to make even him feel hot, who'd spent years on a desert isle quite comfortably. The side you were curled up against was sticky with sweat. He raised his other arm, bringing his hand to your forehead.

Yeah, you were burning up.

He groaned and disentangled himself from your clutches, pulling up into a sitting position. You barely even stirred, save for a rather heart wrenching mewl that had him wincing. Now that he could look at your face he could see how flushed it was, and not in the good kind of way. Not like when you were bashful or flustered, blushing in a way that was frustratingly cute. Right now, your face was dusted red with fever, eyes screwed shut not in restful sleep but heated pain. Your breathing was labored, mouth slightly open as air whistled past your dry lips.

With a tsk, he pushed the hair from your sweat-soaked brow. The night terror must've taken more out of you than either of you had realized. Either that, or... dread settled into his stomach at the thought. He pushed the covers down, moving to grab onto the hem of your shirt all the while hoping his fears weren't about to be validated. "Shit." Sure enough, the bandages along your side were marked with several red splotches. Worry twisted its way into his gut and he grit his teeth. You had been doing so much better recently, too.

He dragged himself from the bed, immediately frowning from the cool temperature of the room. Only dim light shone through the curtains on the back wall, and given how hard it was to rub the
sleep from his eyes it had to be rather early. The clock on the wall confirmed his suspicions. Seven in
the morning, meaning he had only been able to get about four hours of sleep. Though, that was way
more than he had been getting over the past several nights. Enough to give him a minor burst of
energy, even. Not exactly rested, but not entirely dead either.

Stifling a yawn he pushed into the personal bathroom adjoining his quarters, quickly grabbing a cloth
to dampen with cool water. Something to bring you temporary relief while he fetched the doctor.

The sight of his reflection in the mirror above the sink made him freeze.

Never one to mince words, you had the right of it when you said he looked terrible. The night's sleep
had been too little to alleviate the dark rings about his eyes, put there by the past week's restless
nights. Nights with little to no sleep at all, too anxious about what you would say to him when you'd
finally grant him an audience.

'Grant an audience?' What, were you some kind of royalty? Entreating with your vassal?

...Who was he kidding. He'd already considered calling you 'Princess' a few times.

The thought made him groan, hanging his head. Just what in the hell were you doing to him?
Smoothing all his rough edges. Leaving him physically ill with worry. Sending him hunting after all
the cute expressions and sounds you could make. And just as you had been dogging after his
approval and assurances this past year, now he was chasing after yours...

Making him feel more than just the contempt, anger, and bitterness he'd been lost in the past few
years. Beyond all explanation you had wheedled your way into his heart, taking down his guard.
Wide open in a way that at first left him horrified and agoraphobic. Recently it felt more like some
unseen burden had been lifted from his shoulders. Now that the two of you had made up, the secret
would be out...and the thought was more of a relief than a worry.

He straightened, running the soaked towel through his hand to absorb the excess moisture. There
would be time to think about all this later. Right now, you needed him.

You had barely moved in the short time he had been gone, save to throw a leg out over the covers
and release some heat. The bandages about your thigh were still a pristine white, no red to be seen,
and he breathed a minor sigh of relief. "Hang on. I'll be right back with the doctor", he murmured as
he placed the cool cloth upon your brow, knowing full well you probably could not hear him.

You were hot. Really, uncomfortably hot. And holy hell was your side burning. A prickly burning,
like something was constantly poking it.

You opened your eyes to a ceiling you definitely weren't familiar with. In a bed that definitely wasn't
yours. The events of the night came back in a rush, somehow making your heated face even
hotter. "Haaaaaa" you moaned, a mixture of hot pain and even hotter embarrassment.

"Waking up, hun?" Ellia's voice sounded to your right, and you rolled your head to look at her, no
small amount of confusion on your face. The movement dislodged the cloth upon your brow, and
you started as it slid down over your eyes. "What...?" But the voice that came out was far weaker
than expected...and you were still so very hot.

"Try not to move too much. I need to close these stitches up." You heard her gentle tone through the
darkness of the blindfold.

You frowned, 'Why would she need to do that? What happened?'. Pulling the cloth off your eyes,
you looked down at your side. The bandages had been removed, now deposited on the floor to the side of the bed as Ellia worked. Patches of them were stained red. "Oh jeez" you exhaled, seeing the mess of your side. Several of the stitches had bust open, globbed with congealed blood and pus. A tide of nausea rolled up your throat and you rolled your head to look away. It must have happened when you fell from your bed last night. You had landed directly on the wound, and only your panic had kept you from passing out right then and there. Now, it seems like it had become infected, explaining the fever and chills assailing your body.

"Just relax, don't need you undoing even more of my work."

Her words made you wince, suddenly feeling immeasurably guilty. Even if you couldn't exactly control your reactions last night, ruining her expertly conducted care made you feel grossly ungrateful. "Sorry..." The words fell from your lips weakly.

"Oh, no!" Her delicate laugh sounded to your side, and you turned to look at her once more. Eyes careful to avoid your infected wound. "Patching you up is my job. Besides, not like I'm the one suffering the painful consequences."

As if on cue your side ignited in a blaze of pain. You gasped and tensed, before letting loose a low groan. She beamed you a dazzling smile. "Speaking of which. This is going to hurt. The old stitches need to be excised from the wound, followed by cleaning and antiseptic."

'Ooh. She's not sorry at all.' You realized that she was, in fact, quite pissed. Well, as pissed as someone as sweet as Ellia could be.

"I suggest you brace yourself." Though she gave you little time to do so, hands moving down to remove the stitches from your side as she spoke.

You hurriedly grabbed one of the pillows to your side, hugging it tightly over your face. A wise decision, the procedure being as painful as promised. The plush material did well to muffle your pained cries as she got to work.

The only comfort being the traces of his scent lingering on the fabric.

---

Crocodile headed downstairs, the doctor having suggested he get you a change of clean clothes while she worked.

The door to your room was still open, a single sheet half dragged out into the hall. He braced himself for the mess he imagined waited for him inside. Which, to his relief, was relatively benign. Bedding strewn about the floor, with the worst being the mattress itself having half slid off the frame. It seemed you had fled the room as fast you could, little time to cause any panicked destruction to the rest of your belongings.

He breathed a sigh of relief he didn't know he had been holding. The last thing you needed was to have to worry about something like a messy room, or things you had inadvertently damaged. He scooped the linens into his arms to deposit them on the bed, making a mental note to come back and straighten up later. Though if he had any say in it, he'd much rather you keep staying in his room than return to yours...

A presence behind him drew his attention back to the present.

"So you two have made up, I take it?" Daz's voice sounded low, almost irritated, from where he stood reclined in the door way. His arms were crossed over his chest, eyes narrowed, watching his captain like a hawk.
Croc frowned. "You don't seem too pleased about it."

Daz continued staring him down, steely eyes boring into him. After a few moments of this, tension thick as a mire, Daz growled and pushed into the room, pulling the door closed behind him and clicking a light on. "Look. What I'm going to say is not between us as professionals. You may not consider me a friend, but you are one to me. Unfortunately." He huffed, placing his hands on his hips and fixing Croc with a stern glare.

Croc remained silent, knowing full well what this was about. He turned to face his first mate—his friend—giving him his full attention.

"You've only started taking to her recently, these past few months she's somehow annoyed you into liking her. How? I'll never know." Croc puffed a short laugh at that. He didn't really know either. "But, I've been down in the muck with her from the start. Training her. Teaching her. Learning from her too. Learning about her. She pretends to be all fire and lightning, sharp edges, nasty bite." He paused, shaking his head.

"In reality...she's soft. Her natural disposition is compassionate and kind, and if I had known that when she first joined up I would have pushed her to study under Ms. Ellia instead. Away from more violence. I don't know what circumstances put her on the street, but if she'd had a loving family or whatever it is normal people have, she..." He trailed off. 'She wouldn't have turned into the self-righteous serial killer we found her as?'

"I know. I have known. Y/N is a good person...and I'm not. That's why I pushed her away in the first place." Croc said softly. Arms crossed, looking down at the floor. "Underneath all that fire and fury...she's still a scared little girl that's been on the run for a very long time. I don't know what from, but a good natured person like her doesn't just fall into this type of life."

Daz grumbled. "Then promise you'll be patient with her. She's been through a lot, not even counting the trauma she just went through. When she's being difficult or stubborn, or even being kind in a way we'd normally see as 'weak' or 'vulnerable'... be patient with her. Let her have moments to be soft. She's terrified anyone will pounce on any vulnerability she shows, but she needs time to reconnect with herself every now and again, to not be strong, or she'll break apart. Let her have a safe place to do that."

Croc was silent, meeting Daz's resolved glare with acceptance. There was nothing to argue about or discuss. Daz had been along with him for more than long enough to know he should be concerned for you. Concerned about what the former shichibukai could do to you.

"She's...Y/N is not just some toy you can toss away when it's no longer fun, or easy. Take care of her...please." Daz's voice was low, conveying a hidden warning that shone loud and clear: 'don't you dare break her."

A few moments passed, two fiercely intense stares meeting one another. The tension broke as Crocodile gave a quiet laugh. "How your opinion of her has changed since she first joined us. You've gone from worrying she's going to kill me in my sleep to this? Seems I'm not the only one she's grown on."

Daz's expression flipped from stern to surprised before breaking into a chuckle. "There's just something about her. Infectious little thing." He smiled warmly, eyes filled with knowing.

"Hmm." Croc hummed, musing over an interesting thought. "I do think you're wrong about one thing, though."
Daz blinked, cocking his head to the side. "Yeah?"

"There's no way in hell someone as passionate as Y/N would've ever been a civilian, happy upbringing or no. Nor would she have taken to being a nurse. A fighting spirit like hers?" He crossed his arms over his chest, breaking into a smirk. "In any other life...Y/N would've been a marine." He could see it now, golden eyes shining with that passionate fury, standing between him and his prey. Looking so very heroic in the blue and white, cute little neckerchief tied about you neck...long H/C tucked into your cap...The perfect model of noble, valiant marine. So ferocious. So adorable.

Daz's laughter cut through the image. "Yeah. Yeah, she would've. I guess we should be thankful that didn't happen then." Then he blinked, lightly shaking his head. "What happened last night anyway?"

So, Crocodile told him, all the while rifling in your dresser for some suitable, clean clothes. He settled on a flowy, oversized tank-something that wouldn't further irritate your wounded side-and another pair of loose, thin shorts. Your wardrobe was rather plain, not much besides pieces for the simple uniform he asked you to wear on duty, some basic jeans and t-shirts, and the mismatched clothes you used as sleepwear. He wondered if it was because you just didn't care or rather you didn't really know how to shop around. Would gifts make you uncomfortable? You could pull off most anything with your figure...though you'd probably flay him alive if he tried to get you into a sundress.

Even your underwear was plain, mostly boyshorts and monocolored bandeaus and bralettes. He grabbed a comfortable looking pair of stone grey boyshorts, not inherently sexy, but imagining them wrapped about your wide hips...hugging your thick thighs...stretched tight over-

Nope. He quickly banished the image from his head. That type of fun was a far cry given your current state. And like hell he was going to scare you off with that when you had only just made up last night. You could barely handle a kiss right now without getting flustered, anything more intimate might just make your heart give out. He quickly tucked the garment into the pile he had going on his left arm and closed to drawer. No need to embarrass you by flaunting them about the ship.

He turned, noticing Daz scooping up the linens he had deposited on your bed. "Figured I'd get these washed."

Croc made an affirmative noise and made his way to the door. Before he could leave Daz grabbed his wrist tight, halting him in his tracks. "Hey." Daz growled, low and threatening. "Just to let you know...if you break her heart again, I'm going to kick your ass."

The captain turned to look at his first mate, eyes narrowed. Normally such a threat was not to be taken lightly, especially by a prideful man like him.

But this was not a normal situation. Not by a longshot.

Dark eyes met pale ones steadily, holding his gaze intensely, before nodding. "I'll hold you to it."

And then he left, clothes tucked under his arm, anxious to check on you.

By the time Ellia had finished you had been left a quivering, panting mess. Soaked with a sheen of sweat, face shiny with a layer of salty tears. Upon hearing her footsteps moving away you fell limp, letting the pillow slide off your face. You weakly stared up at the ceiling, eyes having a hard time focusing amidst the grip of your fever and the raw pain in your side. She had insisted multiple times during the procedure that you really should accept the IV painkillers. An anti-inflammatory blend
that would also do wonders to soothe your fever. You had refused, of course, still staunchly repulsed by the idea of anything being injected into your bloodstream. Even if you knew what it was.

A light touch on your shoulder caught your attention. Ellia had returned with a glass of water, and another cool rag that she used to wipe the sweat and tears from your face and neck.

"Almost done. I just need to bandage you up and then you can rest." She gripped you about the shoulders, tilting you up and bringing the glass to your lips.

After downing the refreshing liquid you fell back to the pillows with a frustrated groan. "I'm so tired of..." You gestured broadly at your weakened body. "...this."

"I am too, hun. If I never have to patch you back up again, I'd happily retire." She hummed, grabbing a fresh roll of bandages to unwind. "Did you at least have fun last night?"

You fixed her with a confused frown. What was she talking about? No, that night terror and subsequent panic were a far cry from any semblance of fun.

She laughed upon noticing your confusion. "Look, I'm very happy you two have made up, but you really should have waited until you were healed a bit more to, uh, make it official. You're still quite fragile."

You frowned harder, cocking your head to the side, brows furrowed intensely as you tried to read between the lines. And then it dawned on you...what exactly she was insinuating.

Oh.

Oh NO.

Your eyes blew wide in horror, mouth going agape in silent scream. "THATS-THAT'S NOT WHAT HAPPENED!" You damn near shrieked. The heat radiating from the humiliation on your cheeks burning hot as the sun.

"I'm not judging!" She said hastily, raising her palms. "It's my job as your doctor to be concerned about health related matters. I just want to make sure you stay healthy and safe is all."

"STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP!" You screeched, smothering the pillow down over your face. "WE DID NOT HAVE-NOTHING HAPPENED!" The pain in your side had long since been forgotten, now completely overshadowed by the pain of your embarrassment. If your wounds weren't going to kill you, the sheer humiliation of the situation might.

"Y/N~" Ellia purred, tone almost sing-song. "There's nothing to be ashamed of, sweetie."

You couldn't take this anymore, or you were literally going to just die. Your heart would give out just to spare you the indignity.

With a desperate, frustrated noise you threw the pillow at the wall, sitting up to address the sweet, sweet doctor directly. "Listen listen listen listen listen." You made a shushing motion with your hands. "It's not what you think. I had a night terror last night, okay? Fell out of bed and busted my side open. Crocodile found me freaking out and calmed me down."

She grinned at you, clearly amused. "And? How did you end up in his bed?"

"W-well we talked, and made up." You stammered, anxiously interlocking your fingers. "And, uh, he thought I'd sleep better with someone looking over me. So he brought me inside and then we slept
together-I MEAN SLEPT IN THE SAME BED!" You frantically waved your hands in front of her face, desperately trying to wave away that idea. "Not, not, slept together. Just, slept in the same bed together. Not in the w-way you're thinki-I'm just going to stop talking now." You were bent over, hands firmly pressed into your eyes trying to banish yourself to the darkness. This was going to be the death of you.

Ellia only met you with silence, and the awkward tension in the air was palpable. You saw stars with how hard you were palmimg your eyes, hoping to press hard enough to push yourself out of this mortal plane entirely.

Thankfully she broke the silence first, placing a gentle hand on your shoulder. You spread your fingers, turning slightly to peek at her through the slits. She wore that trademark smile of hers, beautiful eyes crinkling at the edges. "I didn't mean to embarrass you, sweetie. Apologies for misreading the situation."

The deepest sigh of your life fell from your lips, a constant trickle of air pouring from your throat as you deflated under that warm gaze. You grabbed another pillow, hugging it to your chest. It took everything you had not to scream into it. Instead you took a deep breath, inhaling more of his comforting scent.

But now you couldn't stop thinking about that. What it would be like. The sensations...the noises...'God damn you Ellia!'

She chuckled before straightening up, walking to the room's center to retrieve the pillow you had thrown a few moments earlier. "Well, it's a good thing we got the embarrassment over with now. And not when it actually happens."

The pillow hit her right in the face, sending her stumbling backward with a surprised squeak. "STOP TALKING ABOUT THAT!" Your shout echoed about the room, flustered tears building at the corner of your eyes. 'Stop THINKING about it, Y/N!' Your mind screamed back.

She reached down to grab the other pillow, now holding both in her arms. A devious grin contorted her lips, such an alien expression on her delicate features. She moved to hurl one at you, and you instinctively raised your forearms to cover your face. Instead, it landed softly next to you, followed shortly by the other. "I'll have my revenge when you're not sick and hurt." She said, cockily placing her hands on her hips. "In the meantime, I still need to bandage your wound. Won't take long."

Like the experienced doctor she was, she expertly wrapped a bandage about your midsection in a matter of minutes. It stung bitterly as her hands moved about your freshly cleaned and re-stitched wound. Though it pained you far less than the procedure you suffered through earlier. Regardless you were left sweating and trembling once more, reminded of just how feverish you were.

"There. All cleaned up." She murmured, bringing the damp cloth back up to your brow as her hands urged you down into the bed. "Now, you really do need to rest. The infection is a minor one, but it has the potential to get worse if your body doesn't fight it off early."

A sudden knock at the door caught both your attentions. "That must be the Captain. I sent him to get you a fresh change of clothes." She straightened up and headed over to the door.

Crocodile's expression immediately hardened in concern upon seeing your condition, eyes flicking between the bloody bandages on the floor and your pained expression. The look made you cringe, sorry he had to see you laid up by your wounds yet again. You were going to kill him with worry at this rate. He made to move to your side only to be stopped by Ellia, who quickly took the clothing
from his arms and shooed him back out the door. "What are yo-"

"Patience, sir. Some privacy while I get her changed." She hummed, flashing him her dazzling smile.

He scowled, mouth poised to protest before stopping himself. Sending another concerned look your way before begrudgingly leaving the room.

Ellia clucked her tongue and shook her head as soon as the door was closed. "Never thought I'd see him being clingy, of all things. I'll never figure out how you managed to enchant him like this." She returned to your side, dumping the pile of clothing onto the nightstand before gently lifting the hem of your shirt. Each movement felt like a miniature slice of hell, but a fresh pair of clothing did sound really nice. Sitting up with a groan you lifting your arms so she could remove your top. The feeling of it peeling off your sweat dampened skin triggered an uncomfortable shiver.

"Do you want to wear this too, or just the top?" She asked, holding up a dark blue bralette. The sight of it sent a fresh wave of heat to your face, it just now dawning on you that he had been digging through your clothing which very definitely included your underwear given the dark grey pair sitting on the nightstand.

Ellia snapped her fingers in the air before your face, trying to get your attention. "You can be embarrassed when you're dressed. Now, bra or no?"

You hastily nodded, "Yes, yes bra."

She helped you get changed, and while the whole ordeal was more than a little degrading, you had to admit the fresh clothing made you feel a whole lot better. Even so, you still felt like shit. The fever burned hot in your head, giving you a throbbing headache to contend with the raw stinging in your side.

Before leaving she brought you another glass of water and a freshly dampened cloth to place upon your brow. "Now you can rest. Take it easy, please?"

You nodded, suddenly feeling rather drained.

Upon leaving you could hear her muffled voice talking with Croc, head too fuzzy to really make out what they were saying from here.

Your eyes slipped closed for what you thought was a blink, only to open them to a totally different time of day, judging by the light streaming through the windows. Late afternoon?

Everything felt hot, hotter than before, and you were slick with sweat again. You tried to sit up, a groan forcing its way from your scratchy throat as your side twinged. Your eyes pressed shut as a wave of nausea rolled through your stomach, and you heard a familiar rustling sound in the darkness of your eyelids.

A hand gently brushed against your forehead, lingering a few moments before moving to cup your cheek. It was startling cool against the heat of your skin. "I don't recommend moving much." Crocodile's deep voice rumbled in the air above you. Sure enough, you cracked open your eyes to see his concerned expression above you. He stood next to the bed, leaning down over you where you lay.

"Wh-" You tried to speak, words catching on the dry flesh of your throat. Trying again, you lowered your volume to a whisper. "What time is it...?"

He winced, clearly not liking the fragility of your voice. "About four. You've been out most of the
"Shit...I need..." You tried to push yourself into a sitting position again, only to be quickly, but gently, pushed back down into the mattress.

"The only thing you need right now is to rest." He growled, giving you a stern look.

Frustrated tears welled at the corners of your eyes, too feverish and vulnerable to hold them back. "I'm just...tired...of being sick...hurt..." You whimpered, turning your head to look away from him as your vision fogged up.

You heard his sigh to your right, shortly followed by a kiss to the side of your head. "I am too, Y/N." He straightened up, eyes flicking over to something on the desk against the far wall. "You'd heal faster if you'd let us fully treat you. Would you reconsider your feelings on needles?" His voice dropped, a plea just above a whisper. "Please?"

"Who...told you...?" You certainly hadn't told him anything about what had happened. Daz or Ellia must've snitched, though you felt foolish thinking of it that way. Of course they were going to tell him.

"Does it matter? Look, Y/N. I understand your hesitation, given what happened. But, this suffering isn't necessary. Please? For me?"

You shuddered, eyes slipping closed as you mulled over his request. The thought of the needle piercing your skin, filling you with some unknown drug, made you want to scream and break into a dead sprint to get you as far away as possible.

But if it was him...

"Okay..." You opened your eyes, meeting his intensely concerned gaze. "If...if it's you...I trust you..." The words came out across several labored breaths. This fever reminded you so much of that fateful night a year ago, and a smile lightly played on your lips. How things had changed...

He breathed a sigh of relief, expression changing to a sad smile of his own. A rustling filled the air as left arm dissolved into sand, turning into a tendril that whipped backwards to grab something off the desk. You didn't think you'd ever get used to seeing his powers in action. Logias really were something else, and his awed you nearly every time.

But the smile fell from your face as his hand moved from your face to take the syringe from his sand-formed claw. "Ms. Ellia left it with me just in case." He reassured you, noticing your frown. "I would never use it without your expressed permission." He quickly uncapped the needle, moving the tip to the crook of your elbow only to hesitate. His dark eyes met yours, "Y/N. Are you alright with this?"

No, no you really weren't. But you nodded regardless, quickly moving your other arm to shield your eyes as you bit into your bottom lip. The needle pierced your skin and you loosed a high, reedy whimper, trembling invading your limbs. A few moments passed before you heard the sound of the spent syringe clattering onto the nightstand. His hand returning to cupping your cheek, "Shhhhh, it's over. You should feel better soon."

Hell, you felt better already. Painkillers quickly unwinding the knotted pain in your side. He was saying something else. Exactly what, you had no idea. And honestly, right now you didn't really care.

The sheer relief sent you falling into the deepest sleep just short of a coma in your life.
Crocodile watched the arm fall from your eyes, already deeply asleep. Your labored breathing grew more even as the minutes passed, and soon the pained expression fell away from your face entirely. For the first time since he'd carried your broken body home, you looked restful.

It it had been just a few months earlier, he would've ordered the necessary injections without giving a damn if it traumatized you or not. A self-imposed weakness was the worst of all, choosing to suffer like a coward instead of accept treatment all because you were scared. At least, that's what he would have thought had you not affected him like this. The thought of violating you like that, holding you down while you cried and injecting you by force...it made him want to throw up. And knowing Hawken and his men had done exactly that to you filled him with bloodthirsty rage.

But they were dead. You had killed them yourself.

He'd get the full story of what happened out of you eventually, not one to settle on just the scraps Daz and Ellia had managed to coax from you. But for right now he was pleased with this minor victory. The next step would be to get you to eat something.

'Patience...' Daz's warning echoed in his thoughts, and he frowned.

What the two of you wanted...this...would not be easy. You would have to grow stronger, so much stronger. And so would he. But he would do whatever it takes, so long as it meant he could have you.

Croc pushed the hair from your face with a tired sigh. "Rest easy, princess."

Chapter End Notes

To be honest, there's not much more left to this. I expect made 3 or so more chapters in this main story, and then I'll follow it up with some one shots featuring the same "reader" character. Thanks so much for coming along for the ride! EDIT: YOU'RE GETTING 20

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Chapter Summary

You blushed furiously, no longer able to look him in the eye as the admission left your lips. Embarrassed because those words carried with them a certain implication: that you wanted him.

'Wanted' him.

Chapter Notes

**TRIGGER WARNING: LOTS OF MENTIONS OF RAPE AND ABUSE**

Not from Croc of course, Reader's just had a really bad life so far.

Sorry about the false alarm when I accidentally fat-fingered post on this way before it was ready. But it's here now!

This is the first smut I've ever written. That's really all I'm going to say. If it reads weird or doesn't flow well, I might revisit this in the future to tweak a bit more.

One last thing: IN THIS HOUSE WE TALK ABOUT OUR PROBLEMS LIKE ADULTS.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

In the meantime, please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was early in the morning, the cabin still just barely above pitch black.

And yet you were wide awake, having more than enough bed rest over the past few days to leave you feeling not just refreshed, but stir crazy. Crocodile lay beside you, still fast asleep, completely unaware of your nervous energy as he slumbered. You spent a few minutes just watching his restful breathing, the relaxed expression on his face, the way stray strands framed his face when he hadn't yet styled his hair. It made your heart flutter and dance. Something about sleep always made even the most intimidating of people look peaceful, and he was no exception. A tender smile played upon your lips as you watched him. Knowing he could sleep so soundly with you next to him meant that he trusted you dearly.

But soon, you were bored. The need for you to stretch your legs and get some fresh air having long grown desperate, and you were eager to get outside in time to watch the sun rise. Your fever had only broke just yesterday, and both Crocodile and Ellia had insisted you spend the remainder of that day in bed. But now you felt fine. More than fine, really. You felt great. The medicine he had coaxed you into finally taking had completely reinvigorated you, and the only pain that lingered was from
when you explicitly put any stress on your wounds. It had even removed some of the stiffness from your left hand, allowing you to barely-just barely-twitch the tips of your fingers. Now you wanted nothing more than to get the hell out of this bed and get back on your own two feet.

The question was, how to do that without waking him. The dark rings about his eyes were growing fainter with each night, now that he was finally getting a healthy amount of sleep. You hated to ruin that now, knowing how badly he needed it. Not to mention some alone time would be nice, given how much he'd been fretting over you recently.

You could shroud yourself, that would probably work. It'd always gotten you in and out of impossible situations before, and this was really no different. Unless his newfound affection for you rendered him immune to it, then you'd definitely have a problem. Still, it was worth a try. The words of the mantra filled your head- *I am nobody. Always was and always will be*'-as you focused on diminishing your presence. But...something was wrong. You didn't feel the familiar sensation that you normally felt, a gentle tingling that lay like a veil above your skin indicating you were now hidden. It was missing entirely.

Your shroud hadn't worked.

You frowned, looking at your hands like they were the problem. Or was the lingering trauma impacting you in a way you hadn't anticipated?

Whatever, you'd just have to be extra quiet the normal way then. Carefully, you pulled yourself out from the covers, mindful of disturbing your...your...what exactly were you two? Was he your boyfriend? Lover? Partner? Any of those words brought a fresh wave of heat to your cheeks. You certainly liked him, liked him. And it seemed he felt the same for you. How exactly to label what was going on...you really had no idea. But you could muse over that particular puzzle when you were outside in the fresh air.

Slowly rolling to the other side of the bed, you sat up and tentatively put both feet on the floor. Only now did you realize how shaky your legs felt. But you couldn't just stop now. You'd go crazy if you had to spend another second laid up in bed. You quickly looked behind you to make sure he was still asleep. From what you could tell he still was, much to your relief.

You rose, trying to remain steady as your legs threatened to buckle underneath you. Your lip stung as your teeth chewed into it, careful to stifle the pained groans fighting their way out your throat. If just pulling yourself to your feet was this hard, walking was going to be another challenge entirely.

But you never were one to back down from a challenge, no matter the size.

About ten minutes later you finally made it outside...a sweating, trembling mess. As soon as the door closed behind you, the massive groan that had been building in your throat burst forth, and you leaned against the wall for support. Your legs were shaking furiously, but damn did the fresh air feel good on your face. You took a deep breath, filling your lungs with the crisp morning air that only the open sea could provide. The sun had yet to peek above the horizon, and the deck was cast in the dim light of pre-dawn. Only the calm sea stretched out in every direction, gentle waves still dark in the early morning light.

The ship had departed sometime yesterday morning. Crocodile had offhandedly mentioned that there was no more "business" left to take care of, and he'd had more than his fill of the abysmal island. In actuality, "business" meant he had extorted and milked the D'Lore family for all they were worth. "Reparations" for "damages" against his crew, he so tactfully put it. What that really meant was that the D'Lore family was as good as gone. With no heir and no assets left to their name, they were consigned to the worst fate of all: death by mediocrity.
Not like you were about to shed a tear. Any family that birthed such a monster had to be inherently evil.

A gust blew across the deck, and you wrapped your arms about yourself to stifle a shiver. You were still in your rather exposing sleepwear, but at this point you didn't really care. Not like anyone was going to say anything or touch you, though it did leave you with little means of warding off the chill in the air. But you could handle being cold for a few minutes while you watched the sunrise.

"Should you be out of bed, kitty?" Daz suddenly landed on the deck before you, damn near scaring the life out of you. You started, stumbling over your feet and falling backwards with a surprised yelp. He reacted quickly, stepping forward and halting your fall with an arm about your lower back. "Sorry. Should have given you some warning."

You looked up at him, still heaving from how he had surprised you. "Where in the hell did you just come from?"

He gestured up at the crow's nest with a rather impassive look on his face. 'Duh. Where else?'

"So, how you feeling? Surprised to see you up and about. Heard you had a nasty fever." He placed his hands on his hips, lips ever so slightly curled into a smile. Ever the morning person, he was.

Still, his energy despite the early hour was infectious, and you beamed him a warm smile of your own. "Better. Much better."

He cocked an eyebrow, tilting his head to the side. "Really now? Because you're barely standing on your feet as it is."

"I said 'better', not completely fine." You puffed. "If I stay in bed any longer I'm going to lose my damn mind."

His eyes playfully narrowed. "As if you haven't already?"

You lightly smacked him, but he only grinned harder. "You're such an ass."

But he was right about one thing. Right now your legs were shaky, barely able to support your full weight. And, he had chided you about not accepting help from the others...

You cleared your throat, getting his attention as he turned to walk off. "Um, Daz...? Could you maybe help me over to the side? I want to watch the sunrise..."

He stopped in his tracks, turning to face you with a smug grin. "Oh ho? The mighty Y/N asking for help? Are you sure you're feeling okay?" He teased, raising his eyebrows quizzically.

Your eyes drifted downward, now looking away in embarrassment as your cheeks grew hot. He noticed your uneasy expression, cocky grin softening as he wrapped an arm about your shoulders to steady you. "Just giving you a hard time, kitty. Of course I'll help."

Daz settled you at the edge of the deck, and you threaded your legs through the wooden posts of the rail, letting them dangle over the side of the ship. "Try not to fall overboard. Can't exactly help you if you do." He ruffled your hair before turning away, resuming his morning duties.

The sun had just started to peak over the horizon, a sliver of pure light haloed with warm stretches of pinks and oranges. You leaned your head against a post, just taking in the sight. It felt like you hadn't seen the sun in years, though in reality it had only been a week at most. Right now it was the most beautiful thing you had ever seen, and your eyes lazily trailed over the multi-hued streaks of light
It was the kind of sight that told you everything was going to be okay. That reminded you that your aches and pains were temporary. That the rawness of the memories would fade over time.

You were faintly aware of the ambient noises of ship life behind you, now that the crew had started to rouse. The men moved about the deck, busying themselves with various tasks. A few tried to approach, only to be quickly intercepted by Daz and sent off on some other job. You silently thanked him, eyes slipping closed as you basked in the warm light of the dawn.

You had no idea how long you had been sitting there, dozing in the sun's warmth. Minutes? Hours? A sudden tap on your shoulder caught your attention, and the warm smell of coffee danced about your nose. Your eyes fluttered open, greeted to the sight of a mug held before your face. You took it gratefully, turning to see Crocodile standing next to you holding a mug of his own in one of his sand-formed claws. He had a sleepy smile on his face that gave you a fuzzy, tingling feeling in your stomach.

The deck had fallen silent, curious about just what was going on between the two of you. Rumors must have spread already, given you had literally been sharing a bed the past few nights. You flushed furiously, not quite knowing what to say. He had been the one afraid of the public ramifications of the relationship, and you were terrified of making the wrong move here.

But he didn't leave you lost and wondering long. Leaning down, he pressed a soft kiss against your temple, purring a "good morning" in your ear. The butterflies in your stomach kicked up a storm, and a warmth spread throughout your limbs as you bashfully looked down into your coffee.

And then you realized. The reason you hadn't been able to use your shroud...

...was because you didn't believe the words anymore.

You were assimilating back into the crew quickly now that you weren't constantly in pain. The men welcomed you back happily, and you did your best to accept their kind words and assistance with bashful gratitude, rather than with hostile frustration. To their credit, only a few dared ask about your relationship with the captain. Too bad you had no idea how to answer them. Most just shrugged, satisfied with what little answers you could give them. That there was a relationship of some sort. One that currently eschewed a proper label.

But, there was one thing that had been nagging you.

A certain seed Ellia had planted in your head.

One that had your mind wandering to all sorts of places.

Lewd places.

Such an alien feeling, it was. You hadn't had a real desire of this sort for...you couldn't actually remember. It's not like you were a virgin. You'd had sex plenty of times...

No.

It was more like you'd been used plenty of times. You couldn't think of a single time you'd enjoyed it...much less wanted it. More than just the innkeeper. Before him, and even after too, there had been more than a few men who'd seen a scared girl on the run and opened their hands with violating claws rather than kindness. Thinking about it put their phantom hands all over you, like you would never
truly be clean. Just used, damaged goods.

Would Crocodile even want you anymore if he knew? Even thinking about being in bed with him like that made you feel guilty. Like you were lying to him in some way. You wouldn't blame him if he dumped you, knowing you'd been soiled.

Not to mention just thinking about it made you feel conflicted...the images in your head tainted by past experiences. You tried to imagine what a tender, passionate experience would be like, only for it to twist to him holding your head to the ground, not caring at all about your pleasure as he took his. You'd furiously shake the imagine from your head, knowing he wouldn't do that to you. But it was all you had ever known. Trying to imagine otherwise...Would he stop if you asked? If you cried? If it hurt?

No one else had.

That's assuming he even thought of you in that way in the first place. He hadn't touched you in any way that couldn't be described as innocent. At night, you were the one that had to do the cuddling, and even then he was conscious not to brush against the wrong places. Subtly positioning the two of you to prevent any accidental contact. The first time you noticed, you thought it had been an accident, or just coincidental. But as the days and nights passed you realized he was actively avoiding touching you in anyway that could be construed as intimate.

It left you feeling cold in a way you hadn't ever felt before. Up until now, your entire worth to a man had been dictated by what he could take from your body. To have him not approach you in that way left you feeling lost. Confused. Did he not find you attractive? Did he know you were unclean? The anxiety twisted through your gut, insidious vines adorned with razor tipped barbs. They cut you from the inside out, lacing your system with a poison that ate away at what little confidence and happiness the past few days have provided.

He had a certain knack for showing up just as your mind started to devour itself. As if he could sense the rising inner turmoil. You'd flush hotly, so mortified as to not even be able to look at him. At first he thought it was a relapse of your fever, and he'd fret about you like some worried mother hen which only made it worse.

This went on for a little over a week since you'd become mobile again. Flitting about the ship like a ghost, consumed by your self-doubts and fears. You could tell he knew something was wrong, given the worried, pensive looks you'd catch him throwing your way. He'd ask if you were alright, what was troubling you, and every time you'd merely sigh and tell him it was nothing. A song and dance that had him quickly growing frustrated, and soon he stopped asking entirely.

And then one night it reached a breaking point.

You had to know.

You had just come out of the bathroom, having spent nearly an hour staring at all your perceived imperfections in the mirror. Your scars, your bandages, your small chest, your jutting hip bones, your freaky eyes...just a few of the many things that made you feel so very undesirable. So mired down in your negativity that it flipped around, giving you a minor boost of bravery to confront him about it.

He paced about by the work desk at the side of his quarters, intensely focused on a report he had received earlier in the evening from a distant informant. From the annoyed expression on his face, the news probably wasn't good. You had quickly learned over the past year that minor feelings hardly had an effect on his features. If his face was showing mild annoyance, the reality was that he was likely feeling intense anger.
You were about to drop the question, crawl into bed and wait for him to either join you or move to his office. But he sensed you lingering on the other side of the room, a terse, low-voiced growl rolling from his throat. "What is it?" His eyes never even moved from the page.

The undisguised aggression in his tone made you flinch, and you took a hesitant step backwards. ".n-nothing." You murmured, more than a little unsettled.

His eyes suddenly flicked up from the page, brows raising in surprise. He looked at you in mild horror before shaking his head, clearing his thoughts. The paper fell to the floor, falling from his fingers as he pinched the bridge of his nose. "Damn it. Damn it. I didn't mean...I didn't realize it was you, Y/N." He let his hand fall, raising his eyes to look at you with a remorseful expression that clenched you about the heart. "I'm...sorry, Y/N."

"It's...it's okay." You breathed, letting the tension fall from your shoulders. You'd be lying if you said he hadn't frightened you. As much as he fawned over you, he was still the former shichibukai, ex- Impel Down prisoner, and would-be usurper Sir Crocodile. He could kill you on accident as easily as snapping his fingers.

He winced, sensing the unease in your tone. "No. It's not. I frightened you, didn't I." Not a question, he knew.

You merely looked down and away, not exactly wanting to admit what was clearly obvious. Yes, his unexpected hostility had scared you quite a bit. Unintentional or no. If you weren't already feeling so low, and weren't still reeling from your injuries, you would've called him out on it with an attitude of your own.

You weren't in the right place to do that right now.

He stepped forward, raising his arm to caress your cheek. "My apologies, princess. I'm not in the best of moods, though I know that's no excuse." He curled his fingers beneath your chin, tilting your face up to look into his. "There is never an excuse to take my frustrations out on you." The look in his eyes was sincere.

You rubbed your cheek into his palm. "Yeah...you scared me a little." You admitted, eyes downcast. Your eyes fell to the paper he had let fall to the floor. "What has you so stressed?"

The frown returned to his face, and he whipped a sand tendril over to snatch the page up. "One of my agents lost track of a...person of interest. The trail is dead and now it will probably be months before the rat resurfaces." He offered it to you, "You can read it yourself."

"Ah, no. I'm good." You pushed the page down, returning your eyes to his own. "What's the deal with this guy? Why do you want to find him?"

He turned away, walking over to the waste bin in the corner by the desk. "He's a Cipher Pol informant, spying against the Revolutionaries." The page disintegrated in his hand, dust falling neatly into the bin. "I honor all my debts, and I still owe them. Unfortunately." The tone of his voice told you not to ask, but still, you were curious. He didn't speak much of the time before you had met him, and you had only recently started to learn about the events of the world now that you were out on the open sea. Maybe he was referring to the events at Marineford? There had been quite a few prominent Revolutionary figures that had fought alongside him as they broke out of Impel Down.

"There is another thing bothering me, though." His voice caught your attention. He returned to your front, hand moving to your cheek again. You leaned into it, your own hands lightly touching his arm. His tone dropped low and tender. "My beautiful girlfriend has been agonizing over something all
week, and she hasn't found it in her to tell me what."

Your face went red hot, mouth falling open slightly as your eyes went wide. "You-! You can't-!"

"'Can't just say stuff like that?'" He teased, knowing exactly what you were trying to stutter. "Can, and will."

Your hands flew to your cheeks, so incredibly flustered by what he said. A thin whine pushed through your tightly closed lips as you struggled to parse over his words. What the hell were you supposed to focus on first?! He had so casually tossed two bombshells your way: that did actually find you to be 'beautiful' and that-holy shit-you were his 'girlfriend'.

His soft laugh filled the space between you. "I don't think I'll ever get tired of making you blush like this."

You bit at your cheek, crossing your arms tightly about your chest and gripping them roughly. His teasing filled you with more than a little indignation. "Doesn't help you do it so easily." You puffed, looking to the floor.

"Is that such a bad thing?" He purred, carding his hand through your hair. "Now," He tilted your face back up at his again. Such a simple action that you somehow both loved and hated...it was so hard to think clearly when he forced you to meet his gaze. Eyes so dark and intense they left you reeling, stomach filled with nervous butterflies. "Would you please tell me what's been bothering you?"

You answered him with a short frustrated noise as you bit into your lip. Now that he had confirmed that he really did find you attractive, your worries felt rather silly.

He frowned. "No. Y/N, you need to tell me what's going on. If it's something I did or said, I can't fix it unless you tell me."

Your eyes clenched shut with a wince. 'Shit. He must've thought he did something wrong all this time.' Guilt twined through your gut.

"It's stupid. Really." You sighed, praying he'd drop the matter.

He didn't, of course, cocking his head and fixing you with a knowing smirk. "You and 'stupid' don't exactly mix, Y/N. And if it really was stupid you wouldn't have spent the past week fretting over it. Now, out with it."

"You..." The words caught in your throat, and you struggled to swallow before continuing. "...You don't...touch me..."

He just kind of looked at you with a puzzled expression. "I...don't...touch you?"

You groaned, wanting to die right then and there. "I mean like...like when we're in bed at night. It feels like you don't want to be close to me...intimate." You blushed furiously, no longer able to look him in the eye as the admission left your lips. Embarrassed because those words carried with them a certain implication. An entirely different admission of their own: that you wanted him. 'Wanted' him.

A beat dropped, and then understanding flashed across his face like he'd been struck by lightning. "Oh...OH. That's what's been bothering you?!!" He laughed, shaking his head. "I was waiting for you to come to me when you were ready. I had no intention of hurting you or making you feel unwanted."
Your eyes went wide, lips parting slightly. "Wh-what?"

"Really? Did you really think I didn't want you?" He scoffed, giving you an exasperated look. "I wasn't about to take advantage of a wounded woman, Y/N. Especially one still recovering from recent trauma." And then his voice dropped low, eyes narrowing as he curled a finger underneath your chin. "Really. You don't know how hard it is to keep myself off you."

There was barely any yellow left to be seen in your eyes as your pupils blew. His words lit an inferno in your face, and you unconsciously started to bite at your lower lip. The butterflies in your stomach had whipped themselves up into a furious storm, one that sent your heart hammering in your chest. An alien feeling took hold in your lower body, a dull ache asking for attention.

"I...I told you it was stupid." You mumbled under your breath. It was the only thing you could manage to say.

He laughed of course, but it was breathy and low. The look in his eyes had taken on an entirely new light, one you had never seen before from him. He leaned down, giving you an intensely passionate kiss. Your knees would've given out had he not reached an arm about your back to lift you upward into the kiss. It was devouring, carrying with it a hunger that ate away every conscious thought still left in your head.

You gasped as he pulled away, left thoroughly breathless by its intensity.

"You drive me crazy, Y/N." He groaned, sounding just as breathless as you were. "Every cute blush...Your gorgeous eyes..." He pulled away, circling around you as he spoke, letting his fingers gently trace over your lips. "Feeling you pressed up against me at night..." You started trembling, emotions riding so high as to impact you physically. Never had you ever felt like this before. So heated, skin feeling electrified, showers of sparks shooting down your spine as his fingers traced about your neck. He rounded your backside, leaning in to plant a kiss on your jawline. "...The way your clothing rides up in your sleep...What your sleepy moans make me imagine..."

His voice rumbled in your ear, sending vibrations that traveled down your spine. All the way down. You gasped, tensing up against his chest. He purred again, and you could feel him smile against your neck as you reacted once more. "Your reactions make it very hard to stop."

And then he pulled away, ruffling your hair before stepping away.

"WHAT!?!" WHY THE HELL-!" You made to whirl around, anger and frustration blazing hot in your eyes. Indignation burning even hotter in your chest.

Instead you let out a surprised squeak as he suddenly surged up behind you. His left arm crossed over your breasts, pulling you tightly up into his chest while he tilted your face upward to stare into his with his hook. But what really had your attention, was the right arm that snaked about your midsection, leading to the hand that gripped at your inner thigh through your leggings. "Y/N." He purred into your ear, a sound that shot little bolts of lightning straight into the apex of your thighs. "Do not mistake me. I want nothing more than to toss you on the bed and fuck you into the mattress until the entire ship is filled with your sweet cries."

"Haaaaa" His words had you exhaling a heated gasp. The look in his eyes was smoldering. A primal gaze that kindled a warmth in your core, a blazing ball of heat whose tendrils coiled throughout your entire being. It had you trembling in his grip as parts of your body woke for what felt like the first time. You wanted this, him, so badly that your body ached for it. No one had ever made you feel like this before. Your thighs unconsciously pressed together, desperate for more pressure in that space at their height.
But then his hold lessened slightly. Hand letting go of your sensitive inner thigh, to move upwards. He curled it slightly, ever so lightly raking his nails against the sensitive skin there as he moved upwards. The sensation practically had you panting, and you bit your lip to keep a reedy moan from escaping. He pulled his hand across your hip, fingers trailing over your pelvic bones as he moved upwards. It dipped under your shirt and left little trails of fire wherever it went. You shivered in his arms, legs instinctively grinding across each other as the need built up in your core. He suddenly growled, pushing your chin upward to look at him again. "My, what a sight you are. So heated after just a little touching." His words sent another shower of sparks surging through the space between your hips, and the heat dusting your cheeks blazed even hotter. You couldn't even think anymore, body having surrendered to its most base instincts. It felt like you were intoxicated, drunk off the hormones flowing in your veins for the first time in years.

"But..." He let your chin fall, voice suddenly somber. His hand moved up your side, coming to a rest over your bandaged wound. The contact snapped you back into focus, body still wary about anything touching your injuries. "Not until this has healed." He murmured. The tone of his voice had softened, no longer suffused with that primal need, but with a gentle tenderness. "I don't want to hurt you, Y/N." He planted a kiss against the side of your head, squeezing you gently in his arms.

With that, he let you go, and his footsteps receded behind you.

Your chest was heaving. Entire body feeling heated, skin a live circuit of electricity that had you feeling tingly all over. The source being that impossibly hot bundle of nerves at the apex of your thighs screaming for attention for maybe the first time ever in your life. How cruel fate was, to finally make you want sex only to toss you a man too considerate to throw himself on you. You let out a frustrated groan so loud as to almost be a roar.

You heard him snicker from the bathroom, a noise that had you grinding your teeth alongside your thighs. The feeling down there was insufferable, so impossibly hot and sensitive. So alien.

His voice right in your ear suddenly made you jump. You hadn't even sensed him behind you, so wrapped up in the frustrated desire flooding your system. "Oh? Did you think I'd get you all heated..." His hand returned to your side, slipping back into your shirt to trace across your hip bone. "Needing to be touched..." You shuddered helplessly as his breath ghosted across your neck. "...Just to do nothing?"

"B-but I thought...!" You bit back a whimper as he kissed your neck. "You just said...!" This time you did make a noise, a startled yelp, as his teeth lightly nipped the sensitive skin there.

He laughed again, this time taking your hand and twirling you around such that you were facing one another. There was a devious glint in his eyes, and his lips had curled into a smug grin. "I only said I couldn't fuck you. I didn't say anything about the other things I could do to you." But then his expression softened, and he brought his hand up to gently caress your face. "That is...only if you want to."

Your heart just about stopped in your chest, and it was all you could do to just nod furiously. Even if you didn't exactly know what he meant by 'other' things.

He smirked, fingers curling under your chin. "Tell me what you want, Y/N."

Your head completely blanked. What did you want? You couldn't have sex, and your prior sexual experiences hadn't been anything other than sex. You frowned, embarrassed by your inexperience once again. "Uh..."

He sensed your unease, brow creasing as he gave you a tender smile. "What was this whole
conversation about in the first place?" He asked softly, guiding you to an answer.

'Oh. Yeah.'

"I...I want you to touch me." You breathed, somehow finding the confidence to meet his smoldering gaze head on.

You shrieked as he suddenly lifted you, legs wrapping about his torso. Your hands rested on his shoulders as he supported you on his left arm. His eyes were practically shining in excitement, a bizarre but thrilling reversal as you were now looking down at him while he looked up at you. "With pleasure, princess."

He walked over to the bed, gently sitting you down before pushing at your shoulder. You fell into the pillows, sprawled out on your back. He materialized over top of you and kissed you passionately again, hand gripping your left hip as he braced himself on his now hook-less arm, doing his best to keep his weight off you. Your entire body was heated as you trembled beneath him, not really knowing what to expect.

But then you froze, paralyzed as your mind forced you to remember: you were tainted.

As he pulled away to work at your sensitive neck you found the willpower to stop him, hands pushing him away. "W-wait. I...I need to confess something." You stammered, anxious tears beginning to build at the corner of your eyes.

He stopped immediately, sitting up to look at you with concern. His head tilted as you remained silent. "What's the matter, Y/N?"

But the words wouldn't come, anxiety and fear at his possible anger rendering you mute.

When you didn't continue his mind jumped to fill in the blanks. His face paled, eyes going wide. "You're...Are you a virgin?!"

You groaned, head falling into your hands. "N-no. I'm not...Not since I was thirteen. And...not by choice. It's never been by choice." The words fell from your lips, heavy and suffused with suffering.

Silence filled the air, dense enough to cut with a knife. You braced for his anger, his disgust, balling up to protect yourself. The tears started flowing in earnest now, completely silent as you prepared for the worst.

You flinched as his hand brushed against your shoulder, and then he wrapped his arms about you in a tight hug. He was silent as he gently stroked your hair.

"You're...you're not...mad?...Or disgusted...?" You asked so quietly against his chest, still afraid despite his reaction to comfort you.

"...Only with whoever did it to you." His voice rumbled in your ear. Terse, but a far cry from hostile. In actuality he was seething with rage, consumed with a blood lust to hunt down and slaughter anyone who had ever hurt you. You were his, and anyone who harmed what was his could not be suffered to let live.

But you wouldn't know that. And he did his best to isolate those feelings of anger and keep you feeling as safe as possible. No way was he about to frighten you, give you reason to fear him more than you already did. You had just opened yourself up to him, exposing to him such a vulnerable piece of you. He would not break your trust like that.
You relaxed against him, a single nervous laugh falling from your lips. "S-sorry. I felt it wasn't fair to you, not telling you." You placed your hands on his chest, rubbing your cheek into him. "Like I was lying to you about being...clean."

He grit his teeth, immensely relieved your current position kept you from seeing the hardened look on his face. It took every shred of willpower to keep himself composed, body language relaxed, in the face of what you were telling him. If you were to tell him names, he would do everything in his power to have them dead within the week. Even if it meant traveling all around the world himself to squeeze the life from each and every man that had left you feeling like you were the filthy one.

To your perception though, he was relaxed beneath you. Reassuring you with a kiss against the top of your head. "Let's stop for the night."

You rocketed up, planting your hands on the mattress on either side of him. "No! This is the first time I've ever actually wanted something like this. Please." You pleaded, beaming him with a desperate, needy look. "Please. Crocodile. I want this." You leaned forward, placing a hand on his chest. "I want you."

He stared at you a few moments, dark eyes searching in your own. Testing if this was what you really, truly wanted.

You squeaked as you were suddenly flipped onto your back. He resumed his position above you, hand cupping your cheek as he gave you a fierce kiss. Pulling back, eyes just inches above yours, he gave you a stern look and growled. "Stop me immediately if you feel uncomfortable. Promise me, Y/N."

"I promise." You breathed, meeting his gaze with resolve.

"Good."

He picked up where he left off. The continued assault on your neck. Each kiss and nip made you gasp, quickly leaving you as heated and panting as before you stopped him. With each noise you could feel him grin against your sensitive skin, only spurring him on. Your hands came up to grab onto onto his shirt, trying to find some stability amidst the onslaught of his affections along your throat and jawline.

You tensed as he moved slightly downward to redirect his attentions to your collar. His teeth and tongue trailed along your collarbone, and you writhed beneath him. His breath was hot as he kissed and bit at the thin, sensitive skin about the bone there. A whimper tore from your lips as he sucked a dark mark over the pale line left from where you had been slashed. He created a few more, leaving a trail of love bites covering the healed cut.

Tank tops would be off the menu for a few days.

He sat up slightly, hand moving from your hip to grab onto the hem of your tank. His eyes met yours, waiting for your permission before continuing. The look on his face sent your stomach fluttering, making you feel even more jittery. His lips were slightly reddened, and he was breathing almost as heavily as you were. The light in his eyes was dark, so passionate and intense it alone sent a rush of excitement to your core.

You nodded, signaling for him to continue.

Your cheeks flushed hot as he lifted your top up and over your head, leaving you with just your bandeau and leggings beneath him...and your bandages. You frowned, arms crossing over each other
to grasp at your sides in a poor attempt to hide the bindings. He leaned down, kissing you on the lips again. "They do nothing to detract from how beautiful you are, princess."

"Heh." You giggled nervously. Maybe one of these days you would learn to take a compliment. But for right now, his words had you squirming and blushing beneath him.

He hummed, hand gently trailing down your left side as he kissed your exposed torso. You bucked underneath him, your sides rather sensitive. It had been some time since they had been touched by another, barring a doctor. And never had they ever been touched so tenderly. You truly were touch-starved, desperate for any kind of physical contact.

He sucked another mark onto your skin, this one just above the start of your bandages. The sensation had you keen a sharp whine, and your hands curled into his hair. He let loose a deep growl, the sensation rumbling into your stomach. You gave a gentle tug, lips curling into a devious smirk as he groaned into your skin. 'Saving that one for later.'

His eyes flashed upwards, giving you a playful frown as he noticed your amusement at the discovery. "Now, now. We're focusing on your pleasure right now."

You giggled, giving him a coy look. "So you're saying it was pleasurable?"

He responded with a sharp nip to your side, just about the curve of your hip right where your bandages stopped. His tongue lapped over the spot, gently soothing the pain he had caused. You whimpered, head lolling back against the pillows as your body quivered under his affections. Your eyes slipped closed to focus on the various sensations he ravished upon your body.

Suddenly you felt him smile against your heated skin, and he pulled away. You cracked open your eyes, wondering what had made him stop. He was staring at you, his own eyes lingering on you hungrily. You followed his gaze down and damn near choked as you realized he was staring at your chest, noticing the stiff peaks poking from underneath the dark red fabric of your bandeau. Your face flushed hotly, and you crossed your arms over your chest in mortification.

You bit at your lip, not exactly sure if you were comfortable with this particular piece of clothing coming off. Your small chest had always been a sore spot for you, and you doubted whether that part of you could be of any interest to him given its size. "Can...can we skip that part...?"

"May I ask why?" He asked softly, but the look in his eyes was too knowing for his question to be so innocent. You knew that he knew what your hesitation was about. He was just waiting to convince you otherwise.

"They're small, okay? Not much for you to work with." You huffed, looking away.

He stared at your blanky, voice rather deadpan. "They're yours. That's literally all that matters."

A few seconds passed as you agonized over the decision. Eventually you relented, letting your arms fall back to the mattress with a sigh. "Okay, just...lower your expectations."

He placed a kiss against your forehead, "There's no need for that."

Regardless, you tensed as his pulled down the fabric, fully exposing you to him. It took everything in your power to not immediately cover your chest with your arms once more, and you had your eyes screwed shut, face turned to the side anxiously. When he made no move you tentatively opened an eyelid. He still sat upward, gaze focused on your revealed breasts with undisguised desire in his eyes. But what had you most surprised of all was the light dusting of red across his own cheeks. It blossomed outward from the scar running across his face, so faint you thought you had imagined it at
first. But no, you hadn't imagined it at all.

He was indeed blushing.

You had little time to appreciate it as he leaned downward, placing a kiss on your sternum as his hand gently curled about your left breast. You tensed at first, but quickly devolved into a writhing mess as his thumb rubbed circles about your nipple. It was...surprisingly pleasurable. You had never felt much when you touched them. Now that it was him, though, it was like the amount of nerves there are multiplied by the thousands.

And then he took the other one into his mouth.

"Haaaaaaaaaaaa~!" The sensation was on another level, drawing forth a keening moan from your throat. You bucked beneath him, hands returning to thread through his hair. He growled again, quickly taking his revenge by lightly sucking on the sensitive peak while pinching the other between his fingers. "Ohhhh fuck." You moaned, breath turning more ragged by the second as he worked your breasts. Your legs were well and truly trembling at this point, and you could feel him grin about the nipple in his mouth.

"Dooon't get-!" Your breath hitched as he gave another hard suck. ":-smug!"

He released the sensitive bud, giving you a cocky look. "Oh? Do you want me to stop?"

"NO!" The word exploded from your mouth a little too quickly, only rekindling the heat under your face and his smug grin even wider.

"Mmmmm. I suppose we'll continue then." He hummed before passionately taking you by the lips again. This time you pulled him down roughly, pushing back against him with a fervor of your own. It caught him off guard, squeezing from him a surprised noise before letting you take the lead. You tried to mimic his previous movements, varying the pressure from your lips, tongue, and hands as you rolled your hips beneath him.

He pulled back with a gasp as you let him go, lips puffy. Cheeks blushing harder than before. "I see you've been paying attention. Maybe you're not so hopeless after all.' He panted, letting loose a breathy laugh.

You lightly smacked him on the chest, "Oh shut up." But your tone was as amused as the smirk on your face.

He responded by giving your nipple a quick pinch, making you yelp and twist beneath him as he chuckled. His eyes bore into yours, making you feel all fluttery and fluffy again.

You didn't tense this time as he hooked a finger into the top of your leggings, looking the silent question down at you.

Instead you nodded rather enthusiastically, his attentions having instilled you with newfound confidence.

You nodded, raising your hips off the bed to make your leggings easier to remove. He attempted to tug them down, the two of you breaking into breathy laughs as he struggled to get waistband down over your ass with just the one hand.

"Here, let me." You sat up, shimmying them down your legs. His eyes followed the top hem of the fabric as you pulled them down, hungrily taking in each inch of newly exposed skin. You found it a bit odd, given he'd seen your naked legs plenty of times over the past week when in bed. The change
of context must've made them a bit more enticing, you figured. Soon your leggings were gone entirely, leaving you heated and jittering with nervous energy in just your underwear, a rather assuming pair of light grey boy shorts.

Well, assuming except for one thing.

And then you realized what he was really looking at.

Your panties were completely and utterly soaked. The light fabric had been stained dark, nigh dripping from the pleasure he'd been giving you. Even the tops of your thighs were slick, the bandages about your left leg slightly damp on the inner side.

And he was staring

_Really_ staring.

A high whine tore from your throat as your hands flew up to your cheeks, face burning red hot in embarrassment.

Before you could throw yourself back into the pillows his hand came up to your cheek, pulling you in for a tender kiss. "Glad to see you're enjoying yourself." He smiled against your lips. "I'm quite enjoying you myself as well."

You frowned, suddenly realizing you hadn't exactly been contributing much back. "S-sorry. I haven't given much in return..." You tentatively reached for his belt, hand trembling. A timid laugh burst forth as your eyes flitted over the bulge straining his tight, black pants. '_Oh, oh fuck. Ohhhhh fuck._'

Duh, the guy was practically two feet taller than you. Of course he'd be gigantic.

But he caught you by the wrist, bringing your hand up to brush your fingers against his lips. "Not necessary. Tonight is just about you."

"Are... you sure?" You stammered, eyes flicking between his face and the strain of his pants.

He hummed an affirmation against your fingers.

Confusion clouded your features. "Uh...what exactly are you getting out of this?"

He let your hand fall before gently pushing at your shoulder, sending you back down onto the bed. His lips returned to ravishing your neck, coaxing out another round of moans and whimpers. "A preview of what I get to have when these wounds of yours are healed."

The thought of what he would do to you sent another jolt of heat to that bundle of nerves between your legs. For the first time ever, the thought of being at the complete mercy of a man didn't fill you with absolute dread—it filled you with _excitement._

Except, well...his size _did_ make you a little nervous. _That_ was probably going to hurt.

His hand ghosting along your bare thigh caught your attention, dragging a high, reedy whine from your throat. He paused his assault on your neck, slowly trailing his fingers up the inside of your inner thigh, testing your reaction. It was like bolts of pure electricity across your skin, a sensation that had you keening and whimpering even louder than before. "Mmmmm, I should have known such thick thighs would be sensitive" He purred against your jawline, triggering another heated shiver.
He began making his way downward again, leaving more kisses and bites down your collar and sides. 'Why is he so good at this?!

You bucked as he settled over your hip bones, loosing a squeak as he nipped the taut skin there. "Oh? Another sensitive spot?" He teased, flashing you a smug grin.

Your lips curved into a pout, about to sass him back, only to fall open in a sigh as he continued lavishing his affections about your hips. You surrendered to him with little complaint, long past the point of being coy.

He moved about your lower half, careful to avoid your sex—much to your frustration—as he took care of your sensitive thighs. As amazing as it felt, right now it was torture. Your core was throbbing with need, demanding release, and all he was doing was working you up higher and higher with no relief in sight. You wiggled your hips, trying to direct his focus to where you really wanted.

"Is there something you want, Y/N?" He had your leg tossed over his shoulder, quivering from where he had been taking his sweet time nibbling and sucking dark marks into the delicate skin of your inner thigh. His eyes peeked around your toned leg muscles, shining with a devious light. At this point he had you well and truly shaking beneath him. Panting, moaning, and so utterly desperate for release.

"Please...!" The plea tore from your throat, husky and suffused with desperation.

He nipped another blemish into your skin, hand coming up to pull at your nipple as he smirked. "Please what, Y/N?"

You loosed a frustrated moan, twisting and writhing beneath him as he teased you more. Everything felt so impossibly hot, the burning in your core leaving your chest heaving. So badly did it ache that tears were pooling at the corners of your eyes. You needed relief and you needed it now.

You sat up, grabbing him by the face and damn near slamming your foreheads together as you pulled him close. "Please, Croc! Make me fucking cum, pleaseeeeee!" You begged desperately against his lips while grinding yourself against his thigh.

His eyes went wide, a deep scarlet hue taking to his cheeks as his lips parted slightly.

And then you were shoved back down into the mattress, fiery kiss planted so roughly against your mouth that your lips stung. His fingers hooked into your panties, yanking them down your legs before tossing them to the side. You whimpered as the cool air touched your soaked folds. If you weren't nearly so heated, so desperate, you would've been a bit more concerned about the fact that you were completely naked beneath him now.

But right now? He'd been edging you for far too long to be modest about this.

You bucked beneath him, rocking your hips into his to remind him that your need attention to those lips, and not the ones he was currently assailing. He pulled back, his own face flustered and heated as your own. "I've got you, princess. Just relax, I'll take care of you."

He sat up, taking but a moment to savor the image of you so hot and desperate to cum. The way your puffy, kiss-swollen lips parted as your panted. How your chest heaved, stiffened nipples rising up and down as you took sucking gasps. The love bites he had nibbled and sucked on you all the way down. The utterly wild look in your eyes, no longer a shred of gold to be seen as your pupils reached max dilation.

And then his eyes traveled downward, coming to rest on the final prize of the evening, so thoroughly
soaked with need that the sheets below you were damp now too. You whined, biting at your lower lip, wet eyes narrowing. "Pleaaaaaaaaaase."

You didn't have to ask him again, as much as he loved to hear you beg for him. He backed himself off the bed, settling on his knees on the floor. You gave him a quick confused look before he yanked you towards him, squeezing from you a surprised squeak as he settled you right on the edge of the bed. His hand gripped your thigh gently so as to not upset the wound there, more propping it up than holding it. You shivered as his hot breath ghosted against the wetness between your legs.

'Holy shit.' He was going to eat you out. This was not what you had expected at all, having fully anticipated him to make you squirm with his fingers. Not to mention no one had ever done this to you before, and it actually made you a bit anxious. You always joked about how he would one day eat you alive. Never had it crossed your mind it would be like this.

You sat up, pushing yourself onto your hands to stammer at him. "I-I've never bee-"

He cut you off, reaching his hand up to push his fingers against your mouth. "Relax." He rumbled into your inner thigh, right where it connected into your hip. A sensation that had you sighing and falling back down onto the mattress. "I said I've got you." His hand returned to gripping your thigh, keeping your legs open for him.

And then he gave a firm lick right down the center of your folds.

Your back rocketed off the bed as it arched. "FUCK!"

You felt him chuckle, and even that felt fucking amazing against your sensitive, swollen lips. Though it didn't feel nearly as amazing as the tongue now exploring your dripping cunt. Your hands flew to your head, threading and pulling at your hair as you writhed and moaned for him. "Ohhhhhhh! OhhhHHHHH~!" He spent a few minutes just teasing and playing around with your folds, avoiding the one spot you desperately needed him to touch. His eyes occasionally flicked upwards to look at your flustered face, and he laughed some more as you shot him the most desperate look of your life.

He paused, giving you a knowing look as he narrowed his eyes.

Blinding, almost painful pleasure seared through your core as he found your clit, giving you a playful lick with the tip of his tongue. THIS.

THIS IS WHAT YOU NEEDED.

The shock of the sensation had you desperately inhaling air, back arching as you grabbed fistfuls of the sheets. "YES! YES! PLEASE!" You practically sobbed, driving your head and shoulders into the mattress as your core throbbed and blazed under the heat of his tongue. Your entire body was so impossibly hot, sweat rolling down your sides and face, so reminiscent of the fever you had suffered through. But the suffering right now was of a different flavor, so sweet and delicious you were begging for more as he teased you.

But you were tired of being teased.

You reached down, threading your fingers through his hair and roughly pulling him in further. His eyes flashed up to yours and he growled low and deep.

You growled back, no longer in the mood to beg. "Make. Me. Cum." You demanded, staring him
down with almost furious defiance.

The expression on his face didn't change, just continued staring at you from over your mound with those narrowed eyes. What you didn't know was that his stomach had damn near flipped over, butterflies of his own sent fluttering about. You had no fucking clue what you did to him, how that blazing will of yours affected him. That he liked you not in spite of your stubborn defiance, but because of it.

He met your glare evenly, before breaking into a smug grin. "As you wish, princess."

You fell back into the sheets with a reedy moan as his tongue returned to that oversensitive bundle of nerves. But rather than playing with it aimlessly, dragging his tongue over and around it with no rhyme or reason, he lapped at it with purpose. A single repetitive swirl that soon had you quivering and whimpering. Your legs began to shake, and he growled as your hips bucked, making it harder for him to bring you to the orgasm you demanded from him. He snaked his left arm around around your thigh, firmly pressing his forearm down on your hips to keep them rooted to the mattress before starting again.

"Fuck. Yes. Please. That." You breathed, top half still writhing about as the heat built up in your core.

He was winding you tighter, each lick bringing you closer and closer to the climax he'd been edging you towards the past hour. Your hands remained in his hair, roughly pulling at him to release more groans and grunts to rumble through your cunt. His eyes flashed up to your face, watching you sweat and pant as he worked you higher. Coiled you tighter.

"Haaaaaaa-! I'm-! So-! Close-!" You heaved, followed by a frustrated sob that released the tears pooling in your eyes.

He continued his assault, watching you with low-lidded eyes focused on every little expression. But try as you might to release the dam of raw pleasure building up in your core, it just wouldn't budge. Your entire body was shaking furiously, absolutely drenched with sweat as your eyes screwed themselves closed. "Pleasssseeed-!" You moaned so desperately, so utterly frustrated, wanting nothing more than to let go and just surrender to the sweet oblivion waiting for you on the other side of this peak you just couldn't cross.

And then he gripped your thigh tight, nails digging into your sensitive, malleable flesh so hard as to leave indentations. The twinge from his fingers pressing about the still healing wound only pushed you higher. Pain mingled together with the pleasure, barely distinct from one another. A feedback loop that pushed you right to the edge.

"Cum for me, Y/N."

Searing pleasure tore through your body as you finally came, vision going white with stars from the sheer strength of it. Your entire body tried to curl into itself, and the throbbing of your wounds only added to the pain-pleasure cocktail rolling waves of raw sensation down you. You sobbed hystERICALLY as your hormones dumped everything into your system all at once. The sobs intermingled with nervous laughter, influx of chemicals wreaking havoc on your emotions. It was all you could do to just lie there, shaking and sob-laughing as the waves of pleasure rolled up and down your body for what felt like hours, triggering aftershock after aftershock that took everything from you.

So overwhelming it was that soon your vision cut out entirely, and you passed out on those sweat-soaked sheets with a tired little laugh.
Crocodile leaned back, wiping your wetness from his face with the back of his hand. He'd be lying if he said he wasn't proud of the mess lying before him. The panting, flushed, beautiful mess of a woman sprawled passed out across his bed. Your chest was heaving, body burning bright hot from the sheer magnitude of the orgasm he had ripped from you. The sight of you right now was not one he would ever forget, face so adorably flushed, kiss-swollen lips parted, body so heated the sheets beneath you were visibly damp.

He had covered you body neck to thigh in love bites, clustered about the various scars and blemishes he'd discovered while exploring you.

All marks claiming you as his. His and his alone.

He rose from his knees, wincing as his pants strained against the hardness of his erection. Words could not describe how badly he wanted to take you, make you scream his name as he fucked you into the sheets. But he would be patient, wait for your wounds to heal before truly making you his. He could keep it in his pants until then...unlike the other men who'd violated you.

The thought almost made him snarl in possessive fury. Knowing your sexual experiences up until now had only been rape had sent him into such a rage it was all he could do not to tear the room apart. But he had held himself together, because you needed him to. The look on your face, so absolutely terrified your confession would make him angry and disgusted with you, had wrenched his heart with despair. To think you thought yourself tainted, like you had been the one to have done something wrong...

You hadn't just let him touch you. Rather you had so eagerly given yourself to him, so readily trusting him to do what others who had come before had not. To treat you with the tenderness you deserved.

No one would touch you ever again.

No one except for him.

He headed into the bathroom, collecting the towels he had preemptively set aside earlier when you thought he had just left you heated and fuming for nothing. In reality he had already started prepping for the aftermath of what he had planned for you, keeping things hidden in case you decided otherwise.

Running a towel under the water he wiped it across his face, letting the cool water take the edge off. He shook his head, relaxing his shoulders and loosing a long, tired sigh. His hand reached behind his neck and massaged the stiffened muscles there. He had spent nearly an hour teasing and playing with you before finally letting you cum, and his position on the floor had left him pretty stiff. In more ways than one. But a stiff neck was a small price to pay for what you had so desperately begged him to do. No, demanded him to do.

His heart thumped in his chest, image of you glaring down at him demanding he bring you to orgasm flashing in his head. He was always one to be in control, to command every situation and be in charge. Insubordination was the fastest way to evoke his ire. No one could challenge his authority and just get away with it. And that extended to the bedroom, never had he ever suffered to let a lover take the lead, to make demands of all things.

Yet he had selflessly denied your own attempts to return the pleasure he'd been wreaking havoc on you with. So eager to make you squirm that he had willingly sank to his knees to do so. To give rather than take. And when he'd finally pushed you too far-teased you for far too long-you had
taken charge and ordered him to finish you off.

It should have filled him with scathing, insulted rage.

But instead he had given in, eagerly.

Never had he'd allowed such a shift in power like this before.

But never had he ever felt for someone quite like he did for you, either.

"What is this woman doing to you?" He groaned aloud, meeting his eyes in the mirror. His face was still reddened, lips slightly puffy from overuse, and his hair was falling whichever way it pleased instead of being neatly styled back. He shook his head with a tired laugh. "She's going to be the death of you, you know."

You awoke in the early light of the morning, wrapped tightly in his arms. As you fully came to, you softly gasped, surprised to be held like this. Ever since you had started sharing a bed, it was always you who had clung to him. Falling asleep wrapped about one of his arms as he slept on his back, doing his best to keep some space between you. But how he lay curled about you on his side, legs twining together with yours as he slept. He held you against his chest such that his chin lightly brushed against the top of your head.

Tears suddenly came to your eyes unbidden, and you silently cursed as you sniffled.

He awoke almost immediately, hand coming up to brush against the back of your head. "What's...what's wrong...?" His voice was breathy, still laden with sleep.

"Just...a little overwhelmed." You murmured into his chest, rubbing your cheek against him, leaving a trail of hot tears behind.

He pushed himself into a sitting position, rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he fixed you with a sleepy look that made your heart race. When he was like this, so raw and not made-up yet, no mask put on for the day...It left you feeling tingly and bubbly.

"Did you not enjoy last night?" He asked, tired eyes wincing slightly.

You rushed to sit up as well, wrapping your arms about his neck and hugging him tight. "No! It was amazing."

He lazily rubbed his cheek against yours. "Then what's got you crying so early in the morning...?"

You pulled back, letting him go so you could fall back to sit on your knees. "I told you...just overwhelmed." Your lips curved into a soft, happy smile as you looked down at your lap. You really were overwhelmed, way too many things to properly digest swirling about your head. A lot of things came out last night, more than just you.

His hand cupped your cheek, thumb rubbing away a stray tear rolling down your cheek. "Alright. Talk to me if you need to."

And then he flopped back down onto the bed, burying his head in the pillows with a sleepy grumble.

You began to giggle, only to be cut off by a long, tired yawn, still feeling quite sleepy yourself. He raised an arm to pull you in close as you sunk back down to the bed with him, pulling you in to cuddle against his chest again. You nestled in close, enjoying his body heat in the early morning.
Before you passed back out, you had one last question to ask. It fell from your lips a sleepy murmur. "So...girlfriend?"

He rumbled a drowsy chuckle. "I don't much care for what we call it...so long as I get to have you."

"Okay then...boyfriend."

Chapter End Notes

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
Daz stood at the edge of the dock, frowning as your back disappeared into a crowd of people amidst the bustling port.

Both he and Croc had been hesitant to let you go ashore alone. The bandages on your leg had come off, area still quite sore but otherwise healed. But the wound on your side was deep, taking much, much longer to recover. If a fight broke out you would be at a severe disadvantage.

But you had insisted you would be fine, that you desperately needed some personal time to decompress and stretch your legs. It was broad daylight, and it's not like anyone knew who you were, what with no bounty. Not to mention this was a rather safe island, one of the few the remaining Whitebeard pirates had managed to keep under their protection after the events of Marineford.

Of course that still wasn't enough to make them comfortable with you setting out alone, even for but a few hours. You had frowned, planted your hands on your hips and clarified you were telling them you were going out for the day. Not that you were asking permission. Reminding them you could easily sneak away at any time. It's not like they knew you were having a hard time activating your ability to stay hidden. Eventually they relented, but not before clipping your scabbard to your belt and making you promise a hundred and one times not to get into trouble.

You had practically sprinted away as soon as your feet touched solid ground, mischievous grin on your face. Eager to do...whatever the hell it was you wanted. Daz had considered trailing you, keeping watch from afar, only to shake the idea from his head. No, they couldn't baby you. You were a full-grown adult who deserved their trust...as much as they wanted to keep you safe. Not to mention how badly you wanted to return to a sense of normalcy. They hadn't exactly coddled you like this before the incident...before his boss had fallen head over heels for you. Daz had long considered you a little sister, and so long as you were happy that's all that mattered. You could take care of yourself...for the most part.
Crocodile had merely huffed with a rather exasperated sigh before returning to his office, leaving Daz down on the deck to coordinate with the crew on what needed to be done in terms of supplies. Not like he minded, Croc always left the more menial tasks to him so he could focus on the things that required a more subtle touch. As for right now, they were supposedly here for information, having tracked down a rather elusive information broker eager to trade.

He got work double checking the inventory logs: requested medical supplies, the various foodstuffs needed to keep the galley well stocked, ammunitions and whetstones, cleaning supplies, etc. Nothing out of the ordinary. Whatever the crew wanted of a personal nature was up to them to acquire. They were given a large enough stipend to do so, no strings attached saying how they should spend it.

It was about noon by the time he had finished getting organized, sending various crew members off to purchase what was needed. You'd been gone a few hours now, and given the absence of explosions or distant screams, it seemed you were keeping your promise to stay out of trouble. Much to his relief.

He settled himself on the side railing, taking a short break in the lull of activity. A warm breeze swept across the deck, signaling a hotter evening than what they'd been used to from the previous island. It was welcome, allowing him to wear his open vest bare chested as he liked it.

And yet you had insisted on wearing a more modest outfit, one that fully covered your legs and collarbone instead of a more appropriate set of shorts and airy top. Probably thinking you were successfully hiding the hickeys and bite marks darkening your skin. They first appeared a little over a week ago, and as some faded new ones appeared. He chuckled, remembering how mortified you had looked when he poked one right on the side of your neck and teased you about it. You had actually slapped him in your blind horror, and the rest of the crew had erupted into laughter as he stood there in shock, red handprint blazing on his cheek. Later that night you had found him and apologized, but he never needed one in the first place.

Pulling at the kitty's tail always carried with it certain risks.

A loud squawk caught his attention, and he turned his gaze upward as a delivery gull landed on a storage crate next to him. It was saddled with a brown leather satchel, heavy with issues of the monthly edition of the news. While the daily and weekly copies reported on more topical, recent events, the monthly issue was packed to the brim with investigative pieces and other exposés regarding all manner of topics. The kinds of hard hitting journalistic pieces that couldn't easily be scraped together in the brief time available to release the daily paper. It was even printed in color.

The gull squawked at him again: 'paper or no?' He nodded, fishing a few coins out of his pocket to pay the bird, dropping them into the side pocket already laden with payments from the gull's previous patrons. It mock saluted him in thanks before taking to the skies, eager to find more customers.

He lay down lengthwise along the railing, expertly balancing himself on the beam much narrower than his body. Normally Croc preferred to get first dibs on the paper, almost obsessively keeping up with world events. He was busy right now, though, and would tolerate Daz at least skimming the headlines while waiting for the crew to return from their errands. Daz stifled a lazy yawn and raised the paper above his head, eyes beginning to languidly peruse the first page.

The yawn caught in his throat with a choking noise. His eyes went wide, mouth falling open as he stared at the face on the page.

It couldn't be.

Holy shit. It fucking couldn't be.
No, the eyes were a different color, a lovely shade of violet instead of striking yellow. But...everything else was definitely YOUR face. The same hair, same facial shape—cheekbones, eye shape, lips, nose, even your strong jawline—and fuck even if they weren't the same color, that was the same fire in those eyes.

There was no mistaking it. The woman he was looking at was very definitely a slightly younger version of you.

His eyes flashed upward to the headline: "TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER, HAVE THE MARINES DELIVERED ON THEIR PROMISES? REMEMBERING THE FOXWOOD TRAGEDY."

"FOXWOOD?" He gasped, losing his balance and flopping to the deck.

His mind was racing, hands rapidly gathering up the pages that had fallen about him. Piling them in his arms, he practically sprinted back inside, bursting into Croc's office without even knocking.

The ornery man sitting at the desk started, surprised expression on his features quickly turning to a mixture of anger and annoyance. "Haven't I told you to kn-"

"SHUT UP AND LOOK AT THIS." Daz cut him off, tossing the bundle of paper on his desk. It slid across the wood, coming to a rest right at the edge. The face that was not yours stared up at the ceiling with that fiery expression.

Normally, such an intrusion—coupled with this insubordination—would've incensed him. But given the pale look on his usually rather stoic first mate's face he knew immediately that this was far from a normal situation. He stared at Daz a few moments, hand reaching down to lift the page as he held his Daz's gaze. Giving it a firm shake to snap the paper open and keep it rigid, his eyes finally flicked downwards to look at what was apparently so worrisome.

His heart nearly stopped in his chest.

He rocketed up from the chair, slamming the page down. His hand planted right next to the photo of the woman's face as he braced himself, eyes frantically flitting about her features as he quickly came to the same conclusion Daz had.

His head fell forward, too overwhelmed by the jarring realization to keep himself composed. Voice hoarse, strained, he finally spoke. "They...they never found the little girl's body...did they?"

"No." Daz replied, own tone shaken as he looked at the photo. "They didn't."

You practically skipped across the market, so bubbly and ecstatic to finally be off the stuffy ship. As much as you loved to be fawned over, being under Crocodile's constant watch was more than a little oppressive.

But being under him himself wasn't too bad. Not bad at all. You licked your lips, playfully biting into your cheek to keep from smirking.

If only he could stop marking you up so much. Forcing yourself to wear a sleeved top and leggings in what was perfect shorts weather kind of sucked. When Daz had poked one of the darker ones on your neck you had almost died. Damn near smacked him into the afterlife too. And having to deal with Ellia as she changed your bandages, watching her try her best to stifle the giggling as she saw just how far down those marks went...Mortifying.

Still, this was the only truly personal time you'd had in weeks, and damned if you were going to let
some love bites—a *lot* of love bites—ruin it for you. You smiled around the straw in your mouth, sipping up the peanut butter milkshake you had bought from the ice cream parlor right at the start of the market. It tasted like sunshine and rainbows, so good you giggled with every other sip. Each new island to visit meant new food to try, and right now you were itching to try something fun. The ship’s chef wasn’t exactly a slouch, but...well, land food pretty much always tasted better than ship food.

You walked about the various restaurants and cafes lining the main thoroughfare, taking the time to stop and read the menus posted outside at each one. Everything sounded delicious, and it took a concerted effort not to start drooling against the windows as you peeked at other patrons’ dishes. From fancy sandwiches to curries to even just vegetarian dishes, it was like heaven. Or hell. The sheer amount of options was almost torturous. But you couldn’t decide just yet. You needed to make sure you vetted each and every option before settling on one. With so many regrets already under your belt, like hell if you were going to add food choices to that list, too.

As you walked between the shop fronts your mind wandered to what you would do after. For the first time maybe ever you wanted to go clothing shopping. Not in the same way as when you were homeless and you just wanted something warm and in a better state than "threadbare". Right now you actually wanted to find some things to look nice in...probably because there was actually someone to look nice *for*. But as you looked through the windows you felt more and more overwhelmed. So many types and styles, it was enough to make you go cross eyed. They all looked great on the mannequins and posters. Whether they would look good on you was the real question.

A light blush settled in your cheeks as a new idea blossomed in your mind. Your side was almost healed, maybe you should pick up something *nice*. Something lacy probably.

He would probably go nuts for lace.

The blush deepened as you smiled at the image of the man in your head—your boyfriend. A terrible, fearsome pirate lord with such a dangerous reputation, so sweet and smitten with you. You nibbled at your bottom lip as you thought of the face he would make if he saw you wearing something as sexy as you were picturing. How his eyes would go wide, own blush blossoming outwards from his scar. A warmth suddenly kindled in your core.

Yeah, you were definitely going to be buying some frilly underwear today.

You broke into a laugh, a sing-song giggle as you twirled about. So giddy with happiness you felt lighter than air. People stopped to stare but you didn’t care.

Who the fuck cared what other people thought.

But first, you would get something to eat.

About two hours later you left the clothing shop, several bags hanging on your arm. A white lingerie set lined in a golden lacy trim had immediately caught your attention as soon as you entered the store. The fact that he loved to stare into your eyes hadn’t escaped you. Not to mention he’d called them ‘gorgeous’ or ‘beautiful’ on more than one occasion. As much as you found them kind of weird, he seemed to love them. Getting something that matched just kind of made sense. Of course you had bought a couple other sets too, safe options of black and scarlet in case you chickened out on such a bold color like white.

Besides the more, um, *racy*, pieces, you had bought a handful of other clothes to surprise him with too. One of them was a *dress* for fuck’s sake. A crimson A-line with white pleats that ended mid thigh, adorned with a black sash about the waist. It tied into a bow just at the small of your back, ends long enough to trail to just above the bottom hem. You had been so hesitant to try it on, afraid
you'd look silly, ridiculous, in it. The shop clerk had watched you agonizing over it for several solid minutes before politely butting in, encouraging you to at least give it a try.

You had wrapped her in a tight hug as you left the changing room, thankful for the encouragement.

"Is...is that her!?" Whispering to your right suddenly caught your attention, though calling it 'whispering' was a bit generous. They were hush-talking plenty loud for you to hear. You froze, a sudden chill crawling down your spine. A premonition that something was wrong. Were they talking about you? How the hell would anyone know who you were? You had built up quite the reputation as the Gilded Butcher, but the only people who knew the Butcher's true identity were the rest of the crew.

"She looks just like her!"

You turned to face them with a frown, eyes narrowed and wary. A man and woman, obviously a couple, stood before you, hiding behind a thick bundle of newsprint. Their eyes flicked up and down from the pages, looking between you and whatever they were trying to whisper about.

"Can I help you?" You asked, fixing them with a suspicious look.

They jumped, faces paling, eyes going wide in...not quite horror. Recognition?

"Oh my god! She really is-!" The woman stammered, hands flying to her mouth.

You shook your head, taking a step towards them. "I'm sorry, but what the hell are you talking about?"

The man swallowed, looking at your face more in depth. "Yeah!...Her eyes are the same color!"

Now you were just getting pissed, and you ground your teeth in annoyed frustration. The boys had told you to stay out of trouble, but it seemed trouble had come to you.

You grabbed the man by his collar, and he yelped as you wrenched him towards you. "Don't talk about me like I'm not right here!" The man flailed as you lifted him off his feet, hoisting him menacingly into the air. "How the fuck do you know me?!!"

His lady friend shrieked, dropping to her knees in fright. 'I'm not going to kill the guy, jeez.' But telling her that would ruin the ruse, and right now you needed to know what the hell was going on.

"T-The paper! Look in the paper!" The man cried, his legs kicking about as you held him aloft by the collar.

You growled and relaxed your grip, letting him fall back to his feet. At this point you were more than a little unsettled. People somehow recognizing you was already enough to make you uncomfortable. People recognizing you because of something related to the news?

That was enough to fill you with dread.

The man yanked the paper from his lover's trembling clutches, offering it to you with a trembling hand of his own. "H-here! See for yourself!"

You took it hesitantly, holding it more like some venomous snake than a benign sheet of paper.

But it wasn't benign at all.

Your golden eyes stared down, meeting their lilac predecessors.
"Oh..." The word fell from your lips, heavy as the weight in your chest.

It took every shred of willpower to not fly off the ship and look for you. He wanted nothing more than to tear through the town until he found you, dragging you back to the ship and making you feel safe.

But the last thing you needed was a scene. Something that would draw attention to yourself. To your face. The one so clearly the same as the woman's in the paper.

The same as the disgraced marine hero's who had murdered her husband and child.

But the little girl's body had never been found.

You hadn't been found...until now.

Imagining your reaction at seeing the news...Worse, imagining the stares from people as they realized who you were...

He paced about his office like a trapped animal. The anxiety in his gut twisting so hard it made him feel physically ill. What should he do? He couldn't call a crew-wide search. That would only call more attention to yourself. He couldn't whip through the town for the same reason, either. Should he just calmly walk about and look for you? What if you were hiding? Curled up in some dark place, willing yourself to remain hidden. Hiding from prying eyes and your past alike. He'd never find you then.

And so he would wait. Anxiously waiting for you to return so he could take you into his arms and clean up whatever broken pieces you managed to drag back with you.

He fell down into his chair with an exasperated, frustrated groan. Here he was feeling absolutely powerless again. Helpless. A feeling he absolutely despised, yet so often created by the woman he was so dearly taken with. What was it about you that created problems he couldn't solve with his strength or wits alone? Complicated problems that left him feeling useless, wracked with guilt and worry.

His head fell in his hand as he looked down at the woman's face.

Marine prodigy and hero just like the rest of the Foxwood line before her, beloved by the people and held up as one of the most model marines in history. Once one of the most respected and powerful marine lineages in the world, the Foxwoods had produced generation after generation of legendary marine heroes. Perfect marines known for fighting with unmatched drive and passion. Defenders of the weak. Champions of justice. Scourge of pirates everywhere. Quite the poster children for the ideal Marine dynasty, held up as example by the World Government. What all marine families should aspire to be.

It was always joked that they would never rest until a Fox had been made Admiral. Each generation got closer and closer, slowly climbing the ranks all the way to Vice-Admiral.

Vice-Admiral Ada Foxwood, the would-be Admiral Fujiko (藤狐). The Purple Fox.

So very close to achieving her family's dream.

And then she had been broken.

Crocodile sighed, remembering that day twenty-five years ago when the news had broke. How it had
utterly shaken the world, pirate and marine alike. He held no love for the Marines or their blind concepts of justice and order, but that didn't mean individuals couldn't earn his respect. He had always been a pirate at heart, long before he first set sail on the wide open sea. But nearly every kid grew up hearing tales of Foxwood heroism, same as the grand pirate stories spun from Roger and other larger than life figures.

The weather had been perfect that day, and he had been heading to report in after completing the seemingly hundreds of menial tasks the old geezer Whitebeard had ordered him to do. To 'teach him some humility' apparently. He was a fresh recruit, and not by choice. The ship and crew he had originally set out with had been raided by the Whitebeard pirates, and he had been forcibly conscripted. 'Be thrown to the sharks or join up', they had told him, and he hadn't been ready to die.

But as he reached the top of the steps to Whitebeard's throne he had froze, shock still as the old man held a newspaper in his hand, a single tear rolling down his face.

Whitebeard had fought with Ada several times, and she been more than a match for him. Lightning fast, packing an impossibly strong punch and even stronger passion, he respected her as much as he could ever respect anyone. In spite of her status as a marine hero, he considered every fight with her an honor. And when he had read the news, of the indescribable cruelty fate had wrought on the woman that was his enemy, he could only mourn for her.

A woman who had been captured and tortured with no goal other than to make her suffer. Broken so beyond repair that when she was brought home she slaughtered her loving family. A gentle, civilian husband. A beautiful daughter, supposedly just as fiery as she was. And the entire Foxwood legacy. All wiped away in a single, bloody night.

Crocodile shook his head, tearing himself out of the memory. He looked down again at the stack of newsprint before grabbing it with a resolved growl. If he was forced to wait here, he might as well read about what really happened that night.

The headline yelled angrily at him: "TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER, HAVE THE MARINES DELIVERED ON THEIR PROMISES? REMEMBERING THE FOXWOOD TRAGEDY."

But as he flipped through the pages, the story it told was of a more somber note.

It started with the history of the Foxwood line-your lineage. How they had risen to such heights, their accomplishments and pedigree across tens of generations, how they had fought so very hard for the organization the believed in. And then it got to Ada...and her family.

He flipped the page, pausing to pore over a photograph. A gorgeous woman, one that looked so very similar to you, stood next to a rather unassuming man. They were both laughing at the little girl in her arms, a wild looking child with the same messy hair and facial features as her mother. Judging by the pouty face and blur of legs she seemed to be trying to kick out of her mother's arms, clearly done with picture time. But whereas Ada's eyes, so suffused with motherly love as she laughed at her child, were a lovely shade of lilac, the little girl's were a striking yellow. The same as the amused man standing next to his wife and daughter.

His eyes flicked down to the caption.

Ada Foxwood(30) with her husband Rhys Downs(31) and daughter Ysa Foxwood(4).
Three years before tragedy.

"Ysa..." He murmured the name. Saying it felt...wrong.

He continued reading. The article dove in to Ada's own accomplishments and promotions. The allies
she made. The enemies she destroyed. Not even a full Admiral, yet ships would hoist the white flag as soon as she turned her sights on them. She had a devil fruit of her own. A mythical zoan that, fittingly, turned her into a fearsome fox spirit. A Tenko (天狐). She would rend her enemies apart with fang and fire both, not an officer content with letting her men have all the fun. Her fighting spirit and passion were unmatched, and she wielded both kindness and blazing fury in equal measure. The Foxwood Fire, they called it.

Three years after that photograph, Ada was in the running to become a full Admiral. So strong was her position that for the first time the Marines were considering breaking the rule of three to induct her in early.

His eyes flicked over to the next page, another photograph waiting for him. The husband stood at the edge of a pier, little girl-though definitely a bit grown since the other photo-sitting on his shoulders. They were waving a ship goodbye, Ada's form faintly visible as she stood from the crow's nest, waving back at her beloved family.

*Rhys(34) and Ysa(7) wave off Ada as she travels to Marine HQ to discuss her promotion. Her ship would never arrive.*

On route to HQ, Ada's ship was attacked and raided by a conglomeration of pirate crews, temporarily united under one banner for the sole purpose of slaying The Purple Fox. No one expected it, certainly not her. That such violent, cruel pirates could tolerate each other long enough to attempt to take her down was a laughable proposition. But she hadn't been prepared, and so they did.

She had fought bitterly, protecting each and every marine assigned to her. There were no fatalities amongst any of her men, and yet more than a hundred pirate corpses littered the decks or sank to the ocean floor. In the end she succumbed to exhaustion. Even her, an Admiral in but title only, couldn't fight off such a pirate army while protecting her own. The survivors of the pirate crews that attacked took her captive, burning with fury for the comrades whose lives she took. They spent weeks brutally torturing her for no reason other than to make her suffer.

The Marines initially wrote Ada off as KIA, and sent no one to officially look for her. Many searched anyways, at least to give her family the closure they deserved. And in the end, one of her most trusted friends and confidants, a rival of hers, finally found her on an unmarked jungle island several weeks later. Utterly broken, body and mind.

Air hissed through his teeth as Crocodile quickly inhaled. Of all the people he had expected to see, this man was not of them.

The next picture was grainy, but there was no mistaking it. A blocky, hard-faced Marine officer strode through a jungle of smoldering plant life, carrying in his arms the tortured body of Ada Foxwood. He was walking away from a cave mouth lit with flames so hot the rock had melted, pools of magma haphazardly strewn about. Crocodile would've recognized that face anywhere, even though it was a much younger, pre-Admiral version of him.

*Then Vice Admiral Sakazuki finds and recovers Vice Admiral Foxwood three weeks after her capture. This island no longer exists.*

Even wrapped in his coat, it was clear that Ada's injuries were horrendous. A ragged, filthy bandage was tied about her right shoulder, a tourniquet. Nothing remained below it. One of her eyes had been gouged out, leaving a gaping hole where it should have been. She was naked under the coat gently wrapped about her. The implications of which were best left unsaid.

The article went on to describe Sakazuki's relationship with Ada, how they were staunch friends and
rivals both. Despite both competing for the same spot as Admiral, he was her most vocal supporter. She had even named him as her daughter's godfather should anything ever happen to her and her husband.

A sentence that made Crocodile's eyes glass over, and the page flopped down the desk. His mind went blank, exclamation points and question marks filling the spaces where thoughts should be.

Sakazuki was your godfather.

A short burst of nervous laughter filled the cabin.

Admiral Akainu was your godfather.

Maybe the one person in the world he couldn't possibly hope to fight. Kaidou seemed like a better choice to pick a fight with.

You hadn't been discovered while you were homeless. On the run. You were too sickly, too hungry, for any marine to possibly recognize that you were Ada Foxwood's daughter. But now you were healthy. Now you were traveling with one of the most infamous pirates of all. And now your mother's face was made fresh in everyone's minds again. The face that was practically your own.

Now, they would find you.

And he could not protect you from a monster like Akainu.

He'd have to get stronger. Impossibly stronger. The past nigh decade he had been coasting, complacent that his powers could allow him to do anything he wanted. The thing was, fighting an Admiral was not on that list at all.

But now he had you to protect. And he was damned if he was about to roll over and let them take you. You were his, dammit. His.

Crocodile held his hand before his face. It dissolved, breaking into particulate sand that he lazily moved about the air. He couldn't possibly be tapped out yet. Something as base as sand had way more potential than what he had settled with. So many types of sand...so many properties...At least one of them had to be effective against magma...as utterly insane a proposition like that was to even think about. He pulled the particles back together to form a monstrous claw of sand, fingertips adorned with razor sharp talons. Just brief contact with them would dessicate anything, even reduce stone to dust.

But that wouldn't be enough anymore.

Not if he had to fight fucking Akainu of all people. What would the Admiral think, finding out his charge had been alive all this time? That she had resorted to theft and murder to get by? And, even worse for him, she was all but sleeping with one of the most notorious pirates in the world.

He reformed his hand, sighing as he ran it through his hair. You and these complicated problems, flocking to you like honey bees to flowers. Life would never be boring with you, would it.

Of course it wouldn't. He wouldn't be so infatuated with you if you were boring.

His eyes moved back to the paper he had dropped, loathe to have read this far without finishing it. He picked it up with a sense of trepidation. The ending to this story not exactly a mystery.

Ada had been recovered by Sakazuki, a broken shell of the valiant and beloved marine hero she had
left home as. Due to the severity of her wounds, and in consideration for her husband and daughter, she received an honorable discharge with every medal they could throw at her. They patched her up, and thanked her for her service. Eager to abandon the loyal marine once she was no longer useful.

Then they sent her home. A dangerous and proven killing machine made deranged by weeks of torture.

Ada would show up at the base local to her home island the next morning, dressed in full uniform. The white and blue stained red with the blood of her murdered family.

'No more family! I-I can still fight. I'm still a marine! No more family. No more family...No more...' -Quoted from officers on duty as they arrested the former Vice Admiral.

In her shattered mind, Ada had interpreted her discharge as dishonorable, and herself as a disgrace to the Foxwood legacy. 'Think of your family', they had told her before sending her home, no idea they were planting the idea in her mind that the family she loved more than life itself was to blame for her pain and humiliation.

Marine officers that went to their house could not describe the brutality of the scene waiting for them. Rhys' body had been rent into shreds, pieces of him strewn about the house. The walls and furniture had numerous scorch marks, with many rooms still smoldering by the time officers arrived. While Ysa's body was never found, the sheer amount of gore at the scene made it impossible to ID if it was all Rhys'. It's speculated that given her small size there simply were no pieces of her large enough to remain.

The rest of the article went on to argue how the marines had failed Ada and her family, and many others too, with their negligence towards mental health. The Foxwood tragedy highlighted long standing issues the organization had with caring for their wounded officers, and with abandoning them as soon as they were no longer useful. In the wake of the incident many promises to fix these issues were made, and the real crux of the article was analyzing how many and how well such promises were kept twenty-five years on.

But he didn't really care about that part.

Crocodile closed his eyes, trying to ignore the scene his imagination was building in his mind. Ada hadn't just murdered her family. She had slaughtered them. Tearing them apart with more brutality than when she fought against actual pirates. But, how the hell had you survived? Had she enough motherly instinct remaining in her broken mind to let you run?

And then he remembered. The scar running diagonally down your back, long faded but still clearly visible. Four ragged gouges stretching from your left shoulder to right hip. Claw marks. And on your shoulder itself was a scar that could have only been from a severe burn. Somehow you had survived Ada's mindless rampage, as young and small as you had been.

Why didn't you run to the marines? They would have taken care of you!

'But then you wouldn't be here...with us...with me.' The thought immediately wrenched his gut.

How differently it all could have been. How the terrified actions of a little girl could've meant the difference between the Y/N he cared for and shared a bed with...or the world having Admiral Ysa Foxwood. Because he didn't doubt your potential, not at all, to have grown into a beloved, respected marine hero just like your mother. In the short year you had been on his ship, your strength had grown in leaps and bounds almost explosively. You learned things impossibly quickly, adopting new
fighting styles and techniques as easily as snapping your fingers. At first he had balked at Daz when he reported how...unnerving he found your natural talent to be after just a month or two of training. And then he had sat in on some of your sessions, visibly seen you learn and adjust mid strike, mind working faster than light to continuously adapt.

If you had started training in your teens rather than your thirties...he shuddered at the thought. He had managed to find a woman with the potential to make the world quake in awe, starving, sick, and dying in the streets of a frozen, no name island of no importance. Never would he have guessed the reason you were so easy to picture dressed in the white and blue was because it was literally in your blood. That your fiery spirit and willpower were the trademark Foxwood Fire.

But right now you were still growing. You needed his protection.

And that meant he needed to get stronger too.

He snapped his eyes upward at a sudden knock at the door.

Daz entered, looking...confused?

"Y/N is back." His voice sounded almost hollow.

Crocodile stood up quickly, letting the paper fall to the desk. "And? How is...does she know?"

Daz nodded, tersely. "She was carrying a copy of the paper when she came back. And... she seemed...fine?"

"Are you sure about that?" Crocodile almost recoiled, taken aback.

"Before I could even ask, she stopped me. Told me she needed time to think." Daz paused, jaw working over the words in his mouth. "She was quiet...contemplative. No sign of tears."

Croc closed his eyes, taking a long, steadying breath. "Where is she now?"

He found you in the kitchen.

Making bread.

Of all things.

You worked the dough beneath your fingers, kneading it every which way. A gentle smile played upon your lips, and you hummed a tune you knew not the name of.

The paper sat propped up to your left, held open at the picture with your parents holding you. So happy and in love. How they should be remembered.

His presence behind you was not unexpected, nor was it unwelcome. But he remained distant, watching you silently as the words failed to come to him. You couldn't blame him. What could he possibly say in this situation?

So you briefly turned your face to look at him, giving him a soft smile over your shoulder. He stood leaning against the door frame, arms crossed over his chest with that concerned look on his face. The one that scrunched up the scar about his nose and made you feel oddly fuzzy inside. He looked uncomfortable, fingers lightly fidgeting with the sleeve of his shirt. Being at a loss for words was not like him.
You would have to take the lead, as much as you wanted to just pretend this wasn't happening in the first place.

"The article doesn't say this, but...my father was a baker." You smiled down at the dough as you worked it about. "I used to help him all the time. The sweet breads were my favorite."

His footsteps came up behind you, hand brushing against your arm as he settled against the counter to your right. You turned to look at him, still smiling. "They still are."

He remained silent, but the expression on his face had softened. Now more lost than anything. He reached his hand up, thumb wiping away some wayward flour on your cheek. You leaned into his hand, and he opened it as you nuzzled your cheek against his palm. You met his somber gaze evenly, golden eyes conveying an emotion that didn't match the one on your lips.

His lips parted, mouth searching for words that just wouldn't come. After a few moments of this, looking at you with such a despondent expression, his hand slipped from your face, eyes falling downcast. "I don't really know how to handle this." He murmured, sounding so utterly lost.

"To be honest...I don't really know either." You huffed, giving him a tired shrug. "So just...your presence is comforting enough."

He looked at you and nodded, eyes crinkling at the edges ever so slightly. "As you wish."

You gave him a gentle smile before turning back to your dough. "I...I was curious if I still remembered how to do this." You continued. "It's been so long, but... it's all coming back. Like nothing ever happened." Your eyes flicked to the picture, the one from a time and place that both felt impossible. But then you shook your head, and flashed him another delicate smile. You held up your left hand, testing the flexibility of your fingers. "It's also a good way to stretch out my fingers! Build back up some strength."

He puffed a short noise. Tone and accompanying emotion hard to say.

You continued to work, grateful at least for his comforting presence even if he couldn't find the right words to say. He watched you work with no small amount of interest, eyes curiously watching your hands and fingers. How you somehow expertly flipped and turned the dough despite not having done something like this in decades. Not to mention how much smaller your hands had been back then.

But then you stopped, eyes going wide as you realized. You whipped your head to look at him, and he tensed, preparing for the worst, eyes already cringing.

"We don't have a bread proofer!" You gasped.

A beat dropped. He stared at you with prepared shock before deflating all at once, head falling forward into his hand with a loud, exasperated groan. "Holy shit, Y/N."

You merely laughed, bending down and resting your forearms on the counter as you giggled. "I felt like the tension was too high."

He peeked at you from between his fingers. "And you couldn't do it without giving me a heart attack?"

"Where's the fun in that?" You snickered at him. "Anyways, I remember how to set up a temporary one. From when ours would sometimes break."
You straightened up and pushed yourself away from the counter, turning to rummage through the cabinets. "Just gotta boil some water." You spoke over your shoulder to him.

"So...uh. You feeling...okay?" His voice was soft, tone gently inquisitive.

"Nope." No need to lie to him about it.

"Oh... I really should have figured that."

You turned back to face him, grasping a kettle in your hands with a sad smile. "But, I will be."

You walked over to the stove, flipping on the burner and setting up the kettle. "Just need a little hot water." You turned to explain to him. "Dump it in some pans, and shove it into a low-temp oven. The steam builds up and makes a nice little home for the yeast to play in."

"Hrm. What kind are you making, anyway?" He looked at the lump of dough on the counter, reaching over a finger to poke at it.

You smacked his hand, and he recoiled with a pouty look on his face that made your heart flutter. "Milk bread. Now be useful and find some shallow pans for me. Wider the better."

He grumbled, but moved to do what you asked. Complain as he did, you had a feeling he was enjoying this for some reason. It was simple. Whereas talking about the fact your mother was a famous marine hero who murdered her husband and failed to kill you too, was not.

You crossed your arms, leaning back against the counter as he began searching through the cabinets himself. "It's weird..." You were speaking before you even realized it, words almost driving themselves. "I've never talked about it with anyone...what happened. Not a single word." He paused, turning to face you. "And now everyone knows. I can't run anymore." You said it with such...resignation. Acceptance.

"Then don't run." He tucked a pan under his arm and walked back over to you. Setting it down on the counter, he took your face into his hand, looking down at you warmly. "You don't need to. Not anymore."

"Yeah." You smiled, closing your eyes as you nuzzled into his palm. "You're right."

He almost snorted. "Glad you're not going to argue with me, for once."

Your eyes snapped open, glaring at his snarky comment. "Don't be a shit and ruin this."

He shrugged, barely containing a grin. "Just trying to break the tension."

The loud shrill of the kettle made the both of your turn your heads. You playfully pushed him away, getting to work setting up your makeshift proofer while he watched.

Once the bowl of dough was set up in its warm little slice of heaven, you returned to your spot against the counter. "It'll be ready to work with again in a couple hours." You smacked your hands together, sending a small cloud of flour into the air.

"What did you do in the meantime? I mean...back then." He asks, suddenly cringing and looking away as he realized the question may be a bit uncomfortable.

You smiled, quite amused by how considerate he was trying to be. Normally he'd be huffy and snappy by now, little tolerance for complicated emotional issues. Over the past month he'd been
softening little by little, finding just enough patience for anything involving you no matter how trite or pointless he normally would've found it.

"Um, well. We would talk." You backed up, placing your hands on the countertop behind you and pushing yourself up, letting your legs dangle down the front. "I'd sit up on the counter, like this. And we'd just talk. About anything a little kid wanted to talk about really."

Crocodile looked at you silently, expression suggesting mild discomfort. Yeah, you were pretty uncomfortable about all this too.

You groaned. A long, dramatic sound that had you tossing your head back as you leaned on your hands. It barely took the frustrated, antsy edge off.

Then you growled, sitting back up and leaning forward with your forearms on your thighs. "So. Let's talk. Because apparently talking shit out is good for you, and I've been sitting on this mess for twenty-five fucking years." You tried to grin at him, but the look in your eyes didn't quite match the expression on your lips. The look of a scared little girl that's been on the run for a very long time.

He walked over, gently taking one of your hands in his. At this height, from where you sat on the counter, you could actually meet his gaze at equal level. He brought your hand to his lips, gently kissing the still-healing scars running across your fingers. The gesture took you aback, fierce blush taking hold in your cheeks as your lips parted slightly. His dark eyes flicked back to yours, glinting with an almost gentle light that made your heart stutter. "Talk as long, and as much as you need to, princess."

You sighed, leaning forward to rest your forehead against his. "I appreciate it...I really do...but you don't have to do this. I know how you feel about stup-"

He tilted his head, sealing your words in with a kiss. A warm, gentle kiss that was almost feather-light against your lips. One that told you everything was going to be okay. That you were safe. He pulled away, lips lingering just a few centimeters above yours. "Talk, Y/N."

You nuzzled into his neck, resting your head against his shoulder. Suddenly too exhausted to sit up properly. Before you could lose what little courage the kiss had given you, you forced yourself to speak.

"She attacked me first, you know." You could feel yourself disassociating as the words came to your lips. Almost as if you were talking about someone else, a tragedy that happened to someone unknown.

"She was standing in their bedroom. In total darkness, just...muttering to herself. I kept trying to ask if she was okay." You swallowed, trying to keep your breathing even. "You know, in the way that a small child doesn't realize a woman that's been brutally raped and tortured for weeks can't ever possibly be okay." He tensed, the hand stroking your hair pausing for a barely perceptible second.

You continued, the story now telling itself as you let it take over. "She didn't answer, just kept muttering. I went in the room, turning to click on the light next to the door." Your eyes glazed over as you let the memories come, unleashing them from the dark corner you had banished them to.

"As...as soon as the light turned on...she lunged. I don't even remember the initial pain...just...falling to the floor...her claws pinning me down...the shadow of flames licking across the floor..." You took a shuddering inhale, pressing your head harder against his shoulder. His hand moved from your hair, fingers tentatively brushing against the start of the claw marks running down your back.

"The way she was screaming at me, claws raking down my spine. 'This is all your fault!' " You
sounded so tired, voice ragged as you told the story of what really happened that night for the first
time in your life. "I couldn't even scream, so in shock. Dad heard her yelling, came running. He
ripped her off me...and she turned on him instead." You took a few seconds, pausing your story to
just breathe. Rough, shuddering breaths. If you cried now, you'd never make it to the end. And he
deserved to know...

More...you deserved to let it go.

You swallowed, hands coming up to cling at the collar of his shirt. "Dad told me to run. That mom
loved me, but she was sick. That he loved me, too. So I got up, and as I ran out of the room she tried
to blast me with fire. Tried to make sure I couldn't escape." His fingers moved up to your shoulder,
lightly touching the burn scar. "I ran out the door, his pained screams chasing me out into the night. I
ran and ran, to nowhere in particular. Just away."

You sucked in another shuddering breath. "It was dark and cold, dead of winter. I couldn't see, never
saw the cliff I ran off. The river was practically frozen, so cold and paralyzing I went under. Even
after what she had just done, my last thought was of mom, swooping in and rescuing me like the
hero she was." A shaky whine pushed passed your lips, and you ground your forehead into his
shoulders. Willing the tears to hold off just a bit longer. He rubbed his cheek against your temple.

"I was swept out to the coast. A group of pirates found me, strewn up against the rocks at the mouth
of the river. No idea who I was or what had happened, just saw a mutilated little girl and felt bad.
They fished me out, patched up my wounds, and set out for sea before the news had broke, taking
my unconscious little body with them." His hand returned to stroke the back of your head, fingers
threading through your hair. "When they realized who I was...they abandoned me a few islands over.
Terrified of what the marines would do to them. But I couldn't go to them. I was terrified of them
too."

A deep growl rumbled in your ear. "Why? They would have taken care of you."

"Whenever I saw the uniform, I froze. Mom was wearing it when..." You didn't need to tell it again.
"...A few months later I did try. But I was so skinny. Dirty. They thought I was just another no name
street rat. One of them hit me, told me to go away." He growled again, giving you a tense hug. "I
never tried again after that."

You leaned back, meeting his dark, sad eyes with your own. Now visibly wet about the edges,
threatening to break apart at any second. "So I kept running. I ran so far and wide that I was no
longer a little fox named Ysa, but a stray cat named Y/N." You managed to smile, a terribly wobbly
thing, but a smile nonetheless. "And that's how I'm here...with you."

He was quiet, eyes searching in your own. You sighed, something impossibly heavy escaping from
your lungs. Its absence made you feel...lighter. "I used to hate her, for what she did..." You
swallowed thickly, struggling to breathe though the lump in your throat. "But then you get
older...realize your parents are human just like you. They have their own battles, struggles..." You
paused, drifting to look at the picture of the once happy family propped up to the side. ". . .And now
all I feel is such...sadness. A mourning for a family ripped apart by tragedy."

Tears were gently rolling down your face at this point, but the cries would not come. Gripped tight in
a silent, consuming grief you'd been holding back for decades. He let you cry, pulling you forward
against his chest so he could rest his chin on the top of your head. His hand slipped under your shirt,
gently stroking your back with his rough, calloused fingers. You breathed in deep, his scent now
such a comforting one to you. Warm, the odd sweetness of cigars and the robust scents of hair
product and coffee.
Eventually the tears stopped flowing. Leaving you feeling not drained like you had anticipated, but more alive than you had ever felt before. An indescribable burden lifted from your shoulders, leaving you feeling almost weightless. You pulled yourself from underneath his embrace, golden eyes suddenly burning with a determined light as the fight returned to its place in your breast.

"I'm done running. I've lost one family and I will not lose another." You declared, tone blazing with conviction. His eyes widened, taken aback by your sudden fire. "I'm going to protect us. No one is going to take this from me. No one will touch what is mine."

And then your grimace changed to a grin, brimming with such resolve. "The Foxwoods may never get their Admiral. But they sure as hell will get a pirate queen."

You proclaimed it with such a determination, eyes shining so brightly with that fiery defiance that made him feel so weak...

He believed every word you said.

Chapter End Notes

As always, come interact with me at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/. I'm always down to chat and take suggestions.
Fulgurite (SMUT)

Chapter Summary

The bandages come off, and you're finally ready.

Fulgurite, Noun: "Vitreous material formed of sand or other sediment fused by lightning."

Chapter Notes

THE TIME HAS COME AND SO HAVE YOU.

IT'S SMUT. GRATUITOUS, SELF-INDULGENT, FILTHY SMUT.

In this world we're just going to pretend getting rammed in the cervix either doesn't happen or just doesn't hurt, lol.

Also, broke 100k words! Wow! What am I doing with my life?

As always, come interact with me at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/. I'm always down to chat and take suggestions.

You stood before the mirror, wondering who in the world the woman reflected in its silvery depths could be.

Certainly not you.

She couldn't be, not with her glimmering gold eyes. Shining like polished coins as they caught the light. Yours were a sickly yellow, like those of slavering beasts lurking in the darkness. Nor could your eyes have ever looked so rested, conspicuously absent of the dark pits hewn there by your chronic nightmares.

But you hadn't had a troubled night in weeks.

No, the woman could never have been you, because when had you ever looked so healthy? The body before you could never be yours. So full of life. So strong. So radiant. Skin so soft and healthy rather than pale and rough, not as threadbare as your raggedy clothes like yours was. Limbs and figure muscular. Toned. Fleshy rather than bony. Emaciated.

She couldn't be you. Not with her alluring body covered in lovingly placed marks, evidence of someone caring very much for her. Lavished in the affections of a man that made her feel beyond special, like she was the only woman in the world. The one person he acted sweet for. Someone that would miss her very much should something ever happen. Someone that would fight tooth and nail to keep something like that from ever coming to pass.
Nor could you have ever worn something as daring as that lacy white and gold lingerie. Perfectly fitting about her curves, making her look positively gorgeous. Expression brimming with confidence.

But as you twitched your hand, the woman did too.

And as you smiled, so did she.

You closed your eyes, taking a relaxing breath before returning to look at the reflection. Your reflection.

One now entirely absent of bandages.

"You can do this. You've both been waiting for this." You whispered at your reflection, meeting those golden irises with burning conviction.

She nodded back in stern determination.

Yes. You could do this.

He was set up in bed, reclining against a stack of pillows. His eyes were slightly narrowed, moving back and forth as they focused on the book in his hand. A dusky red leather tome. Any title absent from its cover.

You crawled into bed and over to his side, leaning over him to peek at the pages of what he was reading. They were littered with complicated diagrams and what looked to be enough mathematical equations to make you go cross eyed. Everything so alien, given how you had never gone to school.

"I can't read through you, princess." He grumbled, lowering the book slightly with a mildly annoyed tone.

You hastily retreated backwards, coming to a rest on your knees at his side. "Just wondering what you're reading so intensely."

His eyes flicked over to meet yours, expression stoic. "A research compendium on the many types of sand and their experimental properties."

"Wow." You tried to stifle a giggle. "Nerd."

He continued staring at you with that impassive expression, before returning his eyes to the pages. "I can assure you it is nothing but wondrously fascinating." He replied, using that dry tone that made it impossible to distinguish between whether he was being sarcastic or totally honest.

His grumpiness was making you reconsider your plans, and you sat there nibbling at your bottom lip wrestling over your choices. No, you'd both been waiting for this too long to let a stupid book come between you.

You moved before you could talk yourself out of it, swinging your knee over his hips to straddle him. His eyes widened slightly, brows shooting upwards in surprised annoyance. "What has gotten into y-"

Before he could finish you grabbed his hand, moving it up and under your shirt to rest on your side. He looked confused for maybe half a second, fingers tracing along the thin, bulging scar. One no longer covered in bandages.

And then you were flipping onto your back with a surprise squeak.
His lips found yours hungrily, driving you down into the sheets with a breathtaking passion. He straddled himself over you. His massive form dwarfed yours. A reminder that he could utterly destroy you if he wasn't careful. But his hand found your face, cupping your cheek with a tenderness that said you were in good care.

"I want you." You breathed, face flushed from the heat already taking root in your core. He looked down at you, his own light blush beginning to blossom outwards from his scar. His eyes were impossibly dark, so much more than normal. An indication of his pupils blowing wide with the desire that had been building up within him for weeks. One he hadn't been able to fully act upon, until now.

He stole another heated kiss from you before pulling away, leaving his lips just centimeters above yours. "Tell me what you want, Y/N." The vibrations from his purring voice making your breath hitch.

You pushed him away just far enough to meet his smoldering gaze with your own, licking your lips before curving them into a sultry grin. "I want you to Fuck. Me."

Your bluntness made him break into a grin of his own, and a deep chuckle rumbled from his chest. "As you wish." He whispered, leaning down, to place a feather-light kiss against your forehead, so sweet and gentle.

A far cry from the snarling passion with which he then attacked your neck with. His teeth nipped at every weak point of yours, lips and tongue lapping the pain away as you writhed and gasped beneath him. He worked your sensitive areas with such precision that by the time he began moving downwards past your shoulders you were already a quivering, heated mess. A chest heaving, sweat-soaked, incredibly vocal mess.

You shivered as his hand slid under your top, grabbing you by the hip.

"I know how to get you worked up so easily now." He purred into your ear, triggering an immediate shudder as he licked a swathe across the delicate skin right behind your jawline. The pad of his thumb pressed firmly onto your hipbone and you bucked upwards with a barely stifled moan.

He really had discovered nearly every button to make you sing and dance for him. So easily put under his control, happily responding to each command he expertly worked into your sensitive flesh. Not like you were complaining.

But you weren't one to be outdone.

You threaded your fingers into his hair, giving a slight tug while grinding your thigh upwards against the erection already straining his pants. He shuddered above you, breath hot against your neck as he groaned.

His reaction had you chuckling, and you teasingly clucked your tongue. "Now now, don't act like I'm not going to have you shaking and moaning just the same." He hadn't let you reciprocate much until now, and you were more than ready to learn how to make him squirm.

He grinned against your neck, fingers tracing along your sensitive hip bones to draw forth another reaction in revenge. "Is that a challenge, Princess?"

"Damn straight it is." You managed to hiss through the reedy whimper he coaxed out. But while your words were full of confidence, you, in fact, were more than a little anxious. That little grinding action had reminded you of just how very large he was compared to you. And also how very out of
practice you were. Even with him being as gentle as possible, this was likely going to hurt.

He shifted himself downwards, moving to torture your sides and hips. His hand slid upwards from your hip, rough fingers trailing little bolts of lightning as they traced across your skin.

And then he halted, body going rigid as his fingers encountered a texture they had not expected.

Your lips pressed together tightly, trying so very hard to stifle the excited, smug grin creeping into your features. You had totally forgotten exactly what you were wearing underneath your rather unassuming sleep clothes, only reminded just now by his reaction. His eyes flicked up to yours from where he was positioned mid-lick at your right side. A furious blush had taken hold underneath his scar, his eyes locked open in shock. The expression would've made you laugh in any other context, as ridiculous as it looked on such a serious person as him.

But as he pushed himself into a sitting position, the look in his eyes made your heart stutter. Without a word he slid your shirt upwards to reveal what had left him so bewildered. His breath halted in his chest, lips parting, jaw falling slack, as he beheld the lacy half-corset tight against your chest. He looked at you with a sense of reverence, one that soon had you flushing hot as well.

"I'm guessing you like it." Your hand came up to your lips, muffling the breathy giggling building beneath your breast.

It was like he didn't even hear you, the racy garment having stuck him in a trance. His hand moved to the side of your breast, teasing the delicate gold lace trim between his fingers. He devoured the sight before him ravenously, tongue flicking out to lick at the corner of his lips.

You ground your thigh upwards again to get his attention.

He hissed through his teeth, back arching slightly as his eyes fluttered half-closed.

"My face is up here, big boy." You teased, no longer bothering to disguise the excitedly proud expression plain on your face.

Your comment chased a low, rumbling growl from him, though his lips curled upward ever so slightly. His eyes flicked down to meet yours with a fiendish light. "You are a devious little woman."

Your giggling was abruptly cut off as he locked your mouth into a rough kiss, so hard your lips stung in protest. You yipped as his hand snuck under the lacy bandeau and gave one of your nipples a quick pinch. The noise had him grinning against your lips. "Will you ever stop surprising me?"

You playfully rolled your eyes with an amused hum. "Aww, and you haven't even seen the matching panties yet."

He made to push himself upwards, eager to get your shorts off. Another growl rumbled out as you stopped him, hands twining tightly into his shirt to lock him in place. A black tee he only wore to bed, so large it somehow was slightly loose, even on him. "Patience. We have alllll night." You purred, batting your eyes seductively. "I want this-" You tugged lightly at his shirt again "-off".

He grumbled but acquiesced, letting you lift his shirt up and over his head. You'd seen him topless several times at this point. Honestly? You didn't think you'd ever get tired of it. He was all lean muscle, toned lines tracing the contours of his body that made you lick at your lips hungrily. Your fingers loved to follow those dips and ridges, squeezing and poking, testing the raw strength lurking just beneath the skin.
His breathy laugh pulled you out of your own trance. "My face is up here, little lady."

You puffed, rolling your eyes. "For someone that acts so serious all the time, you sure do love to sass back."

"Mmm. You're welcome to keep staring though." He rumbled, words snaking past a sultry smirk.

Before you could respond he grabbed the hem of your tank, pulling it up and over your head. His hand pressed at your shoulder, sending you back down into the pillows with him quickly reclaiming his place above you. He pulled the bandeau down with a firm tug, just far enough to expose your breasts while leaving it snug against your upper torso.

You giggled, pouncing on the opportunity to tease him again. "Awww, don't want to take it off?"

He only responded with another deep growl, one that pleasantly vibrated into your chest now that there was no longer a barrier between your skin and his. The direct contact-feeling his chest against yours-was scorchingly deliciously. A sensation that had you biting at your lip, arching your back upwards to rub against him.

Hence your frustrated whine when he began moving downwards again, his absence almost painfully cold.

That whine cut off sharply as your breath caught in your chest, his hand and mouth each having found one of your sensitive breasts. Your back arched, knees shifting upward, toes curling into the sheets. He had you panting and writhing beneath him in seconds as he mercilessly teased your chest.

That punch-drunk intoxicated feeling descended upon you quickly, dropping you into a haze that left your face feverishly hot, thighs trying to grind together to alleviate the ache building in your core. An amused hum rumbled about the nipple in his mouth, the vibrations drawing from you a heated moan.

His knee suddenly placed itself between your thighs, preventing you from grinding them together. "Is there something you want, sweetheart?"

Croc merely laughed at your frustrated growl, pushing himself upwards to smirk at you devilishly. "All you have to do is ask. I'll take care of it."

You glared at him, the night much too early to start begging yet. And yet your lips pressed together tightly, not quite trusting the magical words he wanted to hear from slipping out.

His thigh pressed between yours, making you tense and whimper before you could contain yourself. "Look at you. So stubborn even when it's something you really want."

You looked away, cheeks blazing furiously. Pride not yet worn down by his torturous teasing.

"Oh? Suit yourself," He resumed his position at your chest, eyes meeting yours devilishly. "As you said, 'we have all night.'"

But rather than returning his hand to your nipple, it slid downward, and his knee retracted to grant him access. You couldn't help but gasp as he pressed the pads of two fingers just above your clit, applying just enough pressure that the fabric there pulled taut against you. And then he just left them there. No wiggling or teasing. Nothing but a constant pressure driving you crazy as he teased your breasts again. Just short of real pleasure. Every time you bucked and tried to drive your hips upward he pulled those fingers away. But not without playfully chastising you, much to your increasingly vocal frustration.

Every so often he would twitch those fingers ever so slightly, and you'd feel him grin against your
breast as you jerked and cried out. Lewd noises growing ever more desperate as the minutes dragged on.

You weren't going to last.

Everything was all heat and little bolts of lightning radiating outwards from his affections, gathering beneath your cheeks and coiling up in your hips. That damnable pressure burned away at your stubborn pride with each twitch of his fingers. Every single one of them unpredictable, chipping at your will until you were nothing but a quivering, jittery puddle.

Those fingers flexed once more, and the word was slipping from your lips before you even realized it. "P-please."

He lightly bit about the nipple he had between his teeth and you damn near sobbed from the built up frustration. "Please what?" His voice hummed, playfully teasing as he mocked the cadence of your plea.

His derision revived just enough indignation to make you snarl, sitting up against him as you pulled his head back by the hair. "Make me fucking cum, you ass."

He froze in the place you held him, eyes narrowing in the widest, cockiest grin you'd ever seen from him. You cursed internally at your weakness, that smug look making your cheeks burn hotly. "So demanding." He cooed, flexing his fingers again to make you jump. "But as you wish."

You released him, falling back down onto the bed as his fingers hooked into the top of your shorts. But before he tugged them down, he leaned forward. His lips gingerly pressed a kiss onto the still angry scar on your side, such a tender action that it had you blushing more furiously than any of the teasing he'd been lavishing upon you thus far. His eyes met yours, soft with just a hint of concern. "Does it still hurt?"

Your mouth parted, so taken aback by the unexpected tenderness that your mind went blank. His hand came up to cup your cheek as he asked again, so soft and low you almost wanted to cry. "Does it still hurt you, princess?"

"It's a bit sore." You managed to stammer, swallowing about the lump in your throat. "Nothing too bad though."

He frowned, brows knitting together in concern. "Are you sure you're up for this? I'll be as gentle as I can but I can't promise it won't hurt."

You groaned and dug your heels into his back, pushing him back down onto his forearms to hover above you "Yes, fuck, I want this. Now please, please, make me cum and fuck me into oblivion, okay?" As much as you appreciated his thoughtfulness, there was no way in hell you were going to come this far only to back out now. Especially not when you were so worked up due to a certain someone's teasing.

Your crass response had him sighing, but he broke into an amused chuckle nonetheless. "Alright, alright. I'll take care of you. Promise."

A sigh of relief pushed from your throat as he tugged your shorts down, but he paused again. You almost broke into another fit of laughter as his eyes went wide, mouth going slack. He had totally forgotten about the matching panties. His teeth nibbled into his lower lip, eyes wincing slightly as he admired the lacy lingerie.

This time you did giggle, lips curving into a cocky grin as he rocked backwards to fully take in the
sight of you. How nicely the white and gold delicates contrasted with your heated, flustered body. "Shame they have to come off." He grumbled, pouting as he slid them down your shapely legs.

But before he could begin to make good on his promise to 'take care of you' you shot upwards, hooking your fingers into the waistband of his pants. Flowy, olive green sleepwear that never left the confines of his cabin. "These come off too." You ordered, giving him a determined glare. Any time you had tried to get his pants off before, he had stopped you, more interested in getting you off than letting you return the favor.

Little had you known it was because he hadn't trusted himself to stay in control were they to come off and you to really touch him. But now, you were healed enough to handle him, and he was more than ready to accept what you were offering. You.

He nodded, but rather than letting you awkwardly slide them off he momentarily dematerialized, reforming with the pants now tossed haphazardly on the floor. You snorted, rolling your eyes. "Nice trick."

But as your gaze slipped below his waist your confidence quickly waned. His grey briefs were just barely containing his erection, and fuck did it look even bigger now that there was one less thing between it and you. Way, way bigger than anything you'd ever taken before. It wasn't like you were a particularly small woman or anything, not at your height. But that did little to offset the fact he was two feet taller than you.

His hand moved forward to cup your chin, tilting your face up to his. "We'll go slow." He purred, having noticed your sudden trepidation.

"Y-yeah." The meekness of your response made your cheeks burn hotly. He merely took you by the lips, gently easing you down onto the bed once more.

You bucked, keening a desperate whine as his fingers returned to where they had so painfully tortured you between your thighs. They slid almost instantly on contact. You could feel him smile through the kiss before pulling back. "So wet for me already." He teased, slipping his fingers up and down your slick folds. How ironic, that a hand that could dessicate anything it touched could make you so dripping wet.

His fingers brought that haze back, returning you to that murky, intoxicating heat. The blaze across your cheeks became feverish once more, eyes slipping closed as he gently stroked the sensitive tissue about your clit. Your hands slipped into his hair again, kneading and gently pulling in encouragement. A deep rumble against your chest indicated his approval.

"Haa-!" He coaxed forth a sharp cry as he slowly pushed a finger inside, working it in and out as his thumb rubbed about your clit. He'd fingered you a couple times now, but given you hadn't had sex in, well, years, things were a little tight. With each circle his thumb made you could feel your walls flutter and constrict about him. All the months of training and core workouts had granted you some awfully responsive kegel muscles.

Without a word he dropped to brace on his left arm, moving to nuzzle and nip at your neck again. Your left hand remained twined in his hair, your right shifting to claw at his back as he wound you tighter and tighter. Each stroke about your clit, though gentle, had you whimpering and quivering beneath him. You were getting so very close.

On the next slow thrust in he added a second finger, making you shudder and moan beneath him. This was closer to the level of thickness you had experienced in the past. Only now it felt heavenly. Your panting reached a new height, heat flaring up in your cheeks making you downright
dizzy. You could feel the coil in your belly winding itself tighter, the heat building slowly but surely.

He definitely wasn't teasing you anymore. He was trying to get you to cum, as promised.

"I...I...I'm close..." You managed to whimper out past the panting and moaning he was coaxing from you. Your eyes squeezed together tightly, the haze making it nearly impossible to keep them open. He continued each movement exactly the same, knowing any deviation in the pattern right now would only make you lose the orgasm you were so close to reaching.

As soon as your breath hitched, body going rigid as you reached the tip of that peak, he bit down on the muscular stretch between your neck and shoulder sending you full well hurtling over the edge. You came with a loud cry that cut off into silence as your entire body spasmed, back arching as your legs tried to pull inwards. Stars exploded in your eyes despite being firmly closed, and a field of static replaced the darkness of your eyelids. He kept up his ministrations throughout, letting you ride your orgasm for what felt like forever as your consciousness temporarily faded from existence amidst the waves of pleasure rolling throughout your body.

He had managed to draw from you an orgasm lasting nearly a solid minute, each slow stroke of his fingers coaxing out numerous aftershocks. One that left you panting raggedly, skin flushed and glistening under a sheen of sweat. He really had practically mastered how to make you sing for him.

By the time you came back to reality, he was gone from the bed. You were about to panic, horrified you had passed out on him, when he emerged from the bathroom with a few towels and a glass of water. He grinned, seeing the horrified expression on your heated face. "You've only been out for a few minutes. Took the time to let you cool down a bit." Returning to the bed he set the towels on the nightstand before offering you the glass. "Drink. You're overheating and losing fluids."

You snorted but took it gratefully, downing the glass in seconds. "So clinical."

He chuckled, settling back on the bed next to where you sat with the glass in hand. "Just want to make sure you're here to enjoy what comes next."

The heat the cool water had eased returned with a vengeance as you looked down at the cup clutched in your lap. Your eyes closed, willing a determination into existence to let you temporarily take initiative. He'd touched you plenty now. It was time to return the favor.

Before your confidence petered out, you rolled, quickly straddling him with your knees planted on either side of his hips. His eyes temporarily widened with surprise, before transitioning into a rather excited grin. "By all means, princess." He purred, relaxing into a comfortable position beneath you.

Your eyes trained on the hardened length straining at his briefs, and your fingers hooked into the waistband. Only just now did you realize that they were very slightly trembling. You bit into your lip so hard it stung, keeping you grounded in the impossible heat clouding your mind. With a deep, steadying breath, you slowly pulled them down. Him allowing you unlike with his pants.

'Time to stop thinking and just do it.' If you let your brain stay in control, you'd just overthink this and putter out. So let go you did, relinquishing command to what little experience you did have.

And, boy, was he not expecting that.

As soon as his cock sprang free, you wrapped a hand about its length, giving it a few experimental strokes. He gasped and hissed with the unexpected initiative, hips jerking upwards. You chuckled and looked up at him with a playful smirk, breaking out into full on giggling as he blushed and grumbled. Increasing your grip, you gave him another steady pump, this time focusing on his
expression. His eyes squeezed shut, lips curving into a pleasurable grimace as he groaned again, the noise taking on more of a growl as it ended. An approving throb in your hand let you know that he was, indeed, enjoying this.

His reaction gave you a breathy laugh, and his subsequent grumbling only spurned you on.

You took the time to actually look at what you were holding. Honestly, it was really no different from any of the cocks you’d handled. Except for the fact it was bigger in every single way. Your hand barely closed around its girth at the base, thumb and fingers just barely able to make contact. And—you added your other hand right above it—even with both hands there were still about two inches of the tip left.

Oh. And the fact you actually wanted this one.

Your tongue peeked out, tentatively licking at the tip. His eyes shot open with a sharp gasp, their dark depths staring at you in surprise. You merely hummed, sinking down to lay along his legs while holding that gaze with a devious smirk. With a mischievous lick of the lips, you brought him against your mouth, a breathy laugh ghosting hot air along its length. He shuddered, releasing a barely perceptible little moan that sent a little bolt of thunder right to your core.

The thought of teasing him—making him moan and beg for it like he did you—flirted about your thoughts. But as he looked down at you, eyes half-lidded, chest already heaving, teeth biting at his lip...that was already as good as outright begging.

Still though, you really wanted to see him squirm.

You tilted your head, running your tongue along his length from base to tip. He shuddered beneath you, eyes glazing over as he tossed a forearm over to shield them. You repeated the motion, this time stopping your tongue to tease at that sensitive spot right beneath the head. His body tensed beneath yours in time with a responding twitch from the cock against your lips. He groaned, peeking out at you from underneath his arm. "You tease..." His voice was dripping with honeyed pleasure, deep and almost raspy. One that made you drip in other ways.

You decided that was good enough.

Before he could brace himself you took the tip into your mouth, running your velvety tongue all about. His hand found your hair immediately, fingers twining about your locks. He gripped tightly, desperately trying to stabilize himself amidst the pleasure you lapped and sucked upon him. You merely hummed, letting the vibrations travel through your lips to buzz around him. His moan of approval had you brimming with newfound confidence. You sank down on him as far as you could. Which—as much as he commented on your 'big mouth'-was not very far. Minding your teeth, you could just barely manage to fit the first few inches in, but you compensated by wrapping your hands about the rest of his length. Your left couldn’t grip nearly as well, but he would just have to deal with it.

You got to work, teasingly slipping your tongue about the head and tip as your hands languidly stroked his length. The noises he made all went straight to your own sex, now aching just as hotly and painfully as before he made you cum. Each moan, fuck, each whimper, hit you just as strongly as his fingers had against your clit. You could feel how wet you were, the mess you were dripping on his leg.

"Y/N...~" His breathy, almost delirious moan had you moaning too. You dropped down in that haze again, where everything was intoxicating heat and you couldn’t think straight. Each little movement from him drove you wild, from the occasional jerk of his hips to the way his fingers kneaded into
your hair. The only thing keeping him from thrusting into your mouth was the firm pressure of your forearms on his hips...and an unbelievable amount of restraint on his part.

Still, you kept up your ministrations, pumping and sucking his cock with lusty abandon.

Little did you know how close he was, and how increasingly difficult he was finding it to stop you. Especially as he looked down, the sight of you made him as breathless as your devious little mouth did. Eyes glazed over with mischievous lust, wetness building in their corners. The furious blaze across your cheeks, no longer from embarrassment but from that love-drunk daze overwhelming your inhibitions.

But he had to stop you, not exactly trusting himself to be ready for a round two.

He snarled, shooting upwards and pulling you off him with a sharp tug. His lips met yours with a passionate growl, and he expertly flipped you to your back without losing even a centimeter of contact. When he pulled away, leaving you panting and gasping for air, his eyes met yours with a surprisingly sharp light given how glazed over they looked just seconds before. "You dangerous little minx." He rumbled, running his fingers across your cheek.

It was then you realized, and you smirked at him knowingly. You had almost finished him off right then and there.

That smirk flew off your face with a sharp cry as his fingers returned to your sopping wet pussy. He flicked this thumb across your clit playfully, the quick movement making your vision explode with nigh painful pleasure. His fingers dove back inside, making you moan and squirm as they wiggled about. But he wasn't trying to tease you as much as he was making sure you were ready, fingers pushing at your already well-dilated walls to try and stretch for more space. His face remained hard, eyes closed in concentration despite your mewling beneath him.

When they opened, it was heralded by an almost tired sigh as he rocked back to his knees. His hand retracted from you with an embarrassingly loud schlick, and you flushed hotly upon noticing the stringy wetness stretching from between your legs and his fingers. He stroked up and down his length, coating himself in your natural lubrication to ease what was coming next. The way his eyes fluttered closed, breath hitching as he worked your fluids onto his cock, had you biting at your lip in heated admiration.

His eyes lazily scanned up and down your heated body, taking in the sight before rumbling an approving growl. Before climbing back on top, he reached past you for a pillow, which he then tuck beneath your hips to give him a better angle. You smiled to yourself softly, appreciative of his experience and the level of care he was taking to make sure you were comfortable. He could have just fucked you and been done with it, caring little for any pain or discomfort.

When he finally returned to his position above you, sliding between your legs to brace on his left arm, you were full on beaming at him. The look made him grin too, blush taking hold about his scar as he leaned down to press a tender kiss on your brow. If only you could hear the thoughts in his head. How loudly his thoughts agonized over how frustratingly cute that face was. How lucky he was that someone like you saw something in someone like him.

But you got the gist from his own warm smile.

You tensed as you felt the tip slide against your folds, but he moved no farther. "Think of a word." He purred, dark eyes suddenly serious. "Something you wouldn't accidentally say during sex. If at any time you want me to stop, for any reason at all, you say that word. No questions asked."
You nodded, working your jaw, thinking of what word to use. And then it came to you, a single word drifting up above all the others vying for attention.

"Peanut butter."

The tension dropped from his shoulders, and he broke into a low chuckle. One that revived some of the sweltered butterflies sleeping in your tummy. "Peanut butter it is."

He leaned down sealing your lips in a tight kiss, hand sliding between your legs to guide himself in. You tense and throw your arms about his neck as he began to move forward, ever so slowly easing himself in. The first inch came easily, and so did the next, his tip only slightly thicker than the two fingers he had teased you with so mercilessly earlier.

Your breath hitched, whimpering muffled by his lips as he hit the first stretch of resistance. He retracted a short distance, giving himself more leverage to push in again. He kept going, pushing himself deeper and deeper rather than dragging the pain out across several short attempts. You broke from the kiss with a pained whine, digging your nails into his back as your walls stretched painfully to accommodate him. A trembling invaded your limbs and your legs especially began to quiver on either side of him.

He kept pushing forward until finally you couldn't take anymore, and you slammed your hands against his chest. A rather pitiful "Ow", barely perceptible from a whimper, pushed past your lips.

He stopped immediately, resting his forehead against yours. "You need to relax, Y/N." But his voice was strained, the tightness a bit uncomfortable for him too. "Tell me when I can move."

Never could you have imagined the level of restraint he exercised in that moment, to not just take you as wildly and roughly as he wanted.

You nodded, biting your lips shut to keep the whimpering from escaping. He reached up to take one of your hands, interlocking your fingers together before holding it down against the bed. It was more comforting than you expected, and you were incredibly grateful for his patience. You tried to steady your breathing, to just fucking relax because right now you were so tense and tight any more pressure might just snap his dick off. His mouth, meanwhile, found yours again, and he tried to distract you from the burning stretch down below that, admittedly, was gradually fading.

After a few minutes, all that remained was a dull, aching sensation that wasn't exactly comfortable, but also wasn't making you cry in pain either.

Oh, and also the impossibly full feeling. You felt that too. In fact it was pretty much all you felt, the sensation of being absolutely stuffed full with his cock. And he wasn't even all the way in, his hips still about two inches away from lying flush with your own.

When you finally felt comfortable enough, you gave a slight roll of your hips. You both moaned, shuddering as his length caught and dragged along your walls. He rumbled, and you felt it rather than heard it as it travelled directly through his chest into yours. "I...You can move now...slow..." You managed to murmur against his lips.

He pushed himself upward to look down at your flushed face, slightly damp from pained tears. His hand temporarily detached from yours to wipe away a wayward drop rolling down your cheek. "Remember your word." He purred, before beginning to slowly roll his hips. Slight, gentle movements. Just enough to have you mewling and gasping beneath him. The pain quickly began to fall away as he slowly thrust in and out, leaving something else building in its wake.
Pleasure.

Raw.

And desperate.

It steadily took hold in your core, each gentle thrust feeding it until soon you were no longer satisfied with his languid movements. Each throb, each twitch, made you jerk and whimper, feeling it in the deep-most parts of you. "More..." You moaned, tightly gripping his forearms, nails digging into his skin.

He was more than happy to oblige, eyes half-lidded as he grinned down at you. The rolling of his hips picked up a newfound intensity as he chuckled, a deep-throated, heady noise dripping with raw pleasure. The increased speed had you panting, hands pawing at his chest, now covered in a sheen of sweat as the haze descended over him too. He leaned down to growl into your ear, hot breath against your neck making you shiver even amongst the writhing he was already drawing from you. "More...? As you wish, princess."

His voice somehow traveled straight to your core, making your walls constrict about the cock now steadily thrusting inside you.

The noise he made almost made you cum on the spot. A rolling, deep moan forced itself from his throat as his back arched, his forehead grinding into the mattress next to your face. "Ohhhhh, fuck." He groaned, hips stuttering to a standstill as his breath halted in his chest. You lightly trailed your fingers along his back with an amused hum, waiting for him to fight off the mounting pleasure threatening to send him hurtling over.

After a few moments he took a deep, steadying breath, relaxing his rigid torso and arms to lightly rest against you. "You're tight enough as is, sweetheart." He rasped, voice sounding almost weak. "I won't last much longer if you do that."

You started to giggle, only making him stiffen again and loose yet another whimpering groan. "Ughhn. I can feel your laughter." He grumbled against your neck before breaking into an tired giggle of his own. "You're going to be the death of me."

"Is this such a bad way to go?" You teased, punctuating the statement with a hip roll of your own. The movement made the both of you shiver.

He suddenly pushed himself upward with thunderous growl, eyes looking down at you with almost predatory lust. His thrusting began again in earnest, returning to a modest pace as he watched your expressions with a smoldering intensity. Your eyes squeezed shut, head rolling backwards with a reedy moan. His hand moved to grip your side as your arched back lifted it off the bed.

The added leverage let him thrust harder, and he drove into you in a way that was somehow rough and tender at the same time. Your panting only increased, growing sharper and more desperate as he fucked you. The heat in your core was growing unbearable, coil winding tighter than it had ever been.

With one particular snarl his hips finally, FINALLY, snapped flush against your ass. Your eyes shot open, lips parting to gasp as the feeling of fullness became completely and utterly impaled. He gripped your hip tightly, momentarily pausing his assault to lean forward and take you passionately by the lips. The kiss practically devoured you whole, only amplifying the drunken heat burning your cheeks, making your eyes glaze over.
He released you, but not without playfully biting into your lower lip, making you jump and whine needily. "I knew you could take me, princess." His grin was downright devilish, the light in his eyes wickedly mischievous. "And you do it-" He drew out slowly, dragging his length against your stretched walls, making you whimper and quiver the whole way. His hips then surged forward, coming to rest flush with your own once more as you cry out louder than he'd ever made you before. ",so damn well."

Before you can get your bearings he began thrusting again, driving you down deeper into the bed. Each thrust squeezed from you choked cry after cry, and what lucidity had remained thus far steadily disappeared into that sex-drunk haze. He rutted into you relentlessly until you were nothing but a quivering, moaning mess babbling incoherent nonsense beneath him. "I-Ah!-Fucking fu-Ah!-I can't-ANH!"

A hand somehow found its way into his hair, roughly gripping and pulling to spur him on. He snarled, teeth finding your neck to nip and suck and drive you even further down in the steamy fog. Everything was all heat and winding pleasure, coiling itself so tightly it fucking ached.

But it wasn't enough. Not enough to make you cum again despite how sensitive you already were.

"I-! I need-!" You managed to gasp, voice sounding so absolutely raw and desperate.

He quickly tossed your left leg over his shoulder, tilting your hips upward to give him better access. You jerked, eyes going wide, mouth falling open in silent scream as the tip of his cock drove straight into that impossibly sensitive bundle of nerves deep in your cunt. "I've got you. I've got you." He rasped, eyes fluttering half-closed as your walls tightened about him from the added pleasure. His thrusting continued mercilessly, his cock hitting that magical spot with each roll of his hips.

You could feel yourself going insane. The pleasure mounted higher and higher, threatening to drown you in the sinful heat burning you from the inside out. Each thrust choked from you increasingly desperate noises, and tears were soon pooling at the corner of your eyes as the pleasure grew so tight as to be painful.

Now only barely holding on given how tightly you were rippling about him, Croc would've described the sensation building in his groin similarly. Doing everything in his power to make you cum, dammit.

He leaned forward, bending your leg on top of itself such that your knee pressed down onto your chest, continuing his thrusting all the while. His lips returned to your neck, alternating between licking and kissing and biting, each and every little thing he did only driving you higher and higher.

The new angle only granted him better access, somehow making you feel even fuller. All conscious thought fled your mind, replaced only with exclamation points and gibberish as the pleasure wiped everything else away.

And then you felt it.

The bowstring pulled taut inside you beginning to snap.

"...Oh...Oh no." The words somehow found their way past all the gasping, heralding the oncoming orgasm about the tear you apart from the inside out.

His hand suddenly gripped your thigh, gently but firmly squeezing the still sore area from your wound. Taking advantage of your body's addled senses to interpret the pain as the last bit of pleasure needed to send you hurtling over the edge. "Come on princess. Cum for me."
And then you were gone, every single sense overloading and shorting out all at once.

He came at the same time you did, his own sharp gasps joining your keening cry as his hips stuttered against yours. The pulsing of your walls milked his own orgasm almost painfully as he filled you with his cum. You were so tight he could feel it leaking out around his throbbing cock, no room for it to go. Had he not been reeling from the intensity of the orgasm tearing through him, he would've been quite pissed at the mess.

But right now he couldn't even see straight. The sheer relief of the pressure lifting from his groin giving him both tunnel vision and exploding stars.

"Fu-fuck Y/N." He groaned, words melting against your heated throat as he rode the tides of his orgasm out, slowly rolling his hips to drag himself along the vice-like grip of your cunt. It went on for what felt like hours, aftershocks repeatedly hitting him just when he thought it was over. His arms trembled as he braced above your shaking, seizing body. Barely finding the strength to keep himself from crashing down on top of you as wave after wave of pleasure rolled through him. Each one squeezing from him a pitiful whimper as he shuddered helplessly.

Eventually, after it felt like time itself had become meaningless, it ended.

He lay gasping kind of half next to you, half still hovering over top of you as he panted, trying to get his bearings as the world came back into focus. The first thing he noticed was how painfully sensitive he was, cock begging for relief as it remained just hard enough to stay inside you.

The second thing he noticed was that you had passed right the fuck out, heaving chest already slowing down to more restful breathing. He started to chuckle only to wince, expression breaking into a grimace as the sensation only irritated his oversensitive bits.

He couldn't remember the last time he'd ever cum so hard. Hell, or if he had ever cum this hard ever before. Right now he wanted nothing more than to collapse next to you, passing out like you had.

But he couldn't do that. Not yet.

Because the third thing he noticed was that the two of you were absolutely filthy. Drenched in fluids of all kinds, dehydrated, and way overheated.

So he couldn't join you just yet. Not until he cleaned you up.

His eyes flicked over to the nightstand, peeking over your chest at the towels he'd placed there earlier. He sighed in relief upon seeing them, thanking himself for having the prudence to prepare them in advance.

He had to reach for them awkwardly, skin much too slick to turn to sand. The first one fell to the floor as his fingers tried to tug it over, not quite close enough to get a good grip on. With an exasperated groan he pushed himself upward, stretching over to yank one over.

Now came the part he'd been both dreading and wanting desperately.

He groaned as he drew himself out, way too sensitive to enjoy your deliciously sweet heat any longer. Right as he drew fully out, he pressed the towel between you legs, letting it mop up the various fluids beginning to flow out now that he wasn't keeping them in.

This was the part he always hated. When the haze disappeared and his inhibitions returned, making him find the once sexy mess as anything but.
He stood, legs feeling weak as his feet touched down onto the floor. But what really made him feel weak was the sight waiting for him when he turned around.

His jaw went slack as he looked at you, the post-sex flush making you look positively radiant. Everything about your beauty seemed amplified. From your lusciously wild H/C locks to your glowing, flushed skin...in that moment you looked like a goddess strewn over his sheets...sent from the heavens just for him.

And damn if he didn't feel utterly blessed to have you.

He leaned down, pressing a kiss gingerly against your heated brow, before turning and heading into his bathroom to clean himself up. The sight of his reflection in the mirror madr him snort. Hair going all over the place, face flushed absolutely rosy. The post-sex glow had taken hold under his skin too, and he grinned sleepily at his reflection. "Wow. She really did a number on you."

But that grin quickly faded as he began to wipe himself down, replaced by a worried frown. "Shit." The towel pulled away slightly pink, his heart wrenching upon realizing he had probably torn you up a bit.

You were in for a rough day tomorrow.

"What happened to being gentle? Asshole." He muttered at himself, running the towels under some water to cool you down with. But as your needy, sex-flushed face flashed in his thoughts, he knew there was no way in hell he would've been able to hold himself back anymore than he already did. He just was grateful the amount of blood was as little as it was.

The soft smile returned to his expression when he came back to you, heart fluttering at how you had curled up with his shirt clutched in your hands. It really wasn't fair, how effortlessly cute you could be.

He got to work, gently wiping down your heated skin, getting some water into you to ease the husky panting whistling past your dry lips. The soft whimper you made as he cleaned between your thighs made him wince, area incredibly raw from the ferocity of the passion he had just subjected upon it. He cursed under his breath as the towel came away with a few reddish spots. Each one fueling the guilt beginning to fester in his gut.

But then you opened your eyes, those impossibly gold irises practically glowing at him. A soft, delicate giggle fell from your lips, curving them into a smile he would kill anyone to keep on them for forever and always. You raised your arms, beckoning him into bed with a sleepy yawn. "Cuddle..."

And so he did. Gladly. Clicking the light off and passing out wrapped about a devious little woman he certainly didn't feel he deserved.

But so long as you wanted him, he would never leave your side.

Chapter End Notes

As always, come interact with me at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/. I'm always down to chat and take suggestions.
Exposure (FLUFF & SMUT)

Chapter Summary

The consequences of being with a man like the notorious former shichibukai leave you feeling exposed in more ways than one. But there's no way you'll go down without a fight.

Chapter Notes

This is filthy. That's your only warning.

Oh, there is some plot stuff in here too, I guess. But we know that's not why you're reaaaallly reading this :)

Also, a plug for another fic I recommend if you enjoy mine! Check out "Quicksand" by fixitforme: https://archiveofourown.org/works/15970802/chapters/37252292

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/

You groan as a particularly warm ray of light strikes across your eyelids, drawing you out of your slumber. They crack open warily, and you preemptively cringe from the brightness about to assail your poor, tired eyes. Sure enough, the light has you wincing, sending your head burrowing back into the pillows in search of that comfy arm it loved to lay against.

One that isn't there.

Your eyes shoot open, breath catching in your throat.

His place beside you is empty. Cold.

Crocodile has been gone for a while.

Alone. Alone. The last thing you wanted in the world was to wake up alone ever again. Alone. Cold. Hungry.

You always wake up first, with him joining you an hour or so later. For him to not be there when you woke... Alone. Panic and dread settle into your gut, mind still too groggy to process any of the perfectly logical reasons why he isn't here. You make to sit up, drag yourself out of be-

Pain.

Razor sharp pain radiates from your pelvis outwards. It sends you flopping back down to the bed with a strangled cry, trembling legs curling into yourself. Desperate to alleviate the shooting pain between them. The limbs themselves feel weak, like you were recovering from your sickness and
injury all over again. Jittery, quivering things that weren't listening to the commands your brain was telling them. A brain still addled by sleep and frantically trying to piece together why you were in pain. Why you were alone.

Just as confused, angry tears start to pool at the corner of your eyes, it finally clicks.

The memories of last night come flooding back.

The two of you had finally fucked.

And it was good.

Your hand smacks into your forehead, dragging down your face. The clarity of consciousness returns and now you just feel stupid. A clingy, over emotional woman freaking out because her beau had gotten out of bed before her. Your brain had been too tired to process that, immediately jumping to the nuclear option that you had been abandoned again. All because you lov-

No.

No.

Stupid.

It was too early for that. For the big 'L'. Just because you finally had sex sex did not mean you lov-

No.

You couldn't finish that thought.

That word.

You liked him. Really really liked him.

Not...that other word. The other L word.

Your face flushed painfully hot. Chest twisting and aching.


You groan, trying to stretch yours legs without drawing more pain.

The reason why you felt like you had been torn in half was because, well, you kind of had been. And it had felt downright amazing then. Now? You flex your core muscles, whining as that stinging pain arched upwards. Now it didn't feel too good.

But you didn't regret it a bit.

Remembering his tender care...his expressions...his fucking noises. It's almost enough to make you want to go for another round right then and there. Almost.

Your poor lady bits need some time to recover.

Still, that left the matter of why he wasn't here with you right now. The intensity of the light streaming in through the window probably had something to do with it, leaving you dreading finding out what time it is.
Gingerly rolling over to look at the clock. all the while choking down pained little grumbles, yo-ONE IN THE AFTERNOON!?

The revelation startles you so much that you keep rolling, not catching yourself in time to keep yourself from tumbling right out of bed. You fall with a gasp fueled by both pain and panic, limbs catching in the sheets as you flail wildly.

But you never hit the floor. You stop falling about an inch short from slamming your face into the hard wood. Something caught you about the waist, leaving you hovering just inches from painful, bruising collision.

An exasperated sigh fills the air. "I really can't leave you alone for more than a few minutes, can I?"

And then you're rising, wispy sand tendrils lifting you upwards and gently depositing you back on the bed.

Crocodile stands in the doorway leading to his office, slightly amused yet concerned expression on his face. Like he was looking at some kitten stumbling about, tripping all over itself.

It makes your face burn hot with indignation. "Don't look at me like that!" You snap, hurriedly looking away so he couldn't see the panicked tears that had formed in your eyes. But it's far too late, because suddenly he's sitting on the bed, grabbing your chin and turning you back to look him in the face. His stupid, handsome face.

He's silent, save a low noise conveying an emotion you couldn't really place. Something like a short growl, trying to coax an answer from you. You try to turn away but he holds your face firm, staring at you with that dry, stern look, dark eyes unblinking. Those piercingly dark eyes you could forever drown in. He had started to do this when you were being difficult. Forcing you to look at him, silently staring you down until you finally caved and told him what was wrong.

And it worked nearly every damn time.

You sigh, melting into his hand. "I woke up...not thinking straight. Panicked when you weren't here. Went to get up and look for you and it... hurt..." Your cheeks flush hotly, gaze falling down and to the right. "...I fell out of bed when I noticed what time it was." You mutter, trying to muffle your words in his palm. Embarrassed by how ridiculous it all sounded.

He visibly flinches, eyes narrowing in a self-loathing wince.
Ugh! No! You couldn't deal with frustrated, mopey Croc right now!

You growl and roughly pinch his cheeks, forcing him to open his eyes. "Nu uh, you look at me." You order, glaring at him sternly. "Last night was amazing. Okay? So good I'd take you for another round right here and now if I could." He rears back slightly, visibly blushing a bit. A tiny strip of rosiness barely perceptible beneath his scar. One that has your heart thumping almost painfully in your chest.

'God damn it, calm down!'

You swallow before continuing, trying to keep the butterflies down. "And remember, I was the one that asked for 'more'. So stop moping, please? It was fantastic. You were fantastic. And I have no regrets." As you finish, you give his cheeks another quick pinch before letting your hands fall to his shoulders.

He remains silent, dark gaze meeting yours steadily. If only you could hear what was going on behind it, in that frighteningly intelligent brain of his. He really was so smart...so handsome...so sweet, but only for you...

And then your stupid mouth begins moving.

"I l-" NO NO NO NO NO. That word bubbled up to your lips, and you barely stop it in time. It lingers there, a burning, intrusive thought desperately trying to push itself through. 'Stupid, fucking hormones!'

He cocks his head to the side, eyes taking on an almost predatory light as you cut yourself off. He swallows and rush to give him a believable answer. "I liked it. I really did, Croco. And I want more, when I can." You blush hotly, hoping you can disguise the reason you're really getting all flustered for with what you had just said...and not what you almost said. "That's...if you want more too."

He deflates, shoulders relaxing as the hint of a smile creeps back into his features. "Of course I want more." He half mumbles, half huffs, brow twitching. You can't help but laugh, honestly just happy he enjoyed it so much. That you were good enough for him.

But then he shakes his head, banishing those undeniably lewd thoughts from his mind. His hand finds one of yours, bringing it to his lips. "I am...sorry..."-He almost grits the word through his teeth, clearly not used to saying it-"...for hurting you. But I am relieved you found it so enjoyable."

Your face goes red hot, teeth biting your lips into a thin line. You almost want to smack him, cute aggression rising. 'Fuck. You can't be sweet like this right now. I'm dying over here.'

So you try to defuse the situation, anything to keep that word from escaping and ruining everything.

You smirk at him, a smug little expression. "You know, most guys would be proud of fucking their girl so hard she can't walk."

He puffs a short sound of amusement. "Yeah well, that's probably because they're not so much larger they can actually hurt her."

You were about to rib him back when your stomach suddenly decides to make its presence known, having gone unrecognized for far too long. A painfully loud gurgle sounds in the air between you
two, followed by a stretch of silence. Your hands twine into the sheets as that hunger-induced anxiety kicks in.

He leans forward, placing one of those too-nice kisses on your brow before rising from the bed. "You missed breakfast, but it is about time for lunch. Would you like coffee as well?"

'I don't deserve this.' A single intrusive thought.

"Why didn't you wake me up, by the way?" Is what you really say, still a bit miffed about having wasted so much of the day sleeping. "Also yes to coffee."

He shrugs, giving you that lazy grin he only uses when relaxed...happy? One he uses a lot when around you...always giving you butterflies. "You seemed like you needed it. After last night."

A frustrated groan tears from your throat. "Yeah, but not until the goddamn afternoon!"

"I was just coming to wake you up. Not my fault you decided to take the fast way out of bed." He tousles your already-messy bed hair. "Now relax. I'll bring you some food."

As he leaves, you sink back down into the pillows, tears threatening to return to your poor, tired eyes.

All because of a single, damnable word.

One you didn't know a man like him could ever say back.

"So why 'princess?'" You ask aloud, knowing he's around you somewhere.

There's not much to physically see, what with the blindfold on. All you can make out is whatever happens to be actively moving in about a ten foot radius surrounding you. A different type of sight, where movement is translated to swirling streams of light in the darkness covering your eyes.

Haki training.

The blindfold was a clever suggestion by Daz, something to let you focus on just one sense instead of trying to juggle all of them. Today is all about your hearing, dodging easy attacks by ear alone. It also happens to be your first day returning to training, and your body is practically vibrating from the pent up energy.

"At first, it was because you're a high maintenance brat." Croc's smug laugh echoes out of the dark from somewhere behind you. You whirl around but he's far enough away that you can't sense where exactly he is.

"Pffft. Sure you're not describing yourself?" You grin, but continue scanning the area. It would be just like him to get you all worked up only to toss a sables your way. Nothing that could hurt you, save for your pride. But you didn't have much desire to eat sand today.

A rustling sounds to your left and you instinctively drop into a defensive crouch. While you couldn't see beyond your haki radius, you could still hear pretty damn well.

As soon as the whip of sand crosses into your zone it becomes a vivid tendril of light. Odd, glowing streams paint the intruding sand in grey-scale, coating its length with lines along its path of movement. Almost like the rippling of water from a disturbance. They leave behind a trail of where the intruder came from, and lead just enough ahead you can feel how it's going to move next.
Your neurons work to calculate the trajectory faster than it's happening in real time. To you, it's almost as if it all happens in slow motion.

You wait until the whip is an arms reach away before deftly turning to the side. It arches through the air just a few inches from skimming your nose.

"I'd ask you to try harder, but I wouldn't want you to ruin your perfectly styled hair...Sir Princess." You mock him even knowing you'll probably suffer for it in the next few minutes. You can't not tease him.

The stream suddenly pivots. It boomerangs back in your direction at a downward tilt, aiming to knock you off your feet. You only barely manage to jump away in time, but the awkwardness of your spring has you landing off balance. Your whole body wobbles as your weight attempts to balance on your heels.

He sees the opportunity and pounces.

A much wider band of sand enters your haki radius behind you. You see it without even needing to face it, senses rendering the paths of motion in your mind's eye as clear as if you could see them physically. The currents streaming about the band suggest a blunt strike to the back of your knees. Something to send you tumbling to the floor.

With grit teeth you throw your body weight forward while kicking off the deck. You flip in place, a tight roll with a bit too much power that has you complete two forward spins before gravity takes back over.

But the deck below you isn't moving enough relative to you to trigger any haki currents. And you've spun just long you can't quite tell which way is up and which is down.

You aren't left wondering too much longer, as suddenly you realize you hadn't jumped as high as you thought you had. A damning realization forcefully brought to your attention as you suddenly slam chest first onto the deck. The wind is knocked clean from your lungs immediately, a harsh grunt and click sounding in the air from your jaw snapping shut as your chin hits next. The rest of you follows shortly after, none too gracefully collapsing into a gasping heap of limbs.

A chorus of sympathetic groans and some poorly muffled laughs drift into your ears through the ringing.

You had totally forgotten the crew had been watching, eager to see how the Captain and his belle square off.

But one laugh in particular is what really sets you on edge. "Might I also mention the unwarranted haughtiness as another reason? My dearest Princess."

Indignation couldn't have been a better panacea for the pain. A poultice so good it makes the metallic tang in your mouth taste almost sweet.

With a snarl you spring to your feet, kicking off a dash towards where his laugh had sounded from. He makes the mistake of taking a step backward as you rapidly approach. His movements trigger the vivid haki currents letting you know exactly where he is. Exactly where his face is.

You grin and swipe your hand across your mouth, feeling the wet blood from where you had painfully bitten your tongue smear across your knuckles and finger tips.

Just as he begins to dissipate, you kick forward and upwards into a vicious hurricane kick.
type of kick that would've downed any other man, even sharing his size, shattering ribs and jaws alike. The force of your initial swing carries you through three rotations, each kick passing through him harmlessly as expected. But the upwards momentum carries you up to your true target.

You can't see the look on his face, but you can most definitely feel it. The way that smug grin of his turns into a wide eyed grimace as your dampened hand latches onto his collar. You brace your feet on his chest and rear backwards, gripping onto his shirt while your other hand cocks backwards behind you and curls into a fist prepared to punch the ever loving shit out of him.

But it doesn't.

Your knuckles stop just short of the spot between his eyes. Your haki flares with streams of movement as his hair and clothes rustle from the force of the almost blow.

The entire deck falls silent. Tension thick enough to drown in.

And it makes you grin wider than you ever have before.

With a particularly dramatic flourish you press the flat of your finger onto the tip of his nose, giving him a boop alongside a playful coo: "Chuuuu~" You fall back down to the deck with a giggle, reaching up to push the blindfold off.

His face is bleeding.

Your jaw goes slack as you try to process what you're seeing.

The patch of skin between his eyes, just above the bridge of his nose, is split open as if you had actually hit him. But...you hadn't. You had stopped just short of hitting him.

"How...but..." Your gaze flits between your hand and the cut on his face "...I didn't even..." But from the look in his eyes you know you'll get no answers from him. He's just as confused as you are.

"Always full of surprises, kitty." Crocodile's focus shifts over your shoulder as Daz's voice sounds from behind you. You turn to see him sauntering over, amused smile on his usually impassive face. "I warned you about sparring with her." He chuckles, giving Croc a knowing 'I told you so' look.

"Daz...what...what did I do? What was that?" You look at him almost in questioning horror. For your body to have done something more than you had intended... If you hadn't held back...

He merely shakes his head. "No idea. Everyone's haki is different, and yours is still too unrefined to tell what your particular flavor is."

"But...I thought mine was just observational."

Daz is about to speak when Croc cuts him off. "It may have been just that. At first." His fingers brush against the cut now bleeding freely, blood streaming down around his nose. But then he breaks into a beaming grin, gaze shifting from the blood on his fingers to your anxious frown. "Well, we'll just have to keep experimenting then, won't we?"

You swallow, blush creeping across your face as you recognize the light in his impossibly dark eyes.

Pride.

The news had broke.
Your secret was finally out.

Little Ysa Foxwood was alive.

You sat on deck with the newspaper in hand, eyes intensely skimming over the article as dread settled into your stomach.

The couple you had accosted back on that island had immediately run to the Marines, and then the press. Rather than thinking them crazy for their story about the mysterious woman with the bright yellow eyes—the one with Ada's face—they had instead taken them rather seriously.

An alert had been spread, hopping island to island until someone spotted you.

Someone with a camera.

Crocodile had been meeting with someone that day, an informant of some sorts, and asked you to accompany him. Worried you would be recognized, especially since you were around someone of his...notoriety...you had donned a low-sitting cap to obscure your eyes. One that had inadvertently only made you look more like your mother, what with her iconic Marine cap.

The woman in the picture was undeniably a now grown Ysa Foxwood. Just as much as the man beside her was undeniably the former shichibukai.

But Ysa may not have been the most interesting thing in the picture.

She...you...were looking at something off frame, and from the face you were making it was an adorable creature of some sort. Your hand was outstretched, finger moving to point at it as the beginnings of an excited grin formed on your face. You looked downright ecstatic.

Whatever it was, Crocodile, though, was not looking at it. He was looking at you.

With a look that conveyed much more than the typical relationship between a captain and crew member. Much, much more.

Your chest aches, breath freezing in your lungs.

Seeing the way he looked at you, like you were the most precious thing in the world...you sniffled, only just now noticing the tears building around your eyes. All that day, and whenever you were in public, he had to act cold around you. Callous, like you were nothing more than yet another expendable hired blade. You understood why, but that never made it sting any less. To see this slip up forever immortalized in print...how he really looked at you.

You started as fingers suddenly brush against your cheek, catching a tear as it begins to fall. He gently takes the newspaper from your trembling hands before returning to cup your cheek. The look on his face is hard but...determined.

"Apologies for not noticing the camera." He rumbles, expression shifting to mildly apologetic. "I had hoped to keep your identity secret for a while longer. Until you were stronger."

"I..." But your voice trails off, not really knowing what to say.

Instead he places a tender kiss on your brow. His voice drops low. "Whatever happens, I will never give up what's mine." A threat, to all the world that now have their eyes set on you.

"The same goes for me." You swallow down the lump in your throat, and return his determination
with a defiant look of your own. "No more running, it's time to fight."

You groan, falling backwards onto the bed as Crocodile pushes you down.

His hand has already fallen to your chest, where it now paws at a breast through the fabric of your clothing. A finger flicks your nipple, but he seals in your sounds with a hungry kiss.

Your face flares hotly, already so worked up from his incessant teasing throughout the day. You'd made the mistake of wearing that dress you had bought a few islands over. The red one with the flared, white pleats. Worse yet, you had paired with sheer, black stockings. Ones that tantalizingly stopped just an inch below the hem.

It had driven him mad.

The occasional pinch...the slight wisps of sand across your neck...up your dress, ever so lightly brushing the sensitive skin of your thighs... Today had been nothing short of torturous as he so unashamedly played with you in public. The only evidence having been your surprised noises and expressions. Not a single hint of amusement had crossed into his features, but you sure as hell felt it. That smug aura telling you just how much he reveled in making you squirm and fight for composure with just a little light touching...

He had practically dragged you by the hem to his-yours now?-room and thrown you to the bed as soon as the two of your had returned to the ship. His own composure having run out, left just as needy and desperate as you were.

You shudder and gasp through the kiss as his hand moves from your breast to brush up a thigh, sliding up and under that damnable dress. The pads of two fingers press against your already damp panties and you squirm beneath him, legs beginning to writhe from the low heat already building in your tummy.

He releases your lips with a low, haughty laugh. "So wet for me already."

An annoyed growl rumbles from your throat as you glare at his smug expression. "You've been toying with me all day, jerkass."

"Oh, princess." His voice drips with honey, purring against your throat "You can't wear something like this and not expect me to play with you." He applies just a little more pressure with his fingers, snickering as you mewl from the sensation.

His laugh only fills you with more indignation. In revenge you grind your thigh upwards against the hardness in his pants, making him shudder. His eyes flutter closed, brow twitching. "Don't act like you're not just as hot and horny as I am." You give him a playful frown and attempt to cross your arms over your chest in a mock-pout.

With a surprising amount of speed his hand pulls out from under your dress, catching your wrists just as they cross over one another. He pins them over your head against the mattress with an low growl. "I never said I wasn't. I've been waiting for that 'round two' you proposed ever so patiently."

He leans in, sucking a mark into the sensitive skin below your ear. The sensation makes you squirm and whine. Your back arches off the bed, desperate to maximize the contact between your bodies even as your arms remain pinned above your head. He puffs his chest out to acquiesce your request, enjoying the heated friction just as much.

You try to move your hands, desperate to touch and grab, but he forces them back down to the bed
with a grip just short of bruising. You hear him chuckle so low and soft. "That patience has just about run out."

Your breath hitches, that line going right to your core to stoke the heat now flaring wildly inside you. It stretches all the way down your spine, fingers of pure heat flickering through your body. Your face especially, which now feels painfully heated. You bite at your lip, eyes falling half-closed as your brows knit together.

The idea of him having his way with you leaves you more than a little hot and bothered, but...you feel yourself begin to shake, breath picking up at a more anxious shuddering. The memories of all the other times you'd been held down like this, though with care far less gentle than his, invade your thoughts...and he can tell.

He notices the change in your demeanor immediately, detaching himself from his neck and releasing your wrists. "Shit" The curse hisses through his teeth as he rubs your wrists, expression on his face one of frustration mixed with remorse. "I didn't think, I-"

"I didn't say 'peanut butter.'" You cut him off, looking up at him with an almost demure expression. Golden eyes slightly lidded, lips barely parted. The evidence of your longing still burning red hot on your face.

You hadn't wanted him to stop.

He freezes, looking down at you in worried confusion. "What d-"

"'Peanut butter. The safe word." You huff, eyes drifting away shyly. "I didn't use it."

His expression shifts to one of incredulity. "Y/N. I can sense the anxiety coming off you. Are you sure?"

You bite at your lip, nodding at him too quickly to indicate complete ease. "I...I trust you." The whisper falls from your lips, and your eyes flutter closed.

His hand comes up to your face, cupping your cheek in the way you've come to cherish. The way that makes you feel cared about. Cared for. "I need you to tell me in no uncertain terms exactly what you want."

"I..." You swallow, cracking your eyes open to meet his intense gaze. His dark eyes stare into yours sternly, searching for the answer he wants to hear. One last deep shudder rattles out of your lungs as you gather your composure. "I want you to fuck me. Hard."

He makes a low rumbling noise. A prompt for more.

You wrap your fingers about the wrist attached to the hand still cupping your cheek, watching his expression with your own intense focus. "I want you to fuck me in the way you've been wanting to...the way you've been dreaming about...Wild...Aggressive..." His lips twitch ever so slightly.

"You were so sweet last time...but...that's not how you really wanted me, was it?" You turn your head beneath his palm, lightly sinking your teeth into his thumb. His eyes never leave yours, but the light in them grows more voracious by the second. Your tongue slips out to lap at the divots left by your teeth. His expression remains hard.

Predatory.

You grin beneath the fingers at your lips. "No, you want to pin me down...Take me as roughly as
Before you can finish he's flipping you onto your stomach, choking from you a surprised yelp. You hear the sound of his belt coming undone, but as you try to look behind you two sand tendrils whip out and gather your wrists together. You gasp as they they pin your arms at the small of your back. Another presses into the back of your neck, keeping your face flush against the sheets.

As soon as you hear the belt come free he's wrapping it about your arms, pulling them tightly together and keeping them there. His hand comes off your wrists and you instinctively try to wiggle your arms free.

They're stuck tight.

The heat returns to your core with a vengeance, nervousness now overshadowed by barely contained excitement. You're already panting again, thighs rubbing together in desperation, seeking to alleviate the pressure quickly building at their apex.

You feel his presence lingering over top of you, and your head twitches to the side as his hot breath ghosts along your ear. He rumbles a low chuckle into your neck, straddling you across hips and running his hand down the length of your spine. Your teeth worry into your lip as his erection rests against the curve of your ass. Even held back by his pants, you feel how it throbs. "You've asked for this, princess." He purrs, nipping the tip of you ear. The sharp pain makes you shiver and yelp.

But then his tone softens, and he presses an almost chaste kiss against your temple. "Use your word as soon as you need it. Promise me."

You manage to turn your head enough such that a single eye meets his piercing gaze. His eyes are that same impossible dark as when you last had sex. That very first time. Pupils blown wide with undeniable lust. "I trust you, and..." You swallow, flashing him a soft, reassuring smile. "...I promise."

You really did trust him. He would take care of you. He would not break you.

Croc breaks into a sharp grin, eyes narrowing. "Let's see if you take me just as well as last time."

You shudder beneath him, teeth biting into your lower lip as he flips you onto your back. Your arms remain pinned tight beneath you. No amount of wriggling loosens the belt binding them together, leaving you completely and utterly at the mercy of the man staring hungrily down at you.

The thought sends your heart racing.

His hand comes up to the neckline of your dress, fingers tracing along your collarbones. You shiver, eyes slipping closed as your head lolls back onto the bed. "Really now...wearing something as cute as this...? There's no way I couldn't tease you..." His voices rumbles above you.

"It's going to be hard to take my dress off with my arms like this." You manage to pant, peeping up at him from behind already damp eyelids.

"Oh, sweetheart." His fingers hook underneath one of the wide straps keeping it on your shoulders. "As if it was ever going to come off in the first place." He yanks it down, the other quickly following. "Now, let's get those cute tits out for me."

"His possessiveness has you quivering beneath him, entire body wired. An active current of pure anticipation. Holy fuck you wanted this. To just let go and have him take control, take whatever he wants from you. Whatever he needs. Your pride screams angrily in defiance to not let him get away
with this. But the haze has already descended upon you, and those stubborn voices grow fainter by the second.

True to his word, he quickly yanks the top hem of your dress, sliding your bandeau down with it. Your nipples spring out as the last of the fabric pulls away, already perky from the rampant teasing he'd subjected to you thus far. The friction as he pulls the fabric away makes you whimper, and your face flushes ever hotter now that you don't have an arm to toss over your burning cheeks.

There would be no hiding any of your expressions from him tonight. No covering your mouth and muffling those sweet noises he loved to hear so much.

You were his.

And he was going to do with you whatever he pleased.

"God damn, you look so good trussed up for me like this." He purrs, leaning back to fully admire the glorious sight of his trapped little princess.

The way her cheeks and chest were flushed, already covered in a sheen of sweat. How her lips alternated between parting to pant—chest heaving after so little touching—and being bit tight in some vain attempt to keep her noises from escaping. The wetness building at the corners of her shimmering gold eyes. Such a sultry look, half-lidded and already hazy. Her limbs ever so subtly quivering beneath him, trembling in nervous anticipation with each little trail of his fingers.

Oh yes.

She was perfect.

You were perfect.

How we wanted to utterly wreck you. Leave you a dazed, sopping wet mess. And he would, in the sweetest of ways. So good you would be begging for it, moaning and whimpering just for him. Each and every sound placed in your throat by something he di-

"Are you going to do something or just keeping gawking at me?" You huff, pressing your lips together in a pout.

Ah...Or something he failed to do.

"You are in no position to be making demands, princess." His lip twitches, dark eyes narrowing. But there was a hint of playfulness to his tone, like a cat toying with a mouse.

You had no choice but to play along. Your pride may have been muffled, but it could never truly be quieted. "Maybe if someone would put their mouth to good use then I wouldn't have to be so demaaaaaanding." You whine, giving him a bratty sneer.

Big mistake.

"Oh? Now there's an idea." He growls, scar crinkling about his nose as a wide grin splits his face. You yelp, more in surprise than in pain, as his hand works into your hair and pulls you to your knees, dragging you to the edge of the bed. He's kind enough to gather it at the roots, causing only a mild pressure rather than biting sting. The spark in his eyes is downright devilish as he looks down at your indignant expression.

"Since you volunteered..." He hums, letting go of your hair to run his knuckles down your cheek.
You shiver, already knowing full well what he wants from you in this position. His hand pulls away to move to his pants, eager to slide them down and get himself in your mouth.

As soon as his cock springs free, his hand dives back into your hair, pulling you upwards to a better height for you to service him at. You unexpectedly groan at the sensation. 'So that's why he likes having his hair pulled at so much...'

But all thoughts quickly evacuate as you're brought face level with his already well-hardened cock. You had forgotten just how large it was when not constrained by his pants. And— you wiggle them for good measure—with your arms still firmly tied behind your back, trying to pleasure him with solely your mouth seemed like an impossible venture.

He picks up on your hesitation, tone impatient. "Go on then. You said someone needed to put their mouth to use."

You swallow around the lump in your throat. This was just another challenge. And you never gave up on a challenge. You were not a woman who knew the meaning of 'surrender'. He may be in control now... but after this he would be the one begging for more.

Your lips part, tongue flicking out to tentatively lick at the head. His fingers tense ever so slightly against your scalp. A movement you barely noticed compared to how his cock twitches upward. His body was already betraying just how hungry he was for you.

'Ooh yes. You're going to squirm for me tonight, you big reptile.' You look up at him, eyes glinting mischievously, as you flick at the tip again. This time dragging your tongue directly underneath into that sensitive bit beneath the head. His cock twitches again, in time with one of his eyes. All the while your own never leave his face. You would rather die than miss any of the expressions you were about to give him.

"Even forced to your knees, you still find a way to be so willful." He growls, quickly growing frustrated by your teasing.

Your mouth opens to pant hot air along his length. You give a quick suck to that sensitive spot, chuckling as air hisses through his teeth. "'Forced?'' You hum, kissing the head with grinning lips. "You have me like this because I've allowed it, big boy."

He snarls, but the look in his eyes is not one of fury, but of poorly contained amusement. His girl was never one to just roll over and take it. He would've been disappointed if she had.

"Do I have to shove my cock in your mouth before you get the point? I am in charge here, princess."

He tugs your hair a bit, just enough to coax out a whine. His words have you feeling hazy again, thoughts turning more nebulous by the second. The light pain at your scalp triggers a needy throb in your core.

Why the hell were you enjoying this so much?

"So impatient... but I suppose you've been good enough for this mouth." You sigh in mock impatience. He growls again but before he can speak you're already taking the tip between your lips. Your tongue slips about the blunt head, velvety and impossibly soft, exploring each and every feature as your lips seal around him.

He can't help but groan, fingers tensing in your hair. His immediate reaction has you smiling about him in your mouth. 'Moan for me. Moan for the girl you've supposedly forced to her knees.'
"That's it, good girl." He sighs, voice already husky.

You almost choke. Good girl. A line that feels like a direct swipe across your clit. You shudder, a shiver of electricity jolting down your spine. It feeds into that throbbing ache at the apex of your thighs and your hands clench behind your back. So desperate to touch him. To touch yourself.

He picks up on your reaction immediately, a heady chuckle rumbling out above you. "Oh? Do you like being called a 'good girl', sweetheart?"

You press your tongue into that tender underside, staring him dead in the eye with a hazy, lusty expression. 'Yes. Yes I do.'

He grins, kneading his fingers into your scalp. "Always so eager for my approval..."

Spurred on by his words, you take a little bit more of him into your mouth. Just barely past the tip and it's already a tight fit. 'How did this thing fit inside me? ...Having my hands would be nice.' You idly muse as you struggle to swirl your tongue about the thick cock in your mouth. Not even addressing the length, the girth left little room for your tongue to maneuver. Still, you would just work with what you had, eager not to disappoint.

You press your tongue flat against the underside and begin to suck.

His breath hitches, legs buckling slightly. A low, rumbling groan echoes above you as you start working him in earnest. You bob your head, doing your best to suck and lick what you had access to. Each sound of his winds you higher, somehow tightening that coil in your aching core without even needing to touch it. The heat between your legs is unbearable, almost blistering, and as you grind them together you feel just how absolutely dripping you are down there. You've soaked right through your panties, leaving your inner thighs hot and damp.

Holy fuck you were enjoying this far too much.

Your eyes drift back up to his, only to find them clenched shut. Closed tight under the waves of pleasure crashing over him. A thought lazily drifts through your mind as you grin about his cock. 'More...'

You wanted to see him squirm.

You inhale deeply through your nose, and before he can catch on you push him deeper into your mouth. It takes every bit of willpower to choke down your gag reflex as the tip begins to brush your throat. He stiffens, momentarily going silent as his breath halts in his chest. You take the opportunity to give him a quick suck.

"Fu-ck!" His shuddering moan is pure music to your ears. Your jaw aches, throat burning, but with a reaction as rewarding as that the pain practically fades away. You continuing sucking and licking, gradually testing how far you can take him. It's practically impossible to breathe, and you feel tears beginning to well about your eyes, but right now you couldn't care less. Not when you had the infamous, dreaded pirate captain Crocodile, whimpering and moaning so hotly for you. You needed to remind him: even on your knees, he was yours.

It's an arduous process, finding a rhythm. The ache from your jaw only increases, and even your nose has started to burn from the unnatural pressure in your face and throat. But his noises and movements make it more than worth it.

"Y/N..."
Your name almost sounds like a prayer falling from his lips, spurring you to pick up the pace.

You needed to hear it again.

A salty tear begins to roll down your cheek only to be flicked away by a tendril of sand. It startles you as first, but as it softens and brushes against your cheek you relax into it. His hand remains wrapped in your hair, fingers sporadically tensing and kneading you in approval as you take him. "Such a good girl, Y/N..."

You moan around him, not pausing for a single second. Your face feels so hot, head and senses completely drowning in that sex drunk haze. And he hadn't even touched you yet.

Crocodile had planned to stop you. Had. But as he looked down at you, seeing that almost drunk expression on your face, the lustful glint in your eyes...well, he didn't want to make you stop when you were clearly enjoying yourself so much.

His fingers tap on your head.

You brace yourself, not exactly a fan of the taste of cum. Like hell you were going to stop now, though.

His fingers tap again, more insistent. "Y/N..." The timbre of his voice is shaky, more breathed out than deliberately spoken.

You growl an affirmation around his cock, the vibrations of which send him over the edge. He gasps, fingers tugging at your hair roughly as he loses control. You feel that telltale twitch and take him as far in as you can, hoping to spill most of it down your throat and not onto your taste buds.

But as the first of it splashes into the back of your throat, you know you're in trouble. It's way hotter than you remembered, and stickier too. You try in vain to swallow it down before more comes but it quickly backs up, spilling into your mouth. Tears begin to roll down your face as you try to choke down the mess in your mouth and throat, some of it spilling out to coat your chin and chest.

Noticing your struggling he quickly pulls himself out, unfortunately sending the last spurt onto your cheek. You groan and shudder trying to swallow the cum coating your mouth. The taste...the consistency...the warmth... It was just as uncomfortable as you remembered. Your entire face is wet with all manner of fluids at this point, and you desperately wish your hands were free to wipe some of it off. You try to look away from his predatory gaze, now feeling a bit self-conscious about how absolutely filthy you looked.

To him, though...To him you looked...it activated something primal in him. Your lips all swollen from pleasing him, eyes shining from tears at how your jaw had to stretch, the cum and spittle on your face, now dribbling down onto your flushed and heaving chest...

Suddenly he leans down, releasing your hair to cup your chin and pull you up into an open-mouthed kiss. You squeak in surprise, not exactly expecting someone like him to be okay with tasting himself. But kisses you he does, and with a passionate enthusiasm that has you melting into him.

"Such a good girl." He pulls away to purr against your puffy lips. "Treating me so well."

You shudder against him, his voice making your core throb, making you remember how very heated you were.

You need to be touched.
He chuckles, knowing exactly what the look in your eyes means. "I suppose you've earned a reward." He releases you, sending you falling back down to your knees on the bed. His form wavers a bit as he slides out of his shirt, revealing that toned chest and torso you loved so much.

But before you can get a good eyeful he's bending down, blotting the mess away from your face with the shirt he just took off. "Let's get you a little cleaned up first." He hums. The gesture turns up the heat beneath your cheeks to scalding. Your swollen lips part with the smallest of gasps. He had no right being this sweet right now. Not when your arms were still bound behind your back, your throat burning from choking down his cock and semen.

"There. Better?" He tilts your chin upwards, expression softly beaming at you. Your chest tightens, stomach fluttering slightly as you nod. 'Fuck, just fuck me and be done with it!'

But he had other ideas.

As soon as you nod his expression darkens again, taking on a devilish light. He pushes roughly at your shoulder, and you fall backward to the bed. You yelp as he pulls you forward, ass resting right at the edge of the mattress. He's the one sinking to his knees this time, apparently. He begins to lift up the hem of your dress, pausing once he sees the situation between your legs.

His cheeks blush slightly, teeth nibbling into his lips to contain a laugh. "I regret to inform you, you've absolutely ruined your panties, princess."

You say nothing save for an embarrassed grumble, own cheeks turning red hot. Your head turns to try and bury your face into the sheets. He purrs at you. "Why so shy? Don't want to admit you were getting off sucking my cock?"

This time you flash him an annoyed glare. "Shut up and-!" Your voice cuts off with a keening whine as he presses a finger directly over your clit.

"What were you saying, sweetheart? 'Shut up and' what?" He teases, ever so slightly rolling the pad of his finger up and down. Even this was enough to get you trembling, pleasure already building up in that heated spot in your tummy. "What is it you want from me, my princess?"

But you can't answer, his light rubbing driving you absolutely mad. The only response you can make is a needy whine chased by some heated panting.

He laughs, pulling his finger away as you try and grind your hips upwards. You nearly roar in frustration, so hopelessly turned on for him to prolong giving you any relief. Tears pool at the corners of your eyes from the indignity of it. "Use your words. Tell me what you want." His voice rumbles against your inner thigh as he licks a trail across the sensitive skin there. "Nicely." He punctuates the stipulation with a quick nip.

You grit your teeth, pride reeling. After all you did and he has the gall to make you beg?!

"You bastard." The curse hisses through your teeth, and you flash him a look of pure poison.

He suddenly stands, looking down at you with an amused grin. "Well then, I guess I'll go clean up."

You freeze, expression shifting to one of shock. 'He wouldn't."

But as he turns and walks away you practically scream. "NO! WAIT." You squirm frantically, trying to free your arms and drag him back over to the bed. 'No no no no no!' You needed him to give you that sweet relief. The one only a world-shaking, time-ending orgasm could provide.
He stops, turning to look at you over his shoulder. "Mm? Want to ask again?" The smug grin on his face makes you want to smack it right off, mouth and all. You bite into your lower lip so hard you think it might bleed. 'You scaly fucking reptile.'

"I'm listening." He chuckles, eyes shining so mischievously.

You take a deep breath, so deep it feels your lungs might burst. An explosive sigh ruptures from your chest, one that takes your bristling pride along with it. It leaves you deflated on the bed, letting your legs fall open and head loll backwards. "I want you...to make me cum...please." You hastily tack on the last bit, knowing full well he'd pounce on you for not having it.

With lightning speed he returns to between your legs, bending over the bed to take you roughly by the mouth. His fingers slide under your dress to hook into your underwear which he then promptly tears right off your hips. The sting as the fabric digs in before falling away is delicious. He bites into your lower lip, just hard enough to make you whine, before pulling away. "Now, was that so hard?"

"Please. Please just make me cum." You groan, rolling your lower body upward in some desperate attempt to put a bit of friction between your legs. The pressure at this point was unbearable, all inhibitions and stubbornness overruled by your desire for relief. No, need, for relief.

He returns to his knees between your legs, pulling you forward again to how he previously had you. "Well, since you asked so nicely." He flashes you a triumphant grin that only makes you groan all the harder. 'Shut up and get to work!'

Before you can brace yourself, two of his fingers push right up inside you with a wet noise that could only be described as obscene. Your mouth falls open in a reedy gasp, not prepared whatsoever. His mouth finds your inner thigh once more, and he sucks into it just hard enough that you know it's going to leave yet another mark. He smiles devilishly, eyes meeting yours right as he twitches the fingers inside you upwards.

The sensation nearly makes you scream, not in pain but in total bliss.

He chuckles, shifting his head downward to peek at you from over your mound. "Make as much noise as you want, princess. I want to hear how good I make you feel."

And then it begins.

This time you do cry out as his mouth seals around your clit. He begins sucking and licking immediately, simultaneously gliding his fingers in and out at a merciless pace.  

_Ho-ly-Fuck.

He wasn't teasing anymore. You had begged him to make you cum. And he was eager to deliver.

You writhe and buck beneath him, all manner of noises falling from your lips to echo about the cabin. The pressure that had built up during your blowjob was compounding by the second. Each and every flick, each and every thrust only making it grow exponentially until you were practically howling in pleasure.

He growls and presses down on your hips with his left arm to keep you from moving so much. The forceful action only feeds more into your quickly building orgasm, the one you were hurtling towards at an almost breakneck speed. The pressure building in your core is indescribable, downright painful as he winds you tighter and tighter.
And then you feel it.

Your legs begin to tremble aggressively, breath coming out in gasping pants, high-pitched and rasping. Everything was hot, a blistering, wet heat building up just beneath your skin. He keeps everything up exactly as is, not daring to deviate lest you lose the orgasm he's so kindly worked in to you.

"I-! I-!" You barely gasp before he hums in acknowledgement. Just a small little noise that adds a bit of vibration.

You cum in an explosion of stars, heady cry tearing its way from your throat. Your entire body spasms and tears spills from your eyes from the sheer force of it. Waves of pleasure crash up and down your body. It's indescribable, the relief as the pressure releases from your core.

He keeps his ministrations up through it, though you can feel his fingers struggle to keep up the pace as your walls clench tightly. His movements help you ride your orgasm a little further as the aftershocks wrack your body again and again. Each and every one of them makes you whimper and jerk about on the bed, soaking the sheets with both your wetness and sweat.

You begin laughing as the pleasure dies down, tired little laughs just relieved the agonizing pressure is gone.

But he doesn't stop.

"Uh...I'm...I'm good...hun..." You stammer out between the aftershocks his insistent mouth and fingers keep triggering. His raises an eyebrow from where he's keeping up that now torturous attention on your clit.

Oh.

He has no intention of stopping.

You swallow roughly, trying to relax into the sheets and prepare yourself for the second orgasm he's forcing out of you. There's a dull few moments where the sensation between your legs completely dies. As if the nerve endings there have just turned off. You're aware he's still working his tongue over your clit, his fingers in and out of your pussy, but it's all muted. It gives you time to catch your breath.

Because then everything comes back to life. You jerk as his tongue swipes upward, clit suddenly waking back up. He grins about your swollen nub. The game is back on.

He switches up the movements of his fingers, now opting for a beckoning motion rather than a thrust. A keening whine pushes past your lips as his fingers press up into that magical little bundle of nerves. "Shit! Shit! Aahhhhhhhhh-!" You moan loudly, voice utterly ragged.

The combination of his continued sucking at your clit and pressure on your G-spot has you reeling. The pressure quickly builds back up in your core in a vengeance. You try to twist and squirm away but his forearm keeps you pressed down tight. No escape.

You meet his impassive, almost bored gaze with your panicked own. A wordless plea passes between you for mercy. He merely smiles, eyes slipping closed in silent denial as he continues to drive you to another orgasm.

It hits you suddenly. You're cumming for a second time.
The wind is knocked out of you, like a kick to the chest. You cum not with a moan but with a growl, air forcing its way through your teeth as your back arches into the air. It's far more intense than the first one, so much more so that it's not entirely pleasant. No, 'intense' doesn't even begin to describe the sensation.

Your walls clench about his fingers even harder, and he ceases thrusting in favor of flexing into that now oversensitive patch of nerves. All it does is make you grunt into the subsequent aftershocks. Your head drives into the mattress as your back arches, toes digging into the edge of the bed. The waves of painful pleasure radiate downwards from your pelvis, shaking your legs all the way down.

It's like the temperature both within and around you kicks up twenty degrees. Your entire body breaks out into a renewed sweat. Heated, flushed skin lustrous in the low light of the cabin. The haze in your head grows boiling, stifling all conscious thought in favor of feeling.

"F-fuckfu-ckfuck" A near endless stream of expletives chatter through your teeth. You can feel how absurdly wet you are, not to mention hear it as his fingers continue working you through the harsh aftershocks. Wet, sloppy noises that sound out from between your legs. Evidence of the pleasure he's wrought upon you, now more of a curse than the blessing you had begged for.

He still doesn't stop.

Tears soak your cheeks thoroughly now, along with a string of drool you barely manage to suck back in. You feebly try to lift your head, look him in the eyes, but you are far too drained. It was a miracle you hadn't passed out from your first orgasm and now he was determined to steal from you a third.

"N-no. No no no." You stammer, voice ragged. Desperate. "I can't. I can't. Please."

He stops for merely a moment, just long enough to say. "You can. You can and you will." His voice is firm. A command that leaves no room for interpretation.

You were going to cum for him again. No amount of begging would stop this. All you could do was brace for it.

He resumes his merciless torture as if he never stopped. A sob breaks past your lips as his mouth seals over your swollen, sensitive nub once more. His fingers start to work in and out again, but this time he adds a third.

A broken cry drags itself from your throat as you feel yourself stretch around the additional finger. It's too much. Everything is too much. Your entire body twitches as he works you up to a dreaded, third orgasm.

You can't even keep your feet planted on the mattress anymore. They shake uselessly, draped over the edge of the bed. The pressure in your gut grows to such a degree you actually feel sick. Your abdominal muscles clench painfully tight, a mirror for the clenching in your pussy that never quite let up after the second orgasm.

And yet he continues, the resistance against his fingers impeding him little.

Tears and spittle dribble down your face as you struggle to just breathe. You're not panting so much as you're sobbing, lungs working overtime to process the oxygen the heat in your body is rapidly consuming.

All conscious thought evacuates your hazed mind, leaving you with nothing more than just the base components of human emotion. All of them screaming in a series of exclamation points translating to
Moaning and sobbing are the only noises you're able to make. Mind not exactly capable of cobbling words together. But out of the haze, one word brushes the last conscious cells in your brain. The word that could end all of this.

But it's already here.

You cum silently this time, twitching and gasping as your mind well and truly shuts off. Your vision goes dark. No stars. No exploding colors. Just darkness as the tunnel vision consumes your line of sight. It takes your hearing along with it. Not even leaving behind that shell shocked ringing. Just pure silence.

You melt into the bed as you surrender to the agonizingly sweet waves of pleasure sundering your very soul. Not like you had a choice, no strength left to resist regardless. You vaguely taste blood, not realizing you're biting into your lip because you don't even feel it. There's nothing to feel besides the impossible sensation of the third orgasm currently destroying you, body and spirit both.

The deafening clarion of pain and pleasure consumes you from the inside out. There is no fighting it, sassing it and getting it to stop. It rolls on endlessly, not caring whatsoever that it is too. much.

And then it all goes mute.

Crocodile watches his handiwork with an amused grin on his face. The way you clench about his fingers is almost painful, an indication of what you yourself are experiencing. So overwhelming you can't even choke out any more of those sweet sounds he loves. Better than any music.

But he decides this is enough. More than a fitting punishment for the sass and attitude you spat at him earlier. As soon as your clenching relaxes he extracts his fingers, chuckling as they come free with a rather obscene SCHLICK. Though he quickly wishes he had a towel as strings of your gooey wetness stretch from his hand to you dripping folds.

He moves to stand, groaning as his knees and back creak from the awkward position he held on the floor. Oh, and also from the revived hard-on all that teasing had caused. He really had wanted to fuck you, but since you had relished in seeing him squirm-as if he hadn't noticed your true intentions-he had thought it only fitting to return the favor.

Unfortunately... now you were in no way able to consent to what he had really wanted from you: to take you at his pace. As roughly as he so pleased...within reason, of course. Yet as he turns to move to the bathroom, ready to get the two of you cleaned up, your weak little voice stops him.

"Wait." He looks down at you, your tear-soaked face glowing from how flushed it is. His dark eyes take in every aspect of how utterly ruined you are, everything from your rattling heaving to your vibrating legs. But as his eyes return upwards to seek yours, he finds them trained on something else. Those lovely, utterly entrancing gold irises undeniably focused on his renewed erection.

You swallow, tongue tentatively licking at your dry lips. "You still haven't fucked me."

His jaw goes slack, looking at you incredulously. There was no way. No way you were human. No, you had to be some personal demon sent to trap him for his sins and drag him to hell. Perfectly molded just for him to make the punishment all the more agonizing.

"That's what this was about...no?" You try to sit up, he can see your core muscles trying to lift your poor, exhausted body upwards. But nearly all your strength has left you, now just a jellified shell.
So instead you stretch out, drawing attention to all the features he loved to tease and mark hiding beneath the damnable dress that started all this. Cocking your head to the side, you finally look at him with an expectant gaze he could not bear to disappoint. "You wanted to fuck me your way..." You breathe sultrily at him, curving those puffy lips into a seductive grin. "Well, I'm waiting."

His eyes narrow, teeth gritting as he struggles to remain in control. "Do you even know what you're asking for?" His voice is strained, words formed from terse growls. He had to make sure you understood. He'd never forgive himself otherwise.

You merely giggle, relaxing your head back against the bed. Such an enchanting sound, a delicate noise from such a devilish woman. "I'm asking you to fuck me as hard as you want, damned if you break me to pieces. Doesn't get much more clear than that."

He still doesn't respond, just continues watching you with those predatory eyes. Was this a trick? Something you'd hold over his head? Were you really, really asking for this?

You roll your eyes, lips curving into a pout. "Are you really going to make a girl fuck herself?"

He's on you immediately.

You flip onto your stomach with a grunt, left cheek pressed flat into the sheets. He reaches underneath to settle you to your knees before letting your head fall forward again. You're positioned to exactly how he wants you, prostrate before him, arms still bound behind your back—painfully numb at this point—with your ass arching high into the air.

Without even a little warning he plunges his fingers into the wetness between your legs, grinning as you tremble and mewl from the sensation. In your current state, he couldn't wait to hear you—feel you—react to his thick cock stretching you open, rutting into you exactly how you had asked: however he wanted.

His fingers come away soaked and sticky with your natural lubricant as planned, using it to slick himself up. No reason to cause you any additional discomfort. He wanted to fuck you, not hurt you. Not to mention the better it felt for you, the more he'd enjoy it himself. Just as eager to please as you were.

He feels you tense as the tip brushes against you folds. But he pauses, traces of concern still lingering in his thoughts. "What's your word, princess?"

A single gold eye meets his from where you were planted below him. You give him a nervous smile before the lid slips closed. "It's 'peanut butter'."

He grins, suddenly feeling so immensely proud of the indescribable woman beneath him. "Good girl."

And then he's inside. Your eyes go wide, mouth falling open at the sudden, immediate fullness. One second he had been teasing your entrance, the next he was practically hilted inside you. An impossible fullness, stretching you from the inside in every direction at once. You instinctively try to crawl away, get this thing out of you just so you have room to breathe again. But your arms are bound, and his hand has you by the hip with bruising grip. It's all you can do to just lie there, trembling as you try to breath around the pressure that's invaded your entire body.

He honestly had meant to take it slow, give you time to adjust to his size again. The combination of your wetness, his fingers, and the dilation from your orgasms had made him slide in like you were made for him. Barely any resistance until the last few inches, the same ones that had given him
trouble last time. That's not to say you weren't still impossibly tight. So tight it was almost painful. A constant, rippling grip around his throbbing length that felt like pure bliss.

Fuck. You were so perfect.

He can't help but moan, a shiver wracking his entire body as your blistering heat and wetness takes him so hungrily. His fingers dig into your hip, hard enough to bruise.

You clench about him at his noise, and the last little bit of control leaves him. He gives you exactly what you asked for.

Each thrust chokes an endless stream of yelps and squeaks from your throat, each one of them answered by a growl or snarl of his own. You wrap around him so tightly it's almost like you're trying to squeeze him dry.

He loves every second of it. Not once breaking his pace as he took from you what he wanted. What you had so kindly begged him to take.

His eyes clench closed as a particularly intense wave of pleasure rolls down his cock, your walls fluttering around him. "Such a good girl." He snarls, grinning as his words trigger another pulse around him.

He suddenly releases your hip, but before you can collapse into a puddle beneath him his left arm scoops underneath and across your torso. You cry out as he wrenches you upward, pulling him nearly flush against his chest as he continues his merciless pace. The new angle nearly makes you scream, he can hear the noises struggle to push past each other out your throat. His hand grasps you by the chin, tilting your face upward to look into his.

The look in your eyes is indescribable. Wet about the edges and streaming tears, the light in them is hazy and wild. Practically no gold left to be seen, pupils having reached max dilation. Your lips are parted, dried from panting save for a bit of blood from a cut he only just now notices. He keeps thrusting, lustful gaze boring down into your own, drinking in each and every twitch in your face, each and every expression.

"If only you could see yourself." He growls, voice almost menacingly husky. "Such a filthy little princess. Enjoying being fucked like this."

You try to spit a response, just enough coherence left for your willful nature to stay conscious. He merely shoves his fingers in your mouth, chuckling as your hazy eyes burn with indignation. But the response down below suggests you feel otherwise as you clench down on him achingly tight. He groans, shuddering as he continues to fuck you through it despite the added resistance. Even if your words were failing you, your body was keeping you honest. Telling him you were enjoying this as much as he was.

He keeps rutting in to you, working himself to his own finish. It's a merciless, relentless pace that doesn't let you catch your breath. Drool uncomfortably oozes out of your mouth as his fingers keep you from swallowing. Your eyes steadily lose focus. They glaze over from the haze drowning all conscious thought. He relishes in the sight of it, seeing you lose that stubborn composure and turn into putty in his arms. Surrendering to the pleasure only he could give you.

But then your brow suddenly twitches, a little sliver of gold returning to your eyes. An expression of...panic?

And then he feels it, your legs beginning to shake with a newfound intensity.
Were you...?

You whine, high and reedy, trying to pull away. Your eyes look up at him desperately, a plea for mercy. He feels your walls start to flutter.

You were.

He smirks, looking down at you with eyes narrowed smugly. "A fourth? Really now."

His fingers draw out of your mouth, needing to hear what noises this fourth orgasm will choke from you. "OhGodPleaseICant." You sob so sweetly for him, but he merely hums, keeping up the pace and pushing you towards yet another orgasm.

You gasp and writhe, desperately trying to break free. "NoNoNoNoNonnnnnnnnnnnnnn-"

Right as it hits, he stops. Stops and just feels the way your body is wracked by this fourth impact. The way your cunt squeezes him so tightly, a vise around his cock that feels like pure ecstasy. The way your body seizes and shakes against his, nerves firing off randomly.

He groans and shudders through it, enraptured by the sensation of you trying to milk him dry. It's agony and bliss and everything in between. A bruising pressure on his throbbing, twitching length.

It's another silent orgasm, one that took you by such force it stole your voice right out from your stuttering chest. The only sound that manages to escape is a sharp, breathy noise as your lungs momentarily stop working, throat locking up. Your pupils retract, eyes like little full moons as you go blind with tunnel vision. By the time they glaze over again, the fluttering in your cunt subsiding, your head lolls forward and your entire body slouches in his arms. He's the only thing keeping you from falling flat on your face.

But he wasn't done yet.

With a snarl he pushes you back to the position he initially had you. You fall forward with a dull thump, lying where you land. Completely out, catatonic from the fourth orgasm you had suffered through so prettily for him.

He starts fucking you again, now hungry for his own climax. There's so little resistance as he thrusts into you again and again. You're so utterly wet and relaxed throughout it's hard to believe there had ever been any trouble in the first place. And yet you're still so deliciously tight for him...so good for him...so sweet to him...

As he continues, growling and snarling at a relentless, merciless pace, he starts to feel something else...His focus shifts to your face, so flushed and wet. Your eyes are barely open, staring at nothing in a daze. A small puddle of drool has formed around your mouth, open and breathing huskily. Too disassociated to control yourself.

This is... not what he wants.

He growls, letting go of your hip to reach out and grab the belt constricting your arms. It begins to dissolve as soon as his fingers wrap about the leather, and soon your arms fall limply to the bed at your sides. His chest wrenches upon seeing the bruises left by it. Thick, purpling lines crisscrossing up and down your forearms.

But he could worry about that after.

You whimper as he flips you onto your back, eyelids fluttering ever so slightly. His hand grabs the
hem of you sweat-soaked dress and pulls it off you. Your bandeau shortly follows, and he dissolves
the stockings now ripped about your legs. You're left naked and exposed just for him. Just as he
wants you.

He moves back over top of you, lips tenderly finding yours as he slowly slides back inside you. A
delicate moan pushes from your mouth into his, your eyes rolling back at being filled again. He
groans back as he sets a gingerly pace, more of a grinding as he slowly rolls his hips into yours. Still
so agonizingly pleasurable. You just feel too good.

The smallest bits of clarity return to your glassy eyes, and you smile weakly into the kiss.

Feeling you coming back to him, he pulls away, lips trailing kisses about your heated skin as he
moves to gently nuzzle into your neck. "You did so good, Y/N." You shiver as he murmurs so softly,
placing tender kisses all along your sensitive neck and shoulders. His grinding thrusts continue at a
languid pace. "You took me so well. Such a good girl."

Your arms tentatively lift off the bed, still so numb and stiff, but you find the strength to hang them
over his shoulders. He sighs as your fingers lightly trail across his back.

This is what he wanted.

Feeling your soft, heated body pressed up against his, your hot little breaths puffing onto his
shoulder. How you so tenderly touch him, fingers gently moving across and pushing into his skin.
He practically melts into you, relishing in your warmth and feather-light touches.

He continues his slow thrusting, keeping himself flush against you. His hand now traces the curves
of your body, making you shiver and puff little laughs over his shoulder. It's those sweet noises that
push him closer and closer, aided by the gentle kisses your lips press into any part of him you can
reach.

Your honey sweetness sweeps him off his feet, so in contrast to how he had just ravaged you.
Practically broken you like the monster he was. Yet here you were, laughing and holding on to him
like he was something worth holding on to. How you had ever found something...anything...in him...

Something flutters in his chest. A constricting almost nauseous feeling. A word surfaces in the
forefront of his mind. His face flushes hotly, breath stuttering as he realizes-

You suddenly lean up and whisper in his ear. "Come on...cum for me. Cum for me, big boy..."

He doesn't stand a chance.

"Y/N....Y/N...princess..? Shit." His voice comes lazily drifting into your ears. You're too tired, too
oversensed, too overwhelmed to really process it. Everything is all sweltering heat, uncomfortably
damp and suffocating. Your core aches, no longer with need but from far too much stimulation. You
feel his hand on your face, but opening your eyes right now seems impossible.

There's a distressed groan, and then he's scooping his arms underneath your quivering, balled up
form. You're raised into the air where he cradles you against his chest, much too warm to be
comforting right now. You must've whimpered, or made some other equally pitiful noise, because he
coos and nuzzles you against his chest. "I've got you, babe. I've got you..."

You can tell he's moving, walking you to...the bathroom? There's a click as he turns the light on.
Your eyelids scrunch together as the bright light shines irritatingly bright through them.
And then you're being lowered. A sharp gasp tears from your ragged throat as you touch down on cool tile. So impossibly cold against your overheated skin. But it feels good. Immediately relieving once the initial shock wears off. So good that you promptly fall over, pressing your side flat against it in the hope of dissipating some heat. A relieved moan spills from your painfully dry lips.

You hear him sigh, followed by the sound of running water filling the small room. More than just the sink could make. He's...drawing a bath?

With a tired grumble you manage to crack open your eyes, immediately wincing from the harsh light. He's kneeling next to the combination shower and tub, indeed drawing a bath. His fingers dart between the stream of water and the knobs, trying to get the temperature to something more acceptable.

Something about it, doing such a banal task...your stomach flutters.

He notices you looking at him, and his eyes flit over to meet yours. "Hey there. Coming back to me?" His voice is rough, raspy like the air moving in and out of your throat.

You manage to crack a smile, small and tired. "Whatever's left, yeah."

His brows knit together, immediately tired. "I-

"If you're about to apologize, I'll tear your intestines out through your throat." You muster up the best glare you can manage in your current state. The flames of annoyed fury rekindling themselves in your chest. "I asked for it, idiot."

His eyes go wide, teeth biting into his lips to keep them sealed, very definitely having been about to apologize. He averts his gaze, returning his attention back to the bath. Silent save for the satisfied hum he makes once the water is right.

You cough, suddenly feeling a bit bad for your outburst. It wasn't fair of you to be mad at him for worrying he had hurt you. With a steadying breath, you exhale a massive sigh, letting it take your frustrations with it. "It was good, okay? I really enjoyed it."

He turns to look at you again, giving you a sad smile. A light blush starts to creep out from under his scar. "Needless to say, I enjoyed it as well." He murmurs before shaking his head, only feeding into your own smile.

With a groan he rises from his knees, joints popping and creaking. "I'm, uh, going to strip the bed." He jerks his thumb over his shoulder to gesture back into the cabin.

You laugh, letting your cheek fall back onto the cool tile. "That bad, huh?"

His face just scrunches up in response, and you giggle all the harder.

As he leaves the bathroom, giving the tub time to fill, you relax back into a puddle onto the floor. You'll just rest your eyes for a few minutes while you wait...

You groan and hiss as you're lowered into the slightly too-warm water. Much preferring the cool tile you had been curled up on.

He chuckles, giving you a quick, reassuring squeeze. "You'll appreciate this when you're not so sore tomorrow." His hand smooths your hair back, pushing it out of your face. You merely grumble, letting your head roll back to rest just above the water. You had to admit, the ache was already feeling a bit better as the soothing heat worked its magic.
A relaxed sigh falls from your lips, your eyes opening to peep at him. He's settled on the floor next to the tub, resting the side of his face against the rim down by your legs. The way it smooshes his cheek makes you want to grab it and pinch, way too cute for you to handle right now.

That damnable word surfaces in your mind again.

Your cheeks begin to flush, and you quickly swallow and look away. You look about the room in some desperate attempt to find something to distract your thoughts. A bar of soap, nestled in a little cubby in the wall, catches your attention. "I should shove that bar of soap in your mouth." You puff, smug little grin stretching across your lips. "Never took you for such a dirty talker."

He rolls his eyes with a rather gruff sigh. "I never really have been. Teasing you is just too much fun."

You bite at your lip. That answer was probably the worst he could've given you right now. Anything indicating how he felt for you only threatened to make that word come exploding out.

You try and keep your gaze averted, but he's just kind of staring at you. A lazy, almost impassive stare, accompanied by languid blinks. It makes you feel a little self-conscious. "Why are you staring at me like that?" You grumble, sinking beneath the water such that only your eyes and above remain.

"Watching you to make sure you don't drown."

The water bubbles as you choke on a laugh. "How romantic. The man who can't swim going to save me from drowning?"

You try to sit up, but the combination of your prior exhaustion and the heat from the water has left you no stronger than a limp noodle. A jelly mold loosely held together in the shape of a person. Just as you start sliding down into the water his hand latches about the crook of your arm, holding you up by the shoulder.

"See? Almost drowned." He sighs, but his dark eyes are soft.

You try to answer but your head is fuzzy. The water is suddenly much too hot, and you're much too tired. He rolls his eyes and grabs a fluffy towel, oversized for you compared to him. Time almost slows down as he lifts you up and out of the water. Your brain has just about given up processing what's going on around you.

The chill of the air has you shivering despite the warm towel, and he bundles you close as he carries you back to the bed. You can tell you're just kind of babbling. Sleepy, fumbling insults and jabs nonsensically tumble out your mouth. He chuckles and says something but you don't really process what.

As he settles you in the blankets, you say something that makes him pause. His eyes open wide, mouth falling slightly open as he just kind of gawks at you.

But you're already falling asleep, too exhausted to even poke fun at how silly he looks.

You awake wrapped in warmth.

A sleepy smile breaks across your face as you realize you're being held in his arms. Grateful he hadn't yet risen. After last night, you really needed to wake up with him still there.
But as much as you don't want to move yet, it seems he's been awake for a bit longer than you have.

"Good morning, princess." His deep voice vibrates out of the chest your head was lying against.

You yawn and snuggle into him, just enjoying his warmth. A sleepy purr of your own falls from your lips. "Morning."

He rumbles an amused noise but otherwise remains silent. You eyes focus on his hand as it twines in your hair, aimlessly twirling it about his finger.

You're just about to doze back off when he grumbles, jostling you slightly. "Y/N...do you remember any of what you said last night?" His tone is...almost hesitant.

You frown, tilting your face so that you can actually see his. Instead of looking at you, his gaze is trained upwards, towards the ceiling. An almost wistful expression on his face. "No...not really. Did I say something stupid?"

His eyes slip closed, barely perceptible sigh pushing from his lungs. When they open he's focused on you instead. "Some rather colorful insults I'm glad you don't remember." He breaks into a lazy grin, eyes narrowing. "Don't need you repeating those any time soon."

"Pffft" You playfully smack your hand onto his cheek. "Don't worry, I'm sure I'll think of some better ones."

The grin falls off his face as that wistful expression returns, eyes drifting back up towards the ceiling. "...I doubt it."

Chapter End Notes

The title of this could also be "TwoStubborn Idiots in Love" but that's a bit on the nose.

If you want to chat or ask about headcanons/give me writing prompts, hit me up at https://silversiren1101.tumblr.com/
A Word (ANGST, FLUFF, GORE)

Chapter Summary

A routine excursion interrupted. Someone is after your head.

Chapter Notes

The triple whammy warnings in the title.

I am both sorry and not sorry, and I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it because WHEW.

As always, I feed off of your attentions so please comment!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Crocodile grumbles as you both depart from the quaint shop, a hole in the wall tucked deep in the labyrinthine alleyways of this sprawling city. "That better have given Daz enough time."

You nod, a curt, polite action. "I'm sure it did, Sir. He's... competent." It's a struggle to keep your lips from curving into a wry smile.

His expression remains hard, indifferent despite the affection you knew he held for you. This was the rule: in public, you were to remain nothing but professional. As much as you knew it to be but another mask, his callous persona bothered you more than you wished to admit.

But you hold all that discontent deep within, knowing that he has a reputation to keep. Knowing that he was merely trying to keep you safe. The photograph in the paper had changed little in his attitude towards public affection, and you didn't know if anything ever really would. It was but a single slip up. Nothing more.

So you dutifully took your place at his side, attending him as his sword, and not the woman who drove him wild with passion.

"Miss L/N." You shiver, his aloof tone a rake down your spine.

"Sir?" You do your best to keep your own tone as indifferent as his, hard as it may be.

"What did you notice during the meeting?" Your eyes flick to the side to see his face. Though he was still facing straight ahead, his eyes were aimed right back at yours.

You inhale deeply through your nose before loosing a quick sigh. "He was terrified, Sir, and a poor liar. The goods are definitely where he insisted they aren't." You shrug your shoulders, mouth curving into a bored frown. "Or, if Daz was successful, were there."

He makes a short noise acknowledging your assessment of the situation, but otherwise remains silent. Not much for small talk in general, but the lack of the casual conversation he tended to entertain with...
you in private leaves you feeling a bit cold.

And not to mention, bored.

You couldn't get back to the ship fast enough, the need to tear down this stupid facade growing with each passing second.

The sounds of the bustling city steadily grow as the two of you make your way out of the less...tasteful...areas of the town. This was definitely one of the more industrial places your travels had taken you, an utterly massive city sprawl covering the entire island. It boasts some of the highest buildings you'd ever seen, and the skyline was dotted with numerous smokestacks choking the air with their dreadful smog. Some places on the ground hadn't seen sunlight in years from the way the architecture cast their shadows. This place would've been a far better one to eke out a living than the snowy backwater town you had spent over a decade of your life in. So many shadows, so many places to hide.

So much corruption.

This place was awful. You couldn't wait to leave.

The city sounds that had been growing louder as you approached abruptly stop as the two of you step out into the busy marketplace. Crocodile was not exactly a subtle looking person. Nor was his reputation. Still, after the initial shock most people avert their eyes and go back to their business. For someone like him to make an appearance in a place like this was probably business as usual.

The crowd parts like it's magnetically repelled, but otherwise pays the hulking pirate captain no mind. You merely roll your eyes and stay glued to his side, keeping pace with his long strides as the two of you headed back to the ship.

It was only a short distance away, maybe about a ten minute walk. With no conversation on his part, it was on you to entertain yourself. And so your kind drifts off, idly thinking of all manner of things. Everything from wondering what dinner would be to whether or not he'd want sex tonight. Your teeth nibbled into your lower lip...you hoped he did. It had been a week since that second time, when you had let him take you exactly how he'd pleased. Though you, and supposedly he too, had been wanting more, he had been insistent on giving you time to recover again. As sweet as it was...you really, really wanted him to fuck you again. Maybe he wanted you to take the initiative?...

Your mind continues to wander as you dutifully plod alongside him. Except...

An alien feeling settles into the back of your mind, and your step falters ever so slightly the more you notice it. This general feeling of malaise hangs over your head. It's making the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end, like your body was sensing a presence while your conscious thought could not.

Something is wrong.

You return to his pace, trying to keep your expression even as your eyes surveil the crowd parting around you. With each footfall your haki flared brighter, warning you of a threat you couldn't yet see. Hundreds of warning bells and red flags sprouting up in the back of your mind. All screaming 'Danger!'

"Sir." You voice was low, spoken under your breath.

From your tone, he immediately knows. "How many?" His own voice remains low, expression impassive as he maintains his forward gaze. Careful not to seem aware.
You slowly exhale, closing your eyes as you try and expand your detection radius. The warning alarms continue to ring but nothing in the thirty foot radius surrounding you raises immediate concern. Air hisses through your teeth in frustration. "Unknown. No one immediately around us."

He grunts and continues his pace, doing his best to keep his expression even despite the now bristling aura radiating off him. You have no choice but to follow in step. 'Act. Normal.'

But the longer you walk the more that anxious feelings grows. A solid weight settles into your stomach, a manifestation of the dread sinking its claws into you. You've felt this exact feeling before, but from where you know not. Familiar and awful all at the same time. The sensation of wrongness steadily solidifies until a single memory flits into the forefront of your mind: piercing blue eyes behind a smoldering pistol held before your head.

Someone has you in their crosshairs.

"Side street. Now." You hiss, careful not to break your stride.

He dips into a connecting street to the right to which you calmly follow, trying to look as bored as possible. There's near immediate relief as you break the sniper's line of sight. It almost sends you crashing to your knees, legs buckling as that sensation of imminent doom lifts from your head. But before you can fall he tugs you into an alleyway, only then letting your back slide down the brick. Your knees shake as your body breaks into a cold sweat. Each breath forced into your lungs feels stolen from the air around you as your chest heaves. You let your head fall into your hands, too rattled to hold it up.

"Y/N. What's the situation?" His gaze is intense. He knows this isn't a joke.

You swallow around the lump in your throat as your hand comes up to smack your cheek. 'Focus!' The pain clears some of the blind panic, but words still come with a struggle.

"S-sniper..." You swallow again, choking down the fear in your throat. When you next speak it's far more composed. "Sniper aiming down the main thoroughfare. Scope trained directly on my backside."

He growls, pure venom curdling his expression. That cool composure slips away like it had never existed in the first place. Sand begins to drip from between his fingers as he keeps watch at the entrance to the alley, and the rage seething from him is nothing short of poisonous. "You need to hide yourself and get back to the ship. That is an order." He punctuates the last statement with enough authority to make even you pale. This was your Captain speaking, not your lover.

The captain who's order you were about to directly disobey, whether you wanted to or not.

You cough, looking away. "That's...that's going to be a problem."

He rounds on you, eyes narrowing. "Why do I get the feeling you're about to tell me something I really should have known long before this?" His voice a low, growl.

The faint taste of blood fills your mouth as you realize you're biting into your cheek. It takes nearly everything to meet that piercing stare of his, entire body going cold at the fury you fully expect him to react with. You wouldn't blame him for it. He had every right to be furious at finding out your stealth shroud stopped working, that you were now useless to him as an agent. Useless.

"I-I...-I'm sorry, I jus-"

His hand raises and you instinctively flinch. But it merely grasps onto your cheek, cupping your face.
in a way that immediately makes you feel guilty for thinking he'd strike you. He tilts your chin upwards to meet his stern expression. "For some reason you can't hide yourself. Fine." His thumb idly strokes the soft area beneath your eye as he frowns at you. "I'm not angry so much as I'm disappointed you declined to tell me."

Your face goes red hot, gut churning from the guilt. Disappointment was almost worse than straight up fury.

But you feel that anxious tingling sensation building at the back of your mind again. Your eyes dart back to the mouth of the alleyway, body going rigid. This feeling...so similar to how you felt after that nightmare when the two of you made up.

Like prey.

"Someone is...hunting me." You manage to whisper, not daring to look from anywhere but your only exit.

His fingers lightly rap against your cheek. "We'll talk about this later. Right now we need to get back to the ship." He rises back to his full height, but even having his massive bulk next to you did little to dissuade the nagging anxiety tearing at your chest. "Tell me what exactly you're feeling. What do you mean by 'hunting'?"

"Someone is looking for me...specifically me..." His hand grips onto your shoulder and you look into his hardened expression anxiously. "This is...killing intent."

He rumbles, sand tendrils roiling out from his back with poorly contained insult. "And you're sure it's directed at you? Not me?"

Swallowing down the bile rising in your throat, you shake your head at him. "It feels...targeted."

"Then they've made a terrible mistake. The last they'll ever make." His voice is a low growl, the light in his look in his gaze monstrous. But the hand he places on your shoulder is tender as it gives a reassuring squeeze.

Your haki suddenly flares hot, forcing your attention back to the street. A rather intimidating man passes by, luckily missing the alley the two of you have taken solace in. He's a big, burly creature. Not as big as Croc but definitely more so than you. His is a rather brutish figure, what with the massive cutlass tossed over his shoulder, so openly brandished. By the way his eyes swivel about, scanning the area...it's clear he's looking for something. Someone. You could have easily taken him alone, but while dancing out of the ironsights of a rifle? Suicide.

It's only now that you notice the area around you has gone dead silent.

"He's not carrying a gun. That's not our sniper." Crocodile observes, careful to keep his voice low. He turns to you and does his best to give you an encouraging look. "Y/N. Focus for me, princess. I need you to figure out how many we're dealing with, and where they are."

You exhale deeply, giving him a solemn nod. Your haki senses take over in the absence of sight as your eyes slip closed. Slowly, slowly you push the radius of your sensory field outwards, timing each pulse with a steadying exhale. Your head and heart pound as it stretches further and further. Further than you've ever pushed it before. You'd already disappointed him once, and you weren't about to do it again, no matter how bad it hurt. The taste of bile fills your mouth as your salivary glands kick into overdrive, increasingly nauseous as you tax your senses beyond their soft limits. Everything feels...
cold as your fingers press into your temples. They desperately apply pressure trying alleviate the tension turning your mind to overly stretched putty.

But the payoff is worth it.

In a radius of a hundred or so feet around you, your haki currents paint out in red streams the movements of some seven men. Each one of them armed. Each one of them looking for you. Each one wanting your head.

And yet, there's no sign of the sniper. You know he's out there. Just waiting for you to peek your head out.

Your hands fly to your mouth to muffle the pained gasp as your consciousness snaps back to place. You nearly vomit right then and there, barely quieting the nigh hyperventilating breaths bursting from your lungs. Your entire body trembles in the midst of a cold sweat. Without having moved a single foot, it feels as though you've sprinted miles.

"Y/N, what did you see?" His voice pierces through the painful ringing assailing your thoughts. "I need to know where that sniper is."

You groan and smack your hands to the sides of your head. "Don't know..." The words come out through pained gasps as you struggle to catch your breath. Your heart still thumped wildly, entire chest aching. "Seven men... within hundred feet...Sniper...Don't know..." All the while your haki sense has practically gone numb. It no longer paints the movements around you with those lovely streams of color, but now crackles with static. You'll be handicapped while your senses recharge.

He makes a terse growl, gritting his teeth. "The men on the ground aren't the problem. I can deal with them easily." His hand suddenly plants on the wall across from you. "I trust in your ability to dodge swords, not bullets. We'll need to stick to cover." There's a slight rustling noise as the brick begins to dissolve, creating a hole big enough for you to slip through. It appears to lead to the backroom of some general goods store, thankfully empty of people. Satisfied, he looks down at you, getting a feel for your current status. The concern is plain on his face.

You nod appreciatively as he offers his hand to help you back up. But your stomach lurches as you rise to your feet, feeling acutely nauseous. "I-I'm fine." You rush to stammer, idly brushing dust off your pants as you steady yourself. "Stretched my senses a bit too far. No big deal, just felt like tearing my mind in half. It's going to be numbed for a little bit, warning you now."

Before he can fuss, you move past him to peek into the hole. His hand falls to your shoulder, turning you back to face him. "Look. Y/N I...I..." He suddenly swallows, clearing his throat. "Stick to cover, tell me immediately if you sense those crosshairs on you."

You stop. 'Was he...' But you mentally shake the thought from your head. Right now you needed to focus. "And? What about you? What if they're using seastone bullets?"

His form begins to waver, lower half dissolving into sand. "I'll be with you every step of the way." Is the last thing he says before completely dematerializing, rendering himself into wispy tendrils that settle along your back and shoulders. A nebulous, shifting cowl of sand that stretches down your biceps and spine. More tendrils weave low to the ground, stretching out like feelers in every direction. You remember him mentioning something about being able to 'listen' to ground echoes. In this form he must be keeping tabs on the footsteps of the men you sensed in the immediate area.

You creep through the hole into the storeroom, making note of the exits. Two doors. One leading out to what you assume to be a different alley given the absence of a door in the one you just came
from. A potential escape route, seeing as it led away from the firing lane that was the main thoroughfare.

You begin to investigate the other door when a tendril of sand beats you to it, quietly sliding under the door to investigate. There's a sudden tugging sensation at the back of your shirt just as your deadened haki crackles. The man that had passed by the alley was in the store...and quickly moving towards the door you were crouched behind.

Your hands drop to the hilt and sheath of your saber, already mentally preparing for a fight despite the lingering nauseua. A voice sounds in your ear, ethereal and grainy. "We have to do this quietly. Don't alert the others." You nod, slinking over as silently as possible to the side of the door. Your back presses flush just as the door opens, the man disturbingly quiet despite his generous stature. He takes a step into the room, eyes immediately focusing on the conspicuous hole Croc had created. His expression widens, hand coming up to his mouth to form a cone-

You slide out of the shadows, leaping onto his back and clamping your hands over his mouth before he can call out. He starts, but the noise is choked off as a tendril of sand wraps about his throat. You notice more wisps slide down your shoulders to wrap around his body where they steadily drain the moisture in the flesh they come in contact with. Before he can begin to flail you release your hands from his mouth, trusting his windpipe has been thoroughly cut off.

Your hands clamp onto his temples and twist.

A satisfying crack echoes about the storeroom. His body jerks once before falling to the floor, to which you gracefully land on your feet next to it. A pillow of sand muffles the thud from both the body and the cutlass that would've clanged against the tile of the floor.

There's almost a sense of glee twining about your chest. The mutual takedown having been kind of...romantic. As fucked up as that was. Excitement takes hold next as a realization dawns on you: this is the first real time the two of you have ever fought side by side.

Crocodile materializes crouched next to the body on the floor. He grimaces as he begins rifling through the man's pockets, clearly looking for...something. His face suddenly lights up, smirk curving his lips as he draws forth a crumpled envelope. "Maybe we can find out who's made the very poor decision of making you a target."

He rises to his full height before drawing a letter from the envelope. A rather thick wad of bills falls from inside the paper as he unfolds it. "Well, looks like they're being paid well." But he doesn't answer your snide comment.

The tension in the room amplifies to a near insufferable degree, Crocodile suddenly radiating waves upon waves of unbridled aggression. So hostile and upset by whatever he's read that your haki mistakenly crackles as if he's an enemy right there in front of you. You can only hope none of your hunters have perception haki comparable to yours, because he's practically broadcasting your position for any to sense.

All the while he remains dead silent, save for a slight grinding as his jaw clenches tight. His expression is dark, eyes dripping with pure, venomous hatred. You...you've never seen him like this. Maybe he was like this when you were kidnapped, but you hadn't been there or conscious to see it in person.

This is an entirely new level of hatred.

You take a step forward, lightly tugging the letter out from his fingers, only now noticing the
bristling sand tendrils lashing the air around his back. He blinks, exhaling as your hand brushes his. His eyes soften as they meet yours looking so very...guilty.

He makes no move to take the letter back. Your eyes flick from his to its contents.

It's a detailed contract outlining your description and known abilities, with the stipulation being proof of your demise to erase a debt. Should they fail, the debt will instead be washed away with their own blood. It's either your death or theirs.

You try not to read too deeply into the bonuses offered for meeting certain requirements, seeing as the very first one is an incentive to make it as torturous and painful as possible. There's also smaller price tags associated with specific names from the rest of the crew, Daz and Ellia included. Crocodile is to be left alive, but...you notice a bonus for wounding him that makes your own chest twinge in fury.

 Skipping down to the very end of the paper, your gaze comes to focus on the stamped seal acting as a signature.

A macabre smiley face crossed with a line about the diagonal.

Beneath it, in spindly handwriting, a personal note has been unveiled by Croc scratching the top layer of the paper away:

'Hey! Croco! Hope you remember how to unveil this message.

The way you look at this girl, disgusting! Take this as a favor. All she'll do is make you soft! Can't bear her stealing your attention away, all you need is me~ The offer from Marineford is still good, by the way.

You'll thank me for this!

-Love ya! Doffy'

Your hands begin to tremble. The note reads like a kick to the chest.

"That's...that's Donquixote Doflammingo...isn't it..."

Croc reaches for the paper, immediately turning it to dust as his fingers brush the edges. He then moves to cup your face, drawing you into a tender, reassuring kiss. As he pulls away, his eyes meet yours with a defiant glare not too dissimilar from the ones you were prone to giving him. "I will never let him, of all people, take you from me."

You sway, suddenly feeling completely drained. "I'm sorry I'm such a li-"

A warning growl brusquely cuts you off. "Don't. The only one needing to apologize is me. I'm afraid I've put you in terrible danger."

But you don't have time for this. Your attention is suddenly dragged to the door the dead man came from, haki senses buzzing in alarm. Voices echo into the shop.

"Vic mentioned he saw them head down this street. Anybody see him?"

Three more voices jump in to speak but you stop listening, now scrambling as quietly as possible for an escape.

Without a word Croc dematerializes and settles upon your upper body as a defensive cowl once
more. Sand tendrils begin pushing at your back, herding you towards the backdoor leading to the other alley. "One was easy, a group may be an issue. If Doflammingo sent them, they're at least halfway skilled."

You nod and slip out the door, feeling horribly exposed now that you were outside again. The alley stretches away on either side, one opening out to the street while the other winds further back. The shadowed recesses between the buildings no longer seem so safe. "Not a good place to get trapped." You whisper, indicating towards the winding path. "Can't tell if it opens up or has a dead end."

"We don't have the liberty of time."

No, you don't.

The street it is, then.

You quietly dash to the edge of the dim alley, pressing yourself flat against the wall as you peek out to survey the street. There is a group of four men to your left, huddled up in front of the store you just left. Excluding the dead one, that left two others unaccounted for from the initial seven you sensed.

There could be more, of course.

"Being able to hide would be really nice right now." You hiss through gritted teeth, quickly ducking your head back into cover.

The sand bristles around your neck. "You're telling me."

You definitely felt bad, guilt wracking your conscious. This entire situation was your fault. If you could just hide, slip away back to the ship, you wouldn't have to worry about this sniper situation at all. Crocodile would've wiped all these guys out by now, but with that sniper keeping you pinned down there was no chance he'd risk drawing that kind of attention.

"Focus, sweetheart." Sand pinches your shoulders.

A gunshot suddenly rings out across the buildings. It's much too loud to have been from a pistol, the noise still echoing about the walls. You drop to a low crouch, instinctively taking cover despite already being pretty well sheltered. The bounty hunters gathered about the store do the same...

"DAMMIT! I hate having that bastard shoot over our heads!"

"You think he spotted them?"

But one of them, a rather lithe looking man with overly long arms-'Longarm tribe?'-stands and points in the direction of where the shot seemed to have come from...away from where the sniper had been eyeing your backside. "You idiots. That shot came from the wrong direction."

It came from the harbor.

They all look at each other warily before breaking into frantic chattering.

"This was a stupid job." - "I didn't think she'd be so glued to his side." - "This was supposed to be easy! Kill the girl and get the hell out!" - "If we leave, that flamingo bastard will just hunt us down."

Another shot rings out, sound cracking through the air like the sharp peal of thunder.

"LISTEN." The Longarm, who you now assume to be the leader, gets the group's attention. "The boys at their ship must be having trouble. We're switching to plan Beta." They stand there gawking
before he shouts at them to "GET MOVING!"

Just like that, they scatter, breaking off into pairs with the leader heading off alone.

You exhale a breath you didn't even know you had been holding. This was your chance, gunfire from the harbor probably meant the crew was putting up a fight. But..."Croco, who on our ship uses a rifle?"

He merely chuckles, sand prickling at your backside. "Someone who hasn't used one in quite some time. Let's hope they still remember how to use it."

You take a tentative step from the alleyway, careful to stick to the shadows lest the sniper really has moved positions. Your haki sense stays quiet for now. Though it may have been numbed, you slowly feel it coming back to you with each passing minute.

"Do you think we should try calling the ship?"

The sand pinches your shoulders. "No, they could have a signal jammer. Or interceptor."

You make a frustrated noise, as quiet as possible. "This sucks."

The streets are dead as you creep along, the only noises being the occasional sound of rifle fire from the harbor. You're careful to keep yourself glued to the shadows. Careful that each step is slow and silent, giving Croc enough time to guide you should he sense any other footsteps. Your haki was still too muted to detect anything not immediately next to you. It happens a few times, where he suddenly pulls you into a storefront or another alleyway just as a group rounds a corner. They're never solo anymore.

You feel him bristle every time, wanting nothing more than to tear them to shreds. But he can't, not unless he wants to risk them drawing a pistol and firing at you before he can finish them off. They didn't need him dead. Just you. Once you were down the rest could flee, take their bounty without incurring Doflammingo's wrath.

"Almost there. Stay cautious." The sand whispers from your shoulder, giving you a reassuring squeeze.

You grumble as you sidle up to another wide street, one running parallel to the main thoroughfare leading to the harbor. Your haki-numb as it is-crackles and flares in warning as you approach. Anxiety takes hold once more in your gut, gripping so tight as to make you feel ill. Every fiber of your being screams at you: do NOT step out from this building. A bead of sweat begins to roll down your brow, entire body going cold with that same existential fear as before. He feels you beginning to tremble, a questioning tap at your shoulder.

"Not. Safe." The words hiss through your grit teeth.

But...you can see the masts of the ship from here. And it definitely requires somehow getting across this street to reach it. The faint sounds of battle echo from down the street.

Your crew...your family was in danger.

"I'll take a quick glance." He bristles around you before sliding off your shoulders. A tendril of sand stretches up the side of the building you had pressed yourself up against, investigating the situation. Almost as soon as it crests the top of the building your stomach flips. The hairs on the back of your neck and arms stand on end, warning of lightning about to strike.
"NOT. SAFE." You whisper-scream, trying to drag him back down as the air cracks with another gunshot.

You struggle to breathe as the sound echoes around the buildings, terrified he'd just been shot. A chunk of brick falls down from where the bullet struck the wall adjacent to the rooftop Crocodile had just tried to peek over. He materializes next to where you've fallen to the ground, pale as a ghost. Remarkably unhurt, save for a fresh slice across his cheek where the bullet must've skimmed him.

The breath you've been holding bursts from your chest, and you shoot him a look torn between horror and 'I told you so.'

He shakes his head before roughly swallowing down a breath of his own. His thumb comes up to wipe at the rivulet of blood rolling down the side of his face. "...Definitely seastone." He manages to pant, sounding just as shaken up as you felt. "He also missed...on purpose."

You groan, slamming the back of your fist onto the brick wall behind you. "Definitely has perception haki too then. No way he would've seen you otherwise."

"That...or a fruit of some kind." He says it more to himself. You can practically see the gears turning in his head, dark eyes focusing on images flitting through his mind. You let him think, turning your attention back to the street.

A glaring beam of light suddenly strikes your eye. You flinch, blinded. Crocodile looks up as you start. The spot of light jitters on your face before sliding off to shine onto the brick wall between the two of you. He breaks into a wide grin, attention shifting to the last building at the end of the street, about three-hundred feet away.

You can just barely make out a hand holding a small mirror of sorts, peeking out from around the brick. It's angled in such a way that a concentrated beam of sunlight is being reflected onto the wall next to you. You can't tell who it is, but they had to be one of yours given how they were trying to get your attention.

The beam jitters in place again. Crocodile nods, raising his hand to let them know you've noticed. It begins to blink, alternating between long and short pauses.

Morse code.

"I-S D-A-Z."

Short pause.


It pauses again, giving you time to parse the message. "He thinks a total of fifteen? Do you think he's counting the ones we've already encountered?"

Croc grumbles, grinding his teeth in frustration. "No idea. Fifteen is too many as is." He raises his hand again, urgent for more info.


"Oh ho, taking the initiative." He muses, a pleased noise rumbling from his chest.

"Angel? Who's angel?" You genuinely had no idea. "Is that our gunner?"
A shot suddenly rings out over your heads. The sound of the mirror shattering and faint cursing shortly follows.

Crocodile snarls in fury, brick beneath his hand starting to disintegrate. Your hands fly to your mouth in horror. Hoping more than anything that shot had only shattered the mirror, and not Daz's hand. But he knows better than to poke out and show you he's okay. His name was on the list too.

The only thing you could do now was to 'stick tight' and wait for this Angel to deal with the reaper just waiting the pull the trigger over your head.

"I hate this." You spit, grinding your heel into the dirt. "I hate feeling like such a burd-"

He growls, shooting you a nasty glare. "Don't even finish that thought. They're after you because of me."

Yelling behind you catches your attention, and you both whirl around to face the group of four men now running towards you down the side street you were currently hiding in. "THERE THEY ARE. JUST AXE THE GIRL AND GET OUT!"

Another shouts. "PUSH HER INTO THE STREET, GORSA WILL TAKE CARE OF IT!"

You both snarl at once, but as you begin to draw your saber he pushes you behind him in a move that leaves you infuriated. "What?! Let me fight! I'm tir-"

"Do NOT argue with me right now!" He cuts you off quickly, giving you a look that makes your blood boil in fury. "Stay there and-just STAY THERE!"

He shoves you backwards before sending forth a desert spada. It bisects one of the assailants immediately, too slow to dodge the frighteningly fast blade of sand rending a deep crevice in the ground before him. The others dodge far quicker than expected, and he curses under his breath. As the sunlight reflects off their weapons, you notice the edges glint blue. Seastone. They really were halfway decent.

Worse yet, they scatter in several directions, forcing him to split his focus in three different angles. Wide, sweeping attacks were out of the question. There was no way he'd risk hitting you. Instead he leaps forward with a barján against the closest one, careful to keep his form nebulous and agile.

This was bad.

You grit your teeth, hand gripping your saber's hilt so tight your fingers may as well snap off. But you knew as soon as you tried to help, his attention would be diverted back to you. He'd be left wide open.

They weren't under orders to kill him. But that sure as hell didn't mean they wouldn't seriously hurt him. Especially if it meant they'd get a nice bonus.

Your haki senses suddenly explode in warning.

But they're far too late, still dulled from the stress you put them through earlier.

A hand clamps over your mouth. Another wraps about your waist. You're roughly turned about, lifted off the ground as the man who used the fight as a distraction prepares to throw you into the street. But instead of panic, you slip into a battle calm.

You were done hiding. You were done running.
You needed to fight.

Your teeth sink into his hand. Hard. Hard enough you taste blood. Hard enough you hear the cracking of bone.

You land back on your feet as he howls in pain, deftly drawing your blade. He tries to grab for his own, but before his hand even reaches the hilt it begins falling to the ground. Blood spurts everywhere as his panicked, terrified scream fills the air. You merely tsk in annoyance, wiping the hot liquid from your chin as more splatters on your pants.

He falls to his knees, clutching at the profusely bleeding stump at the end of his elbow. His eyes flash to yours, and for but a split second you recognize a look you've seen many times before. A look commonly shared amongst your many victims as Butcher and assassin both.

A silent plea for mercy.

And then they glaze over, turning to empty spheres of glass. His hand instinctively flies to his throat, futilely attempting to stem the tide of crimson spraying from the wound.

Yet it matters not.

He's already dead. Dead long before his body slumps backwards, thudding onto the ground.

"DON'T YOU DARE!!" You turn just as another man lunges at you, massive axe threatening to bite into the top of your skull. Crocodile stops him just short, spada exploding upwards from the ground beneath your attacker's feet.

It cleaves him in twain.

The two desiccated halves of his body fall away from each other, crumpling into themselves as they flatten on the ground. It's rather grotesque, but you had to admire the lethality of such an attack. The lethality of the man who'd stolen your heart and was now fighting to keep you safe above all else.

But the look on his face is one of desperation.

And then you feel it.

The hairs on the back of your neck standing on end. Warning you of the lightning about to strike.

You had taken a step backwards as the axe swung at your head, and the man from before, the one you had killed, had already dragged you slightly backwards to begin with.

Now you were in the street.

Unwittingly having taken just a single step backwards to your death.

Time slows to a near standstill. The world fades to gray scale. Your survival instincts kick into overdrive as they desperately try to think of a way out of this situation. But it's all in vain.

There is no getting out of this.

Head turning, your eyes immediately focus on the barrel of the rifle poking out from a ninth-floor window several hundred feet away. The feeling of the oncoming thunderclap grows ever more imminent. Even from this distance you swear you can make out the movement of his finger pulling on the trigger.
Your eyes slam shut as the sound of gunfire cracks across the buildings.

The ground rushes up to meet you, wind knocking clear from your lungs as you land on your back with a dull thud. All you can do is lie still, waiting for the pain to register. Waiting to feel just how painfully you were about to die.

But the seconds pass...

...and It never comes.

You warily crack an eye, only for both to shoot open as you see the grisly spectacle waiting for you. Spilling from the window where you had spied your would-be killer is an arm dangled over the sill, the remains of his exploded skull slumped against the frame in a way that makes your stomach turn. Blood has already started to run down the wall beneath where he lay. Thoroughly and utterly dead.

It's now you notice the thin wisp of smoke rising from the rooftop directly across the street. Your eyes trace the trail downwards, coming to rest on the last person you ever expected to see holding the biggest gun you'd ever seen in your life. Much larger than the petite woman now lifting her head from the scope, her big green eyes crinkling at the edges as she shoots you a warm smile.

"Holy fuck." The words practically fall out your mouth, too utterly stunned to process the fact that your kind, sweet doctor maybe wasn't so innocent after all. She gives you, or rather, gives her Captain, now rushing to scoop you into his arms, a rather playful salute before turning to reposition her rifle.

You're quickly lifted as Crocodile's arms slide underneath you, hoisting you into the air. He gives you a tight, almost suffocating hug as he brings you against his chest. "Too close, Y/N. Too close."

You sniffle, not even realizing tears had been steadily streaming from your eyes. Nor had you noticed the aggressive trembling wracking your limbs, or the stuttering of your chest as you struggled to breathe. Body too utterly shocked from the near death experience to properly regulate itself.

He takes a deep breath, face in your hair before easing the tension from his grip. "You're going to have to walk on your own, okay? I can't protect and carry you at the same time."

You give him a meek nod. "Y-yeah. I...I can walk..."

He sets you down, making sure to keep a steadying hand at the small of your back as your legs threaten to buckle. You suck in a shuddering breath before turning back to look at Ellia's roost on the building behind you. The barrel of her rifle now aimed down the street over your head, prepared to give you any cover fire needed to make it back to the ship. She gives you a reassuring thumbs up.

And then you're being dragged along, grabbed about the wrist and pulled behind him as you still gawk at the utterly massive rifle now watching over you.

A guardian angel.

"Why does Ellia have the biggest gun I've ever seen in my life?" And it truly is. Easily six feet long, stock to muzzle. Slung across her back, the stock would come to a rest just short of her heels, the tip of the barrel a few inches above her head. Practically a pacifista buster.

He smirks, turning to wave over his shoulder at the woman in acknowledgement. She gives another salute in return before ducking back down to her scope. "You really didn't think I'd accept anyone helpless into my crew, did you? Doctor or no, I expect some level of combat expertise."
You trot along behind him, still struggling to steady your breathing. "That's...that's a bit more than combat expertise."

"She probably has just as many kills as you do, princess. If not more." He chuckles, but the laugh is terse. Still on edge. "An assassin from the New World. Her conscious got the better of her and she picked up medicine instead. Thought she could do some good by saving lives instead of taking them."

You would've stopped dead in your tracks had he not continued pulling you along. The small bundle of white feathers adorning the muzzle suddenly painfully clear. "You're not...She's not...Rogue Angel Mirke is she? THE Rogue Angel!?" Even you had heard of Mirke's reputation. A legendary sniper who somehow always found a roost to take her victim from, no matter the location, no matter the defenses. Her gunfire would ring out for the entire island to hear, a bell chiming another soul she'd guided into the afterlife. Always she'd leave a single white feather in the spot she'd fired from, oftentimes utterly impossible locations. Firing from angles no one could ever replicate.

One day she just...disappeared. People wondered if she had been caught, but no news had ever surfaced. A complete and total mystery.

"Of course she's not." Though you can see him looking at you from the corner of his eye, glinting with a knowing light. "She's just Ellia."

As you get closer to the ship, the sounds of an active battle grow all the more apparent. He slows down as you approach the last building before the harbor. The place Daz had been flashing the mirror from.

You grumble in annoyance as he pushes you behind him again, but don't bother to complain beyond that. Your hands were still shaking pretty bad anyway.

He presses himself against the side of the building to peek around the corner, surveying the situation. From the frown on his face it's not ideal.

"The crew is fighting to defend the ship, in front of the dock. There's at least..." His brow scrunches up as he tries to get an accurate count of the number of attackers amidst the flurry of battle. "...thirteen...? Not counting the four bodies."

Your face pales, chest tightening. "None of our guys...right?" The thought of the guys getting hurt trying to keep you safe? You wanted to throw up.

But he thankfully shakes his head. "Not on the ground, no." What he doesn't tell you is that the entire crew is not out fighting. Some of them could be nursing wounds back on the ship. Regardless there were not enough of them to deal with the bounty hunters steadily pushing them back. He could make out Daz doing his best to hold back the Longarm leader. Well, the best he could given the massive gash running down his side. Bleeding bad enough his leg below the wound was already stained red.

The situation was not good.

He huffs, turning back to face you with a solemn look on his face. His hand grips your chin, tilting your wide-eyed expression up to meet his more intense one. Grim. "I can't believe I'm saying this..." He swallows, cocking his head to the side as if he's struggling to get what he's trying to say out. "...but I need you to fight."

Your mouth opens, not quite sure how to respond. A combination of excitement and dread wrenches
your gut, knowing the situation had to have been truly dire for him to willingly put you in danger. Your expertise involved stealth kills and one-on-one duels where you could fight dirty. None of those situations involved a battlefield. But he needed you, and you were done being a burden. So instead you merely nod, putting your own hand over his and giving it an affirmative squeeze.

He returns your nod before turning to look back down the street, waving to get Ellia's attention. He makes a few specific gestures you only kind of get the meaning of, but from the way you can make out Ellia's salute she knows perfectly well what he's asking. She begins packing up her setup, sling the massive rifle across her back before heading your way. You can't help but gawk at the way she so gracefully leaps between the rooftops. As though she were aided by wings none could see but herself.

"Stick close. Don't do anything reckless." And then he's moving, disintegrating and whizzing through the air to reach the fight.

You follow hot on his tail, saber at the ready. The battle calm slips back over you as you near the scuffle, already eyeing some easy hits. They'd have to be quick: an collapsed windpipe there, a ruptured kidney here. You couldn't afford to get wrapped up into a tango with a single opponent right now. Tunnel vision would just get you killed.

Crocodile goes straight for their leader, the Longarm, and it's only now that you see the state Daz is in. The wound on his right side is worrisome, a long gash running from below his pectoral all the way to his hip. Seeing it is a punch to the gut, one that fills you with both anguish and seething rage.

"WAIT!" His yell is frantic, trying to get his Captain's attention. "Don't hit him!"

Croc stops just short of slicing the guy's back open with his hook, pulling back in a quick whirl to land back on his heels. He growls upon straightening up, and in his hand manifests a mini cyclone of sand to keep at the ready.

"His fruit." Daz pants, wiping some blood from his cheek with the back of his hand. "He can reciprocate a wound on whoever gave it to him."

Sure enough, as you look at the Longarm fruit user, he has an identical gash running down his own right side.

"How very annoying." Croc practically spits.

The Longarm clucks his tongue, fiendish red eyes looking over Croc's shoulder to focus on you. "Bringing the girl into a fight where you know all we want is to kill her!" He licks his lips, and the killing intent radiating off of him is enough to make you shiver. "Maybe he don't like you so much after all little fox. Maybe he wants you dead too."

Crocodile snarls, just barely containing himself. The whirling spiral of sand in his palm lashes about wildly in his frustration. Attacking the bastard right now would be suicide. Maybe even literal. His brain was churning overtime parsing out ways to deal with this frustrating ability. Even getting this scum in the water might result in him phantom drowning. There was no way of knowing what the extent of his reciprocation was.

But your focus is drawn away as one of the enemy foolishly announces his intentions to attack you with a rather guttural yell.

Your eyes flit to the side, meeting Croc's seething glare. He summarily gives you a terse nod. "Scream and I'll be there. Fight defensively."
You turn to face your assailant, as much as it made you uneasy to turn your back to the standoff between the enemy leader and your boys. But they have way more experience than you do in battles like this. Troublesome fruit user or no, you knew they'd find a way to deal with him.

So for now, all you could do was stay out of their way and focus on your own fight. The guy attacking you is another biggun', and from the way he's charging-roaring at the top of his lungs-you got the feeling he wasn't the brightest of the group. Your mind was already calculating the best way to take this moron down quickly lest you get wrapped into a duel.

A combination of both Daz and Croc's voices echo in your thoughts as you remember the best advice they'd ever given to you. 'Fair fights are for the dead.'

You quickly drop your saber and flash your palms at your attacker in a pleading gesture, making sure your face looks as desperate as possible. He reacts immediately by charging at you with even more gusto. More momentum meant a much bigger arc...and a much bigger impact.

Right as he reaches clubbing distance, you take a step forward. The world around you blurs as you throw yourself into a forward roll at his feet. You land into a crouch on the balls of your feet maybe a meter before his own, quickly drawing the daggers holstered to your thighs. There's a thud as the club hits the dirt from where you had only stood moments before. His mouth is mid 'huh?' before it cuts off with a pained, guttural scream.

Before he can even begin to fall, tendons on the back of his ankles having both been slashed, he's thrown forward. Sent sailing through the air as you use his size and momentum against him. You quickly whistle, giving Croc just enough warning to step aside and allow the man to crash right into the Longarm leader. A risky bet, built on an assumption you had no way of knowing was true until proven otherwise.

But as the oaf collided with his leader-"YOU IDIOT!!"-sending them both falling to the ground, the reciprocal impact never came.

Crocodile turns towards you with a look that could only be described as 'furious concern'. "What in the hell are you doing!? You can-" But he stops himself upon seeing you still standing. Not crumpled to the floor like he expected.

A wicked grin splits your lips. "If you can't hit him, let someone else do it for you!"

"Exactly what I was thinking, kitty!" Daz grunts as he hoists the man you had thrown onto his shoulders, now looking absolutely delighted despite the spurt of blood the movement squeezed from the gash on his side. The man he's grappling, on the other hand, looks rather terrified and screams in vain. The only way he's getting put down is by being thrown.

"Focus, you two!" Croc still looks quite pissed, and the tone of his voice quickly wipes the grin from your face. "Daz, you handle this scum" he gestures towards the Longarm now scrambling to his feet as a string of curses spits from his mouth. Your captain gives you a stern nod-'Don't do anything reckless'-before losing shape, darting across the battlefield to help some of the others.

You suddenly feel both very alone and very surrounded at the same time. No one was actively attacking you, but that didn't mean you couldn't feel them eyeing you. An active battlefield was far from your natural element. This was not a place of darkness and shadow, a place where you could strike when and where you wanted only to slip away unnoticed.

'Fight defensively.' Fine. You'd have to wait for them to come to you.
Quickly scooping your saber back into your hand, you drop into a reactive, agile stance. Almost immediately, two of the enemy round on you. "Fox-girl is all alone now! We kill her and we can get the hell out of here!"

"Not a fox." You hiss through your teeth, taking a step backward.

One of the men merely snickers. They split apart to come at you from both sides. The left-tall and slim, about 6'5 you'd say-brandishes a spear, an admittedly horrible matchup against your darting in-and-out style. You tsk, sucking your tongue as your eyes shift to assess the threat to your right. Smaller than the other, shorter than you even, a lithe boy stands at the ready with a saber none too different than your own. He can't be more than sixteen years old. In fact, you'd bet on being even younger.

Too young.

The thought of having to kill him fills you with a deep unease.

"How'd a cute boy like you get wrapped up into this hot mess?" You make sure to look him in the eye. If you were going to get him to run, you needed to make this personal. Connect to him as another human being.

He doesn't respond, save for the tightening you can just barely make out in his jaw. His left hand hooks behind his back as he drops into a dueling stance. Textbook. The kind of clean academia that doesn't belong in a real fight.

You roll your eyes, clucking at him. "C'mon boy. You really think people fight like that? Get out of here."

All the while you devoted what little haki sense you had left to tracking the movements of the spear user now behind you. Your little heart to heart with the boy doubled as bait, making yourself look as distracted-open-as possible. Being on the reactive would be your best bet against that nasty spear.

"Have you ever killed anyone, boy? Not just helped...but felt someone die? Felt the way their heart stops around your blade?" You flourish Garuda around in a graceful ark as you soften your expression.

The man behind you shifts closer. Your haki tingles as the spear pulls back, ready to thrust.

You wink at the boy just as the spear shoots forward. Just as you dodged Croc's sand during your training session, you simply just...turn to the side. The spear pierces the air right where your gut had been but a half-second before.

"GUH-HUH!" The absence of your body to halt the forward momentum of his thrust offsets the man's balance. Right as his forward foot skids, trying to stop himself, you grab hold of the outstretched arm holding the spear. His eyes meet yours, but as they widen in terror you give him the sweetest, warmest smile you can muster.

And then he's falling. With but a single push against the outside of his forward foot, he's sent spinning to the ground as he pivots about the arm you hold tight. The spear clatters to the ground next to him. An echo to the gasp forced him his lungs as his back thuds into the ground. You kick into the elbow of the arm you still have gripped tight, snapping the joint with a gnarly crack that has the man screaming in agony.

His broken arm falls down to his chest where he clenches it tight, and despicable, ugly tears start to
puddle at the corner of his eyes. You lean backward, rolling your gaze over your shoulder to look the boy dead in the eye. He's pale as a ghost, and you grin devilishly as the saber rattles in his grasp.

Repeating the dramatic saber flourish from earlier, you wink at the boy once more.

And plunge Garuda down into the man's heart.

He stops screaming almost immediately. The noise cut off with a disturbing gurgling instead. His eyes look up at yours so utterly lost and afraid, but you feel nothing. He knew what he signed up for. His hands instinctively paw at the steel now embedded in his chest, weak and fumbling.

You twist the blade, internally grimacing as his body jerks. But you needed to make sure he was well and truly dead.

When he falls still, you know you've done your due diligence.

Your saber pulls free of the ruined chest cavity with a sickening crunch. You turn to look at the boy again, bloodied blade held casually to your side. His eyes are frozen onto his fallen companion. The fear radiating off of him is palpable. 'Good. Run.'

For good measure, you snap the blade through the air. A few drops of blood splatter onto the boy's face. He doesn't even flinch, so absolutely terrified of the supposedly defenseless 'little fox' before him.

"Are you sure you want to dance with me, boy?"

His own saber falls to the ground with a rattling clang, and without a word he turns tail and runs.

You exhale a massive breath, immensely relieved that plan worked as intended. If worse came to worst-you having to actually fight the child-you would've insisted on taking him captive.

Killing him yourself was never an option.

You could already hear the boys scolding you for it. 'Letting the enemy escape!? What if he comes back to hunt you down in the future?' and 'There's no room for mercy and kindness on the battlefield. If he didn't want to fight and die then he never should've joined the battle to begin with.'

If they think you weak for it, fine. Everyone has their own code to live by. Harming children is a big 'no' in yours.

Shouting from behind gets your attention. "WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING, BRAT?!"

You whirl around, immediately scowling upon seeing the fleeing boy accosted by a supposed comrade. He has his palms up in surrender as he quakes before a squat, brutish man. The look on his face is nothing but pure disgust, one that transforms into a slimy sneer as he brings the barrel of a pistol to rest on the boy's forehead. "Running away?! After we took your scrawny ass in?!"

There's no hesitation. You stab your saber into the ground and dive your right hand to your belt to grab the set of throwing knives holstered there. Thin blades perfectly balanced to arc through the air exactly as you want them to. They slip between your fingers with the casual ease only experience could grant. That familiar, welcome sting pricks at the thin skin between your knuckles as you rear your hand back and take aim.

"This is the thanks we get, boy?! Well, let me show you just how we thank cowa-" The first knife
hits him dead in the side of his neck with an almost banal thud, with the next embedding into his temple not a second after. His gun hits the ground before his knees do, luckily without having fired its charge.

Blood spurts onto the already terrified boy's face. It joins the blood you had splattered there previously in a macabre constellation of crimson stars that only makes you pity the poor lad even more. If this didn't convince him to take up a better life, there was no telling what would.

You're about to yell at him to go when your senses flare hot with alarm. A cutlass slashes the air where your back had just been. The very end catches on your left shoulder, senses not have warned you quick enough to make a more graceful dodge. You hiss as the blade bites through your shirt with a painful sting. It sinks but half an inch into the muscle there, not enough for true concern but definitely enough to piss you off.

Quickly, you toss your last knife into the ground at the boy's feet, rolling your eyes as he squeals. "Take that and get out of here!"

He looks at you one last time. The expression on his face is incredulous, eyes brimming with immense gratitude. He nods at you, a jittery, uncontrolled motion, before scooping up your knife and running away.

"You better be paying attention to me, girlie!" Your attacker growls, and before you can reclaim the saber planted into the ground to your side he hooks his cutlass into its hilt. With a heft of his arm, he sends it flying into the air. You don't dare turn your eyes away from the man lurching over you, but from the distant clattering noise you can tell Garuda has landed at least several meters behind you. 'Not. Good.'

Your new attacker beams down at you with undisguised sadism. "This is revenge for killing my friends, little girl!"

He raises his arm to cut you down, but before it reaches peak height you leap upwards. He grunts as the soles of your boots plant on his chest. You use him a springboard, kicking off him to send yourself arcing backwards through the air in a moonsault. He flails and tries to slash one of your legs but you're far too quick for him.

You land in a crouch next to your thrown blade. It flips into your palm like it never left, the hilt so comfortable in the curve of your hand. You spring to your feet with a cocky grin plastered on your face, left hand pressed tight against your back sneakily gripping a dirk from your thigh. "Seems all you're doing is letting your dead friends down, mate!"

He snarls and begins to charge. You hold your ground, dropping into a reactive stance as the man leaps at you, cutlass already rearing back to cut your head off. His eyes flit to the side but you know not to look. He was just trying to distract you, throw you off guard and kill you like he and the rest of his comrades came here to do.

As his cutlass swings downward, you can tell he's expecting you to dodge out of the way again. So you do...not that. His blade crashes down onto yours so hard that sparks fly, but you're at the ready. The cutlass is deflected to your side from your parry. You hiss through your teeth as the maneuver painfully wrenches your wrist, the man having considerably more power behind his swing than you can perfectly redirect.

He spits a string of curses into your face, but before he can attempt a remise the words die in his throat with a pained wheeze. Blood splashes onto your left hand as you stab the dirk deep into the man's gut. You had pulled it free from its place on your left thigh-still bloodied from slashing the first
man's ankles-upon rising from your crouch. He had been none the wiser, and now his mistake has left him as dead as his friends.

You wrench it free, grimacing as his blood soaks into your arm. The man falls to his knees, but the look in his eye and on his face is far from the ones shared by his fallen brothers.

He looks at you with a smile.

Your hackles raise for but a split second in warning.

The air suddenly cracks with not one, but two gunshots. The second immediately chasing the other.

Your body freezes. The air halts in your lungs. Garuda falls from your hand to the ground.

It's like the entire battlefield has stilled. The individual fights stopping just as you have.

All you can do is wait for the pain to hit. The man had been just a trap. A setup meant to get you in position for the bullet that would end all of this.

But like before, the pain never comes.

A woman's voice, cursing loud and distraught echoes from the rooftop she's taken roost on. "NO! GOD DAMMIT!"

Your heart seizes. A gasping, horrified sob chokes out of your throat. Ellia is the last person that needed to be shot. Barring her-her, not Mirke-kind, sweet disposition, to have the doctor be shot...

You turn to look at the rooftop, hoping beyond hope she's unharmed.

And she is. She is miraculously unharmed, the barrel of her rifle smoldering with smoke from her shot made just seconds before.

But you don't relax. The look on her face makes it impossible to. An expression of pure anguish has contorted her delicate features. So utterly distressed her hands tear into her hair, bulbous tears ringing her panicked, green eyes.

You know without truly knowing, what's just happened.

Though you hadn't noticed the trap...someone else definitely had.

There's only one thud, followed by the clattering of a pistol as it strikes the ground. The man Ellia has shot falls, dead. Dead a second too late.

And then the air is filled with a dreadful, wet hacking.

You turn just as Crocodile falls to his knees, hand clutching at his chest. The back of his coat is already stained red, blood flowing from the exit wound at a frightening pace. He's coughing violently as he chokes on the blood shooting into his throat. Each hack sends crimson drops sputtering onto the ground before him, glinting in the sun around his knees.

You can't see his face.

You don't want to see his face.

You don't want this to be happening at all.
Several things happen all at once.

It's a presence you've felt before. A chamber of whirling energy you've only been able to tap into in times of duress. Energy that slowly breathes life into your haki senses, generous and greedy all at once. Raw, pure spirit nothing short of demanding.

The dam holding it all back...shatters.

A wave of such indescribable rage descends upon you. Animalistic and all-consuming to the point you can no longer form cohesive thoughts. Left with nothing but the utterly overwhelming and undeniable desire to kill: a bloodthirsty madness.

The breeze kicks up, no longer that of a gentle day but now one warning of a coming storm. It swells as the mindless fury takes hold of your senses, growing all the more powerful as you surrender to the bloodthirst until a now furious cyclone swirls about your feet. Each gust slices into the dirt as true as any sword.

You take but a single step forward, and it's like the wind itself billows beneath your heels. So impossibly light you may as well be made of air yourself.

Someone roars. A single, monstrous howl joining in the chorus of the thunderous storm churning about your body.

The storm carries you forward, a divine wind joining in your one desire to kill. Your saber has returned to your hand without you having consciously placed her there, but there she is and she is just as ready for the coming slaughter as you are. Never more at home was the mighty Garuda than in the heart of a storm.

And what a storm you have made for her.

The first man doesn't even have time to scream. From across the battlefield you're just there. A wind bound rokushiki soru has carried you right to him, the very first you would ever do and certainly not your last. Before he has time to even realize it the top half of his body thuds to the ground. His bottom half remains standing, and a full second passes almost comically before it geyser a fountain of blood into the air.

You aren't there long enough for it to soak into you. You've already moved on.

You cut each victim down as ruthlessly as the first. Garuda barely needs to touch them herself as she sends slicing gusts outwards wherever you swing. Rankyaku, you would come to know it as. But for now, it's just the wind itself bending to your maddened fury.

"YOU HAVE TO STOP THIS!" A single voice tries to pierce through the incessant howl of the storm. Your storm, manifested from the now out of control haki feeding off your grief-fueled rage.

It matters not.

"KITTY! Y/N! YOU NEED TO STOP!"

Nothing matters but the need to kill. The need for vengeance.

Everything short circuits as something strikes your gut. Hard.

Static. White.
You double over, bile filling your mouth tasting conspicuously of metal.

The shock of the blow forces some of the frenzy from your mind just as it forces your saber to the ground. You were now suddenly aware.

And pained.

Horribly, horribly pained.

Someone grabs at your wrist, tugging it forward so roughly you almost fall forwards.

You blink once, twice. The world comes back into focus with an almost agonizing sharpness.

Daz stands before you in the eye of the storm still raging around you, gripping your wrist with bruising intensity. His other arm is poised for another punch while his chest heaves from exertion. The look he gives you conveys an exhaustion so palpable you feel it yourself.

"You're hurting yourself, Y/N. Please...please calm down." His plea is almost soft. His steely eyes, desperate.

Your gaze falls from his, coming to a rest on the bloodsoaked arm by which he had you by the wrist. Numerous slices and cuts run down its length. As if he'd taken a tumble in barbed wire. But, as your eyes travel down his arm to yours, you realize yours is the same. The flesh is slashed all along your arm, and from the way your entire body stings...so is the rest of you.

The storm wavers.

Everything stills.

Your legs buckle.

It all goes black by the time you fall into his shoulder.

Consciousness returns all at once.

Your eyes shoot open with a gasp, the now unfamiliar ceiling of your own room high above you.

Memories of gunfire echo in your ears.

Images of blood. Heaving breaths, choking on red.

The ceaseless howl of a raging storm.

You drag yourself from your bed, so cold and alien to you now. An indescribable exhaustion weighs on your body so drastically you struggle not to fall to your knees.

But it won't stop you.

Nothing will stop you from getting to him.

The ship is out to sea now, you can tell by the way it's rocking on the waves. You curse the listing of the hull as you try and steady your shaking steps. Your legs tremble aggressively, and you choke down bile as your stomach rolls with nausea.

It hurts. Everything stings and aches and throbs. Your chest is tight, heart still taxed from its
overexertion earlier.

Something had awoken inside you upon seeing your beloved fall. A howling gale had been set free. One seeking blood for blood.

You had delivered...and it had almost killed you.

But you can rest when you get to him.

The light from the hall illuminates your body as you step into the hallway, revealing the numerous bandages haphazardly wrapping your arms and legs.

"Hold her steady." A deep voice echoes about the cramped bathroom.

"Look, Daz you need to rest. You can't just shove gauze in your wound and be ok-" One of the crew tries to plead with him.

He cuts them off with a snarl. "Not until Y/N is taken care of. Now hold her still!"

Foggy memories shift into your mind. Hazy images you both remember and somehow don't at the same time. You had flicked in and out of the conscious world as Daz had dragged you back to the ship, as wounded as he was himself.

He had cleaned your wounds and bandaged them as best he could. More concerned for you than he was himself.

Tears prick at your eyes as you stumble towards the stairs.

Both of your boys had gotten hurt. All because of you.

The stairs take nearly everything from you, and by the time you reach the top deck you crash onto your knees with a choked sob. You're shaking violently, body wracked with both chills and heat at the same time. You can't will yourself to stand. The energy just isn't there.

So you just sit there, on your knees, sobbing at the sheer frustration and helplessness of the situation.

You don't even hear him approach. Too wrapped up in your misery that you only notice Daz's presence as he's kneeling to the ground and wrapping you in a gentle hug. "Shhhh..." He coos at you, gently rubbing your back.

"I-I have to-I need to get to..." The words choke past your sobs as you try to convey your desperation to the man you now considered to be your older brother.

But he says nothing, opting to remain silent as he calms you down. You can't help but notice the bandages wrapped about his torso and arm. The horribly tired look in his pale grey eyes.

Your fingers shakily trail over his wounded arm. An unbearable guilt settles in your gut, knowing you were the one to have done this. Your winds had slashed him as readily as if he were any enemy.

It fills you with disgust.

"I would never blame you for this, kitty." His voice is soft, just as soft as the touch he reassuringly runs down your back. "Everyone is alive. We're all alive." And then he gently pulls you away. His
hands move to cup your cheeks, thumbs futilely wiping away the tears that will just be replaced in seconds. "And most important of all, we still have you."

Your sobbing renews in earnest. He lets his hands fall away, allowing you to fall forward into his hug once more. You let him comfort you the best he can, but soon it's not enough.

You need to get to your love.

"...Daz...please..." Your pleas barely a whisper, raspy from your tears. "I need to see him...please..."

The unbridled aggression in the room is palpable. You can taste it on your tongue, an acrid grit that makes your stomach turn. There's a low, rumbling growl as you open the door. A warning.

But you know you have nothing to fear.

So you say nothing, calmly turning to close the door behind you. The room is plunged back into darkness, the only light being the dim moonlight creeping from under the drawn curtains. Only the vague shapes of the furniture become visible once your eyes adjust.

The malice radiating off him grows ever more intense, all the while your senses scream for you to run. 'Danger!'

Daz's warning echoes in your ears. 'He's not the same when he's injured...He could hurt you. Scream if you need help.'

But you shake those thoughts from your head. There would be no need for screaming.

You merely swallow around the sour taste building in your throat, and take but a single step forward.

A grizzly claw formed of sand shoots forward, only loosely held together in its intended shape. Raggedy, poorly composed. Not expertly formed with its usual precision.

It leaps to your face in but a split second, each talon at least a foot long, messily dripping with sand. They begin to close around your head. Ready to kill.

You don't even flinch. Not even a single blink.

You don't even sigh in relief when it stops just short. Talons so close you can hear the minute rustling as the grains within fight to maintain their composition.

Because you knew.

He would never hurt you.

There's a few moments of stillness, the mangled claw still half closed about your head.

And then it shifts. It loses its shape all at once, instead devolving to a thick band that droops down to push at your back. You're guided forward, pushed toward the bed. Pushed toward him.

Just as your legs collide with the edge of the mattress, the band wraps about your waist where you're none too gracefully dragged onto the bed. But all the annoyance fades away as you're brought up against his chest, radiating heat.

Feverish, pained heat.
His right arm weakly drapes over top of you, hand pushing the back of your head closer to him until he's burying his face in your hair. You feel him take a deep breath, shuddering as it rattles painfully in his chest. His arms tense around you as he tries to hold you tightly with what little strength he has left. You merely grit your teeth as his embrace irritates your own wounds, but you don't dare let him know. Not when he's hurting far, far worse.

The aggression and rage radiating from him begin to die down as he breathes.

He says not a word all the while. Silent save for the rattling in his chest with each pained breath he takes, seeking calmness in the comfort your presence provided. The noise twists like a knife in your heart with every shuddering inhale.

Your fingers trace over the bandages covering his chest as his own lazily twine through your hair. The wrappings are so very thick, area over the bullet's entry especially dense with padding. You blink back tears as you investigate the extent of the damage, images of him choking on his own blood shooting to the forefront of his mind.

But as you begin to sniffle, his hand moves to yours. His fingers trace over the bandages covering your hand and arm, traveling upward to find where they stop just short of your shoulder.

There's a low, displeased noise. Practically a whine. Barely audible in how quiet it sounds. Weak.

"How..." His voice is the quietest you've ever heard it. The roughness of his throat makes you cringe. How slurred he sounds between the pain and painkillers. "...How...did...?" He can't even finish, hoping you understand the question without it needing to be said.

Your lips fall open, tears coming to your eyes in full force. Even as injured and pained as he was, he still found the energy to fret over your own wounds, pitiful in comparison to his. It only makes you feel even guiltier. All the more because you did this to yourself.

He whines again, needing an answer. Begging for it.

"I...When I saw you..." You take a shuddering breath of your own, struggling not to burst into tears. "When I saw you hurt...I...Something...Something inside me..." And then it all came tumbling out. The pure, howling rage you felt as seeing him fall. How the wind itself gusted beneath your heels, carrying you forward to deliver you divine retribution. You had cut down each and every one of the enemy left standing. A swing of your blade having sent forward slicing gusts that rent the ground and flesh alike.

But you hadn't even known what you were doing. So blinded with fury and grief you had surrendered to acting on your rage alone. Your winds had torn at you just as easily as they had torn apart the men you had slaughtered, too enraged to control them.

Daz had stopped you, brought you to your senses at a cost that left him slashed open too. Though you casually left out how he had done so by punching you in the stomach. Hard. Shortly afterwards you had passed out, body too utterly drained by the explosive outburst to stay entirely functional.

He stirs after a few moments, giving you a languid squeeze. "...Wind..." His face nuzzles into your hair again as he presses you against him. Of all the things you expected, feeling him smile was not one of them. "...That's...my girl...so...strong..."

He tries to mutter something else only for it to be muffled by your hair. You can tell he's slipping off to sleep. His arms begin to relax around you, breathing growing longer, deeper.

But...
Your chest felt about to explode. You needed to tell him. Tell him how you truly felt, how important
he was to you. You had almost lost him and now...The word needed to be said. Demanded to be
spoken aloud.

"There's...There's something I have to tell you..." You swallow, scared tears already pooling at the
corners of your eyes. Fear hooked its claws tight into your gut. What you were about to say might
destroy everything, and it terrified you. But you couldn't live a second longer without telling him. "It
might ruin everything...what we have together, but...but I have to tell you...I...I...-

"I love you, too."

His words, somehow so quiet, crack through your heart like pure thunder. They steal the breath from
your lungs, the fear from your gut. He pulls away slightly only to reposition his forehead against
yours. You only just barely make out his eyes in the darkness of the cabin, glazed and wet from the
pain.

And yet despite it all: "I love you, Y/N. That...bullet...I moved before...-

You shush him with a gentle kiss to the lips. So pained and exhausted as he tried to express what you
had been meaning to do yourself for weeks now. Your heart was soaring, fluttering in your chest
lighter than it's ever felt before. The tears flowing down your cheeks were now ones of indescribable
joy, relief that he not only reciprocated the love bursting in your chest but willingly admitted to it,
too.

"I didn't even get to say it..." You sniffle, rubbing your face into his chest, too utterly enraptured to
even consider the fact you were crying into his bandages. "You cut me off."

A muted puff, the closest thing to a laugh as he can muster right now, pushes from his throat.
"You...said it...already."

You stiffen, eyes going wide as your mind wracks itself apart thinking of when. No, no no you
would definitely remember it.

"...After the bath..." He helpfully fills in the gaps, voice growing more slurred as his need for rest
saps his remaining composure.

Oh.

The faint images of you muttering something, only half awake as he sets you down in bed. His
expression shifting to one of surprise, dark eyes gawking at you as his jaw goes slack.

You had admitted your love for him right then and there. Too hazed to realize or even remember it.

No, no, no!

That didn't count!

"Well, I didn't remember, so..." You swallow again, nuzzling your face into his neck this time. "I
love you."

He doesn't respond, the pace of his breathing indicating he was already deeply asleep.

You try to huff a sigh, only to cut off with a yawn. The extent of your exhaustion catches back up to
you all at once, and it now feels near impossible to keep your eyes open.
He would be here in the morning. Grouchy and pained, but here. Alive. He could hear you say it then.

So for now, you surrender to your exhaustion. Both of you drift off, letting the pain fade away as you fall asleep in each other's arms.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not crying, you're crying.

Thanks for sticking around and reading! I appreciate you more than you could ever know :)

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