Bad Dreams
by R_S

Summary

Luffy carries his past heavily with him, returning to his home on the Sunny two years after his brother's death. Surrounded by all of his nakama once again, and back on the Ocean. Only he finds he cannot rest himself, because if he does, then he'll remember...

Please note the Timeline for spoilers
Chapters fit into the Canon like this:
Chapter1- Leaving Saboody
Chapter2- Leaving Fishman Island
Chapter3- On Hazard Punk and Leaving Hazard Punk
Chapter4- Takes place after the defeat of Doflamingo, in the Hut on Dressrosa.

Notes
See the end of the work for notes.
“Nh.. Mmmnn...Ac..e...”

They had come back together.

“Mnnn...”

Found each other again, after two entire years *forced* to be apart.

“Mnn... n-no...”

Scraping, and suffering. To find their own ways back. Each of them.

“A...ce..n-”

Some of them, crawling... on bloodied hands, and knees. Through Hell itself.

“...n-no-*NO!!!!!!”*

The crew is already awake inside the men's quarters. Usopp, Franky, Chopper... Zoro hadn't ever gone to sleep, he's just come in from his turn on watch.

“E-eh? H-huh?” Luffy's hit his head, sitting up in his box-hammock like that. Not that he's noticed, being made of rubber. Busy digging all his knuckles into his face after he'd woken himself up. “W-why everybody up? What time is it?”

“About an hour after midnight.” Zoro's answered his Captain. Kicking off his boots, and flapped open the green coat he wears now. Over a bare chest and maroon belly-band.
“Are you alright, Luffy?” Chopper asks, and the Swrodsman wishes their tiny Doctor would \textit{stop} asking. Worried little face lit up by the light cast from a Lamp Dial Franky'd mounted to a beam.

“Hahaha! Yea, Chopper. I'm fine! Hahahaha!”

Zoro slips his katana from their sash. Fingers tightening around polished sheaths.

“If you want to talk about anything, Luffy...?”

And Usopp... Zoro grinds the flats of his teeth. Wanting to scream at his kink-haired nakama to shut the fuck up.

“Oh? Haha- Nah, I'm alright.”

Zoro's going to rip his coat, if he doesn't put it down.

“Ya'know, 'f somethin's eating at ya, little-bro - there's no reason ya gatta go up against it all by yerself.”

And \textit{Franky!} He's older than all of them, and should know better. Just \textit{what} does he think he's doing?!

“Hahaha...” He can't lie for shit, so everybody onboard already knows. That Luffy – previously known for having to be woken up \textit{only} by the smell of breakfast, isn't able to sleep more than about forty minutes. Not anymore. It's only their \textit{second night} out from Sabaody. The Sunny plunged under the waves, into total darkness twenty-four hours while they traverse lightless, deep-water currents.

Zoro had heard some sailors talking about \textit{going down}, while he waited for the rest of the Strawhats to assemble. About places so deep into the Blue that it turns Black. That sometimes weak or damaged minds don't last down there. Can't handle it. People go crazy. Stories of maniacs that murder their whole crew, or those who simply exit their bubbles to be crushed by the enormous pressure beyond. Dark tales, he'd heard, that left a sour bile on the back of the swordsman's tongue.

Knowing his Captain's never been strong-minded. Strong Willed, yes. \textit{Nobody} can deny Luffy's Strong Willed... but not strong-\textit{minded}. He'd been easily influenced so many times in the past. The weirdo hypnotist back in Usopp's hometown, and that Colors' girl with her traps... \textit{tricked} by Foxy- and more than once! And the list goes on. Now that he's... that he's been...
Zoro does rip something. It's the towel he'd picked up to wipe his face with. The rending fabric sounding incredibly loud in an otherwise silent room, and draws a little girly-shriek out of Usopp.

Luffy's eyes come up, and his First Mate catches onto them. Big, and brown. Round in shape, that makes him seem a lot younger than he really is.... or... those were the eyes Zoro wanted to see. The eyes he'd remembered, and reminded himself of every moment he spent in Mihawk's dark-stone Castle. Fighting endless waves of humandrills, while his rival sat observing and sipping wine.

Except Luffy's eyes don't look like that anymore. Still brown, and round... but... It had been something he'd begun to pick up on right away. Luffy's pride and jubilation from seeing his nakama again alive being a very short-lived expression of happiness. In fact, no sooner had Sanji cleared away the plates from their Whooohoo! Everyone's Alive, Let's Have A Feast! feast, is when it happened.

Like layers of wax in different colors melting.... revealing successively, a different expression for each rung of understanding Luffy was somehow climbing down. Experiencing, right in front of them.

Ne, S-Sencho?" Zoro hasn't felt truly disturbed very often in his life. But, sat there at the table along with the rest of the crew. Oi!" It had. Gold teardrops clacking under his left ear, as he's jolted in alarm. A numb witness to his Captain getting up from the table- The place where they'd been so happily laughing and eating together only seconds earlier! Sharing stories about where they'd been, and what they'd done – and how they'll kick ass in the future... Oi!"

Everyone saw, not just Zoro. Luffy's face wet with tears, up and ran out onto the dark lawn deck.

*Flap!* Thrown the torn towel against the wall, Zoro recalls the hours that followed that dinner. And now... everybody's staring at him. “What?!”

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Sitting on a stool in Sunny's Gally, Sanji's taps a polished black heel against the metal base. A stiff clear drink with a cocktail olive flouting amid tiny little ice crystals at his elbow. He's flipping through the ship's unofficial photo album. Something Nami and Robin started putting together after they'd returned from Sky Island with Vision Dials. Usopp arranging the printing system, and they'd been adding to the thick binder ever since.

“Ahhhh, what beautiful – Beautiful Angels~” A tear slips down the Strawhat Cook's pale cheek, and a bit of blood on his lip. Dabbing at his nose with a napkin. Chopper said this might happen, minor nosebleeds. After he'd diagnosed Sanji with Pretty-Lady Disease, and now is completely restricted to photographs. Robin and Nami putting on long sleeves, and long pants. Well... it might have been because it was cold down under the Blue, away from the sun... but Sanji felt so disappointed. Aching to hold his lovely ladies in his arms, and they can fall in love with him all over again...

*Bang!* “Sanji-!”

“Ah!” The bloody napkin goes flying, and he's very nearly spilled his drink. “Oh, it's you... little Rubber Shit.” Not that he's especially surprised to see his Captain tonight. Not after last night. In fact he's only surprised that... wait... no... here he comes. Their great-green-Cyclops.

“Sanji, meat!”

“Aye, Sencho.” Pale-blue eyes following after Zoro's bare footsteps. He's not wearing a shirt, either. Just his black trousers, and hamaraki. “Aren't you cold?”

“Che- 's none o' your business.”

“I've gatta look at your ugly beat-up hide. Why don't you put a shitty shirt on?”

But Zoro's not listening anymore. Too busy noticing that while Sanji had put down a huge dish of Braised Sea King in front of Luffy, his Captain was making no move towards wolfing it down. Staring at the browned meat, and expert grill marks... he's not smiling at all, and... that truth hurts Zoro, somewhere in his chest behind a long thick scar he'd gotten years before in East Blue. Squeezing at the neck of the bottle in his hand, until he's crushed it. Blue glass biting into his palm, and it stings for the stringent alcohol that seeps into the wounds.

“What the fuck-?! you stupid green-Moss!” Gone and kicked the broken bottle against the wall, and jerk his shipmate's hand open. It's not too bad. Doesn't even need stitching. Sanji grumbling ill curses
towards the Swordsman, gone and started to pick up the mess made on his floor.

Zoro, however, didn't even know he'd broken anything... only vaguely wondering what happened to that bottle he'd been holding. Air circling about inside his lungs, but not doing much for him. Luffy's still just staring at that large hunk of meat. “Sencho?” From the opposite side of the Galley, gone to get a broom, Sanji's ears prickle.

“A-aye?”

“You're not eating.” Like his lungs are being squeezed. He needs to be drinking... Didn't he come in here to get a drink?

“A-aye.”

The Strawhat Cook taps a cigarette from his pack, and lights the end. Dragging thick, soothing yellow smoke into his lungs, before blowing it out.

“Couldn't give us a minute?” Zoro growls, when it looks like the guy's gonna stay and fucking watch!

“'s my shitty Galley, Caveman.”

Luffy already up on his feet, before Zoro has a chance to posture back at Sanji. Leaving behind the meat on his plate, untouched.

“You better go look after him.” The Cook's advice, after he's sure the door to the Galley's swung shut behind their Captain..

“Eh? Don't order me around, Swirly-” Even if he is across the room, with his hand on the latch. A second pilfered bottle in his opposite hand.

The Cook considers a snide remark he might make. Could make. Just as the door's about to swing shut. Something that stings good and deep in, like a barb off one of those porcupine-possums...

Except he doesn't. Blood dripping off the ends of the swordsman's fingertips, and that's the hand he uses to open the door. Gone through, and all that's left behind when he's gone. A bloody smear.

Sanji drags more smoke into his lungs. Blowing yellow haze up towards the ceiling, and watching it drift there a moment before being pulled away.
The Sunny looks exactly the same, to Luffy. Everything. Just as he'd remembered from two years ago. Big grass-covered deck, and Robin's flower beds. The long benches that wrap around the ship's main and foremasts... The apple trees, and the tire swing. Nami's mikan grove planted in a big patch of dirt, quietly, on the second landing.

There's no breeze inside the bubble, and so the leaves don't toss. Nothing makes any sound – not the grass, not the swing, not anything...

Luffy puts his hand on the nearest white railing, climbing up towards Sunny's observation deck. The bubble sticky under his fingers, and he sort of wishes it wasn't there. He'd like to feel the grains Adam-wood he knows Sunny's built out of. Underneath his own fingers, to know he's really back aboard his own ship. Even if he knows for sure he's here... it would make it seem so much more real.

Luffy gaining the wide platform at the top of the stairs. Sunny's Observation deck. There are a few sun chairs up here, and another few flower beds. Usopp's composting station way in the back, and the Ship's Wheel... Also, Brook.

“Yohohohoho!!!!” The skeleton standing quiet and still in the dark. A cup of tea in his bony hands, and a fluffy orange-feather boa resting across sharp shoulders. “Sencho-san. What brings you out of your bed again this evening?” Because he'd been up last night also. Looking much the same way. A bit lost, and certainly confused. Brook figured Luffy should have realized running up here he'd meet him again, since this is where Brook spends his nights. The thought of sleeping in the men's quarters, while appealing in the sense that he'd be nearer to his very-dear nakama – When he'd considered sleeping in anything that so closely resembled a coffin...it confused his mind. When the near hundred-year-old Pirates is so unsure anymore, what qualifies as sleep when one has no eyelids to close or even eyes to be covered. His every moment is awake in that way, he supposes. Or, alternately; he is always... inside his dreams? Yohohohoho-!

“Br-Brook.” Although he does seem surprised. Luffy craning his neck to look up at his much taller nakama.

“Is there anything the matter, Captain?” Tears gather, and a few break out of Luffy's eyes, rolling down his face. Droplets that get onto his red shirt, and darken the smooth silky fibers. Wiping his face on one wide crimson sleeve, and he's set his jaw – much as he'd done the night before.

“Nah- Shishishishi-” An octave lower than it should be, Brook is very sure. Luffy's voice has changed anyway, in the most slightest of ways. The older more keenly aware than maybe the rest of the crew, that Luffy is a little bit calmer than he had been. Or that he in fact listens for longer. That he has gained so much more control... or at least, he appeared to. When they were all gathered together
and laughing.

“Luffy!” Brook tips his head, recognizing Zoro's presence immediately. The burly swordsman climbing the steps behind their Captain. Two paces is all that's necessary to bring them into contact, and he's wrapped the younger up tight in his arms.

“Zoro-san. Is there anything that you need?”

“No.” Hoarse. He's buried his nose into Luffy's black hair. Clutching his Captain's back so that his fingers drag on the other's loose red shirt.

“Then I will take my leave,” and his tea, and his afro. Brook retiring to the Galley, where he will keep Sanji-san company during his rehabilitation efforts.

Zoro listens to the hard heels on his nakama's buckled boots click on the stairs. The Galley door closing behind him- sound echoing in his ears, being bounced back and repeated off the inner surfaces of the bubble protecting them all from being crushed by black ocean.

Until it's faded completely away.

“You're alright.” He can feel Luffy's body heave beneath his hands. Wet gasps that pull in a tight chest, his Captain trying to catch a breath but coughing into the swordsman's shoulder instead.

“Z-Zoro-” Holding onto his nakama, Luffy turns and pukes in Robin's flowerbed. (He'll apologize to her later) Throat burning, and choked on his own spit. “Ah-! Z-Zoro – Cough- Cough-!” Tears mixing with vomit, and his back trembles, held against his swordsman's bare chest.

“Get it out.”

“Aah-” Wiping his lips on a shirtsleeve, Luffy looks ahead of him. To the silvery sheen of bubble about six feet away. The slightest of reflections show the two of them. Him and Zoro. How even in the blurry image, they look so much different now, from then... But everything is different... isn't it? Nothings the same! Not like Luffy thought it would be. He'd been sure, once upon a time on that lonely island in the Calm Belt. Certain that'd he'd take himself back out to Sea stronger than ever, with the rush of adventure boiling in his blood. That his life would become a whirling race, and he'd fall with the thrill – to ride the frenzy all the way to the shores of Raftel.

“Oi. Stand up properly.” Zoro keeps close to his Captain, as he's gradually stood. Brown eyes
darting all over the bubble wall. The swordsman perceiving Luffy watching their reflections there, further unnerving him, and he's chosen to step between his Captain and that reflection.

Luffy's eyes refocusing. “H-hi, Zoro.” It's only the ghost of a smile, but it still passes for one.

“Hi.” He doesn't expect Luffy to be jumping up and down every minute of every day – even if that is how he used to behave. Known for it. A trait in his character that irritated most everyone on the crew at one time or another. Always running off to look at this and see that and oh holy crap we gatta have one of these! Zoro's heart breaks apart. Shattering. Merely to think Luffy's lost his childlike wonder. The tingling elation he voiced out loud for the world, and at every possible opportunity.

“Think it'll take very long?” Zoro's fingers slip over the younger man's hands, Luffy going to stand at Sunny's rail and lightly poke at the bubble wall. Soft ripples wobbling away around his finger. “To get there...? Fishman Island.”

How would he know? “I suppose it'll take as long as it takes.”

“Shishishi- Yea- Haha-” That stare... into the dark, fathomless Ocean.

“Oi-”

“Zoro's stronger, Ne?”

“Wh-? Yes. I think we all got at least a little stronger-”

“Even though Zoro....” Luffy takes one hand from the rail, using it to clutch at his chest. “He.. he doesn't have his eye anymore?”

He'd wondered when that was going to be brought up. “Sencho-”

“It is gone, Ne? Zoro's eye? It's not still underneath there is it?” Fingernails rake over the slick, smooth skin that'd grown over a massive burn. A mark on him that'll last forever, earned in an injury Luffy had received from the same fucking Marine who killed his older brother right in front of him.

“I can see just fine.” Because he can. It doesn't matter how he'd lost it, he's lost it. No medicine or miracle going to give him his own eye back, so the swordsman set to work conquering what he felt a minor disability. Developing layers of Observation Haki, while under tutelage from the man he hoped one day to defeat. Day after day, until the stitches fell out, and he started forgetting he had an eye missing. The result being that every time somebody mentions it, he's reminded. “Che- Not like I need eyes to fight-”

“Zoro needs his eyes!” Thrown himself back from the rail, Luffy's shoved at his First Mate. “Don't act like it's no big deal!”

“Hah-” On his ass on the Observation Deck, the Swordsman's leered. “But it's not.” Which isn't what Luffy wants to hear.

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Hard slams make vibrations down through Sunny's Adam-wood Walls. Waking Nami and Robin
from their beds.

“Goddamn morons!”

“Fufufu- *yawn – Well, we must make allowances.”

“Must we?” Nami’s combed a few fingers through long orange curls. Her hair hanging in an elegant cascade down past her hips.

Both women deciding, now that they are awake, that they might as well visit the Galley - because if they are awake, everybody else is too.

“Our Sencho-bro's sure brought home some s-u-p-e-r dark Devils with him.” Franky thumbs the cap off a bottle of nice-'n-cool cola. Tipping fizzing liquid into his mouth.

Usopp sighing, reaching for the coffee pot at the center of the Galley table. “He had to see Ace die.” It'd been in the papers. More than one photograph. Somebody having managed to take them- of his Captain holding the bloody and blasted body of his older brother. On his knees... The Sniper's not sure he'd have come back from that. If it had been someone important to him... like Kaya... To see them die right in front of him?

“Could we perhaps prescribe our Sencho something?” Robin's sipped her own coffee. “So that he may sleep more soundly?”

Across the table, Chopper's also drinking coffee. Blowing over the hot surface, after adding sugar and lots of honey. “I have the right ingredients to mix a sedative.” Blue nose twitching, Chopper's little hooves hold onto his cup. “But sleep forced on the body isn't something that should go on Long-term.” and Luffy's been waking up two – sometimes three times every hour! Unusual in such frequency, so whatever he mixes needs to be strong. The reindeer shakes his head. “Luffy needs help.” Little wet tears don't leave any traces, rolling off Chopper's slick brown fur. Robin puts her arm around her nakama.

“Don't worry, Chopper-san. For I am sure he will be alright. Our Captain – he is strong.” Brook's understanding of Luffy began on a strange day on a strange sea, with a strange request, and an even stranger outcome. Not two months, did they spend on the Ocean together before being parted by a cruel turn of fate. Yet he understood then – and still does this very moment, that he will follow that young man's Will to the very top.

“Oh, he'll be fine!” Nami's not drinking coffee, or tea. Broken into Zoro's stash of sake, and already he's drunk this much! The Strawhat Navigator pours herself another glass.

“Ahhh- Nami-swan is so confident and beautiful-!”

The redhead grinning and Franky's caught her little whisper to Robin, that she really did miss Sanji's compliments. “Haha-” Finished his cola, and put his large metal hands behind his head. “I s'pose you're right.” Zoro's up there. Whenever Luffy had a problem, Zoro would make it go away. Always been like that! “Hahaha!”
Red, thick splats of blood hit the deck. Because Zoro can hit harder now. His captain doubled over. Spit and puke and blood all over the deck. The swordsman not without his share of injury – in this fight come out of nowhere. But it's not stopping. Not that it's really going anywhere either.

“Ahh!” Luffy comes at Zoro in such a direct fashion it's almost as if he isn't trying. Just being damn noisy, which is made weird because every battle-cry echoes off the walls of the bubble. It's only Luffy's voice, because Zoro's said nothing. Swatting away punches and kicks easily. Not unsheathing his katana. This isn't really a fight – is it?

Zoro pivots, and lands a hit using Wado still in her sheath. Luffy lifted clean off his feet and sent skidding on his back and shoulders. Gasping. “What's your problem?”

“E-eh?” On his feet again. Luffy always gets back up. Rubbing his arm, and squinting at his First Mate.

“I said, what's your problem.” Zoro re-ties the sash around Wado. Taking his time, that worries him. Luffy doesn't take his time answering anything.... “Why aren't you sleeping.” Finished, and he's faced his Captain.

“... am sleeping.” Looking away... he really can't lie. Not even to save his own life.

“You're not staying asleep.” the Swordsman clarifies, because why argue. “Tell me why.”

“Mnn.” Eyes flickering all over, but not at Zoro. Luffy's shoved himself up off the ground and he's gone running towards the slide. Climbing up and rocketed down it.

Lungs filling, and he wishes he could smell the sea and not the sickly-soap smell from the bubble coating.

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“It appears our Swordsman's attempts are falling short.” Robin's uncrossed her arms, to pick up her coffee. Lips pursed, and she's taken a sip.

“Doesn't surprise me.” Sanji lights himself another cigarette. Putting pans on the stove to serve another round of pancakes. The fact that the smell of his cooking hasn't encouraged his Captain to come running starting to chip away on his nerves. The meat he had to put back into the refrigerator, also. Grated on the Cook's comfort. Sensing it isn't right.
“Where did he run off to?” Usopp's doesn't appear shocked either. Chewing on some toast.

“He is.. inside the upper storage hold- Oh my...”

“Oh my?!" Nami's knocked an empty shot glass back to the table a little too firmly, the resulting bang making Chopper jump in his chair.

“He is...”

He is curled, shoved his body into a small crevice between some crates and the hull. He's crying. Robin blooms an ear, and she can hear Luffy sob thickly in the dark silent Hold. Lowering her arms, once again, the woman's faced her nakama. A single sparkling teardrop sliding down the smooth curve of her face.
Second Attempt

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fishman Island turned out to be a beautiful place. Come, and now leaving almost as quickly as their visit into the sky. Zoro supposes it's by design. That so much excitement be partitioned off, and so when they return to the ship they are all half surprised by it.

You shut up, Luffy! I'll decide where we're going from now on!"

Eh!? No way! I'm the Captain!"

“Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves.” Franky has been reading and re-reading the same three or four handwritten pages for the last half hour, with his green haired nakama stood near the helm. The Strawhat Swordsman ardently listening to the rest of their crew screaming and yelling at each other on the coral shore below, voices distorted by a layer of slick bubble coating.

Please-! Listen to your Navigator-!!”

“Sounds like.” Grinding his teeth, Zoro walks to the edge and peers over Sunny's side. Seeing Nami wrestle with their Captain. Hands around his neck that's stretched out a few feet from his shoulders. Nervous locals looking on, only nervous because they don't know it's the only way to deal with him...

Ah! Frightened Nami-swan is also so - so Love-ly!!"

“Good to see our Sencho actin' a little more lively.” Folding those pages, and the Shipwright's slipped them into the pocket of an open shirt. Franky moves steadily along the upper deck. Arranging a number of large wooden blocks, all attached via a long thin rope.

“Sure is.”

Cyborg Franky, as well as most of the crew, have watched without much comment. These last couple of days fighting and feasting together in a magical Palace under the ocean. So wondrous. So much to see... yet... not without it's limits.
It only took half a day for Luffy to hike all the way across Fishman Island, wandering the streets and small alleys. Meeting new people. He met all the kids, Zoro's sure. They're there. Lining the reef, waiting to wave them off. A bunch of them asking their dads and moms if they can have a Hero's Hat. It makes the Pirate grin, a little. Thinking that they think Luffy's a hero. He's no hero.

“Alright! Let's go! To 'shaky' Island!!”

“Shut up!” Bonk*

“Ow-! Na-mi-?”

“We're all going to die- Luffy's already sent a threat to Big Mom-! We haven't even made it to the New World yet, and we've got an appointment to be killed by one of the Four Emperors of the Sea...”

Zoro watches Usopp slowly stumble to the tire-swing and sit down on it. Everyone else milling about on the grassy deck. Franky chortling to himself, shaking his head as he's put out towards the island's entry dock. So many Goodbyes, and not-goodbyes! just see-ya-later's. After it's all behind them, and they've caught the current into a dark deep ocean.

“Oi-?” The Swordsman pulling his green coat more closely as temperature drop almost instantly. His Captain come up the stairs, and across the upper deck right in front of him. Gone to the bow, and he's up on Sunny's carved lion's head. Staring up at the long line of boxes tied to a cord and strung out ahead of them. These wooden blocks made of Guigos, a wood with enough buoyancy to float their Adam-built Brig Sloop back to the surface of the Blue Sea – Franky had said. “What's up, Luffy?” Because Zoro's followed his Captain, found him clenching both hands into white-rubber fists. Red back shivering.

“When we go up there...” Dark eyes look ever ahead, into an even darker Sea. “...we'll be where Shanks is. The same Sea.”

Zoro doesn't make any mention of the blood he sees seep from in between white rubber fingers. Dripping onto Sunny's gelatin-like coating, to slide sickly down it.

“I want to see him.”

The Swordsman's fast, in grabbing Luffy's shoulder. Spun the smaller man around, and opened up both his hands. Blood in all their creases, from square fingernails broken through his skin.

Silence and simple pressure inside their bubble heavy in his ears, when Zoro's slowly put himself on
his knees. Gathering these bleeding’s hands of his Captain as he does. To provide a long soft lick across each salty palm. “You will see him.”

Luffy looks down at his First Mate. Blood on the man's lips, and both knees on the deck. “Zoro...” One hand brought forward, to comb tanned fingers through short emerald hair. Brushing against the man's cold brass jewelry.

The Swordsman relaxing his neck and shoulders for the feel of a tug. His Captain's hand wound into the short green hairs at the back of his head. A hard hot bulge rubbed against his cheek.

“Haaa-” Dark all around him. Deep, deep darkness... and more than that. Because Monkey D Luffy is a Devil's Fruit user. These encircling bubble coated walls, completely surrounded by the ocean. Somehow, even though he's not strictly touching the Sea, it still drains him. Made to feel confined by it. “Haa-ahh-” It reminds him of Level Six. In Impel Down. The dark and deep throbbing pressure, a hard heartbeat of the sea that sounded loud beating against walls of dark stone and metal bars. Freezing him, a moment. One half-second of horrific recollection, hitting over and over.

“All that darkness broken apart, for Zoro saying his name right in front of his face. Blinking, only to find lashes wet with tears, and he's rubs his hands at them. Passed being ever embarrassed in front of his nakama, and his First Mate in particular, it's not a situation he prefers to be in. Attempting to turn and walk away, when a thick hand winds up in his red shirt.

“Get go!”

“Tell me why?!”

“Why what?” Grappling, after his First Mate's swept his legs out from under him. Folding him up so his hips are wound the opposite way of his chest, and his left leg is crossed over his right shoulder. Face squashed onto the deck.

“You know what and why.” Spoken quite calmly, Zoro's keeps all his weight down on his Captain's back. Balancing on the toes of black boots.

“I...” He can't stop heaving air in and out. Luffy steadily hyperventilating. Closing his eyes, and banging his own head onto the deck. Zoro shifts to stop him, giving the Rubber-man his opportunity for escape. Which he takes, and does. Standing face to face with his First Mate in time for his hot blood to surge. Hard pounding of his heart to bruise it against his breastplate.

“I wonder how long it will be, before we're to see the Blue Sky again?” Robin rests a delicate hand on her cheek. Considering the cold dark Ocean that slowly surrounds the Sunny as they leave Fishman Island. It had certainly been enjoyable. She had learned so much, and hopefully, she will
one day return to learn much more.

“It took three days just to reach the Sea Floor.” Nami's considered, stood at the woman's elbow. “It should take at least that long.”

“Only two, actually-!” Franky's called. Their massive Shipwright come down the stairs from where he had been up on the Observation Deck with Zoro.

“Oi!” Nami's pointed at her blue haired nakama. “Shouldn't you be steering?!”

“Hahaha- Nah, don't sweat it, lil-sis.” though he's still put his hands up, when she's taken a threatening step forward. “There's no steering for at least an hour, then we'll need to get onto the right current.” Placing folded instructions in her hands like an offering, he's able to placate their fire-headed Navigator. Nami sighing, as she's sat down in the grass to read them.

“Only two days?” Usopp's asked, still slouched on the swing. “Why so much quicker?”

“From here we go straight up?” Shrugging massive shoulders. Not that they'd had the best directions to get to Fishman Island from the beginning. Finding a small dot on the dark Ocean Floor a lot harder than finding the sunlit sky that's all around the world.

“Oi, Morons- lunch is ready.” Sanji stood on the mid rail, just outside Sunny's Galley. Smoking a thin white cigarette. “What? no Shitty Captain?” No shitty green vegetable either, now he looks.

“Zoro's up there with him.” Franky points away towards the Observation deck.

“Oh, lucky us.” Surly. The Cook has been most effected by his Captain's inability to get any sleep, well.. second only to their First Mate. At least he'd been allowed to rest while others cooked for the crew back at the palace. “Well, whatever. Get in here, we should all be grateful for a safer meal.” without some grabby rubber shit stealing off everybody's plates.

Lunch went on a while, and into a first round of drinks... before anyone mentioned anything about their two currently missing nakama.

“I saw him. Out there. Just shitty walked right into the middle of that great big mob o' bad guys and...” Sanji pulls softly on the lit tab set between his fore and middle fingers. Letting smoke out gradually, and as he speaks. “Just like that, and they're foaming at the mouth, the whites of their eyes showing.” Maybe they're checking that they still have a brain? “...Conqueror's Haki.”

“Chopper-san surprised me the most – Yohohoho – I thought I would die of shock! Then I realized! I was already dead! Yohohoo-”

Nami sits with Chopper in her lap, eating sweet cake with pink frosting. The Cook adoring each lovely curve of the young woman's breasts outlined even if she is wearing a thick woolly sweater. Effort required, for the Chef's brain to circle back onto the memory of their little Zoan in that valley
of battle. Chopper's beastly form a very-very powerful one, and now something he's trained himself to control! It was a shock, but not as big as the one that's banged into the Galley – just then.

Zoro. His one remaining green eye narrowed, the man crossed the Galley and gone into the kitchen. He's shared a look of understanding with Sanji, that if the fucking Cook gets up now he'll cut him up.

“What happened to you!” Of course, this said nothing about Nami. Chopper gotten down off her lap as the both of them follow their nakama around the bar and through the kitchen. “Oi- Zoro-!” Pushed them both out of his way to get at the liquor cabinet. “Let Chopper look at you.” Because he's leaving blood in huge splats all over the floor. Dribbling from his nose, where he's been obviously punched.

“What happened?” Chopper's asked. He's already has his medical bag open, and gotten out a towel. But Zoro refuses to let himself be cleaned up, just like he always does...

“It's nothing.”

“Zoro-?” Nami watches him rip the wax from a bottle of sake, and put it to his bloody lips. Guzzling down cheap grain-alcohol just like it were water.

Eyes flick from the table, and the redhead turns. The Galley door banging open, and their Captain's come in. Luffy's smeared with blood all over his face, and his hands....

“What-”

“I said, it's nothing.” Zoro's cut Nami off mid-sentance. Taking another long drink from the bottle he's holding. Until he's emptied it. Putting the empty container down in the sink as the sea slowly rolls beneath them. Sunny's timbers creaking.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading :) r&r's are awesome!!
He's a prick, sort of. This guy. Kin'emon. But his swordsmanship is undeniable. Zoro could hear it, as soon as they'd put the guy back together again. The breath of the other man's katana swept with fire, and draped in intent. Even as they ran full-pelt across loose snow and ice with this great big group, a blob of poisonous gases gaining on them.

Nice, to have a second who takes up his sword and cuts in compliment to Zoro's own movements, because the Samari is quick enough to catch and copy them. Slicing through a metal shutter into a cold docking bay.

_Ahh! What the hell are you doing!!_” Marine Soldiers, all dressed in grey winter uniforms. G5 marked on their hats and lapels. They rush at the opened gap where the last survivors have just come. Escaped just in time, from the spread of death across this entire island. The Marines fitting the cut metal back in place in time for pale, sick smelling foam to seep in through some of the gaps before holding solidly.

_H-how is it out there, Brook?”_

Drawn to the sound of his nakama's voice, Zoro finds Usopp stood in front of a limp skeleton half kneeling on the floor. Brook's skull lolled onto a bony shoulder, and a... _strange_ vapor above the cold gold crown he has perched on top of top-hat and afro. Gathering into a ghastly representation of their Musician's own face.

“_It is... completely and utterly, a world of death-! If we had not been able to shut-out the gas in time I – I shudder to think of it-!”_

Disbelief in these rather mean-looking Marines' expressions comes form seeing a ghost rather than what the man had actually said, the Swordsman's sure. “Okay.”

_What's okay about any of this!!”_

“_Zoro-! You're here!?_”
He hasn't seen his Captain since leaving with Brook and Sanji/Nami to go looking for the weirdo-Samari's torso. Left Luffy, and everyone else, to look after a bunch of kids. Something tells him that's no longer the plan. Single green eye taking in the number of rifle barrels pointed at him and those around him.

“Members of the Strawhat Crew, and Wanted Pirate Brownbeard! You are under arrest, in the name of the World's Government!”

“Hahahaha! Zoro! Now you made it, we can go wild-!”

A grin on his lips, because that's the Sencho he knows and loves so much. Determined, and excited. A ring on his voice the Swordsman has missed viscerally for the long years.

“Oi-! Everybody shut up and listen to me!”

'che Zoro's not interested in hearing what he has to say. Tralfagar Law. Even if he needs to pay attention. A pretty bad situation they've managed to fall into. Bad for them, those kids, and these Marines. A second later, Luffy's out of sight, run off yelling about something.

“Let's split up and look for the children.”

He'll follow Nami's instructions. Now that she's Nami again and not Nami who looks like Sanji, because he can't stand looking at the blonde fuck's face even if it isn't really the smarmy Chef. But that doesn't mean the First Mate of the Strawhat Pirates is not curious, and that he won't waste time asking Usopp what he's missed. “W-wait, what did you say?”

“He put Luffy down once already. That Ceaser-guy, he's gas! A Logia! He absorbed all the oxygen out the room, and his men! Be careful around them, they have gas in those tanks on their backs. They put people to sleep.

Hit hard by this shocking revelation, making echoes inside the man's skull. “Che-! What the hell. This is not the place to be stupid and careless! If we're off our guard, we're not just in trouble. We'll be dead.”

“Haha-” Usopp's not chewing his nails and pissing himself, and that's a first. Given that they were not doing all that spectacular at the moment, in getting off this island alive. “Don't sweat it, we all
made it through in the end-.”

But this is not yet the end. “I am not joking, Nose! Oi-! **Luffy!-!”**

“Eh-?!”

He knew his Captain would hear him. “You need to *wake up*, Sencho!” Snarling as he's downright ignored these Marines intent on chasing them. “The New World *starts* here!”

“So *harsh-”*

“Can it, Nosebleed...” Zoro has a hard lump in his chest steadily growing and growing. Sure to become big enough to crack open his ribcage. Baring his teeth for that expression holding his Captain's face. His... *thinking*.

“Yea! Sorry, Zoro!! I'll be more careful from now on!!” Hard lump bursting to drive shrapnel deep into all his internal organs, when Luffy's executed his next maneuver. The rubber man's lower half spinning like a top. Knocking Marines out of his path as he's made a way across the catwalk above. “Da-hahahaha! I'm going on ahead!” Arms up in the air above his head.

“...take this *seriously!”* Groused under his breath, with one gloved hand going numb on a hard katana hilt.

“Aha-ha-hah! Go get 'em, Capt'n!” Usopp clapping his green haired nakama on his shoulder, one fist in the air.

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“Haaah-! Haaah-! *pant* wheeze *pant...” He’s made it there! The door! Luffy Hanging more than double, dragging cold air into his body. His legs on fire.

“Oi, listen-”

“Haaah-! No!! Wait a minute! Haah-! Haaah-! I ran so fast getting here, even the ground is burning *pant...*” Standing up, he has his eyes closed. Smoker looking on, quietly, and with both his arms crossed over his own chest. “It’s Haaah- aaah- so unfair you can fly around with the fluffy smoke-...”

“Okay, listen-”

“No, I said wait! Haaah-! I gatta calm down!”

Got to **calm down**? Smoker's frown deepens, letting a steady stream of rich heady smoke out from between his lips. A hand up to press a buzzer into the room they'd come to.

“Oi!!! I haven't said it's okay! *pant* *pant-*!” Luffy's shouting at Smoker.

“Listen. Vergo is my enemy-!”

“Haaah-! Haah-! I know that, but I get Ceasar. Don't touch him, okay!? *”

Don't touch Ceasar. It's the same thing Law said not an hour ago... now another Pirate's made the same request. “Oi?”

“Haaa- haaa- N-ne?”

A Pirate Smoker has to admit to himself, that he knows quite well. “Your First Mate looked awful worried about you, back there.”

“Haaah-!” Brown eyes come open, staring like he doesn't have a clue where is.

“I see he's got just-cause.”

“Zoro...” Checked-out between the eyes, and forehead relaxed. Like the guy's just waking up from a long time asleep. “He's not gonna lose.” Gathering himself, and more systematically than the Marine had seen him do two years ago. Metal doors into this marked laboratory coming open, and the Pirate Captain rolls his shoulders. “I'm not gonna lose either! Ceaser!”

"~~~"
“I think I might be needed here.” Tashigi's spoken quite sternly, to this rash of G5 Soldiers currently under her command.

“Huh?” Zoro dumbstruck, by a mass of Marines who turn and go, but that woman doesn't. “O-oi, you can get out of here too.”

“I'm also free to stay.” Her sword already drawn, polished steel gleaming. Black hair pulled back on her head. Been made a full Captain now, in the Marines, judging by those gold patterns on her coat, however...

“You're in the way!!”

“You are free to think that.”

He doesn't have time for this... “Well, then I guess I'm free, as a Pirate, to take care of you first.” Two swords drawn, Zoro's right hand drifts to bring one of his blades to the girl's neck.

“You can't.”

“What?!?”

“I said,” Tashigi's eyes never stray from the smiling harpy who's quite enjoying her chance to rest and ready herself for this fight. “You can't cut me, or that woman.”

He's caught the flick of her dark attention, and the pinch of her eyebrows that accuse him. “You-Don't just decide that by yourself!”

“It's clear in your stance. Why you wouldn't cut me, back then, Roronoa Zoro.”

He remembers that day, clear as if it were yesterday. The day his Captain had his head on a block, high up in the air. On the same execution platform as where the last Pirate King had been put to death. Hearing Luffy laugh, and his apology to them – The Swordsman heard it over everything. Words that had rattled him, and he was trying to cope with that when this woman had shown up... looking so much like Kuina. “Well, you're wrong.” Biting into the side of his tongue.

“I'm not. You think women are weak, and so you fight carelessly against them. Believing you are so much stronger! Thinking you've won, without delivering the final blow.” Katana steady at her side, the Marine's advanced a step. “That's why you should stay where you are. If I let this Logia chase after my subordinates, the damage will be enormous.”

“Me sit back and watch? Are you trying to make a fool out of me?”
“Yes.”

Her tenacity so alike to Kuina's, it's almost refreshing. Zoro making up his mind at once. Sheathing his swords, and gone to sit against a cold metal wall. “Do as you like.”

“Huh?!”

“Those are my Orders also, not to let this woman go after any of my own nakama. So as long as I'm looking after this corridor, I've got no problem in you taking her on first.”

“Do you realize we're running out of time?! You're just going to sit and watch?!”

“You shouldn't let yourself get distracted, or the enemy will kill you.”

More than bitter about someone existing in the world who can drag up Kuina's memory out of a past he's basically put at rest in his heart, there's also a nostalgia in seeing the woman's first few slashes. Two handed, on a single katana. Just as his old dear friend had chosen to fight. Their styles nearly identical, and he wonders if Kuina would have grown her hair out long to tie behind her head as this Marine does... If she might have been a Marine, if allowed to live and her dream of becoming the Best in the World herself.

A nostalgia that wobbles and shreds. Because this woman is not Kuina. Tashigi vanishing from view in a swirl of white – the snow harpy making an attack from within a blizzard. Blood caught up and mixed up so that the ground is flecked with pink. Only when the snow has begun to settle, he sees it. The biggest difference between these two women. Tashigi’s right shoulder bit into, by this shape shifting bitch. Long, sharp teeth gone deep into flesh and muscle so that the Swordswoman's bleeding all down herself.

*Slash*

“You talk big, but you just take too long.” He knows Tashigi's crumpled to the ground. Her legs under her. “Time's up. I'm gonna take a turn now.” He's no desire to embarrass her, though it may be unavoidable. He knows Kuina would be angry with him, if he were to step into one of her fights. But he knows this young Marine doesn't want to die here.

“Ahh-?” Blood on white feathers, Monett looks balefully at the Pirate dressed in green. “I thought
you would not cut a woman, Swordsman?"

“Seems you've underestimated me.” Raising his blade. “Daishinka.” Using one sword only, Zoro's cut cleanly through the middle of the woman's skull, and down the length of her entire body. Splitting her.

Tashigi looking on, with a hand pressing into her shoulder to try and stop the bleeding. “Y-you cut her?”


He begins to walk away, but Tashigi's glaring at the still moving halves of the snow-harpy. Their opponent a Logia. A Devil's Fruit User, which means her body cannot be damaged, unless a cut or blow is made using Haki. The only way to negate a User's effect in the absence of seawater... Satisfied? No, because she's been proven right. On both of their counts. He did not use Haki, and so he's relying purely in this woman what? Giving up? Bowing with respect? Knowing that stroke could have killed her, but did not? “No.” Tashigi utters under her breath, steeling herself. “No, I'm not satisfied. You can't win against these overwhelmingly powerful enemies with the strength of Will alone. But to be so confident that they can? Just what have these Pirates been doing for the last two years...?”

“I won't let you go!”

It's the moment Tashigi'd been expecting for the last few seconds. For the reconstituted Logia to make an attack while the man's back was turned. “Kirishigure” Releasing a strike of her own. Cleanly, and through the snow-harpy's heart. Haki solidifying her strike, and when the woman falls, she knows she will not be getting back up. “Why didn't you deliver the final blow?!”

“Huh?” Zoro had turned back before the body had hit the ground.

“It's exactly as I said! You look down on women, so you fight them half-assedly!”

“che You're the one who just went ahead and killed her without being asked. If you hadn't just cut
her, I would have.”

“You're such a liar! You can't say something like that after the fact.”

“Nobody asked you to do anything.” Turned to go find his Captain, job done and no threat to defend against.

“Where are you going? You're under arrest.”

“That again.” He can hear shouting, and loud bangs. An explosion from somewhere. “You Marines are like dogs chewing on old bones.”

“Pirates won't leave the world in peace, or we might be able to bury a few bones.”

“'che It's not peace you Marines are after...” Stepping over a pile of debris, the Swordsman glances back over his shoulder. Not offering the woman a hand, but curious to see if she'll need one. Which she doesn't. This women not as delicate as that damn Chef keeps saying all women are.

“And what exactly are us Marines after?” Stern expression, just like Kuina's.

Zoro stands before this woman. Someone who's semi-haunted his dreams since he'd learned of her existence back in East Blue. “Control.”

“Isn't that what being a Pirate's all about? Controlling others and what others have.”

“Huh.” Not hardly. “If that's what you think, you're better off a Marine.”

A few hours later, and it's all resolved...
“Ahh~ It smells good~~.” Usopp's lying on his back on a bench outside in the snow. Nami beside him, resting while Sanji started up the barbeque. Always enough time for a feast before they head back to the sea.

One at a time, please. What's your full name?” The redheaded Strawhat Navigator glances towards the Marine with a pen in her hand. Tashigi. Taking down each child's name, and matching them with missing person's reports they'd managed to find from the wreckage of their own ship.

Nami Smiling. “I'm relieved, somehow.”

Her long nosed nakama tracking the line of her eyes. “Your mom was a Marine, wasn't she?”

“Mmm. I'm glad these children will be helped now, by a strong Marine woman.”

Zoro has his legs crossed in a loose lotus, sat on the ground next to the bench with his two nakama. His Captain not far away, helping that kid Momo to start eating. He'd gone ten days without food, he thought he heard that shit-Cook say. For a kid like that, it's amazing he's still alive.

“I'm not hungry!”

“Oi-oi! You break any of my dishes, and I don't care if you are a child, I'm kick you into next week!”

It's Kin'emon, Zoro seeing the man walk with purpose across the snow and sit down at the table with his son. Pulling the closest plate of food towards him and starting to eat it like he usually doesn't eat a lot... Stuffing his cheeks full as he's stammered his appreciations. Tears falling from his eyes. Only after that show of encouragement does the young boy begin to eat also. Luffy sat next to him, chatting about how eating's great and Momo should do it more often.

“If you're hungry – eat!”

Zoro grins. Hands resting on his knees, and it's the first time all day he's let his shoulders relax. Been
all-go since that morning, when they'd first landed on Punk Hazard. … Seems so much longer ago, than just one day...

“Looks like Momo really likes your cooking, Sanji.” Usopp rubbing at a cold nose.

“Idiot.” The Cook's flicked his lighter, stood back away from the table near the bench next to Usopp, Nami, and Zoro. The Swordsman listening, with his eye closed. “Food does things to people, and it takes a special... certain person who can go for ten days without eating, and still be so stubborn.”

“Shishishi-!”

“I've brought tears to people eyes with my food, and been real proud of that... but trust me – these tears, there's another reason.”

Curious to see what Sanji's on about so seriously, Zoro peeks his one usable eye open. Instantly agreeing with the damn annoying bastard. Those tears, those expressions... but it's Luffy's expression he catches. Honing in on, as he's straightened his back.

Because what he's seeing is that other Captain. Law. Standing tall over Luffy, with a hand fisted in his coat. “We have to leave right now.”

Eh? Really?” Zoro's heart pounds hard, when he sees Law shake Luffy.

Yes, really! Tell your friend's we have to get going!”

Giving his Captain orders to give to the crew? Is that.. allowed? The Swordsman not having been paying attention to those nearest him, and gets a boot to the shoulder. Sanji scowling down at him. “What do you want, Dartboard?”

“These Marines seem to have changed their minds about eating with us,” Grinning around his cigarette. “You want us to demand they supply the booze?”

Booze, and the food's getting near to done. Big fires burning in a couple black brassieres that the children are huddled near. Brook playing his guitar. They have the makings for a real lively Strawhat Farewell after a big fight. Not that it'd been much of a challenge.
Shishishishi-!

*Are you listening?* Ticks of annoyance skitter over Zoro's face. Fingers jumping at his side for Tralfalgar Law shouting at his Captain, like he has any right to do so...

“Yea.” Grinning from ear to ear, because it's the only way he can think of it hide so much malic boiling his blood. “Yea! Break out the whiskey, and we'll have a bash.”

“Aye.” and he's gone. A trail of smoke following the blonde Chef as he's walked over packed snow.

“I wonder what they're talking about.” Nami watches the conversation her Captain's having. Tralfalgar speaking fast and low to Luffy, who is nodding. Grinning like a fool.

“Me too, but how this even happen? What's he mean an Alliance?”

Alliance? Zoro's head hurts for a thick vein pulsing hard behind his eye.

“Law wants to take down Kaido, and wanted Luffy to help him do it.”

“Huh?!” Usopp's boots stamp on the snow next to Zoro's knee. The swordsman fighting to keep his breathing steady and even. Hoping the alcohol isn't long in coming.

“I thought he was going to say no, and the reason for saying no was because he wanted to take down all the four emperors, and not just one.” The Swordsman straining to hear, Nami lowering her voice as a bunch of children wander passed on their way to get food. “But he *convinced* Luffy, that Surgeon of Death.”

**Convinced** him?
“Have we caught the log for Green Bit?” This place that they are going, not that Usopp wanted to be going there. Or Nami.

“I think so.” She's checked her three Pose Needles against the map a dozen times already, will will keep doing every hour. The rest of the crew disbursing themselves throughout the ship. It's the first time they've taken a prisoner, also, so there's construction going on to build a cell. A guard rotation on top of normal Watches. “Has anyone seen Luffy?”

“Mm, I think he's asleep.”

“Asleep?”

“Yea, he.. uh..” Usopp scratches into small black curls at the back of his head. “He was helping me restock the cola, down below-deck. Passed out right after.”

“Did you give him a blanket?”

“Aye, one o' Franky's.” Looking out across the water, as darkness begins to crowd near their hull and stars are coming out. “Maybe he'll get some sleep, after a fight like that?”

“How long has-” Nami's startled, eyes flying wide. Usopp hurrying to look over the rail. Heads poking out from doorways on other decks.

“Ahhha-!! aha-!!!”

“What was that?!” Trafalgar Law demands, grabbing his sword up from where he'd lain it as he sat in the Galley talking with Chopper, Sanji, and Zoro. All of them gone pale, most of them clueless. The First Mate doesn't appear that way, however. Zoro surging to his feet, and made towards the door. “Oi-?” Law catches the broader man by his beefy shoulder, and slammed him up against the Galley wall beside the door. “I asked you a question?”

“Get your hands off me.” Zoro shifts to try and free himself, when Law shoves a thumb into a pressure point between his collarbone and shoulder. Joint screaming with hot needles followed by a
spread of even hotter numbness that flushes down to the swordsman's fingertips. Throwing his green head back against the wood-paneled wall to clear his clouding brain.

*ka-chack* The door into the Galley opening right next to them.

“Zoro.” Nico Robin, tall, and darkly beautiful. She rests a gentle hand on the wooden doorframe, as she speaks. “He is in the woman's quarters.” Said to her First Mate, capturing his single jade-green eye. Speaking more subtly to the man's own mind than out loud.

He's left them, directly after.

“Will someone please tell me-?”

“Sit down.” Robin's led the young Pirate Captain to their Galley table, Franky joining them, and Brook not long after. The whole crew sitting down, sans Captain and Swordsman. Momo and his father bunked already in the men's quarters for an early night.

“Nightmares?” Law had semi guessed it might have been something like that, a strangled yell just after dark. Though he'd not guessed the person who screamed was Luffy. He'd thought it was that kid... “How long has he been having them?”

“Been goin' on since we all got back together.” Franky’s said, uncapping a cola. Must be... what? A week? Two weeks?”

“You've only been back on the sea for two weeks?!” His head's starting to hurt. “What have you all been doing these last two years anyway?”

“Training.” Usopp's told Law, reaching for a beer. “Trained our asses off, thank you.”

“We were sent away from each other,” Robin's fingers clutched around her cup. “That very day we crossed paths with you, actually, and the other eleven supernovas. That fateful day... on Sabaody.”
The allied Pirate Captain is a witness to the heads that bow over their drinks, and the Cook lighting a fresh cigarette. Blowing smoke out a round window.

“Those... Pasifistas. And then the man himself, who came for us...” Cyborg Franky grips a metal knee in one massive hand.

Nami sipping an orange drink in a long flute. “We were all sent to different Seas. All alone.”

“Word reached us.” Brook is nothing but bones, drinking from a chipped teacup. “Our Captain... he had entered into a mighty battle...”

“A battle he didn't win.” Robin sets down her coffee cup. “Hard fought, and bargains purchased at the highest of prices, I am sure – though nevertheless, our Captain... lost...”

Several around the table are jolted, for the sound of a cabinet door being kicked in by the Strawhat's Cook.

“We understood,” the dark haired woman went on. “Orders came to us, that Luffy wanted to meet two years later than we had originally planned, so... being where we all found ourselves-”

“We worked hard, because we knew he was.” Chopper isn't drinking alcohol, but a bright berry juice Sanji keeps in a pitcher behind the bar.

“You've been apart two years? Training all by yourselves?” They all nod, around the table. Trafalgar Law gaping very slightly, before he's brought his teeth together. “Isn't that a bit much to do for a child playing Captain-games like he does-?”

*sshing-!

Usopp's elbow still pulled back, from his releasing that bladed Star in the space of half-a-heartbeat.

“Say that again,” Robin was not always a Pirate, as evident by the knife she's lifted from the table. Via a disembodied arm, bloomed instantly from the wood surface. “...about our Sencho, and his playing games.”
“You mean he doesn't?” Cold eyed, and colder hearted, Law pulls his hat down lower over his eyes.
“That's good, then we might all live thought this.”

The grin on that guy's lips bothers the hell out of the Strawhat Sniper, Usopp leaning forward on the table. Beer in hand. “Oi, what do'ya mean by that?” Sanji also, listening closely from behind the bar. Franky balling all his metal fingers.

“I mean, we're going straight ahead. If your Captain's just serendipitously stumbled through this Ocean without thinking up to now, he won't last a month, but since you all think otherwise chances are better.”

“Better than a thirty percent chance.” Nami's clarified.

“Eh?!” Franky, Brook, and Usopp.

“Your Captain was in full possession of these facts when he agreed.”

The redhead sighs. “Yes...” Gold eyes looking up to catch on the Galley door. Wondering if Zoro's managed to console Luffy, of if he's gotten lost somewhere between here and the women's room and is still trying to find him.

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The Galley is two doors down from the Women's quarters on the same landing. Zoro didn't miss it and open the door to the water drawing machine... He didn't – alright?!

“Luffy?” There's not a lot of light, just a single blue lamp dial glowing on their female crewmate's dressing table. Tall mirrors draped with shawls, and decorated with pretty things that glittered. Two queen-sized beds stand in the room. His Captain wrapped up in the blankets of the one furthest from the door Zoro closes and locks.
“-orry...”

“Ne? What was that, Sencho?”

“...'m sorry... Nami's probably worried, 'n Chopper... 'n -oro...”

“Get your head out of these pillows.” Not that he had no idea what the other man had said, he just wants to see his Captain's face. Wrestling to get the comforter down off Luffy's chin, and wrapped him up so he can't wriggle away. “Talk to me!”

“No!”

“Why not?!” No reason. There isn't any reason Luffy can't talk to Zoro, about fucking anything.

“Because it's not Zoro's problem! It's my problem!!” Tears on an angry face, and he's never seen Luffy's eyes contract in quite such a way. Shoving at Zoro, except his larger nakama's caught his hands. Struggling only breifly until they're both completely still, and quiet.

“It..?” He can feel the younger man trembling, Zoro maintaining his grip on Luffy's lithe wrists. Watching the other, his eyes held very tightly closed, and he's frowning... grimacing.

“Hha--” Tears break, sliding down Luffy's cheek into Robin's pillow to darken the fabric there. “Haaa...” It's so exhausting... he's so exhausted... only just aware on some level that Zoro's hand is there. Gentle and warm, on the side of his face. That trying to catch his own breath is even too much. Conscious slipping and sliding until he can't stay awake any longer. For the second time that evening, drifting into a tentative sleep.

His First Mate still by his side. Zoro ever watchful. Stroking quietly down the side of Luffy's face, and wondering fondly why he still hasn't managed to grow any facial hair. Not even a mustache. The only mark on his face is the scar below his left eye. Two huge stitches that held the wound closed while it healed leaving a gnarly mark years later... Zoro swallows thick in his throat. “Goodnight, Sencho.” Barely a whisper, barely a breath. Zoro curling himself against the wall beside the bed. Gentle creaking of their ship in his ears like a lullaby. “Don't wake up.”
Thanks for reading!! Comments are welcome!
Another Brother?

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

It wasn't more than a blink of Zoro's one good eye. The Strawhat Pirates and company coming to the country of Dressrosa. Fights beginning almost at once, and *Hey! There's a Coup already going on!* Bloody... bruised... both their enemies, and themselves. The battle seeming to have no end at times, but Luffy had won. In the end. He'll *always* win.

*knock *knock-knock...

“Who's that?” Franky putting down a screwdriver. Half the cyborg's face torn away from a hard blast – even he's unsure now when or where during the war he'd sustained such damages. Standing up from his chair at the table in this little house to step carefully between the sleeping forms of Kyros, Bartolomeo, and Law. Making his way towards a plank-door.

Zoro moves his knee so he doesn't trip the larger man. The Swordsman sitting awake and cross-legged on the carpet much closer to the door than Franky had been. He doesn't mind the other going to answer it, though. Because that means he can keep drinking, and watching his Captain sleep. It may be sleep from exhaustion and injury, but whatever – it's *sleep*. Luffy had in fact slept the night before, also, with his First Mate propped next to the bed all night in the woman's quarters. Law waking them up, actually. Some time within the mid-morning hours – and it'd been *all go* since.

Fierce battles, one after the other until they all stopped at once. Midnight fast approaching. About to turn the world over again, when the Swordsman takes another swallow from the clear glass bottle clutched in his hand.

“Eh? Who're you?” Franky's opened the door on a man in a long coat. White ruffles on a blue shirt underneath.

“Sabo-?” Nico Robin's put her hand up, quietly waving. Zoro aware of the woman's exchanged glance with Franky, that this guy... Sabo... can be shown inside. All of them keeping to whispers, so not to wake the number of injured who share this small space with them.

“...don't get up on my account.” He's said, removing a top hat from a head of wavy gold hair. “You
all must be exhausted.” Smiling pulls at the man's fair face, left eye and most of his cheek underneath pink and glossy. An old scar. Sabo goes to the bed currently occupied by Luffy, with Usopp snoozing on top of the covers lying sideways across his Captain. The Sniper halfway fallen off, his long nose squashed against the floor. “I just came to say my goodbyes.”

“You're leaving?” Robin steals a brief glance towards her Captain. “So soon?”

Sabo sits down at the foot of the bed. “CP0 will come back here, and we're their target... so...”

Zoro's brain is lighter than he'd admit to anyone. Listening to the comfortable conversation this guy has with Robin. Drinking quietly, and trying to figure out where he's seen the guy's photograph before.

“...Dragon will need our report, now that we've finally discovered what has been happening here in this country all these years.”

Dragon? Luffy's father, Dragon? Zoro's face heating up in the half dark room, almost choked on the liquor in his throat. Somehow he's put his arm down without shattering the glass bottom of the bottle. Watching Sabo reach an arm over Usopp's unconscious back. Gloved fingers on Luffy's forehead, being combed through black hair. There's a smile on the man's face, and a look of endearment that pulls on blue eyes. “Oi,” A look that has Zoro's fingers itching. “Who're you?”

“Mm?” He has a genuine smile, this pale bastard. “Me? I'm Luffy's other bother.”

“Brother..” He drinks a steadying guzzle of grain-alcohol, wiping his lips on the back of one wrist. “So you, and Ace..?”

“Hehe-ha- We were always together, back then... used to get into so- much- trouble.” Affection, in the most platonic sense. Sabo's gloved hand that moves from his little brother's heavily bandaged shoulder to a slightly less bandaged elbow, and back up again to tweak the other's nose.

*Snooore “Haama-nnm m-meat...”
Zoro's heart beats loud and violent against the scarred wall of his chest. Vibrating in both his ears. “You knew about this?” Green eye on Robin.

“I did.” She says. The dark woman giving a gentle expression to this blonde man who's taken his hand back. Resting himself forward on both knees. “I spent a great deal of time with the Revolutionary Army, while away-.”

Stumbling to understand this. Zoro. Really... he's... what the fuck! Luffy has another brother?! Having been one of the only people who hadn't been phased by his Captain's introduction of Fist Fire Ace as his brother, but this is completely different...

“Weeehw~” Long whistle come out from between Franky's teeth, taken up his screwdriver once again – and long-prong adjusters. A new left eye on the table, rolling around looking at everyone. “Not that I should be s-u-p-e-r surprised or anything, but....” The shipwright pauses, to stare at Sabo. “Won't say it's not a real shock, finding out something big as this.”

“Hehe-” Raising sea-blue eyes, Sabo's smiled. Not that he's looking at any of them. Only having eyes for his younger brother. “I think it was Luffy, who got the biggest shock of all of us.”

“Eh?” Zoro can't keep the edge off his voice. His whisper more the angry snarl of some beast. “How do you mean?”

Sabo regards the Swordsman. The First Mate on his Little Brother's Pirate crew. Roronoa Zoro. A man who used to be a Pirate Hunter. “Hehehe.” Trust Luffy to find the most unlikely guy in all of East Blue to take with him. “We were a bunch of wild kids, back then. Ace, Luffy, and I.” He can remember now, and so clearly, like it's only been yesterday. “Three brats, becoming brothers over cups of stolen sake... It was that same year...” Sabo's attention moves to his brother's sleeping face. “I was involved in an... incident. And after that, I- I had amnesia. Both Luffy and Ace... they thought I was dead.”

Zoro's sure he can hear the man's teeth grinding at the back of his mouth. Forehead folding into thick ridges.

“It was Ace, who came and found me. Told me everything. Hehe-” Smiling. And even if they aren't blood related, those expressions are born of the same things. “Came right off the page of that newspaper... and said to me Oi! You're Sabo! Brother of mine and Luffy's!” His fingers grip to his own thighs, sure to leave bruises. “So I... I did what I had to do...” only a moment. “... alright, time to
go-” The Revolutionary standing up from the bed.

Huh? Well, the guy did say he only came for a short goodbye. It's past midnight now.

“Oh, yea – almost forgot.” Taking out a large white paper, slightly fibrous at its edges, and tearing off one corner before he's given it to the Strawhat's First Mate. “I made a Vivre Card for Luffy, just in case.”

“Eh? When did you...”

“I know my little-brother can be quite the handful, but you will take care of him, won't you?” Reminiscent of when Ace had said it, stood under the sun and free blue skies while they docked off the sandy shore of Alabasta.

“We will.” Robin's quietly promised.

“Aye, ya can count on us. He's our Captain.” Sparks snap at the junctions that are still damaged on Franky's face. The man making only temporary repairs until he can get back to his shop on the Sunny.

“...” Sabo's looking at Zoro, all this time. A careful contemplation that makes the green haired man feel as if he's being held under a microscope. “Hehe- Ya know, Ace said just the same thing to us?”

“Did he? Haha-”

Zoro's grin follows after the other man, “Aye-” And just as that time, Luffy's older brother's turned. With a smile on his lips, and a wave of his hand.

Gone on the wind.

“Franky,” Robin gives a gentle smile, indicating their Shipwright's left temple had split along the side, exposing a metal plate and a few sparking wires. The man making to adjust something when
their Captain's wriggled. Mumbling in his sleep. Something that had not happened even once while his brother had been speaking with them.

Zoro getting up from his spot on the carpet, and shoved Usopp so he's flumped onto the floor. “Eh-?” The curly haired Strawhat Sniper not knowing where he is, and managing to elbow Law in the face so now they're both awake.

“Ah? Are we under attack?! Oi- Robin-ya-”

“Nothing like that,” She's whispered, a hand bloomed from both these men's own shoulders to hold over their mouths. “Shhh.” They had been completely ignored by the Swordsman who's settled himself within arms' reach of his Captain. Back against the bed, as thick coils tighten in Zoro's chest. Listening.

… nnha 'cca .. 's not... -lt... 'nna get 'm....

Robin's hands dissolve in a flurry of pink flower petals. Usopp getting up off the floor, rubbing his sore nose.

“… mn n- no w-way...” Two rubbery fists fly up, and then come down onto the mattress. … mm... n-...

… Zoro's eye coming open as the volume of his Captain's voice builds, and full words form. “… not- n-no way!? ...s-Sabo!!”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!!

End Notes

Thanks for reading!!
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