A few drops of holy cuckold

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Summary

The retainer needs retaining. Law relearns his place. Doflamingo is the tutor. Marco is the pupil.

A dark fic. Please read the tags and warnings.

Alternate direction from chapter five. Puts some of the comfort back in hurt/comfort. Alternating storylines: Dark Marco / Lighter Marco from chapter five.
Chapter Summary

Doflamingo pays a visit

Chapter Notes

**Trigger warning**: explicit rape and sexual assault throughout the whole fic. Proceed accordingly, or hit the back button. All hurt, no comfort. Slight non-explicit animal cruelty.

This is another hybrid work. Marco and Law are together as per the *Repossession* world, but Doffy lives, unlike the *Repossession* world. Marco and Law in most of my fics are solid and have a good thing together, but not in this fic. Can be read standalone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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**Wake in fright**

Marco turned. It wasn't unusual to find the space next to him empty, but there was more. Something in the air. A rustling. Fear like urine trickling down an inner thigh. Barely noticeable because of crushed ribs, trapped hearts, things beating too fast. Sick, slick, blood wrung from muscle and bone.

"Law?"

He turned further, woke up, was in no way restrained or imprisoned, but something was not right. Law's nightmares usually kept him in the bed, though he wandered at times.

"Law?"

He didn't have to do much to remove the covers, they'd mostly been stripped from the bed, and there was a tread he didn't recognise, a few thumps and bumps, the click of a lock. Stickiness under the flat of his forearm, his hand. He lifted it from the sheets with distaste. The fuck? How did anything get past him. Or Law? Not to mention the dog?

As he grabbed and threw off the edge of covers over him, his feet on the hardwood—and he was almost upright before he could even think—the sneer serrated the room. Marco was blue and white in flame but he knew for now it was not enough.

"**Fuffufuffu.** Marco the Phoenix, Whitebeard's right hand man. How low you've sunk. To think you're with this trash." And Marco's gaze narrowed in the darkened house to three metres of pink sprawled over their armchair in the corner.

"We fucked right beside you."
Doflamingo

"He's very good, isn't he?"

And Law.

Marco wiped his hand on the cargo pants he'd quickly pulled on. The fuck?


Marco picked up his shirt from the floor, tugged it over his head.

Doflamingo's hand in Law's hair, massaging his scalp, pulling his head back.

Fucking beside him.

Marco hadn't seen Law shake like that for a long time. Even his nightmares were more like flinches, tics, now. Eyes wild and scared. Marco knew he'd find the well of whatever he needed to draw on to get through this, but right now it was dark and eels rippled just below the surface. Under his own skin too.

Fucking beside him.

Doflamingo and Law.

Law was on his knees, hands tied behind his back with a Doflamingo string, Marco guessed, like a court's page. An exploding collar around his neck like a page's frill.

Doflamingo swung the keys from the tip of his middle finger, the hand not in Law's hair. Elbow on the armrest, hand under his chin. Jovial. There had to be seastone. Had Law drunk so deeply from the cup of Familial insanity that neither of them sensed him? Had Doflamingo been invited in?

Marco pushed the thought away.

The pink freak had used their dog's t-shirt, Law's t-shirt that she'd pulled from the laundry basket during one of the Heart's absences to remember him by, and wouldn't let either of them reclaim. His scent imprinted into it at the time, but her imprint now well and truly dominant. How had Doflamingo got it away from her?

It was ripped and worn and encrusted with dog and slobber and fleas, which was fine when it doubled as Misery's security blanket. But not when strips filled Law's mouth and were tied in some obscene obi bow at the back of his head. It was a running joke between them how it was impossible to wash. Misery wouldn't let them. But Marco knew it'd be an absurd mercy now if they'd been able to.

The noises weren't all Law, but he was making them, and when Marco looked closer there were track marks down his face. Tears? Dry now. Fuck. How long had he slept and through what?

Fucking. Obviously.

What else?

His gaze narrowed. Blood. Not surprising if Law had fought Doflamingo, Blood over Law's abs. And Marco didn't doubt he'd fought if he could. But

—not Law's. A little too dark.
Not Law's. A little too—

Not fucking Law's

—a little too

much.

No obvious wounds, but blood could disguise that. The freak was too clean. Marco's pulse yammered. Would not shut up.

Noises. They had a clock that clicked over on the hour. Doflamingo's foot tapped the floor. Law's muffled whatevers, and the touch of gold in his eyes in the moonlit room flicked to the other wall and there was a scrabble and whimper, a whisper, that had nothing to do with Law. Marco was all cement shoes and bottomless lakes. It had everything to do with Law.

"Did he ever tell you, Marco—?" and Doflamingo worked a string around the Phoenix's wrist while he turned to see what was making Misery cry. Marco burnt it off. Doflamingo was casual in temporary defeat.

"—Of the time he shot his dog?"

When Law was completely quiet it worried the fuck out of Marco. The gulping noises, glumphing, muffling past those rags, that gag, worried him even more.

"In cold blood."

Marco lunged. Doflamingo sent a shock through the collar, Law jerking and the sound louder behind the cloth. A scrape of skin across the floor. His shoulders shot forward. Was there warning in Law's eyes? Darting his way? He wasn't sure, but it looked as if he could pass out, choke on his own vomit. Fit. Those fine ripples on his belly folding and folding in. Everything on display.

"Why don't you see, Phoenix, what Law has done to your best friend? You know it's for reals or the poor thing wouldn't cry so. The doctor hasn't got up one of his fancy Rooms. What'd she ever do to him, hmmmm?"

And what would happen if he turned his back. To him? To Law? Nails scraped across his thighs. What would happen if he turned his back to Misery? Marco edged over to her, keeping both men in his sight.

"Go see what the Surgeon of Death does for kicks." Joker sat back in the chair, legs open, turning the remote to the collar between his fingers, spare hand splayed across his stomach.

"Why can't you leave him the fuck alone? Been outta your life for years."

"Oh?"

Doflamingo buzzed the collar.

He gripped Law's hair again, grin broad at the revolting ballooned mouth, lips struggling to breathe. The spite behind the fear.

"He's so much—"

Buzzz
Law spasming, in too much pain to remain angry, was hilarious.
"fun—"

The strings prevented Law from doubling over. He would if he could.
"—to play"

Marco smelt singed flesh. The fucker.
"—with."

Doflamingo smoothed Law's hair back. Knew he'd be panting in pain if he could. Was. Just couldn't be heard past his pushed back tongue. His eyes flared.

"I've missed you."

Law convulsed.

"Little bird."

Chapter End Notes

Within the AU I've written for Law, he was Doflamingo's slave after getting recaptured by the Family shortly after Cora's death. He escaped at sixteen. There is other background, but it's not really crucial to understand this story. Luffy has become pirate king and co-governs with more upright World Government members. The world is more peaceful.
Wake and bite-(NSFW)

Chapter Summary

Doffy does some damage.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger warning**: explicit rape and sexual assault throughout the fic. Proceed accordingly, or hit the back button. All hurt, no comfort. Slight non-explicit animal cruelty

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Wake and bite

He'd picked up the jutte idea from Smoker, guess he'd seen him fight somewhere, and that was enough to have Law against the bed while Marco slept, along with threats of hurting Misery. She hadn't avoided the strings. Law had been too groggy to stop them. Too goddamned fucking complacent.

Law braced back so Marco wouldn't wake to the rocking, to Law accidentally touching him as Doflamingo fucked him. His thighs pushed against the side of the bed. His dick, squished. The jutte, like a cattle prod, horizontal against the back of his neck, pinning him.

He'd prayed Marco would wake and interrupt this castigation of his arse so they could fight together, and he prayed hard he wouldn't. Doflamingo wasn't gentle when he exited with a spray of semen like a fucking wild boar, and seastone felt like shit anyway. He pulled Law back to him then, spinning them both so he plopped down onto the Heart captain's side of the bed, and he turned him again—so wet and drippy—and pushed him onto his knees in front of him. Must really like that dog. The boy knew what to do, too. Never underestimate the effect of reacclimatising him to the season, to his reason for being.

Doflamingo drew Law's head, his mouth, forward to service his cock—just as he always had. Just as he always had. The years could zoom by, but Law never lost it. Doflamingo released a pleased growl.

Such a magnificent betrayal. Such humiliation. Doffy leant back, so close to Marco. Imagined him waking and seeing Law between his legs, or just his head, that shock of hair, kept—with the jutte—just where he wanted it. Law where Law belonged, lovingly tending to his master's needs. Maybe Marco would sweetly take his hand thinking it was Law's own. The flesh of Doflamingo's curled palm was so close to the sleeping man's arm.

How would he react? Waking to giddy fear and delight as Law drank him in, and the Whitebeard not knowing, not knowing, *not knowing* what all the commotion was about. Doflamingo grinned, and let Law use his tongue, his throat, his lips, his jaw, in that way he was proficient.
Collar bobbing, Marco peering over his shoulder.

The collar chafed a bit though, against his thighs. He sighed. Ninety-nine percent content. Couldn't be helped. You had to take a bit of the rough with the rough trade.

And still he hadn't let the dog go.

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**oOOo**

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The pup he'd had Law shoot when they'd recaptured him after Cora's death looked like the one Cora and Law had shared the sweet potato with while they island hopped, visiting hospitals. Not that Doflamingo knew that. Such a gentle, lost, curled, skinny thing.

"We don't have the food to spare." Doflamingo spoke through a mouthful of tagliatelle; over mountains of fruit, and pilaf. "I can't take in every stray." He twirled fork prongs, mother of pearl handle, into the plate of pasta in front of him. "Best to put it out of its pain."

He'd directed Gladius to oversee. Jora murmured protest. After the event, Baby 5 and Buffalo avoided Law even more than they had been, and the few non-Donquixote kids in the area looked at him as if he was the pinnacle of savagery. After Cora he was a different boy and was treated accordingly.

He'd needed to be silent in that cart full of corpses leaving Flevance; too shocked to make a noise, and any noises made, squashed and muffled. Then silenced in that second coffin to all but himself. In that treasure chest. Cora ensured no-one heard Law, but Law heard everyone and everything. His own cries, so loud. Cora smashing against the chest, the shots, Law's fists pounding the insides. One of the first things he'd healed with his new powers were the grazes. Once he got the hang of it. He often wished he hadn't.

Cora's care hadn't saved him anyway, Gladius grabbing his leg as he tried to tumble away from the trunk, a bundle of snot and snivels. Vergo had punched him out cold before they'd shot Cora, and the Family repeated the act. Training Law to relinquish life to grant Doflamingo eternal youth was to be delivered the hard way.

Considering he was persona non grata, and Doflamingo had sent in the paperwork to properly own him, he was a boy with less of a future than before. Except he had the fruit. He would live. Cora wanted him to live. He just had to get stronger. Escape became even more pressing as he came of age. Not that any age of majority came with the title. A possession couldn't be a person. Silly.

He'd not been able to hide the pup for long. Its cries and whines brought oohs and ahhs of adoration and tickles along the tummy from the Family, until Doflamingo spied the attachment Law had. The loyalty the dog gave. Law betrayed the family. It was as simple as that. When he'd delivered his edict, the pup was curled on the Don's lap. But, running away with Roci, stealing the fruit, was beyond the pale, and he knew the dog would go to Law if he called. Torture was par for course in whichever form. It's not as if Law had never been warned.

His failure of a protégé lost more of his sheen after that. Doflamingo had admired the hate in his eyes when he'd overseen Law's tutelage. The possibility of what the young doctor could become for him, would become. And the wreck and anger of the boy after they discovered him in that chest, and now he had the **ope ope** fruit. His rage was directed altogether unfairly against the wrong people. Blind, brutalised indoctrination was the only answer.
Marco swallowed a spit of vomit, and wondered if Law had thrown up behind the gag.

"One of the first moves I taught him. How to slit a throat. Naturally, it was easier to do after he got his fruit. Such the perfect torture. Deciding which dumb fuck would continue to take up space, or not. Letting Law choose. Different for an animal, of course. The methods required."

He was a doctor. Marco knew he preferred not to take lives. Though he'd seen him take them. Didn't take them for the fun of it. Would take them for pragmatic reasons; defensive and offensive in the case of revenge. Rightfully.

Keep talking, keep talking, keep talking. Room still worked when his hand shook like the fucking trembling leaf on a puff of wind it was. Not as effective, but it worked. Law could almost taste the tip of that jutte, although it had been against his neck and not on his tongue, but now seastone was mixed with the remembered oyster tang of Doflamingo's massive hand pushing his face into the mattress below, the after-tang of being fucked—

—Misery. The accumulation of dirt and smells and secretions from this fucking t-shirt. Don't cry again. Or do. Took attention from his hands moving against Doflamingo's binds. Kept the creep occupied. He found Law's distress entertaining.

Buzzer, collar, key, replace string with harmless thing. In two seconds. Remove collar in two seconds. Hope that Marco reacted within two seconds. Time. Maybe Misery had time. Doflamingo twirled the knife he'd made him use. Blade dark, bloodied. A prop for all occasions. While he kept track of Marco the jutte lay ineffective on his lap.

Law'd wanted to do it swiftly if he had to do it at all. The *ito ito no mi* forcing his movements. She'd looked at him with such confusion, and even growled with apology when she'd rather walk over hot coals than go against him. Why hadn't the panicked yapping and howling woken Marco?

Because Doflamingo muzzled her with string. She took a chunk of flesh out of Law's cheek just before it, and he was glad. An accompaniment to that scar the marines had scraped across his face a life time ago, and that fucking memory flooded in now. Would Marco be able to look at him? How'd he let it happen?

*Can still make a room while you're shaking, Law, you useless, fucking cunt.* Can still act through the fear, just like the dog could whine through her binds. Only one bastard in front of you now.

He tasted his own blood mixed with everything else. Doflamingo had backhanded him and cracked his nose, driven him headfirst into a few walls. He'd bitten the inside of his cheeks, his tongue, more than once. Before, and now with this fucking cloth filling all spaces. Hard to breathe through a bloodied nose. Don't black out. Not yet. Maybe there was a chance for Misery. Doflamingo hadn't let him cut her throat cleanly, neatly, all the way through. Of course not.
Wake and fight-(NSFW)

Chapter Summary

Law fights back. Doflamingo goes to town.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger warning**: explicit rape and sexual assault. Proceed accordingly, or hit the back button. All hurt, no comfort. Slight non-explicit animal cruelty

Wake and fight

She'd streaked the floor with red trying to reach them. What had interrupted her? Doflamingo's strings around her legs. She didn't see Marco, didn't feel him, didn't know anything but pain and now a warmth and cold that meant something dark was near.

No animal wanted to die alone.

Don't cry. Don't speak. Think.

And there. Yes. A flash. Marco saw it, Doflamingo too, and the knife was the thing and the buzzer. No seastone, huh?

Law dropped the keys near Marco, the remote into his own shaking hands, now free of binds, the jutte to the other side of the room. Doflamingo quickly curled his string around it. The knife landed harmlessly near Misery as Law swapped out some dog hair.

Marco flamed up. His hand scrabbled across the floor. Keys first. He felt the second lot of strings go in a number of directions. Where was Kikoku? Then his talons reached for the knife as both Law's and his own haki deflected those razor sharp parasites. Law. How?

Misery was still alive. Law acted by so wanting Misery to be alive. The number of people and creatures close to him he *hadn't* been able to save in his life was in double figures if he included his classmates in Flevance. He didn't include them. He hadn't been tasked with their care.

Had he been able to save anyone? Even once? Luffy? That was his only claim to fame? As awesome as it was, at this point of his life, Misery meant everything.

With the Room still up he shambled his nodachi and a quick mess of clothes and himself into the corridor. The key from Marco's hand. He had to be fast. Marco loved Misery too and Doflamingo knew it.

He pulled that fucking vomit-scabbed rag from his mouth, hauling the tie over his head. Yelps punctured the door—the string was free then. He spat and gagged but kept moving, retching. He
stepped into the trousers, his lower body and his back, his front, face, were crusty, fucking disgusting. Slipped on the t-shirt. He'd fight naked, but why give Joker more fuel, himself more shame?

"Law!"

Ah, fuck it. Marco's voice wasn't laced with anger, anxiety for himself. Fuck.

They could protect themselves.

But not the dog.

He freed his neck and eased his fingers into the muscles, loosening up.

He'd done it before, he could do it again. Steady hand now. It's not seastone. Steady, steady. He'd done it before, in the face of shit, more shit than this. Was it more shit than this? Couldn't think about it now. Most things could be reassembled.

He unsheathed Kikoku with an easy sweep, as he had against Vergo on Punk Hazard, lined up, breathed deeply, fluidly, aimed and sliced the wall, ceiling, the roof, off that part of the house, and sent it tumbling into their yard. One-handed. Crushed a few trees. Shambled the remote to the yard at the same time. The rooftop annihilated it, the collar detonating near him, a few shards embedded in his ankle. If he was lucky, he'd also sliced through the flamingo.

In the debris and dust he teleported onto the wrecked wall, barefoot, black-clad, blood running down his feet. Down his face. Doflamingo hovering above them now, peering below, in the night air. No such luck then.

"Na, Law. You covered up? Ashamed of Corazon's tats? Shy now? Regretting letting me fuck you against the bed in front of Marco the Phoenix?"

The breeze blew a few feathers about him, suspended against the dark.

"A little late for contrition. You were wanton, and he'll know. He's a good man. He'll always know." Doflamingo squinted at something in his arms. Revulsion and pity, hunger, flit across his face, lit from the moon. He turned to the Whitebeard.

"He lapped me up, Marco, took all of me, both ends. Gagging for it. You were sleeping. Blew my load all over him. You were blessed with a few drops of holy cuckold. Lucky man. Maybe you'll start dreaming of me the way Law does."

Law walked along the skeleton of the house, along the joist that hadn't been sheared off, splinters joining the shards of the collar lodged in his skin, the skim of dried flamingo coating his body.

"And you, Law?"

Law glanced up.

"Fuffufu." Hard to take that glare seriously when the brat hadn't thought to shower. "So eager, so quick to betray. My Blue Persian. My sleek Burmese. You missed my balls that much?"

Doffy leered, scratched them. They were this side of exquisite, he had to admit. And Law nosing around them, choking on them, even more so.
Huge fucking moth above him. Above them.

"You begged for more so—"

Doflamingo held the bundle to him like taking home the best cuts wrapped in butcher paper, tied up in string. A bit bloody, a bit raw for his liking though. Still, he brushed back a hand across the fur in the way he liked to pet Law.

"—prettily."

The words whirred like flying cockroaches, and Marco too watched the form Doflamingo held close, letting his poison scatter. Misery was still bleeding, but within the Room. Wrapped in Doflamingo's fucking strings. In his arms. The Whitebeard and Heart stood there like slugs, waiting. Do something.

A blanket, the air, another blanket—the second swaddled the shuddering bleeding dog. Law shambled her to Marco's arms.

"Get her away." His glance was quick, urgent and he promptly redirected it to the Heavenly Demon. He'd suffer whatever he had to for a chance she'd be safe.

Doflamingo rubbed the first blanket against his cheek. Game on. An invitation?

Marco looked down. She wouldn't survive without Law's help, and even then chances were slim. She bled through the wool, over his arms. His own restorative powers only went so far. Law knew she probably couldn't be saved, but to leave her with that prick. Couldn't do it. And to fight him together would be a death sentence.

Marco knew he had to leave his partner with Doflamingo. Fuck. Law flew into the air, nodachi drawn, but Doflamingo went for the dog, barrelling toward Marco, so Law neared as close as he dared, and threw his sword down. Doflamingo changed direction on the turn of a dime, swooped onto his subordinate, the two tumbling, freefalling, the sound of Kikoku clattering to the floor below.

"Go!"

Doflamingo tangled his body around the Heart. Whipped out the blanket—a matador's cape—and wrapped it around the lean body like a funeral shroud. The outline of Law's open mouth tested the probabilities of air. Must be cosy in there. Law just couldn't get enough of being stuffed.

"Fuffufuffu, Law. Your lover not listening? Maybe he likes to watch?" His lips moved in against the scratchy material, near where Law's ear might be. It was going to hurt when they made landfall if he didn't loosen up.

The Phoenix transformed, changing positions in the sky with the ex-shichibukai as Doflamingo and Law hurtled to the floor of the bedroom. Law landed with a crack to the back of his head, muted by the cloth, and Doflamingo lay over him, on him. Misery was too quiet in Marco's arms as he now floated above them. So slippery, cold.

Doflamingo bit against the cloth hiding Law's lips. The blanket didn't taste the best, but what a way to catch your prey. Not too many threads against his teeth, let him know what he was in for. More fun and games. His breath was thick and fast and frightened under that veil. And boy did it
feel *right* to be rubbing against Law again. To have him so *constricted*.

Doflamingo stood, then looked up at the bird as he tossed the blanket away, a magician revealing a pigeon and a top hat. He grabbed Law by his shirt front—the wardrobe change had worked out well for him. Wide-eyed, the Phoenix's slut of a boyfriend, his absolute harlot, let Doflamingo bend him back and kiss him up and down his neck, the Don's hands already rummaging in Law's pants, holding up his back. Law's hands were loose, fingers twitching as if preventing himself from forming a Room. What control. What respect. What acceptance. Doffy didn't even have to bind them in string.

Sweet words of encouragement, nips along his jaw, were more than he could have hoped for. Typical though. His slave's hand reached for the back of his head, without permission. His messy gaze only on his master. That was more like it. He could forgive him.

Doflamingo had to lean down a long way to bring his face to Law's, so he lifted him instead. Rubbed his cheek against his as he'd seen that bear do some time or the other, recalled how close he and the little tyke used to be, then whirled him around, and pushed him down, head first, hand cupped on his neck, jutte nearby, to the edge of the bed. That squeeze of breath . . . delicious.

"Marco, fucking *go,*" Law yelled, voice muffled into the bedding, lips against his scent in the sheets, Marco's, Donquixote's. Still damp. His words short.

Doflamingo kidney punched him. Hmm, Not as subservient as he'd thought. Law coughed, depressing the material below him. Joker folded him over the edge of the mattress again and looked up directly at his feathered compatriot taking next to no heed of his man. Didn't any of these pirates know anything about communication and unity? No chain of command. Marco stared as Doflamingo tugged Law's pants down.

"So compliant, *na,* Phoenix?" No struggle at all. Doflamingo, cupped, cradled, one arse cheek. "It's no wonder you like him. He lets you take him like this? Any time? Any way?"

Law's heart, those pitter-patters he couldn't control. Law's heart under his fingers as he moved them over his body. Doflamingo smothered the small fry completely, both now ensconced in pink, a much more fashionable shroud. Not so many got to hear Law's fear so close, saw-toothed and pitted like the scratch of a slag heap. Pants pooled at his shins, hands, arms shaking on the bed, Doffy positioned himself between his cheeks and let Law feel him as he dry rutted. A taste of the pleasure to come. Law's skin yielded. That quiver in his shoulders against the muscles. First rate. The bow of tenseness across them.

Doflamingo was hard like fucking quartz. He pulled back, entered slowly, keeping Marco's eye. Law grunted at the breach. What a prize. He, the Don, was steady like an oak of course, the runt was a bit unstable like a card table. Always had been. He moved. Law was kinda prepped from their earlier dalliances, and was now once more jammed onto his dick. The gift that just kept on giving. His slave and the mettle of a fucking king.

Gloat, glut, git, grit—fucking was hard work. Just as well the payoff was... *ah*...so worth it. Law. He couldn't go lower. It made it all so more alluring. Doflamingo's lips straightened into a line of serious concentration as he shunted Law part way across the bed into the scrunched up sheets, then pulled back and pushed in just a little more. Retract, ram, ream. Law'd fall off the other side if Doffy didn't keep an eye on things.

But teasing was boring. He fucked his way in more firmly, forcefully, and the traitor's arms spread like a sea turtle's flippers trying to find their way across sand, only more frantic, more spastic as Doffy didn't let up. So entertaining. Baby puffs of air. The lift of Law's hair. Marco must be having
fun. Doflamingo drew him back, bunching up the neck of the t-shirt. And again leant completely over Law's body, whispered.

"One thrust."

Doffy patted his cheek.

"Two thrusts,"

He demonstrated

"Three thrusts more."

Do you like that, brat? Hmm?

"Law's breath even,"

Doffy tipped his head back, his throat, and preened. Fucked forward.

"What a whore."

They should put that in the Nursery Rhymes of the North Blue. The little shit's back was slick against his chest as his t-shirt rode up, and Doflamingo knowing he was rubbing against that Corazon tattoo; feeling Law's hair tickle his chin as he hammered into him...Bliss. Law's hands found some kind of balance, fisted under his own head, if he'd been able to lower it.

Misery whimpered. Marco soothed her, but lingered.

Doffy hardly had to catch a breath. Kept in tandem with the sweet fuck under him. Really, Jora's Sunday morning Yoga kept him supple. He was glad he put in the effort. Law was less foundry and more grounded with the motion now. Catching up. Always was a quick learner.

"My name, Law."

"Fckrr."

"My name." He released string in Law's vision. What else could he do to that pathetic mongrel? Hadn't she bled out yet? Marco hadn't listened. Bet he was listening now.

A filthy growl.

"Doffy."

Doflamingo pulled Law's hair back so he had to look up and he just rode that fucking slave of his like taking his finest thoroughbred to market. He had a number of very accommodating thoroughbreds, but Law really was the best. He'd missed him. His beautiful ruined flanks, his long limbs, his very useful orifices. He'd have to forge a horseshoe or two one of these days. The way he shuddered, pawed the ground.

He circled the tip of his pinky in Law's ear, his fingers over the trinkets. Sticky with wax, they found Law's lips wide and open and succulent as he tried to breathe. His tongue was all kinds of tingle across the tips and knuckles and even to Doflamingo's joints as he devoured his fingers, through the blood, the bruising. Crooning encouragement. The weak, needy, backstabber singing to him, luring him in.

His tatted fingers gripped the sheets, wrists arched, poised like spiders over the keys of a piano.
Doffy's cock pumped into him—a manic clubfoot at the pedals of a baby grand. Law's Arse: Doffy's opus.

Get the fuck out of here, Marco. Law didn't know if he said it. Take her away. His teeth jarred a mess of cracked pavement against the roof of his mouth and gums.

So sweet. Still trying to communicate? Doflamingo was glad Law had destroyed the collar. He could easily grip his throat from the front with his bloodstained hands (except his fingers, Law had licked them clean). Law's carotid pulsed against his skin, and the span of Doffy's palm pushed the weakling's jaw up—an audible clack of his subordinate's teeth. Ouchies. Hope he didn't damage that talented tongue.

His other hand lifted Law by the back of his t-shirt, his upper body completely off the bed, and he rocked further into him. Law's arms dangled for the moment, then swung back, and forward again, and back and forward. Again. Again. A battering ram pendulum. What he'd give to have Vergo standing there opposite him, the opposing force, the returning force, as they swung Law between them. He grew more content knowing Law hadn't got away with it, Vergo. He hadn't got away. He looked as foolish as he ever did. Even kinda pretty the way he did after Vergo used to mark him up. Everything was set in motion and could not be stopped.

Law's breath, choking his throat, spattering his face, enlaced, complemented Doflamingo's own. Pausing for a second, Law was a scramble of limbs, the Don hauled his lower body more centrally onto the bed. Pulled one tattoo-free-leg so it was kneeling, supporting him on the mattress, the other dragging on the ground. His arms trailed like jelly, now holding him upright, just. Doffy pulled out, and could not wait to re-embark. He whacked the jutte between Law's thighs to open them up like rattling a wand against a triangle. He wanted to go in deeper. Law flinched as it hit his junk. He slipped, flinched again as Doffy grabbed his butt cheeks, pulled them wide and bore into him, and if he let go, he'd fall face first into the bed. Into their emissions. That was the beauty of seastone and being weak. Doflamingo could rearrange him, mould him, mount him, however the fuck he wanted.

"Breath is exponential to pleasure, Marco the Phoenix, the rhythm. It's escalating, the whore's breath." Doffy grinned to the night air. Peered at his own cock ramming into Law for a few glorious seconds, ramping it up. It was good to be alive. Law's arse took all of him, but his trembling thighs, cheeks, body, were a sweet rosy hue in coy protest. The sounds. How could Law bear to hear himself get so thoroughly squelched? It was fun. "Rather engaging, your man, wouldn't you say? Do you think he'll come for me?"

Doffy didn't doubt it. His pushed his hips with a showman's flourish, demonstrating just how smoothly the product ran, what it could take, even when it pretended not to want to, Law all a-gibber at the slightest touch. Not that Doflamingo touched anything lightly, even when tiptoeing. Law might lose a few more of his teeth tonight. "Rather engaged, perhaps?" Doffy's face—a tumbler of cognac held up to the light. Quite. To the victor go the spoiled.

"I like milking him, Phoenix."

Doflamingo had paused but thrust again, rapidly, a few hundred fucking times, before breaking off. Law jarring, panting. Huh. The Donquixote pirate reached around for Law's curled dick, brushing his wet pubic hair.
"Sometimes he comes just from looking at me." He ran his finger over the tip, the head, so familiar, so at home in his hand. It never took long, a few practiced jerks, and his hand was rapidly covered in Law's adoration. Law's muck. "Who wouldn't?"

Law shuddered. His head down. Tried to maintain balance. His own cum on his belly, everything dripping, everywhere. Why? Why didn't Phoenix just take Misery and go? What could he get out of this?

The fuck wasn't going to let go. Was stroking him again like petting a cat.

"So surprisingly silky for a piece of trash." Doflamingo's pinch sent a shock of pain amongst the unwanted release. Law felt his bored investigative touch explore ridges and folds, like filing the day's returns. Doflamingo made sure his investments always paid off. He let go, one hand still on Law's lower back, both ready for another round. He shook out the hand covered in whey, brandished it to the sky. He licked it—Little Miss Muffet had nothing on him—continued chatting to Marco.

"You'd think it'd be burlap rough. My little Hereford. Hobbled thoroughbred. I like looking at Law best this way—and it's a common view, believe me. Not just for me, though it should exclusively be for me."

He stroked the glutes. Thumbed the hole wide again.

"I'm happy to share with you, though, Marco. A black velvet cave, flanks, an arse just made, just waiting for me to stick my dick into."

He pulled Law's hair back again, and forced him to look up. "Patiently standing here. Waiting for things to happen to him. Chewing cud. Waiting, hoping to be fucked."

Desperate to be fucked. His spare hand soothingly, lovingly, rubbed the shape, the contour of Law. "Only he's not so patient." He grabbed a handful of buttcheek. "He moulds to me so perfectly. Nary a protest, na, Marco? This end, me assessing my stock, no need to see that whiny insipid face, no matter how beautiful, when this end tells the real story. Is quite the conversationalist. The tale of the tail."

He flicked a wrist and watched the red glow. Hmm, yes, his naughty barn animal had rid himself of all marks of ownership. He dropped Law's head and held his hips. Let the cow hold himself up.

"Better get back to it."

Unghh.

"Sweet. He's lowing for me, Marco." Was he boo-hooing? Doflamingo laughed.

All the way in. Any breaking of skin had already occurred. A number of times. It had to hurt. Not him.

"Moist. Delicious. A little burnt like your great aunt's fave recipe. That'd be me lubed up, and him lubed up on my tailings. He's dripping, Marco. He likes it that way. Disgusting. Friction. Bite. Zest. Where'd we be without it?"

He hummed as he thumped into Law. Some show tune ditty. Law cursing out of time. Not supporting himself that well. Shaking? That card table always collapsed unless you set it up properly, one leg always turned inward. Doffy went harder. He was a machine.
"Who'll have him, Phoenix? Except you and me. And we can all tell who he prefers. Who he instinctively responds to."

He reached to the front again, eyes locked with the Whitebeard even while the two bodies rocked. Law's arse like a fucking sea anemone spreading and retracting on the end of his dick. Nerve endings, filaments, reacting to, drawing him in. Shying away from him. As if.

"Who he obeys."

Law's fingers jerked, and it took everything not to scrabble away. Pinned by the jutte, the man himself, he wouldn't get far. Felt his warm, intrusive fucking touch on his dick again. Manicured nails, soft skin, moisturised regularly. Breathe. Weep.

"So ready, Marco. It'd take most men a while to respond after just shooting their load, but not our heifer. He's already leaking." He thumbed the tip. "His arousal is arousing."

Marzipan was the worst taste in the world and Marco couldn't clear it from his mouth. The slap of balls against Law's arse carried into the night sky. Just as Doffy's voice did.

The fuck returned his attention to the bed and Law glanced over his shoulder with a smile. Those even teeth. White all over his tan skin. Savage. Doflamingo leant down, Law's head dropping, and he took Law's skin in his mouth—teeth marks on Law's shoulder. Law fucking obsequious. There's one of Benn Beckman's million dollar words. What the fuck did he have to smile about? Doffy was right. His breath was in tandem, heightened. His legs, his whole body was so obliging. Marco was exiled if he so much as brushed the skin of his delicate elbow.

He got Law was trying to save Misery, but did he have to follow every fucking lead? Marco heard and ignored a smothered curse. Only Law, only Law. It only happened to him.

He was too far away to see properly anyway, but couldn't miss the fuck me now or die grunts reaching for the stars through their brand new skylight. And he'd come twice from Doflamingo's touch. Sure Law knew how to serve. Sure, one of his legs quivered like crazy, but so did Misery's if you tickled her in the right spot. Was he drooling? Law drooled if you hit him just right. Face or prostate. Doflamingo surely knew.

Fuck it. What was he meant to do? He flew up and away. Far away. Misery was optimum. He'd wasted too much time. Law could look after himself. But he didn't call Luffy or Vista or Smoker or anyone who could help him battle against Doflamingo. After, he went down to their—scratch that —his bar, he did most of the work after all. And sat outside on the bench, watching the water wash in the luminescent plankton, listened to it crinkle shells, while Doffy fucked his lover. While his lover let himself get good and fucked.
Flight (dark ending 1-NSFW)

Chapter Summary

The saviour always gets nailed to the cross.

Chapter Notes

If you want the alternate ending which has the comfort side of hurt/comfort, rather than just hurt, skip this chapter and go straight to chapter five.

**Trigger warning:** explicit rape and sexual assault. Proceed accordingly, or hit the back button. All hurt, no comfort.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Flight (dark ending 1)

It was dawn. Yeah, dawn, when he decided to return. The vet hadn't been able to save the dog. Marco had said goodbye as well as he could. The vet said he'd lay charges for cruelty to an animal, and sick fucks like that should be wiped off the face of the earth. Good. Someone had to pay. At least he'd been there to herald her farewell. She hadn't died alone. She deserved so much better. Didn't deserve this at all.

He took a sip of the beer he'd removed from the bar shack's fridge. Placed it with a clunk on the bench beside him. How often had Doflamingo visited their home? Other locations? Maybe Law and he caught up on a regular basis, and Marco slept through it all, all the time? But he'd felt the fear.

After he waded into the shallows and washed the blood off, he walked the hill to their house. Didn't fly up. It was pretty out with the early feathered songstresses, the pink skies. Everyone safely asleep. He entered their yard. His yard. Well look at that. The roof had been reassembled. Law had won? He'd been able to use his power? Or his Room had subsided and the roof reassembled itself?

Why hadn't he been able to use it on Misery? They'd got that dog to help Law through an all too familiar scenario, and this was the repayment. She adored him. He wouldn't have made it without her. Look at his gratitude.

Marco's haki sensed Law, but not Doflamingo. The house was coated in scuffed nails and torn skin. Anger. The euphoria of ejaculate. He pushed the door open, didn't need a key. Doflamingo had manipulated the lock on his way in. Marco didn't need to take off his shoes at the door. The soles of his feet were dirty. So was the house. Filthy.

The rearranged furniture and spilled books and papers, a broken mug—the chair legs waving in the air like an upturned beetle—indicated that Law had been fucked against every surface of the house.
Of course. Face down. Face up. To the side? Against the wall, legs wrapped around the giant, head hitting the plaster? Shuddering. Body fucking arching and shuddering in reaction.

The medical dictionary Law'd pulled out last night, checking one bunch of pills against another before turning in, was open, pages torn from it. Where had those pages been stuffed? What had they wiped up? He could almost hear the banked up salt and blubber. What a mess. How often had he cleaned up after Law?

He opened the door to the bedroom. The smell. It was drenched in sex. Misery's blood.

Light seeped in through the drawn blinds, and a heavy breath cut through the room, the kind tempered with a throatful of blood. A shadowed lump rose and fell at the foot of their bed. Marco's feet were already dirty, what was a little more? But he still grimaced as he squished through who knows the fuck what underneath his toes.

As he approached the bed he let out an appreciative whistle. You couldn't fault Doflamingo's manners, quite the gracious guest. Had left such a pretty thank you gift, more apparent in the lightening room. Law's hole was rancid and ready, fucked red and raw, and his body and mouth were covered in film. His hair. The sheet was sopping, Law lying against the worst of it. He was black and fucking blue all over. Still shaking. Wuss.

His lips were swollen from a night of kissing and biting. Beard rash and finger scratches littered his face and body, matching those marks along his enticing inner thighs. Looked like he'd had a good time. No matter how blunted, how aflame his eyes were.

How relieved.

Not this time. Babe. Marco wasn't playing saviour this time. They always got nailed to the cross.

Law's heels pressed against his buttocks, and his hands were chained to his ankles, and the edges of those chains to the side of the bed. His hands held his legs open, Doffy's strings helped out there. Blood seeped through from something buried in his skin, colouring his fingers. His abused dick was drawn up tight, cold and frightened. It might have been cute under other circumstances. How startled it looked, like shellfish trying to bury into the sand.

Very nice, though. The presentation. Pathetic, but nice. Who could resist? Who wouldn't want to coax that shy little mollusc into showing an antennae? Just as Doflamingo had.

Marco assessed the bestowal from one side of the bed, and then the other, his thumb under his chin, his forefinger over his mouth, the memory of Misery's blood right under his nose. Law's breath sludged.

"Marco?"

Law was hoarse. From sucking dick. The first division commander made his judgement, moved in, and gripped Law's hand gripping his ankle.

"Misery?" Law tried to move a finger against Marco.

If Law's position didn't say, fuck me, Marco didn't know what did. Blood trickling under Law's hold stained Marco's hands now, as if he hadn't already had enough. He slapped the finger away, careful of the chains, the string. No point in them both being as useless, being as conveniently accessible, as a sack of potatoes.

Doflamingo had left him right at the foot of the bed. Had he sent anyone else to partake of his
prize? His beloved slave? While Marco was absent? Had Law cooed? Called them in? Those clucking noises he used to wake Misery in the morning? Of course he had. Of course he did.

Marco folded Law's legs way back. They tensed against his grip. How could there be any fight left? The side chains had some length, and Law's hands against his ankles were the perfect upside down brace position. Just as well they'd popped into Pilates, meditation and all that crap when they'd had the chance. Law's urging. Something about maintaining balance, flexibility. It paid off now, and he could see why his unfaithful whore had been so keen. He spied the t-shirt. Misery's ripped shirt. Looked as if it had been used to wipe up cum.

He grabbed a clump of it, one-handed. Ugh. Law tried to back up the bed, but he couldn't. The chains stopped him with a jerk. The position stopped him. The seastone stopped him. Marco grabbed him around the thighs and pulled him back down. Dr. Death.

"The fuck, Marco? Just get me..."

He had his weak spots. The arm still, after all these years, anybody's rump if you delivered a stinging blow. Especially on a brand new fucking brand. Doflamingo's Jolly Roger embossed into Law's skin. The cancel mark red in ink and red in rupture. Slave brand. What didn't Law understand about being defeated? Quite amusing to see someone's back arch when they were basically doubled back on themselves.

Marco pushed Law down by the collarbone, forearm pushing up under his chin, forcing his head back. He pried Law's lips open with his thumb and jammed the cloth in. His mouth wasn't completely dry. Surprising. Law's teeth scraped his skin. Glugging tapped the back of his throat. Panic? The scraps were a fitting kind of homage. Could he breathe with that skewed nose? Marco sent his fist into his cheek. Skewed it some more.

Law's head shot to the side, but maybe the impact was dull against the skin Marco hoped Misery had torn, and dull against Doflamingo's own kneading skills. Master baker that one. Law's eyes rolled back. Marco checked that some air was getting in. A scurry at the corner of his lips. One nostril seemed operative. He worked hard to breathe. Good. So had Misery. What had the vet said? The cop's would find Law without any trouble.

"Don't mark me, bitch."

Law twisted against the chains. Tried, oh, he did try, to get away. But Doflamingo was good at taming the dangerous to docile. More blood. Those strings weren't kind. The Will of the Defeated was that they had no right to one.

Marco laughed low, frustrated. How could he struggle, trussed up? As wiped out as he fucking was. His back trying to buck like a fish fighting to return to water, hair lifting, his lips, tongue moving to spit out the cloth. He hadn't seen him put that kind of effort into rejecting his master. Into protecting Misery.

"Everything you know, Law, everything you touch, anything good around you, fucking dies."

Law's eyes widened then hardened. What Marco could see of them between his folded back legs. Between the bruises.

"No argument?"

Marco ran the front of one hand down the convulsing torso. Flaking fucking torso. Ugh. He pulled Law to him again and again as he tried to back up. He could cup Law's retracted penis in his hand.
He gave it a flick. So cute. Had Doflamingo got him off? After the first two? A third time? A fourth? Law erect, alert, full size for his boss? Twitching, begging for release? It was a given. And now he was stiff as a board—his body, not his cock—for him, his partner? Always so frigid when it came to him.

Marco stepped back and lowered his cargo pants and lined up with that sodden cunt. Law—beautiful on the outside, trash within. The glitter disguising the gutter had fooled him for too long.

He eased in, but it was pretty smooth. Doflamingo was a giant, and Marco's skin prickled at the thought, his dick thickened. Ah, Law felt so good. So familiar. Misery was gone. This was for her. Law tried to bring a leg, a thigh against him. Death by shackled drumstick. Impossible.

Arm tight around his thighs, Marco concentrated. In. Out. In. Pause. Wait. Couldn't. The cunt was struggling too much. Like kelp through fucking sea currents though. Easily knocked out of him. What did he expect?

Law's eye, directly at him, from the bed. That look, what? He angled the legs so all he saw was a hole, the back of Law's thighs, to get him off, to use. Law felt skin, his own skin, pushed against him, his hands very much aiding in his own abuse. Bruised there too of course. The inner thighs. Marco's lips had placed a number of kisses along those muscles in the past. Some future registry of shame checked vague awareness that Law's junk was part of the skin that rubbed against him.

The Phoenix entered. Law couldn't make any noise. There were no sounds or movements functional in the shale pit.

Marco fucked the doubled-over shit back and forth, and he found comfort in the clink of iron against the side railings. A soothing rhythm like thralls oaring a longship. Despite that, the actual bed moved under them, of course, even from that distance, tapping the bedhead against the wall. With application, Marco thought, they could crack the plaster. Fucking didn't feel as good with haki though.

Law was so used to it he gave way to the motion, must fucking want it, love it. He'd have his legs wrapped around Marco if he let him. Begging him like he begged Joker. Doffy. Or he wouldn't. Law never appreciated the good he had. Good guys always got the raw deal.

Not this time. Marco gripped his fingers into Law's buttocks as he pulled the body against him again, gouging that spanking new brand Doflamingo had burned into his cheek. Try flensing that one, arsehole. Law jolted, a yell behind the cloth. Marco grimaced. Idiotic.

Property of the Donquixote Family, indeed. He'd have to slap the shit out of that new embossment later. Healed and healing. Felt cosy thinking about punishment for this errant child. Worst fucking generation. Tonguing it once it was healed. Aftercare was important.

The retainer needed retaining at times, and it felt good to do so as his dick reclaimed the flesh and filaments of Law's canal. Only one language he understood. It felt so good to disregard those false sentiments he and Law had explored and tip-toed around for almost as long as they'd known one another. He'd never been wrong to take him in the past. All those years of wasted regret. He'd never been wrong.

He loved the way he, Marco the Phoenix, Whitebead's First Division Commander, slammed into the Heart, moving him about, loved the way he sounded. Which one was louder, Law? Which one had more power? He bit the side of Law's leg. Nostalgic. Playful. He tried to kick out. Seastone. Dick. You ain't going nowhere.
Law. Silent now, the fucker. Guess he only truly sang for one. Adulation could escape that gag. Misery was dead and it was the fault of the Donquixote family. Of their sadistic fucking doctor. Couldn't even kill her painlessly, with mercy despite having the ability.

They'd taken her away from him, and property was to be owned, was owned and fucking owned. Doflamingo had branded and gifted Law to him. If the Family had a right to torture his dog and leave her to suffer, he had an equal right to fuck their most precious belonging senseless. Law was used goods, was used to it. It was all he knew. Marco had been stupid to think things could change.

If only he'd stayed with Doflamingo, the loss of life would have narrowed to one. Law's own when he obeyed his Master as every loyal underling should.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, at the end of the third chapter I could have written the fourth chapter with good Marco, and followed a trail of rescue, retaliation, revenge, recovery. Maybe I'll write a good Marco chapter in the future as an alternate ending. Chapter 5 covers this.

This fic is an indulgent divergence. For anyone who reads the Marco/Law stories, they are mostly happy and healthy together and the way that Marco and Law saw Misery out was a lot more respectful and painless, to Misery and the guys. Phoenix took a dark turn for just this one. I'm turning into one of those writers who doesn't give Law a break. Ugh. The long fics illustrate the comfort side of hurt/comfort as well, and have happier endings.

Most of the one-shots are light and/or have hope.

Thank you for reading. Thank you to those who left kudos and comments, and any other form of feedback. I know it can be tough to do on a dark fic.
**Respite (lighter ending 1)**

**Chapter Summary**

Alternate ending with comfort. Marco is a good guy and Smoker makes an appearance.

**Chapter Notes**

This continues from chapter three as if chapter four didn't happen, depending upon what you feel like reading. It still has confronting scenes but a whole lot more comfort than hurt.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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**Respite (lighter ending 1)**

It was dawn. Yeah, dawn, when he decided to return. The vet hadn't been able to save the dog. Marco had said goodbye as well he could. The vet said he'd lay charges for animal cruelty, and sick fucks like that should be wiped off the face of the earth. Good. Someone had to pay. At least he'd been there to herald her farewell. She hadn't died alone. She deserved so much better. Didn't deserve this at all.

He took a sip of the beer he'd removed from the bar shack's fridge. Placed it with a clunk on the bench beside him. How often had Doflamingo visited their home? Other locations? Maybe Law and he caught up on a regular basis, and Marco slept through it all, all the time? He shook his head. He'd felt the fear. Don't wander that path.

After he waded into the shallows and washed the blood off he walked the hill to their house. Didn't fly up. It was pretty out with the early feathered songstresses, the pink skies. Everyone safely asleep. He entered the yard. The roof had been reassembled. Law had won? He'd been able to use his power? Or his Room had subsided and the roof reassembled itself?

Why hadn't he been able to use it on Misery? They'd got that dog to help Law through an all too familiar scenario, and this was the repayment. She adored him. He wouldn't have made it without her.

Marco's haki sensed Law, but not Doflamingo. The house was coated in scuffed nails and torn skin. Anger. The euphoria of ejaculate. He pushed the door open, didn't need a key. Doflamingo had manipulated the lock on his way in. Marco didn't need to take off his shoes at the door. The soles of his feet were dirty. So was the house. Filthy.

The rearranged furniture and spilled books and papers, a broken mug — the chair legs waving in the air like an upturned beetle — indicated that Law had been fucked against every surface of the house. Of course. Face down. Face up. To the side? Against the wall, legs wrapped around the
giant, head hitting the plaster? Shuddering. Body arching and shuddering in reaction.

The medical dictionary Law had pulled out last night, checking one bunch of pills against another before turning in, was open, pages torn from it. Where had those pages been stuffed? What had they wiped up? He could almost hear the banked up salt and blubber. What a mess. It was open on F — treatments for fever. He flipped forward a few entries to where more sheets had been pulled out, the binding loose, and shut the dictionary. They'd have to get a new one.

He exhaled, opened the door to the bedroom. The smell. It was drenched in sex. Misery's wounds. Why hadn't he come sooner? Because it was drenched in red. He almost walked away. Man up.

Light seeped through the drawn blinds, and a heavy breath cut through the room, the kind stoppered with a throatful of blood. A shadowed lump rose and fell at the foot of their bed. Marco's feet were already dirty, what was a little more? But he still grimaced as he squished through who knows what underneath his toes.

Law's breath quickened and thickened as he drew near.

"Oh fuck."

Doflamingo.

Marco guessed this was his sick fuck way of leaving a gift, a warning. The shivering lump grew more defined in the lightening room. Marco stood at the foot of the bed, in front of it. Law's hole was rancid and ready, fucked red and raw, and his body and mouth were covered in film. His hair. The sheet was sopping, Law lying against the worst of it. He was black and fucking blue all over. Marco could hear the squish of moisture under him, the tremors were that insistent.

Law's lips were swollen from a night of kissing and biting. Beard rash and finger scratches littered his face and body, matching those marks along his inner thighs. His breath clunked like an escalator at a department store of buckled grilles and broken windows.

His gaze was blunted, aflame. Wary.

Relieved.

Marco wanted to run, but couldn't. Looked like Law wanted to get out of there too. His chest rose far too fast, too often.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck."

Law's heels pressed against his buttocks, and his hands were chained to his ankles, and the edges of those chains to the side of the bed. His hands held his legs open, Doffy's strings helped out there. Blood seeped through from something buried in his skin, colouring his fingers. Bits of glass? Plastic? Metal? His abused dick was drawn up tight, cold and frightened.

oOOo

Footsteps. But he couldn't look up. His shame was too deep and he didn't know if he had the strength, and the way he was chained didn't allow it, and what the fuck could he do? He waited for the lift of his legs, cock against his hole, violation. The chains had some give. Couldn't have restraint get in the way of pleasure. Who had Doflamingo sent this time? But instead, whoever paused to the side of him, bent down, and cupped a palm to his face.

He shirked away. Tried to. But — there was a calloused warmth. He exhaled.
"Marco?"

Law was hoarse. From sucking dick. Screaming. The toothbrush shove of every object forced into his mouth sat at the back of his throat. Fucked if he'd die from choking on his own vomit.

Marco's movement around the bed, his voice. Cursing. Marco. Luck was on his side. Maybe.

"Law?"

Would the Phoenix take him? Law's stomach clenched tighter, if that were possible, waiting for Marco's move. Look at how he was on display. It was obviously an invitation. He couldn't see properly.

"He branded you?" Law inhaled sharply at the brush of a hand over his buttcheek.

That's right, he was property again. Tagged again. Redefined. Retrofitted. It was Marco. He hoped he'd see him through this, even if he gave up on everything else.

Soft steps suctioning the grungy hardwood moved away from the bed. No such luck, huh?

They returned and something soft fell across his groin, his legs, covering as much as possible. He tried to close his legs in reaction, couldn't, and not needed. Winced at the pain it shot through his sliced up flesh. Marco had pulled a clean sheet from their closet. It hid his dick and anus, his spread legs. Leastways, he wasn't on show, though he felt like he was under the operating table for a brief second. Didn't think his body could shake more, but he could hardly hear a thing over the rattling of his fucking bones, the chains.

Marco walked to the side of the bed. Law's ragged lips tightened, a relief perhaps — confusion? — on his face, and yeah, he'd be fucking crying too if he were in this situation. There was blood on the sheets, streaked from Law's arse, both from being fucked and the brand. Doffy's strings. The shaking was violent. Fuck, what had Doflamingo done? What had he done further? Law's skin cut up, disrupting the flow of his tattoos.

"Law!"

A hammering on the front door. Doflamingo's goons?

"Who's here?" Law rasped, would have jumped if he could've. He tried to pull something to him, but couldn't shift his hands. There was something he had to ask Marco. Something important, but every knock beat him about the head like a block of timber. The Family didn't announce themselves. They strode in. Wasn't them.

Marco cocked his head. That was Smoker. He'd deal with them. "The cops. Because of Misery."

Ah, that's what he had to ask. He looked at Marco, and Marco fought his way past the swollen and macerated face to read Law's eyes. They were fucking hard to locate in that pulped up mess, but he understood the question. The cops, the marines, wouldn't be here otherwise. Unless they came because they actually cared for a pirate. Luffy was in power. It wasn't unheard of.

Marco shook his head, and Law turned his. The only body part he really had governance over at the moment. He exhaled heavily. He deserved to be taken. "Sorry, Marco."
The anger was unreasonable. Marco tamped it down, and sent its molten belly heat Doflamingo's way. "It's Smoker. You'll be all right."

"Get me unchained, covered? Before they take me."

The open wounds he'd seen on Law's arms. The inflammation of his genitals. The bruising everywhere. Marco understood. Of course he fucking did. He knew Law could barely stand it that Marco witnessed it.

"We'll get the cuffs off. Maybe Smoker's got someone."

Law nodded again. Deeply humiliated. "Are they going to use me? The marines?"

Marco drew back, surprised. Smoker and Law had a good relationship, but he'd been fucked up by the marines before. Still, these were times of peace. Law'd lost his bounty. But who knew where his head was at the moment. No place you'd want to take your grandmother.

"Fuck no, Law. What gives you that idea?"

Law looked up at him from the bed. Yeah, why wouldn't he think it? Marco put his hand gently and carefully along the crusty face and hair again. He was bruised of course, and any touch was bound to spiral him.

"No." He would not fucking let them. Law wouldn't let them. "They're not taking you anywhere."

Law swallowed. "Get Doflamingo's strings off? Before they come in?"

Marco pushed Law's hair up. He'd known the task was not one likely to be successful. Rescuing Misery. "I'm sorry too."

Law's shoulders rose and his eyes darkened and his neck tipped back, and Marco knew he wanted to curl into a corner somewhere, or slice up a few thousand warships with Kikoku. He wasn't dangerous unless he chose to be, but they always restrained him for reasons of just in case. If they caught him, and hunting season lasted three hundred and sixty-five days.

Marco shifted to the end of the bed. Needed to get to the strings. Couldn't touch the seastone. He lifted the sheet but kept it over Law's knees as if the pirate were one of his female patients booked in for a pap smear.

He burnt off the strings, the skin was cut deep, bleeding. The strings had carved a path well below the epidermis, through fatty tissue that had no right being exposed to the air. Despite the pain, Law's relief was audible. He was still chained, though. Hands to ankles, hands to bed.

"We'll get you out of this kairoseki. Whoever Smoker has we'll make sure he doesn't talk." Marco's healing powers wouldn't work on Law against the seastone.

Law nodded. Those tremors. He knew he was tearing up. Kept his head averted.

Marco lowered the sheet again. Pulled a spare pillow from the closet and slipped it under Law's head. Who knew what the other ones had been used for. He spied the ripped up rags of t-shirt that Doflamingo had gagged Law with. Misery's t-shirt. Used to wipe up cum? Another thought Marco pushed down the trapdoor of no further contemplation.

"I'm gonna see who Smoker's got on his crew, okay?"
Donquixote's scent was all over the joint, the same lacing of fear and ownership from the days when Smoker and Law were something, and he had to take care of the pirate on occasion, finely hatched lines all over his body. Some fresh, some scabbed, some ancient. He was glad he'd intercepted the call. The vet was a babble of fury and shock. How could anyone do that to a dog? That mock surgeon. That pirate blight on their sleepy hollow of a village (packed as it was with smugglers, counterfeiters, and the occasional murderer). To think that he treated children, that townsfolk sent children to him.

"Misery?"

"That's what she died in, yeah."

Smoker pulled the den-den closer, its cigar-chomping face outraged and fatigued. "No — that's her name. Misery."

"Was. Gone, and what a fucking way to go. Slit her throat and kept her breathing. Left her to bleed out. Someone needs to do the same to him."

"Law wouldn't." He stopped himself. "Who brought her in?"

"The blond one. The freaky one who flies. Was so upset you knew it wasn't him who did it. He stayed to see her cross over. There was that. Bawled like a baby."

Marco.

"You visit their bar?"

"Won't be until that dark one's behind bars, and yeah, so what? Never know what kind of person someone is until you see how they treat animals."

Smoker lit up. Blew out a gust of smoke into the small office, upsetting the clerk on duty.

"Did Marco — the blond — did he say where Law was?"

"Up at the house."

"Why weren't they together?"

"Dunno. Too busy sharpening his fucking knives."

Something not right. Smoker swivelled his chair, leant his head back, staring at the uneven ceiling panels.

"I'll look into it."

"See that he gets what he deserves, Smoker."

"Hmm." The marine interpreted all questions from his own bias.

Marco argued against Tashigi if someone else was available. Sure, she was a non-fruit user, and Law had been her unofficial physician throughout her pregnancy, and she had seen Law hurt before, and Law was all about practicality when it equalled survival, but Marco knew if there was
an alternative, his partner would prefer he take it. Smoker had promised confidentiality. Marco didn't know if he could keep that promise or not, but Law had to get out of the cuffs.

Smoker called up medics, Marco called up the Hearts, knowing they'd come faster. Medics were always wary of a den of thieves. Law couldn't stay here. Not now. Not right now. Marco didn't think he could either.

The grunt pushed through the defiled house. Marco had kept up a shield of Phoenix fire to block the view of a band of curious and concerned onlookers — neighbours who hardly gave them the time of day — traipsing through their yard, their home, to sticky beak, as if they'd painted garage sale signs on cardboard boxes. A man plucked one of Law's tomatoes from the vine, bit into it, and swallowed it down. Commented on its sweetness. Guess it wasn't every day that the cops pulled up outside. Their roof landing in the yard last night must have echoed throughout the area, and Doflamingo revelled in a mouthy Law. But their house was isolated. He wondered if any of them had ventured out in the middle of the night, wondering if they should assist. Then again, he hadn't been there either.

There was a bunch of Marines to back up Smoker. It was fucking peacetime and Law and he had kept their heads down, helped the community out, and Smoker still needed manpower? There always was the possibility of Doflamingo. How he'd finagled a pardon from Luffy's government Marco didn't know, but the Pirate King didn't rule alone and he was too forgiving.

"Fuck. What happened to him?" The grunt peered over the sheet at Law's bloodied face and chest. The Heart captain stared. Stared that soldier down. He was so grateful for the sheet. Must be a newbie to not know his reputation as Doflamingo's indentured fucking whore. Trembling whore.

"Get the restraints off. Smoker says keep Law's appearance to yourself. Never know when bad luck's gonna rear end you, y'know?"

The Heart flinched at the word choice.

The muscled guy flexed a shoulder Marco's way, without thinking. Was this lowlife threatening him? The boss kept some strange company. He pulled his skeleton keys from the bunch of tools on a belt around his waist.

"The boss mentioned Teach's name. Doflamingo too. Seeing you are who you are, guess it was the bird, huh?"

Or the whole fucking Family, Law thought. Teach?

The marine lifted the sheet to the side as Marco instructed him, not surprised the dark-haired one didn't answer him. Surgeon of fucked-upness. He'd be surprised if he could speak. He worked on the shackles tying his hands to the side of the bed first. The gashes left behind by the strings were bleeding badly.

"Man, gotta get these wounds seen to," he said to Marco as he worked one of the chains linking to the hand shackles.

"Aweare of that."

Removing the irons holding Law's wrists to his ankles involved lifting up the sheet. Law couldn't ensure the little bit of privacy he had. An assurance in the easy grasp of a hand was physically off limits for Marco. Though maybe Law didn't want that, and it was enough that Marco kept watch, kept up the fire, when he couldn't, couldn't do a fucking thing.
Law lay back against the pillow and knew it looked as if he'd put himself in this position. He hadn't. And this kid would live, and wouldn't understand what he saw. And Law would bury it all away for some nightmare to feast on in the future. He knew it was difficult to find the right key and insert it while he couldn't keep his body still, and being confronted with— what could the marine see?

The grunt shut tight the fuck up as he loosened the ankle locks, which meant he knew. It was pretty obvious. Again Law burned with anger and shame.

"There you go." All restraints freed. The marine straightened.

Law's legs, used to being spreadeagled, had a hard time closing, a hard time coming together, but he managed, dropped them to the mattress, rolled to the side and tried to pull the sheet over him, but his arms were useless. The brand. The new brand. He would've seen it. The material under him was a cesspool.

The officer clipped his keys to his belt, nodded at Marco, and joined Smoker just outside the room, Smoker pacing as if Law was giving birth. He growled at how pale his subordinate looked.

"Which one we arresting, boss?"

"Neither of those two."

oOOo

"Can you stand?" Marco asked Law's back, pulled the sheet over him. Law had only got it as far as his thighs. Law shook his head. The farewell assaults had been particularly brutal. Doflamingo had evenly burnt a cigarette into either side of the back of his neck. Six burns in total. Must have found their emergency supply.

"Use your power?"

"Not yet," Law said. "Can't use my hands or arms."

"Okay. I've got you. I've got my barrier up—a wall of flames. We're gonna dress you. I'm going to have to carry you. Sorry, Law. Is it okay? We gotta leave."

Law nodded dumbly. "Why?"

"Smoker called the medics, but I called your crew."

"Not gonna arrest me?"

"If the vet has his way, they will, but it's Smoker, Law."

Smoker. Law tried to reach back to better memories. Older men. Fuck. Yeah, they hadn't all been shits. He'd hooked up with one for years now.

"Don't wanna go to the hospital."

"Don't have to, but I want to get you out of here before they force you onto a stretcher."

"Wash?"

"No time babe. Sorry." Marco went through their drawers and pulled out Law's loosest t-shirt, the baggy linens he always wore, thank god. Then rethought the wash. Went to the bathroom, got a
cloth and rinsed it quickly in the basin, brought a bowl of warm water. Law rolled over, slowly, as he came back into the room.

"Quick sponge down."

Law laughed. Yah, like he was Olympic snail level at the moment. He took the cloth from Marco, dipped it into the water he'd placed on the bedstand and, with a hand that was never going to be steady again, washed himself between the legs, his arse as much as he could. Sitting on that brand, infecting it with fuck knows what. Crying. Law's silent crying.

"Was she in pain?" Law looked down at his genitals. The Family jewels huh? They sure didn't belong to him. They were so precious they were worth taking a life for? Then again, Doflamingo didn't want his dick, he only wanted to dick him. Playing fair wasn't really part of his track record, but it had been fucking low to pull Misery into it.

"She didn't know I was there."

"But you stayed until she went?"

Marco nodded as Law squeezed out the cloth, the water turning pink, his useless fucking hands trying to wash down his chest. Marco took the flannel from him, and Law let him. The Phoenix sat on the side of the bed, and he pulled Law from behind so that his shoulder supported his slumped, tremored body. Useless. He couldn't lift or hold anything. Had used up all his dignity wiping between his legs.

Marco gently mopped his front, back, the arms, but was scared of contamination with any shit squeezed out into the water. He spoke over the caramelised hair.

"Shh. Law. None of this is okay, but really, not your fucking fault."

"She trusted me." Law's words struggled past chipped bone, swollen tongue.

"Not your fault."

Marco dried him with the clean sheet, now streaked with blood too. "Not my fault, not her fault."

"Definitely not her fault." Law's tears were fat and heavy and he knew he'd gone through hell for nothing, but he'd had to try. Why hadn't Marco sent backup? But he'd prefer Misery didn't die alone, like Lammy, like Cora in the snow. He'd do it again so she had a chance. Some love. Some company. She should have trusted him less.

It was like dressing a child, and Law knew it, but what could either of them do? It reminded Law of too many of Doflamingo's fucked up games, but this was Marco. Law was free if they didn't charge him. The Phoenix tried to hold Law's arms by the elbow rather than around the wrists where — fuck, one of them, or the Hearts, had to stitch that together soon. He pulled the shirt over arms, head, swabbed body. Law's legs were boneless as they tried to get them into the trouser legs.

"I can walk."

"You can't."

"Help me up. Chair, sit, shoulder, here."
Marco followed. Law put his hands on either side of Marco's shoulders then winced and pulled back in pain as he applied pressure, trying to lever himself up. He sat back on the bed, bleeding.

"Fuck, Law. I'm the one who lifts you up from the waist. Didn't they teach you anything in slice 'em up school?"

Marco pushed the chair back a few centimetres.

"That's for invalids. Get the gauze from the bathroom." Law watched the blood stain his new clothes. His clothes. They stuck to his injuries, but it was good to wear them.

"Have to lower my flames." The medical supplies were further back in the room than the basin, and just out of scope of his power.

Law gave a small nod. Marco reduced the fire, the en suite was four steps away. Law sat on the very edge of the bed looking at the angry welts festering with poison around the collar pieces embedded in his shins.

"Room." He tried, a glow lit up. He extracted a piece, then sat back, sweating. Only another nine hundred fucking lacerations and perforations to go. He'd done it once, he could again.

"Don't do it."

Law didn't look up.

"Medics are coming."

He still didn't look up.

"You'll need your powers later."

"To escape the fucking hospital," Law muttered.

"Hah." Smoker sat beside Law, careful to avoid the bloodied areas, the bed dipping. It was difficult. Impossible. Law missed the lip curled in distaste.

He glanced toward the marine from the side.

Smoker's face didn't change but screw Doflamingo. He chewed the stub of his cigar. Screw the perverted slime.

"You gonna arrest me?"

"You know you're not the one who should be arrested."

Law tipped his head. Short, sharp, not quite convinced.

"She was a beautiful dog, Law. You wouldn't have done anything to harm her."

"Ugly as fuck. She was fucking ugly as fuck." Misery and he shared their broken-crockery charm together. Law returned his attention to his ankles.

"Inside. She was Loyal."

"Yeah." Too fucking loyal. If she'd attacked him, she might have stood a chance.
Marco stepped out of the bathroom, raked a look over his partner's ex. He was gruff, but ultimately had Law's back. He threw a rolled up bandage to Smoker — easily caught, one-handed — and pulled the chair up so he could work on Law's other arm.

"Wrap him up, then the Hearts are taking him."

"I want to interview him."

"We won't be in hiding."

"He needs a doctor."

"They're the best, and Law and I aren't novices."

Smoker unravelled the gauze, and the wound would need better sterilisation later, but it looked minimally clean. He wrapped Law's wrist, and secured it with the safety pins Marco had left on the side-table. Marco did the same to the other arm.

"Bepo," Law said

"The bear?" Smoker noted the blood seeping through the material.

Law nodded. "Need him."

That concern. Smoker's. Could he take it or could he not stand it? Law didn't know. It was better than contempt. He dropped his eyes. They weren't going to arrest him. He felt nothing. Marco finished. He touched Law's hair lightly, drew his attention toward him. Law looked up. Looked like a rat following any path it was set on. Not frantic, but not in full control.

"Where's Kikoku?"

Where she fell. Doflamingo hadn't touched her. Too scared her thirst might sing a little too strongly to his fuck-toy. Not to mention it was nice to taunt Law with her presence when he rolled over and let himself get pounded. He glanced around the room to where she lay just outside of Marco's circle. Amazing Joker hadn't taken her despite his wariness. He could handle her easily under less salacious situations. Law tilted his head that way. "It's okay. She'll let you carry her."

"Her and you. Don't know if I can do both."

"Give her to Bepo. Plus, I'm walking."

"Of course you are."

Marco brought her over and put her on the bed. He'd come back, or get Smoker to pass the sword.

"Ready?"

Law nodded.

Smoker looked on. Both men deliberately locked him out, though they obviously knew he was there. Marco shifted the chair away from the bed and stood in front of Law. He bent down, and Law rested his arms, but didn't press down, on Marco's shoulders.

"Okay?"

Law nodded again. Marco placed his arms around Law's back and pulled him toward him. Law
couldn't help but push down to help lever himself up and let out a yell of pain.

"Idiot," Marco exhaled.

Once standing, Law turned to the side, one arm still needing Marco's shoulder to keep him upright. His breath, wet against Marco's body, remained choppy.

"Told you you shouldn't used your power."

The look from Law said shut it. If Smoker'd been able to see his eyes. Guess there was more to a glare than a flash of the pupils.

"You used your power?"

"Got slave collar embedded in my ankles. Was getting it out."

That explained the blood. "Doflamingo?"

"Me. The remote got crushed by the roof and I didn't think to shamble the collar out too." Law's fingers were bloody against Marco's shirt.

Both men shared a gallows smile.

"Just as well I'd removed it from my neck."

"Shush now," Marco held Law steady at the waist, "Did you take a Luffy serum or something?"

That bruised grimace could pass as a smile.

"Feet firm on the ground," Marco said as Law slipped.

He straightened. Attempted to. "We packed some of my shoes?"

"We'll get them at the door... Centred. Get yourself grounded."

Law breathed in. Marco squared himself and Law sank into his side.

"C'mon Nana. You really are a Nana now, aren't you? You're certainly walking like a ninety-year old."

"Can't fucking walk, can only shuffle. I've even got the puffed up ankles." Those shards.

"It's enough. Lean in, and I'll drag you best I can. We'll buy you granny compression stockings when we can. But you should try to put one foot ahead of the other now. Like, you know, lift your knees if you can."

Painful as fuck, but Law hoped that was surface. Bruises and brutality, but no permanent damage. He knew from experience not to count on that. He tried. Marco did most of the work as the two of them moved toward the door.

"Smoke-ya."

They stopped.

"Bring the nodachi, just as far as the door? Give it to Marco. Don't want Tashigi to get her hands on it."
"Unh." Smoker was still sitting on the bed, looking at the cradle of his hands. Planning how to bring Doflamingo in.

"I know you're not my lackey."

"Brat."

Smoker took Kikoku from where Marco had left her, marched across the room and stood in front of both and put the sword in Marco's spare hand. His gaze bore into the Whitebeard.

"Why couldn't you help him? Why's he so torn up, Misery gone? You've hardly got a scratch on you."

The First Division Commander had always been a stand-up guy, but something wasn't right. Not now. Not now.

"Law's cold. He's sick. Let's get him to his crew."

"Misery." Law spoke to his fingers. "We tried, we hoped she had a chance. Someone had to take her. Doflamingo would've just gone after me if I'd tried."

"Doflamingo sliced her up?"

Law shook his head, face dark.

"Used his strings on Law," Marco said. While he was sleeping. Used her life as collateral.

"Why didn't you call for help once you'd gone to the vet's? Says you came at three but he didn't call us until six, and said he worked on Misery until four-thirty."

Law closed his eyes. He didn't know if he wanted to hear it. What corner of the house was Doflamingo fucking or beating him into at three-thirty, four o'clock, four-thirty? Was it before or after he'd made him chew the pages of the dictionary outlining Amber Lead Syndrome? Forcing him to read it first. F for Flevance. Reinfecting him he'd said. No survivors, he'd said. What time had Marco returned to the house? But he had returned. And Misery had an hour and a half of a chance.

"We both loved Misery," Marco said, and continued to walk-drag Law outside the house.

Law nodded thickly again. That he understood, and it wasn't Marco that had held the knife against her fur. F for filed for later.

"Sorry. Filthy. I'll ruin your clothes." He was still bleeding. Not a surprise.

Marco shrugged. They'd changed Law, but he hadn't changed. This shirt was not going to see another wear anyway. Law was heavy against his shoulder, Marco's arm around him, Kikoku over his other shoulder. Law was probably the cleaner of the two after the bath. Both their feet were grimy against the sticky floor. Smoker's too.

Law slumped. So weak. It hurt. In all ways — the proximity hurt him physically and it dragged across his mind, but better Marco than anyone else. His face was a mess, he knew. Drooled, draggy and open mouthed, he couldn't breathe any other way. Still shaking, his mind shut down on every level.
Marco felt Law's energy wane. "I'll keep the flame up until we get to Bepo, and I can't shield you any more from there. Once he takes you."

"Unh."

Marco guessed that was thank you. The Phoenix fire hid the sacked house from Law. In the space before the front door, he pushed him against the wall while he'd got him to lift his feet and slipped on flip-flops. Marco covered his own feet this time too. They exited to a whir of video, the clank of den-den surveillance.

"Media's here?" Law whispered.

"Stepping through," Smoker said, easily clearing the flames. Nothing whipped vigilantes into action more than a child or animal killer. Law's hands could only remain lax at his side, fingers twitching to make a room. He remembered the ostracism when Doflamingo had forced him to kill the pup when he was a child. Criminal. Sadist. Pirate. They'd strip him of his licence at the very least. He couldn't see the crowd but heard jeers, discontent.

Marco shuffled him through the people gathered around their yard, and forward to the Heart pirates just coming into the garden. Smoker spoke to the reporters, directed his men to disperse the gawkers. The Hearts lived on separate islands and had to call in a few favours to get to Law's. But they got there. The Heart headquarters were on the island Law and Marco lived on, so they had a safe place.

"Captain!"

Bepo stepped into Marco's sphere.

Marco didn't think Law could get more tense, but he did. He also felt his powers, his haki, struggling to rise. He passed Law over to the bear. Law trying to look like he could lift one leg after the other.

"Can't walk properly at the moment. Got serious wounds. Get him to your offices, leave some crew to convene with me, but work on patching him up as soon as possible. No fuss."

Bepo nodded. As if he had to be told, but it was good to get the lowdown.

Marco watched Law grip at Bepo's fur, as much as he was able. He guessed it was a returning home. His face was buried away from them. He still shook though. Jesus, he didn't blame him. White turned pink.

"Keep him warm. Doflamingo had him stripped down. And, you know."

Law's movement was returning to his fingers, and his hold was tight on Bepo's fur. That was his story to tell. Bepo and Marco both heard the muted growl. But hell, it beat being tied up in there forever, being used. A low-lying grumble from the Mink reverberated against his body. Nothing felt more solid to Law than his soft Mink arm.

"Got transport?"

"Yeah, clinic car."

"I'll walk you to it so he's spared the stares."

"Thank you," Law stuttered from Bepo's hold.
"Hold on, Captain." And if the way Bepo pulled Law to him lifted him off the ground while keeping him at his side looked suspiciously like he was being carried, no-one was defining or complaining as they moved toward the road outside. He was just returning the favour. Room had carried them from danger more times than he could count.

Law felt Marco's palm against that crusty mess he was sporting for hair and face for a second before the Phoenix, still holding Kikoku, matched Bepo's stride.

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to mark this complete, but might continue it. I feel I've written Law's recovery in a number of my fics, so it'd just be exploiting the trope If I followed that path. But I have a few ideas, and if they gain any kind of form, maybe I'll continue.

As some of my readers know, in Repossession Doflamingo didn't live to haunt Law's life again (only in nightmares and flashbacks). Within that world, Luffy got to be pirate king, Smoker was promoted to Admiral, Tashigi to Vice Admiral, and the two of them got together and had a kid. Law saw Tashigi through her pregnancy (Birds of a Feather). The marines/police force is a strange kind of blend that I'm not going to look at too closely. I'll add more if I think of details that are a bit confusing in the story.

Of course in the Repossession world, Misery dies naturally and with dignity (A Rascal, A Rogue, A Scamp).

Thanks for reading and thank you to those who left kudos and comments, and any other form of feedback. I know it can be tough to do on a dark fic. Takes a lot of debating to put them up too.
Marco inspects his latest acquisition.

A dark chapter to follow on from chapter 4. I'm not sure how this fic is going to go, but I'm intending on alternating storylines between Dark Marco / Good Marco. Chapter 4 is dark, 5 is lighter, 6 is dark. All content is dark, just a heads up, but in terms of motivation, Marco has two storylines: bad guy / good guy.

If you want to just read about light Marco, go for it. Just about dark Marco, also go for it. Want to read them both -- I hope it doesn't get too boring and go for it! I see it dovetailing into the same kind of ending, cos' Law has to win. But we'll see.

Chapter Notes

See the summary above. Usual warnings apply. Please proceed accordingly. Hit the back button if it's not your thing. **Explicit rape/sexual assault** in this chapter, though it finishes on an upswing. Next chapter will be softer.

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The beers wore off, the adrenaline, the sense of loss, of vengeance. Marco had unchained him. Law didn't think Phoenix had lost his sense of ownership. Fucking Luffy not changing those outdated regulations of servitude and human trafficking because it was boring and everything was peachy now because they were all his friends, and he'd kick the arse of anyone who tried to own Law again.

Yeah, well he probably would, but it's be great if he did it before his own arse got fucked and another brand seared into it, and so that legally neither Doflamingo nor Marco had a leg to stand on.

But they did. Law knew they did. If they wanted to burrow deep enough, and pull him up in front of a judge conservative enough, with enough resentment, closeted desire towards his fucking type. Whatever that was. Homo Erectus Scumwater. Homo Sapiens Sap. He hadn't stood for it when the celestials had dominance, and he wouldn't now, but he had to wait. He moved his tongue against loose teeth. His power was a low pulse, reconfiguring.

He didn't know what Marco expected him to do. It took him some time to get the kairoseki off, the other fruit user's hands shaking against the substance, but there was a sweet spot otherwise
Doflamingo wouldn't have been able to use them in the first place. He burnt off the strings and discarded all restraints with a casual throw of the wrists as if they hadn't just let him smear his own seed on top of everyone else's. Chaining him again would let him do it again.

Law was slow in bringing his legs down. He'd been in that position for a while and it was hard to get anything moving. Marco squeezed his knees together, then pushed against the side of one so Law's lower half twisted, the brand again on display, part of it, both legs falling to the mattress with the lack of muscle resistance.

"Have some fucking decency."

Law tried to bring the soaked sheet, the bloodied blanket, something over him. His grip was weak and he only managed to raise them off the bed before they slipped from his fingers.

Marco stood up. Looked at the gashes in Law's arms that really needed some attention and his splotchy skin and body, and the blood just reminded him of the blood on his own shirt from their dog. Blood let by Law's own hand. Looked at Law staring at him as if he was some kind of slater crawled out from the dark, except that slaters were kind of cute. Neither man could recognise the other. Anything Law had ever let Marco see was buried.

"Clean this the fuck up. Clean yourself up, and physician heal thyself while you're fucking at it."

He moved in. Law attempted to scramble up the bed, moved about an inch. Marco pushed Law's hips where the Donquixote mark could just be seen and his touch was light on it, but it spoke of chattel exchanging hands. The granite set to Marco's features was something Law had never seen directed his way, but it was his tyre-kicker's face, assessing the potential wear and tear of a purchase, that got him. But then, Law'd killed Misery. It was unforgivable.

The Phoenix yanked one of Law's hands, the Heart yelling despite himself, and let his flames of restoration flicker over them. Law guessed healing thyself meant the deeper healing. What did Marco want him to use his hand for? Still. He leant back into a wary relief. Good, let him do it. All the better to gouge his eyes out.

Marco extended his talons.

"Don't even think about it."

Law glanced away. Thoughts, orders, ordered thoughts, trying to get them in some kind of rolodex coding, hide them from the Zoan. Was he that transparent? Guess they knew each other too well. Marco took Law's other arm.

"I was Whitebeard's First Division Commander. I knew Roger."

Whoop-de-doo. Law shot him a look and tried not to focus on anything. There were too many body fluids around, a good many of them his.

"You upstarts keep getting beaten down. Step one ill-fated foot in front of the other, bring disaster on everyone."

He was gentle while he worked the arm, that was the kicker.

"How's it work? This ownership deal? You're the one with experience. Like having a chore boy, only I get to fuck him too? That's how Doflamingo trained, you right? That's why this bad luck came to us? I didn't ask for this Law."
As if I fucking did, Law thought.

"Each to their own. Each in their place. Rest up. Clean up. Get the blood out of the fucking floorboards and wash. You're wearing another man's cum as if it was some fucking badge of honour." He could sleep on Misery's fucking blankets tonight if they didn't burn them.

"You're the pricks who mark me," Law growled. "You think I like not being able to take a breath without you or Doflamingo flaking off of me?" Without Misery's blood peeling away. Wheezes rattled through him.

"Don't get mouthy now," and Marco pressed into Law's lacerations without his fire, watched him bite his lip so he didn't cry out. "Or I'll use the other hole. I'm in need of a dog, and look what's strayed into my bed."

Law shut it. He wasn't strong enough. Marco felt a spark of satisfaction at the shot of pain lacing the resentment in Law's eyes at the mention of their loss, his loss.

But he was a starved street mongrel. It was fascinating to watch that gutter survival slink back into Law's expression. He'd been too complacent, some form of content. Just as well he'd trusted him so much they both knew where the knives were.

He wondered if Law liked the jutte? He and Smoker had been a thing. Surely they played marine and pirates, and Doflamingo was only indulging his slave's fantasies by using it to subdue him. He could be a kind master. Marco had been stupid to think there was anything equal between them. Being taken. Law understood that. He idled a finger over his chest, flame up, tracing an M, for Marco, not Misery. Maybe P would be more appropriate. The three simple kanji for his family name would be elegant. Eternal.

He could get used to this slave thing. Law had no existence without his own, and his existence was to advertise, revere his own. Good luck with that, but it might be fun trying to get him to comply.

"It's the way of the world, Law. Some rise to the top."

And keep the others at the bottom. Yeah, yeah. Law'd heard it before. He'd like to breathe normally at some point in the near future. The last eighteen hours or so had been nothing but grasping for air. Fighting down fear. Could Marco's fruit sear him? Jesus H Christ.

Law was through. What had happened here? He'd been fucked against his will once by Marco in the past. They'd been solid for a number of years at the time and they worked through it, had a sweet equilibrium. Nothing close to it ever happened again.

Marco had been the one to see him through the fallout of one institutionalised assault after the other prior to that — escape from the marines, and from the Family — and a fucking random Kid attack.

Law guessed this Doflamingo attack was one too many. He exhaled. Contemptuous, resigned. Any assault was one too many. But that was it. He was stupid to have thought that part of his life was over. He signed off on being invested in anyone. In Marco, anyway. There was no healthy relationship with his name on it now or ever, and he wasn't so ground down he could see anything desirable in the alternative.

Marco wasn't insistent in his cruelty and anger the way Doflamingo was. He wasn't even sure he wanted a serf, especially if that serf was Law. What was he doing? But that line had been crossed. He could keep Law there at the moment. He was too weak to go anywhere, and with kairoseki he
could make that a permanent situation, but the policing involved, the need to watch his back, to hide all the fucking knives. Seemed a lot of work.

Law did most of the cooking. That'd be another pain too. A chained sullen Law might not want to cook a single thing, preferring to starve out. Marco wouldn't put it past him, but he did relish the idea of having a cuffed Law making a meal for them both — Marco wasn't so far up himself he'd treat himself like a king and expect others to also, though he'd make Law eat from the dog's bowl for a while — and fucking him from behind while he cooked, bitch, while he prepared, appealed. Not allowed to stop. He pictured Law's own dick rise in unwanted pleasure as he was pushed against the counter, but he wouldn't be allowed to touch it. "Just chop the fucking onions and keep your hands to your task."

Knowing the doctor knew where to fatally Pierce that knife and that he could use the onions, the heat, as a weapon, would make the fucking all the more enjoyable, and Law's obvious servitude by that time well-learned. Hell, if he still let him play in the garden there might be herbs and spices packed with toxins. Could be interesting. But Law had to pay. Marco needed to learn how to play. Everything was punishable. That was today's lesson.

He sat on the side of the bed and it seemed Law was readying a kick, but Marco's flames were up, he could extend his claws in an instant, and he knew just how much stamina Law's powers gave him, and just how long they took to return. All that work they'd done together really taught him a lot. The research notes they'd taken late into the evening. Plus, Marco hadn't finished healing all of the right hand, all of everything. Let Law hurt a little more. It only treated the surface, anyway. The doc was the superior practitioner.

"Ah, no." Law shook his head as Marco moved closer. If he used his power now, he'd never get away later. "What'd I do to you, Marco?"

Marco thumbed Law's dick in the way he knew he liked. He'd had years to learn what the doctor liked. Huh. He thought he'd finished shaking.

It wasn't what Law had done to him.

"I'll clean the room, just leave me alone."

Marco stroked harder. It was true, Law's hole really needed some restoration too. He applied his flames and watched the inflammation decrease, the puckered angry welts lose their redness.

"No." Fucking bastard.

"As good as new, Law."

"It's not. You know it's fucking not." Law had given up trying to control any of the pulses and surges of blood and neurotransmitters that kept telling him he was drowning and he better get out of the water. His voice'd had that edge of ink since their conversations this morning.

Marco clamped down the hand that was forming a Room.

"What're you gonna do? Scamper out there naked and hope the neighbours help you?" He laughed. "Look at you. Jesus, you'd scare your neighbourhood rapist."

"Well that's you, isn't it?"

Marco sighed. Placed a hand flat across the heart tattoo. A nice cursive M, just below it. Maybe in magenta, like his shirt, to contrast with the rose-red fucking brand on Law's arse.
"You're a slave, Law. Doflamingo bequeathed you to me. You're mine. What I do could only be construed as rape if you were something beyond a possession. And you're not. That's what I didn't understand before tonight, but your former Master drove the point home — insistently — and I wish to as well."

He was crying now? What'd he have to cry about? Unattractive noises. That generation had no grit.

"You fucking have, Marco. Driven your point home. What more could you possibly take, destroy?"

"All this from a dog killer. Tears? You slit her throat, and left her to die."

He knelt on the bed. Pulled Law's legs towards him, up and around his hips. “You know it will be easier if you don’t struggle.” He lowered his own pants. Any attempt Law made to move up the bed and away was hampered by just how wet the mattress still was, Law's injuries and his rookie weakness.

"And you know how to make it good for both of us. C'mon whore. It's nothing you haven't done before."

Restorative powers hadn't cleaned Law out. He was still disgustingly easy to enter.

"So fucking smooth cos you've let yourself be fucked so many times. You said it was to save the dog, but you knew she was gone, that there was no saving her. You were the only one who could save her, and you slept with Doflamingo instead. It was to get you hard knowing I was watching, right? I should've joined him."

"There was a chance." Though the odds were incredibly narrow. But she might have been saved. Maybe if Marco had fled when Law urged him to.

"Slut."

Marco was disappointed that there wasn't pre-cum dripping from Law's dick, it was hardly erect. Not like the way it was instantly bobbing about under Doflamingo's expertise. That wasn't how slaves worked. He knew the Pavlovian nature of the situation. That's how it had happened way back, when Law had given his consent coming out of a nightmare. Imagine making Marco feel like a bad guy all those years, telling him he hadn't said yes. That it wasn't as easy as all that

He fucked Law again. It came with the job description. Sex slave. As the doc stared up at the ceiling, somewhere far away, Marco recognised the finger movements, grounding him, centring him, letting him escape somewhere that wasn't right here. He was using that against him? Their system? Nice guys always came in last.

"Come, Law. Just like you do for Daddy Flamingo."

Law's dick decided being fucked against his will wasn't very exciting even on a physiological level and Marco felt himself lose power. Law felt Marco slip, shrink, lose motion and motivation. He looked at him and smiled with his smashed up, bloodied mouth, some of those teeth were pretty loose. By the end of it, he hadn't been able to come for Doflamingo either, no matter how conditioned he was. And Marco. Marco could kill him, but he'd never own him.

"You dare pull that shit-eating grin when—"

"When my partner decides to rape me? Yeah. You're not getting me off."
"Master, Law. Partner was a mistake. You only sing for Doflamingo?"

"Why be like him? I hate him." And he'd never hated the Whitebeard until this very morning. He jerked his face up, knowing a fist would soon send him back to darkness, perhaps, not something he wanted right now, cos he wanted to get away, but it would be welcome in many ways. More than a fist. Who knew? Seems Marco had a new role model, so who knew what he'd get up to.

Flying above, Misery, in his arms, bleeding out. Watching Law smile at Doflamingo, letting the heavenly demon bite him, the spurts of semen he could coax from him with a single touch. The noises Law made, Doflamingo driving him into the bed, hand clutched in his hair, and Law's obscene encouragement.

Marco shut up and grew harder and just fucked the kid in the way he knew how to get fucked. Hey, at least Marco was smaller than Doflamingo, that must be some kind of relief. Though Law probably craved that massive cock, and it was why their own sex life had always been up and down.

Law had welcomed the fist rather than the fucking, but he guessed the second caused less damage. He slid into the wet sheets as Marco silently, furiously took what was his. What was his due.

But Marco wasn't Doflamingo. Ultimately he couldn't keep being a prick forever. Someone might notice and call him out on it. Doflamingo didn't care, but Marco did.

So after he'd — what? — revenge-fucked him, he reminded Law, pushing into him in a way that used to be their space, their exploration, their intimacy, their humour, the allowance they gave one another — Marco's sweat dropping onto Law along with everything else — he reminded him that things had fucking changed and Law was the one enmeshed in the wet spot. As if he could forget. He told him again, as he pulled out of him, off him, spraying over him, to clean up, clean up and clean up.

Marco grunted off Law. Wiped himself down with distaste with Law's long discarded t-shirt. Wiped that across Law's abs. If his lover clenched his jaw any more he'd have smithereens for teeth. Pulled on his trousers, zipping up and patting down his pockets as if making sure he had his keys.

He picked up the cuffs from where he'd left them, handling them from the sweet spot. Law looked like he wanted to somersault off the bed, but he was too feeble.

He grabbed the actual house keys from the bedside table and his reading glasses. Scratched at his stomach, and the back of his head, yawning, the glasses cases tapping his skull. He put both on the drawers, then pulled out clean clothes for himself. Fuck getting ready in here though. He couldn't bear to look at Law, all squashed, insignificant and totally ruined against the mattress. Struggling to breathe.

Doflamingo's smell disgusted him too, the memory of Misery. Whistling, he gathered the bundle. Fucking whistled, as he left the room and closed the door on Law. Daytime sex was invigorating.

The click of the percolator, the sound of the shower from their other bathroom tapped through the house and Law concentrated on moving what he could, isolating and categorising the damage. It
wasn't until he heard the slide of the front door, the habitual locking of it, that Law let himself get up and away from the bed. Marco going down to open the bar. Keeping up appearances.

Considering his injuries, being fucked on a mattress was preferable to whatever hard edged surface these guys thought made them more of a man. The small mercy didn't fill him with thanks.

With his power returning, Law did clean up. Himself. Fuck everything else. The blood in the hardwood could stay there. Law never wanted to see this room he'd made a home again.

He listened for Misery's clack across the tiles as he went to the en suite bathroom, and remembered her bewilderment and pain, and slipped it back under a plaster adhered to his skin, to think about really deeply when his own survival was a little less paramount. Still, his cut up and burnt finger pads — Doffy had him hold the lit end of a number of cigarettes — clutched at the doorjamb for a second before Law wondered if he could afford a shower, cos getting the fuck out of there was high on his list of priorities.

He settled for a quick sponge down, knowing it was hardly enough, but maybe he was presentable enough to scare off a molester rather than a rapist now. He didn't have much luck with repelling the latter anyway.

His power was up enough. He knew the ferry times. He threw on what he could find and tumbled another few t-shirts, trousers, underwear into his backpack — yes he wanted to have some against this skin for once other than wet sheets and another man's sack. He threw quick medical supplies, cleaning cloths, spare cash (hidden away — guess he hadn't been that trusting), passport, a few crucial medical qualifications, into the bag. Fuck the commemorative tea towels he collected — his absurd attempt at being normal. As if.

With Kikoku against his shoulder, he shambled himself to the port in just enough time for the ferry. His embarkment close enough to leaving to make sure hardly anyone saw him board. And of course the Phoenix could follow if he so wished. But he had a bar to run. Customers to please. A dog to bury.

Once the ferry drew away Law sat on the deck, All the better to see Phoenix or Doflamingo soaring across the skies. All the better to be seen.

He'd be better off sitting in a corner of one of the tatami rooms where passengers who were travelling further than the next island had bought a bit of space. They played games with their families, scooping up hands full of dried fish and almond slivers, downing them with popped beers.

As fucked up as he was, they probably wouldn't let him in. Might not let him in if he wasn't busted up either. He'd certainly draw attention. The nodachi might have something to do it, but there were other weapons in there. Artisans made a living from the tools of their trades, travelling from island to island. There were times he could lay low, and other times when he didn't have a chance in hell.

The clouds hung low, and the ocean spun grey, so he had little company. A few gulls. The breeze couldn't make him any colder than he was already. He sat on the bench near the entrance. His usual resting place, and a good position to duck inside if foreign projectiles interrupted the skies.

Out of habit he rested a hand just below the seat so Misery could sniff it. She loved visiting others but hated the ferry trip with the ship's clanking metal stairs, carbon monoxide fumes from cars ready to escape the hull, from just not being at home with him or Marco. Walking with him or Marco. But she trusted him enough to nose or lick his palm before she curled back in on herself, willing solid ground to reappear.
He left his fingers dangling a long while after he told himself Misery was no longer there to seek out and give reassurance. And whose fault was that? He couldn't close his eyes, lean back, block the world out. He scanned the sky and placed that hand on his lap as if broken.

Law couldn't think about appearances or consequences as he half shambled, half tried to stride, the hill to Robin's house, ignoring the jeers of her cranky neighbour, ignoring everything. Consequences, everything. Hill, more like a fucking mountain. He'd pulled his boots on this time, instead of the flip-flops he wore around the island. Needed something sturdy. Hadn't done up the laces, the tatts on the bridges of his feet now covered.

The ticket-seller had taken his money, hadn't turned him away, but Law saw him turn to the phone. Probably calling the big boss. They didn't want trouble.

Thanks to Marco's healing he could curl his hands, but he hit the door with his fist, and then the heel of his palm, and he was sure neither were good for him. Salt gathered at the back of his throat. His head rested against the wood, his palm now flat. The sooner he was off the street the better.

When would the marines be around to pick him up for animal cruelty? Marco to lay claim to property? They'd have to find him first. Not that hard. Marco knew his first port of call for refuge.

Robin opened the door to Law standing upright, just, and was struck with how low, dark and wounded his energy was, reminiscent of that night of rescue so long ago on the Sunny.

"Law?" Her voice a trouser-cuff-shuffle of leaves in a breeze. He forced himself to see her, to not drop his head again. Don't drop your head. He was shaking. Again. Had he ever stopped?

"It seems all right," he waved an arm vaguely over his body, "but it's superficial." Not even a drop of blood from his wrists, though Marco hadn't worked on his legs. And he'd stopped healing his arms when fucking him became the more attractive option. There were marks. "Got collar in my ankles, and I'm branded again."

Robin didn't know what the first one meant, but she glanced up in alarm at the second. Plus, his face was bloodied, bruised and swollen.

"Looked at yourself in a mirror, hon? You don't seem all right."

He touched his face. The least serious of his injuries. He'd forgotten.

Law's stumped nails on that hand, a historical gift from Kizaru, were chipped and flaking blue. She knew he chose that dark colour in particular as a kind of homage to Marco, to what they had. He did it cos' the Phoenix liked blue, and Law liked the Phoenix.

She took his hand and guided him in, his whole body trembling. He was going to pass out. She took him to the spare room, folded down the cover of the bed.

Law sat delicately, but maybe didn't need to. Was surprised at the lack of pain. That's right, Marco only healed what he'd wanted to use. On the ferry he'd not thought beyond getting away to pay the absence much mind. They'd worked with his power before. It didn't fix everything, but did a pretty good job at alleviating symptoms. Or it might just be adrenaline and fear that cancelled out physical hurt.
"Should I get Chopper?"

Law didn't know. He pulled his bag to his lap, his arms folded over it. He wondered how he'd been brave enough to strap grenades to his body and face down Donquixote's henchmen back in the day. He'd only been ten.

"Don't let Marco know I'm here. Don't let him in if he comes."

Robin inhaled. She didn't know if she was strong enough to fight the first division commander.

"Marco did this?"

Law stared at the window, wanting to draw the curtain and wanting to let the sunshine pour in. Why did he always have to hide away?

"Some. Doflamingo mostly. Misery's dead. Doflamingo made me. I killed her. Vet wants me arrested. Marco is not in a forgiving mood." And neither am fucking I, thought Law. "Doesn't know I'm here. Got it into his head I'm chattel. His chattel. His bequest."

"Misery?"

"Sorry, Robin...I."

_I'm a fucking monster._

She sat beside him. People really wanted to be all up in his space at the moment, and she pulled back a little at the tenseness she sensed, but space had been something shared between them for most of their friendship.

"Law, you'd never hurt Misery if you could help it. Never." Her hand was on his forearm and he didn't pull it away.

Did Marco's healing make things permanent, he wondered. Was the brand there to stay? He observed Robin's hand, fingers. It was nice to feel a touch that wasn't trying to hold him down.

"But I did, Robin. She's dead and I killed her."

"Doflamingo."

"How could I be so relaxed that he just waltzed right in and fucked everything up?"

And Robin knew that meant Law himself. His hand, loose from the bag, gripped the cover below.

"We were sleeping." His voice was low and what she could see of his eyes were bloodshot. Man, that nose was not right either.

Waking up, creeping around, overhearing her _protectors_ deciding to turn her in. Plotting to take her from her bed. And then that old lady she'd cleared the fields for calling in the goons. One old lady, eight broad shoulders, ten-year-old Nico Robin. Hurtling from one danger to another; even pirates couldn't be trusted. She had a life of never believing anyone. Law too. But Marco? She mightn't ever get the story, and Law had pulled through too many situations to give up now, but brutality was brutality and betrayal salted the wounds.

"Law." She lifted the halfway healed hand from the bedspread and squeezed his fingers, but he couldn't respond because he was shaking too much.
"I need to wash." He unlaced their hands and tried to open his bag. She took it from him.

He ran clinics. He knew he should get samples taken for evidence, but all that would come out into the public was that he killed a dog. That he left her in agony. That he let himself get fucked. He was a whore. He'd cleaned himself up at the house anyway, but under his nails, in his mouth. He grimaced thinking how much they still stained his body.

"You need help? Should I get anything from here?"

Law nodded. "Med kit, and help, yes. Hate to ask but I can't feel anything much. You need to see to tell Chopper directly if I pass out." Likely. "And to tell me, later. My powers are in and out. He had me in seastone for a while. His strings cut right through here"

"Who? Doflamingo? Marco?"

"Doffy put me in chains. Phoenix kept me there."

Law circled his fingers around a wrist and blanched at the memory of Doflamingo binding him. The t-shirt strips stuffed into his mouth, wrapped around his head.

"Robin?"

"Mm?" Her breath blew across the tatt on his upper arm. She remembered when Law stayed with her in the past. That was never fully explained.

"All I wanted was what Marco and I had. The practice. The bar. Misery safe from the bastards who'd put her in the rescue centre. I haven't hurt anyone in a long time." Maybe he fucking should have. Soft. He'd got too fucking soft as he aged.

If at all, Robin thought. Law acted in self-defence, and was a master tactician, but she'd not witnessed the deliberately cruel side plastered on his bounty posters. Nor the rumours of loose morals they'd used to undermine his achievements. She, Demon Child, knew all about the navy's love of exaggeration.

Law had upset Doflamingo's empire though, but it was a long time past, and Joker had more than extracted his revenge when he'd recaptured Law for those two years. Luffy had granted the Dressrosan king a pardon, with certain restrictions. That hadn't gone down well with Law, but how could Joker still have a bone to pick? Pure spite.

Robin hoped Law would see this through. Especially if Marco was somehow responsible. Unbelievable. He'd — they'd — had happiness for so long. It wasn't fair. It really wasn't. Each time something felled him, the climb back up took longer.

Maybe her own contentment was on shaky ground.

"What's first?" She pulled out the kit and took in the contents. She had her own. What self-respecting rebel didn't? But Law's really was something else. Being a doctor and all.

"Let me shower first. Then if you've found the tweezers..."

"Let me get Chopper." Or Penguin, Shachi. But Chopper lived on the same island.

Law nodded. If Marco came, Robin and Chopper we're stronger than his crew, and at the moment he could not handle a crowd, nor his friends sacrificing themselves in his name.
Thank you for reading. Huh, apparently slaters are slaters in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Australia and NZ. They have a number of names over the world, including pill bug and sow bug. There's about twenty names for them. Much cuter than Marco in this chapter.

As said, next chapter is 'good Marco', so lighter.
Marco sat in the darkened room, the beaten and bloodied Heart captain sleeping fitfully in the infirmary bed in the near corner. He should take up knitting or something, some bizarre domesticated hobby that'd appeal to Law's off-the-wall humour. Plus you could never have too many knit caps. Even though they lived on a tropical island. Like that had ever stopped Law from wearing his hat.

They'd wanted Law conscious so he could help himself while they helped him, but he'd slid under in the car and stayed under, caught like reeds in the sludge of a river. Smoker wanted to talk to him. He could wait.

Marco hadn't whittled much since their pirate days. As exciting as the battles were and watching the currents could be, there were long stretches of nothingness when not even Haruta's jokes or Jozu's games of heads or tails were enough to engage him. That was when he needed a bit of wood to scratch and shape and carve his thoughts into to pass the time.

Pushing back into the slat of the seat, (the Hearts could really do with better furniture, but at least it wasn't steel ), he missed Law's powers. With a flick of his death-stained fingers he'd have a stick on the table, the exact knife removed from the draw, or something that would substitute. But when Marco was angry all of his efforts became sharpened staves perfect for puncturing a flamingo's lungs. Maybe it was just as well his whittling tools weren't nearby.

The boys had worked on Law's hands, and the brand. Marco had used his own powers to rejuvenate the damaged areas, and to search for and neutralise any harmful bacteria, and any foreign objects embedded in Law's skin. Yeah, there was quite a bit of that collar in his shins. Shachi sat there with surgical tweezers trying not to gouge too deep.

Law had spent much of the nightmare with Misery's hair and spit and blood and what the hell else rammed into his mouth. That flooded Marco with memories like dirty oil. He knew he didn't want to access them, but neither would Law. It would help both of them if he and the Hearts' crew
removed what they could now to lessen trouble — medical and psychological — down the road.

Ah, man, if Doflamingo had taken Law away as well as the dog he wasn't sure what he'd have done, and he might succeed in taking the Heart yet. It wasn't over. Law could shut down completely after an assault, and no fucking wonder. That was a doozy. A cute word like the toys of Dressrosa, the singing flowers and sweets of Whole Cake Island. You didn't have to visit the countries to know them. But understanding what hid behind the piped icing and the epaulets decorating the jackets of tin soldiers was a whole other level of familiarity.

Uni checked Law's teeth and tongue, and yes, some work would be needed. They put everything in place, anyway, in case Captain's energy was too low to fire up when he woke.

The arms, the muscles, the bruises, the cuts, the gashes — they worked on all that. Marco stepped in when it came to treating damage caused directly by the rape. Rapes. He knew the Hearts wouldn't think less of their captain. They were loyal to him due to what he had been through and put through, and the person he was, regardless.

Jean Bart stayed as Marco used both his general skill and his flames of restoration. Law was out, but they'd also sedated him. He didn't know if Law would've preferred being conscious or not.

Jean Bart knew the way of slaves and the abuse of slaves, and was all for the couple to have their privacy, but damned if anything was going to happen to his captain at his most vulnerable. He sat cross-armed in the corner, and Marco's positioning, and the help Bepo provided, blocked his view, but he was there. The Phoenix was putting on a pretty cool face, but you could see he was a mess. A detachment sprung from shock not disregard.

After they snipped the last thread on the stitches, Law remained under. Marco kept watch. Jean Bart left to wherever the others were hanging out. A mess room, the kitchen, a card den.

Bepo brought in a few of Law's books. Marco asked for something lighter. He brought in a few of Penguin's girly magazines. He asked for something slightly more highbrow. The Mink settled on one of Ikkaku's crime novels, and Marco was happy with that. About three-quarters through the sheets rustled and the IV clanked and Marco looked up and over to Law staring out at him, the curve of his shoulder rising above the sheet.

Law hadn't expected him to be there. He swallowed a few times, and tried to find his voice, and felt the teeth that were loose with his tongue. He curled his fingers to make a room, but felt nothing.

"Suit you."

Marco put down his book at the croak. He looked across. What?

"Glasses suit you."

He'd only got them over the last year or so, and Law tried to get him to wear them as often as he could, though not when he was wearing his own glasses, cos it made bringing their faces together difficult.

Marco took them off and returned them to their case. He rubbed between his eyes, stretched his thumb and ring finger over his brows and down along the side of his face, his cheekbones, circling his closed eyes. Law didn't need him to cry. His pirate sounded like a gravelly voiced frog calling for rains in a drought. Maybe he should keep his glasses on, just for him, but they were for reading.

He stood and dragged his chair to the side of the bed. Plopped down. Law might need comfort or he might despise it. Marco fucking needed some. But it wasn't something he could ask for at the
moment.

Law raised a clumsy hand to his own hair. Felt the tips. Clean. That was a relief. Clothes. He was wearing them. He glanced at Marco. Yeah, he'd changed. Time must have passed. He was drooling onto the pillow, lips numb and as unresponsive as the rest of his body.

"What'd the crew dress me in?"

He lifted the covers, peeked. Black. That was good.

"Sweats."

"Got Penguins on them?"

Marco pushed Law's hair back and he let him.

"Bears?"

"Hallucinating, Law?"

Law moved his head. "Just something they'd do."

"Your Jolly Roger, of course. Stamped all over it like some royal crest."

"Hah," Law smiled. Wobbly toothed. Tapped his tongue against one and winced. There'd been too much in this mouth recently. He twitched, blacked out the images rushing in, and Marco kept a hand to the side of his face. Ah, his arse had been stamped, too, right? Some other royal crest burnt into his skin.

"Branded again."

"Shachi says you shouldn't flense that one. You're already like a crater. Doflamingo knows you do it, and he'll make it his mission to cover you in so many that removal would be life-threatening."

As if it wasn't already. As if scorching his skin with a fucking branding iron wasn't.

Law's eyes darkened. Not just from bruising. At least the swelling had eased a bit.

"There's no dog left, Marco. He won't catch me again." And he bit at the softer edge of Marco's palm like a cat giving a warning nip, which was really fucking stupid, cos he didn't even know if his teeth were secure in his mouth. He inhaled in pain.

"Moron," Marco said, his thumb firm, but not pushing into Law's jawline. "Got you something."

He stood, returned to the table, brought his bag over and pulled out a linen cloth.

"Tea-towel?" Law wasn't sure if the time was right, but hell, it was always time to add a new dish cloth to his collection.

"Trinity picked it out." The woman who ran the commemorative tea-towel society. Marco and Law were their best customers, and anyone who bought presents for them, which was all of their friends and colleagues.

"Her eye for travesties is second only to Robin's." Not including Law's own. He appreciated Marco's effort to normalise him by focusing on one of his less than normal — to most pirate eyes — hobbies. Marco unfolded a submarine and lighthouse motif. Law had plenty of designs of one or the other, but not combined. They were printed all over the towel like a Haute couture monogram.
And then Marco showed him another. Bepo with Chopper on his lap. Oh man, they'd have to use that for their end of year fund-raising edition.

"Chopper knows?" Law asked, pulling the cloth near but having to leave it on top of him — as effective a blanket as a fig leaf used to hide nakedness. It made him smile. The design, not the fact he couldn't coordinate.

"Not yet, doc, but he will. You'll want his opinion." Chopper worked for Law, after all.

"Yeah." There was no-one better than the tanuki. Law respected Marco's power too, but it was a different kind of healing.

He pulled that towel with Bepo and Chopper in front of his face. Chopper was holding one of the Heart pirate pencils with the polar-bear Mink eraser at the end.

"Lie with me?" He spoke to the towel, eyes riveted on Chopper's hoof.

"It's okay?"

"I'm cold, Marco — like fucking ice." Law's hand clutched at the cloth so he wouldn't drop it. He glanced up at the Phoenix.

One of the few memories he had was driving with his father. A longer trip, across country, some convention he'd attended and brought Law to. A passing truck kicked up a rock that smashed the windscreen into a web. His father had driven with a blanket held up against possible collapse on the passenger side, and made Law sit in the back until they reached a garage. Drove with a towel wrapped around his head, covering everything but the eyes.

This crumpled material in his hand brought all that back.

"Want me to get Shachi?" Law shivering pitched Marco back to ground zero, Doflamingo's venom stripping their bedroom of anything they'd built together.

Law dropped his gaze to the towel again. "Nah, just crawl in." It was hard to see Marco at the moment. His vision was kinda blurry. "Is it okay?" It was his turn to ask. The Whitebeard had seen Law as low as he ever got. Maybe it was too much. Maybe this was one time too many.

Marco had a thing for Law's long lashes — an attribute he only noticed sometimes now, detail lost in familiarity — clumped, flickering up. His face was a few bruises less mottled now. Reductions in anxiety.

He squeezed a shoulder, softly, then walked around to the other side of the bed. Didn't have to be asked twice "Shachi yells at me, you gotta take the blame."

"Of course, 'cept if I black out."

"That likely to happen?"

"Maybe." Law's voice was steady but quiet.

They'd deal with it when they came to it.

Marco slipped out of his shoes, lifted the cover and eased in beside him.
It hurt. It hurt to move, it hurt to have Marco next to him, but he needed it. He rolled toward him like an emerging pupa, IV tubing moving with him. Marco's hand stretched across and stopped the tea-towels from falling to the ground. Misery would snuffle and steal them if they hit the ground. Fuck. No she wouldn't.

Law shut his eyes for a second, opened them, staring at Marco's black eyes. Questioning. Supportive. Was it okay to lift a hand to touch his lover's hair? He didn't know if he had the strength. Would it seem like he wasn't still fucking reeling?

Marco flattened the designs over the lumps their bodies made under the covers, and lifted his hand to that the bruised face. It was a wonder Law could talk considering the damage done to his mouth, nose, cheeks.

"Can't lift my arms very well."

He understood and moved closer and dropped his arm back across him like a twig landing on a pool cover. The now very clean, very bandaged captain. Law's breath was irregular as fuck, but close and safe. Marco's thighs touched the sweats embossed with the Hearts' Jolly Roger.

Law's lids shuttered. What the fuck did he look like? Who'd want to touch him again? *Globus hystericus*. His nasal cavity and trachea was a glob of blood, mucus — of semen and bits of dog and Doffy — of that fucker's fingers, though it all must've left him now, right? He dry retched. He couldn't feel pain in his shins, but that could just be whatever Shachi and Penguin were pumping him full of.

"Hey." Marco's arm — Law felt the flame resting on his back. The warmth, the power, the sun. Someone touching him without wanting to fuck him, he prayed.

*Globus hystericus* — now renamed *Globus pharyngeus* in medical circles — caused by previously placed objects, stress, trauma. He'd scan himself when he could to make sure all foreign entities were well gone. He coughed. Eyes open. Tentatively put his tongue over his teeth, wetting his cut lips. Inability to produce enough saliva caused lumps in the throat too.

Marco's gaze had not dropped from Law's face. "You've been to Hell."

Not the first time. Law lifted a hand and it rested lightly, almost uselessly, awkwardly on Marco's arm. His wrists were bandaged.

"My muscles atrophied a little. I'll get their use back." What do you think of me, Marco the Phoenix? Couldn't protect the dog, and let myself be consumed, fucked like a windsock just waiting for a breeze to fill it out. Any old breeze would do, but he only attracted category five fucking hurricanes. It all hurt. Category one through to category five. He couldn't ask

"For what it's worth," Marco said quietly against that shattered or chipped cheekbone, "You're still my weird-as-fuck pirate, Law."

He didn't think Law had the strength, but the dig of his nails into his own unmarked skin was the kind of pain they both needed to feel now. His hand slipped like Misery trying to find balance on river soaked rocks. Marco closed his eyes and if Law had not looked across he wouldn't have noticed the moisture.

"Don't, Marco." Law couldn't push against his chest. His palm flapped and fell like a ball pitched into the dirt.
"Don't apologise," Marco said, knowing the things Law said sorry for were things he should never have to say sorry for.

"You neither, eh?" Law's flop-limbed hand slapped against Marco's face with a lot less gentleness than he intended.

Marco figured it was safer to stay awake. He took the hand in his own and touched his lips to the inside wrist, the bandage. Even that created a tingle of pain if he went by the pulses skittering over Law's eyes. "You beating me up now? Once a Pirate . . ."

"Can I say sorry for that?"

Marco laughed. "Yeah."

"Wanted to be gentle and caring and shit."

"Glad to see your body still knows you're a bruiser, even if your head hasn't quite caught up."

"Don't want to bruise you, Marco. And you know, bruiser? Don't insult me. Calculating assassin. Get the praise right."

Marco laughed. There was a lot more to Law than brute force. However, you could pretty violence up all you liked, but it was still violence. "Can you roll onto your back?"

Law was tired as fuck. "You can't lie on top of me. Can't take it." Why would Marco suggest it? But he let his body fall back.

Marco still had Law's hand. "I'm not stupid, and no. Why would I do that? Just wanted to look at designs with you."

"Designs?" He tipped his chin so he was looking down at his torso, but couldn't really see the sweats under the blankets. "You've seen my crew's Jolly Roger more than once."

"Submarines and lighthouses."

Law willed one of his clumsy hands to pick up one of the towels. He glanced back at Marco. I'm allowed to be this? Can be defined by this? Could expect Marco to stay there, even though he was a mess? To stay there, and do nothing, even though he couldn't fight him off?

Not Doffy, Law. He's not Joker.

"Minks and tanuki."

You're still this, Marco thought at the lost, hopeful, unsure expression colouring his partner's face. You can be as innocuous and average as you want to be now.

Law placed the garish windmills and submarines over his face, spoke into it, a bit like being wrapped up in that blanket Doffy had trapped him in. "I just spent the night getting fucked like a cat yowling up the alley and you want to talk tea-towels?"

Marco was staring at Bepo and Chopper. He wished Law was too.

"We can talk about that too, if you want."

Law scrunched up the cloth on his face. He'd regret that later. Couldn't display them if they were creased, and he always bitched about ironing.
"Your breath over my shoulder helps me fall asleep. Wanna feel whatever the fuck normal is. Just a little."

"Tea-towels?"

"Can't hold me."

"Didn't know if you'd want to be held, Law."

"You haven't Great-Aunt-zoned me?" Too broken to be anything but the spinster aunt wheeled out at family get togethers. Then again, he wouldn't mind being Doctor Kureha. Nothing powdered Great Aunt about her.

"I'm not the one who collects tea-towels. And can't you be my favourite great aunt, partner, and friend? Had no idea whether you'd want to be touched of not. Whether you wanted anyone close to you."

"Had no idea whether you'd want to even look at me," Law said.

Marco had his arm across Law. He was too hurt to properly hold him, but Marco was there, right next to him.

"Not to fuck me, mind you. Had enough of that until Luffy decides he hates meat."

"Damn."

"Just—"

"Yeah, it's okay, Law. Though I'm going to be setting the Hare Krishna on the pirate king once you're healed."

Chapter End Notes

Couldn't see the year out leaving Marco as a villain. Though he is if you're following the dark thread. Here they are being tender and shit, the way I like them best.

Flensing. In the Repossession verse, Law was branded twice and flensed himself twice. The original idea of the brand and the flensing came from Worth (in my bookmarks).

The tea-towels and their importance are explored in chapter 31 of Repossession.

Again, whether this develops further, I just don't know. Hope you've got something out of what you've read so far if you got this far. Early Happy New Year. Hope 2019 treats you right.
Law sat on the wooden ledge following the curve of the bay window, shaving the hair off a kiwi fruit with a scalpel. He drew the knife toward him, not away, tuning his fine motor skills. Robin's island had a cooler clime than Marco and Law's. He wore a loose grey round neck sweater, jeans that Robin rarely saw him in when she visited, and toe socks. With Hearts Crew Jolly Rogers on each digit. His nails were clear of polish.

He sat with his back to a window side panel, one leg in a half lotus, the other dangling to the floor. The socks were a bit over-the-top for Law, who usually let one symbol at a time do the talking per body part, symmetry and his own embroidered shirts aside, and she almost laughed at him, but they were from Bepo. He'd dressed Law in a similar pair after the Hearts and Chopper had given him a thorough, fully anaesthetised check-up. Chopper had called in the Hearts. They all worked together in Law's clinics, after all. Penguin, Shachi and the Mink had clad him head to toe in Heart insignia. The comfortable sweats they'd eased him into, lifting his limp, mottled body, was crazy with Law's Jolly Roger.

Robin was still proud of her affiliation with the Strawhats so she got it. It was identity too. Law needed to be reminded and reassured of all the roles he played separate to Doflamingo and Marco's damning restrictions. Cora's smile cancelling out his own cancelation at his brother's hand. Cora's smile negating the cancel mark of that brand.

The marks up the back of his neck scabbed at the edges, but he'd been able to use his power and medical knowhow to fix most of his face and heal his ankles after Shachi had patiently pulled out sliver after sliver of exploding collar. Law extracted the deeply embedded pieces, with some pain and a lot of energy, once his powers returned fully.

The light filtered through the trees outside, danced against the window. She could meld with those patterns, but she made sure Law knew she was approaching. She cupped the back of his neck as he turned his head her way.
"Does it hurt?"

Only in memory. Doffy, smoking casually, after fucking him. The arm and the cigarette draped possessively over him, Law's back against him, shaking, shaking, shaking. He lay on the jutte. It was strapped to the side of his lower leg with Doflamingo's strings. Joker's other arm cupped his shoulder.

After each deliberate exhalation, Doflamingo brought the cigarette against Law's skin. Three vertical circles burnt on either side of his vertebrae, six in total. Doffy thumbed each indent. It was amazing how well-aligned they were considering he'd been as stable as a shifting tectonic plate.

He'd cried out. Still had that pain response.

"You like decorating your skin, nah, Law?" Doflamingo's fingers brushed over the new wounds. No need to worry about infection. Law had such a clever power. "Something so primal about the whole thing. Little boys trying to prove they're men." He turned on his back, stubbed the cigarette out on the nightstand, arm stretched across to make sure the smoke didn't drop burning to the floor. He'd freed his other arm from under Law, and cradled his neck.

He rolled back to the middle of the bed. His gigantic knee, thigh, leg, crossing over Law and pulling him near, the jutte still draining everything. It was away from Doflamingo. He just tied that leg down if he didn't want Law to use it. Well out of harm's way.

He kissed the boy's coming of age wounds, sucking on them. Always had a penchant for a little bit of blood, especially the tainted kind, and the kind that had escaped taint, though that was never really possible. The taint with taint. Described Law with and to a T. The marring wouldn't hurt him. Would just teach him. Shooting your father and decapitating him was something you could write home about. When a boy took down a man which one was the adult? Definitely not the one under him.

He pushed against him of course. Who wouldn't? And Law was so broken all he could do was stare across the room at the tree shadows sweeping the wall.

Law shook his head and returned to the task. He'd almost cut himself. Sure he could fix it if he sliced off his fingers, but he'd prefer not to have to.

"Going to eat that after you finish?"

Law nodded this time, no smile, but not unhappy. At that moment. "It's not breadfruit."

Robin laughed, sat next to him. He dropped his leg, moved over, and let her. There wasn't much she could say. She'd found him buried in the deepest, darkest room of the bowels of the Sunny once, the darkness within her friend needing a congruent space to seep into. Marco used to speak of Law's hidey-hole on the Red Force. Sub-cellars. They were fine, serving the purpose of letting Law relax into his pain. The only issue was if the darkness switchbacked in and it often did.

He wouldn't be using a scalpel if he didn't feel threatened, if he wasn't thinking about vengeance. Even if it was his stock in trade. They could both protect him as well as they could but they couldn't guarantee his safety.

Law liked that Robin was one of the few he could just sit with. If he walked away, she wouldn't take it personally, though she'd call him out for rudeness. She wasn't sure where he was going ultimately, but they traced the same paths of childhood loss. He put down the fruit — hairless but
still with its skin — and the knife to his side. Rested his head against the window pane, Adam's apple rising with a swallow.

He had none of his talisman. They'd helped with healing in the past, but now the healers had turned on the patient. Luffy, not deliberately, but in allowing that barbaric statute to still exist left Law vulnerable. The pirate king argued that the archaic notion of slavery, if he actually knew the definition of either of those words, meant that no-one would ever enforce it again.

Fat lot of good that defence had been. Law didn't have the legal system on his side, even if he had people in the system who'd support him.

Marco. That had been deliberate. He missed the feel between his fingers of the agate Luffy had given him, and the basalt Marco had brought back for him. Maybe he'd select a piece of geological matter for himself to carry around like a folly in his pocket. In the meantime he pressed his finger pads hard against his nails. The scrappy and the whole. It settled him.

"You got everything you need?"

"Nah."

"Some things left at the house?"

Law nodded.

"Contacted you?"

Law sat with his eyes closed, the sun warming his face.

"Left my phone behind." Hadn't wanted to be tracked. It had pictures of Misery on it, but then Robin had pictures too. The other photos he couldn't bear to see.

"Contacted you?" Law asked, looked her way.

Robin shook her head now. Law hoped Marco was going to scratch his actions up to some kind of nightmare impulse fired on by Doflamingo's own refusal to separate right from wrong. Law wanted him to leave him the fuck alone. But god forbid anything was that easy in his life.

"What do you need?"

Clinical. Unlived in. Unloved. All affection stripped. The floor too. Industrial strength chemicals had stained the hardwood in all the wrong ways, and left a mark near where Robin knew Misery slept; that ghosted her into permanence and out of existence.

Eyes, hands. Ears, nose. This place was drained of personality, despite the neatly made bed — nurses' corners. Law and Marco were always good about those. So many years at sea. There'd been a comfortable, tousled cleanliness to the rest of the house whenever anyone visited, but now it was soldier-barrack-sterile. The warm notes of cooking, essential oils, clothes waiting to be washed, had been erased. She guessed traces of Doflamingo, Law, Misery and Marco himself too had been scrubbed away.
It didn't mean a thing. She listened. Looked. Waited for Marco's tread. Was waiting for Misery's barrelling energy too, she realised, and Law's easy lope as the two came in from a walk, looping the leash over the back of the door, but Law was right beside her now and Misery was no more.

"No-one's home."

"Mmm."

"Seems like maybe no-one's been home for a while."

Law didn't let his concentration blip but took it in. Wondered if Marco was sleeping in the spare room. If he'd taken up with Vista and Izou, personally confirming all of Izou's biases about him.

"Secateurs are in the drawer in the kitchen, the towels are just held up by tacks. Get the towels first and you can use them to carry the other things."

"Or I could grab a bag."

"That too."

Law directed her to the carry bags near the sink, and then to the wall displaying the towels honouring those important in either of their lives, celebrating the various nuptials, coronations, tournaments won, and those made as fundraisers for the clinics he ran.

Bepo's Wedding, Tashigi and Smoker, Bepo being the stand-up guy (Mink) he was; he needed all of those dishcloths. Shanks' and Benn's anniversary towel featuring one hundred red Buggy noses.

"There's one of your guardian."

Law wavered. Marco had commissioned it for him. Same as the photos in the tatami room on their small altar of remembrance. The Phoenix had tracked down Sengoku to get those for him despite having no love lost for the ex-admiral.

"Take it. And the photos of my family near the butsudan in the next room." He knew that meant leaving behind photos of Ace and Whitebeard. He had no need for them, though Luffy might like the one of his brother.

Robin, arms crossed in her own house, focusing next to Law, directed her devil fruit limbs to quickly unpin the towels from the wall and to throw them into the bag. She moved to the tatami room. She had often come to the house and found Law or Marco lighting incense or cleaning the small altar, leaving tiny offerings for their lost ones. It was a peaceful space, but the tatami was ripped now, the reeds exposed and fraying, and the walls stained red. Law or Misery? The bleach hadn't taken hold here.

"Doflamingo kicked the table over, so the photos might be gone or underneath it."

It was upright, but not clean.

"Did he tear them up?"

"No." Doffy was more interested in having him eat the pages of the medical dictionary at that time if he could rely on his memory at all. It had more blackouts than power lines hemmed in by trees.

The frames were splintered, the glass shattered, pictures ripped out, a tear down the middle of them and then once more. A pigtail, a stethoscope, grey eyes.
"Do you want the pieces?"

"How many?"

"You'll be able to tape them." Maybe Usopp could do something, or Franky. Shachi was really good with his hands, the Hearts' tattooist.

Law nodded, eyes glazed.

Robin picked up the frames, shook out the glass, removed the slashed photos and put them next to the towels.

She had great respect for both Whitebeard and Fire Fist, but she tipped the photos over without telling Law, fractured the glass with a flick of her fingers, and made sure the exposed paper was near some of the shards. Maybe the ghost dog had run through the house and her overenthusiastic tail knocked them off-balance.

"What's next?"

"The secateurs. Can you go to the yard?"

Robin glanced at Law in her house. His powers took his stamina, but also took some time to drain him. He'd fought hard against Doflamingo at both Green Bit and Dressrosa before he couldn't use them anymore, and it was the loss of an arm, being bounced around by Trebol and Doflamingo, and having a few bullets pumped into his body double, that wiped him out the second time. But, he'd warned them of its limitations. Law never pretended to be something he wasn't.

Across the years he'd increased in strength. Probably from travelling and training with Shanks and Benn. His Room extended from Robin's to his own island. Not an easy feat. Would it cut his life even shorter? Then again, what didn't? The sooner she was out of there the better. He knew if someone attacked one of her extra appendages it hurt. If Marco had been home they would have tried another day. He wouldn't let her get trapped.

"Clip the smaller sprouts that grow between the main branches and main stem. Get about ten. Sever them from the base of the plant, and snip close to the main stem."

"Aye, aye."

Once outside, her extra hands readied the gardening shears. It was a sunny day, as usual on that island, the soil below the plants dark with earth-worm burrowed goodness. A latch caught. The gate swung open. Robin's eyes flattened into the wall, her arms and the secateurs hidden under the leafy shrubbery of Law's tomato plants. Her fingers folded over the red handles.

They hadn't had a chance to grab any clothes, but the closets and drawers had been bare. She looked into the garden. A scorched earth policy had burned a hole into the centre of the yard. She recognised a scrap of one of Law's shirts. The ones he embroidered symbols into. Phoenixes. Hearts. Letters. Black on black. Secret messages for those who knew him best. Time to cut losses on that one.

Marco didn't look good; bleary-eyed, even more scraggly-chinned than usual, wearing an old man's vest-tank top, cut-offs spotted with bleach, and his sandals, one unbuckled, the other pushed down at the back. Sloppy. He went to the bar like that? She couldn't imagine it.

Unpredictable? Perhaps. But it also meant he wasn't finely in tune. From the little Law had told her, he'd gone through hell watching his partner get fucked up. Not being able to save Misery
tipped him into Doflamingo psychopathy. Law had sketched facts, not made excuses.

Marco would always be a level above her, though combined with the ope-ope mi, they had some strength.

The Whitebeard scratched his groin, slid open the back door with an unsure hand, looked around the yard and at the entrance for someone, something. His face clouded when no-one came, when the house remained silent. The door closed gently behind him.

Robin didn't know if he'd notice the missing tea-towels, the turned photographs, the reclaimed vandalised snaps, sooner rather than later.

"Robin?"

"He's there." She spoke through the side of his mouth. "Gone inside. He doesn't look good. I'll grab the cuttings then get outta there."

"Mmm. Don't let him touch you." He didn't look good. In what way?

"You can always disassemble him."

"You'd have to direct me. You can break his neck."

"No point when I'm in one of your Rooms."

"True."

His Room didn't neutralise anyone's power. It just gave him the chance to operate on them at all levels of meaning.

Robin pruned the vine as Law had instructed, correctly she hoped. Threw the cuttings and the shears into the bag. She sure as hell didn't have any as fancy if Law was going to play Mr. green thumbs at her house.

The door rolled back. Marco stepped into the yard again, speaking on the new model Den Den Mushi, his words a blur. His gaze raked the yard and landed on the tomato bush. She froze. The bag was olive green and blended in, and Marco wouldn't be looking for it, expecting it. Unless he sensed something. She gripped the red handles jutting out from the bag, making sure they were obscured.

He took one step, two, the grass dry, puffs of dirt rising as he walked toward the cluster of plants. Law stared at Robin, her face grim, not at all in the room with him. He readied his hand, his words, to help her out if needed. She flexed her fingers under the bushes as Marco's own hand stretched across. Ready. Marco snapped off a leaf and smelt it. Pulled a face, and threw it to the ground, wiping the sap on his clothes, grinding it into the dirt with his shoe.

"When?" The person on the other end of the Den Den grabbed his attention. Loud.

"Next week." Marco turned from the plant and walked up the small hillock the garden swept to, peering into their wood fired oven as he went. Checking the flues, the grills. He plopped onto the bench — he, Law and Robin had shared many conversations there — his back to the house.

A rustling as quiet as the sea breeze drifting over their house lifted the leaves of the tomato plant. A cutting from Robin's own garden, a pruning from an over-zealous zucchini plot, replaced the bag. Let that grow, thought Law. Propagate and prosper. Marco hated fucking zucchini.
*Fwoomp.* The bag landed on the floor in front of them, Bepo and Mina's wedding towel slipping out. Robin lowered her arms, Law his Room, and both leant into the other, Law happy to see the smiling face of his navigator. The zucchini sucker was already conversing with its fecund friends on Law's old island.

Marco stood from the bench, strode back to the house, staring again at the tomato plants. He'd have to uproot those fuckers too. He'd expunged Law from most of their home, but something always remained. And how endearing he'd found it that the Heart had loved the smell of crushed tomato leaves. The small things that sustained him and seemed to keep him human when he should have been a monster.

That hid he was a monster in human form.

Chapter End Notes

**Thanks for reading.** All feedback is appreciated.

Oh, wee bit of background. After escaping from Doflamingo, second time around, in the *Repossession* world, Law sailed with the Red Force, under their protection. The Whitebeards intermittently sailed with them too, which is where Law and Marco originally hooked up.

The tea-towels and their importance are explored in chapter 31 of *Repossession.*
Chapter Summary

Healing, Hurting, Hurtling — Light Marco 3

Chapter Notes

Continues from chapter seven.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Light Marco 3

"No more slaves for anyone, okay?"

Benn packed up the papers.

"It's not that simple, Luffy."

"Who's the judge? I'll go kick his arse."

"Again, not that simple, but Kizaru. How could you let him retain that power?"

"Fujitora felt sorry for him."

oOOo

"It's not okay, Marco, using my past to justify this shit." Law was pissing in the wind. Doflamingo didn't need an excuse. Law just needed to convince himself. Misery died because of him, like the pup back in the Family compound all those years ago, but if this was just deserts it was as karmically aligned as a car running on a shredded tyre. Law wore everyone's shit while Doflamingo ponced around in designer loafers, flashing his thousand-watt smile.

Marco lightly kissed that one unbruised patch of skin. He knew, he knew. Guessed Law needed to vent. The clumsy brush of Law's lips against his hair settled him beyond everything raining down on their heads, maybe it'd be all right, but the gracelessness should've given him warning. He looked up, more closely, and Law's lips were as grazed and chewed upon as the rest of him. No wonder.

"How in God's name am I meant to have at those?"

You don't, Law thought. Didn't stop Doflamingo, Law thought. He hadn't strung them open for his celestial pleasure, Law thought, this time. There was that.
"What are you? Thirteen?"

"Shh," Marco said, guessing at the shadows gliding across Law's face, ignoring the grimace trying to pass itself off as a smile. He put his hand again to where it seemed there was less hurt, the lone patch on his torso. He avoided the raised scars around Law's mouth from past abuse. He brushed Law's flesh with his fingers, the Heart captain's tremors and warmth pressing against Marco's skin.

"Your crew are worried about me sliding into emotional quicksand. Just about where you should be at the moment."

Law's pores absorbed Marco's breath like sun into the seashore. "Believe me, I'm knee deep."

"Better than up to your neck," Marco said.

"It is quicksand."

That deserved a mirrored grimace-smile. Marco blew a raspberry against that spot. An unsteady Franky-like hand thumped his head. Marco identified it as a caress. A plus for effort. C minus for execution. Law wished he could do more. That he had more unbruised skin.

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Through the night Law had woken often, each layer of skin a blanket of fury, but it wasn't just pain. He didn't want to be caught sleeping. He'd shocked himself awake every hour or so. The minute he felt himself go under he dragged himself to consciousness. He hadn't sensed that feathered bastard scoping their house, stepping into their room. If he had, this wouldn't have happened.

He'd reassured himself each time he woke — breath bottlenecked — that the body next to his was Marco's. That his own hands — painful, swollen, and sluggish — were free to move. The push of the sleeping Phoenix's body against his own helped, it really did. Once he'd convinced himself it was the Phoenix.

"It's okay, Penguin." Marco and Law had been partners for years, so Law knew Penguin's concern stemmed from the medical not the proprietary.

Penguin turned his attention to the blond. "Marco, we need to check him, disinfect, change his bandages. He's cut everywhere."

As if he hadn't been there.

"I want to help."

"I wouldn't recommend it."

Law closed his eyes. "He can handle it."

"Captain," Penguin said quietly. "Law."

"He saw the causation," he said thickly.

"Knowing and seeing the effects are two different things." Penguin stepped further into the room, dumped an armload of bandages, ointments, syringes and blister packs on the side table.
Law shrugged, as much as he could in his condition. Marco had already seen his arse dragged across the carpet like a dog scratching at worms. Seen him at his most beaten and vulnerable. Mindfucked too. Now, at least he was recuperating. Recovering. At least Marco was still there. He hadn't counted on it.

"He used haki, Doflamingo did," Penguin said.

"Smart mouth," Law said, eyes still shut. "Can't stop myself sometimes. Never a good idea."

Marco cupped the back of Law's neck, covering the cigarette burns. His fingers pushing into his hair, massaging his skull. "I helped operate, Penguin. Treated the damage from the assaults."

Law would've turned quickly if he could've, read his partner's face. But his body pitched an internal Molotov cocktail if he even tried to lift a finger, so he remained where he was, his back to Marco, relishing his touch. It made sense that he'd worked on him. Better Marco than Bepo.

Penguin knew. He'd had to leave the room. He'd done as much as he could, but Marco wanted to protect Law — from his crew's judgement, from Law's own judgement — and Penguin hadn't known if he could stop himself from breaking down. If he could have kept a steady hand. That fucking brand.

"Bepo and Jean Bart stood guard."

Law groaned.

Penguin shrugged, and walked to the end of the bed. "You know they care for you, Captain." He had a hold of one of Law's toes. "Roll over, on your back."

It was easy to flop on his back. Harder to rise from it. Yah. He knew they cared. He didn't know what kind of captain he was though.

"Can you feel that?"

"A little," Law said. Marco sat up. Penguin had pulled the sheet back, and the Whitebeard spied the blood against the bandages, round like the ruts in Law's ankles from being fettered. From being tied to the bed.

"Boss, what if while Marco's here we get you walking a bit, get the circulation flowing. Then we can change everything."

"Good idea." He would have bled more into the bandages from the activity then, so it would work.

Marco inhaled. Not all of the blood was desiccated.

"Doflamingo's strings. He tied him down. They can cut a building in two if he wants." Penguin acting as if Marco didn't know Law's stories. His demons. As if he hadn't freed him from those restraints. Or maybe it was just an observance. Trying to fix the reprehensible in some definite plane. Maybe he hadn't seen Joker in action.

"Thought I'd leave that room amputated if I was going to leave at all."

Their room.

"Stop. You with your black humour."

"He's probably got a kink for fucking amputees."
"Stop." Marco looked down at that bust up face. He curled his thumb and forefinger into a monocle, placed them around Law's puffed up eye-socket and tried to see if he could read his expression beyond the swelling.

That tic at the side of his mouth. Law's lemon-puckered smile. Through all that damage. He swatted Marco's hand away with the subtlety of Bepo trying to pull up the zipper on his jumpsuit.

"Hah." Marco lifted his fingers.

"Fucking hurts."

"Sorry." But Marco felt the grapple of Law's hand against his own before it fell to the bedcover.

Penguin stood to the side of Law. "Can you sit up?"

"Why didn't you ask me that when I was on my side?" Law griped. He pushed himself up on elbows that didn't quite work. Slipped back down to the bed before flipping himself to the left and almost toppling to the floor. He regained some kind of balance as he sat at an angle, clutching the sheets and sucking in air over his teeth to stop from yelling as he pulled himself up.

"As elegant as a beached whale, my love."

"Yeah, fuck off."

Penguin's smile was quick and gone by the time Law looked up. He leant over one side of his captain, and indicated to Marco that he go on the other.

"It's gonna hurt, boss."

"Like a motherfucker," Law spat.

They heaved him out of bed, his deadweight arms over their shoulders, their hands supporting his jellyfish back. He let out a bark, and where there'd been a tremor before, there was now a violent shake.

"C'mon boss, lift your leg."

Law tried. A few millimetres off the ground.

"And the other one."

Likewise.

They shuffled around the room, no more than a metre or two, Law's breath ragged. Penguin and Marco returned him to the bed.

"Okay, good job. You'll be mobile in no time."

Especially once he flared up his Room.

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By the time Marco returned to pick up a few things, Smoker's clean-up crew had scrubbed the house to within an inch of its now very sterile life. Offensive materials were stripped and taken as
evidence, against animal cruelty at the least. Law had no faith in the legal process working in his favour and wasn't pursuing any official way of seeking recompense.

Law didn't know Marco'd returned to their house. He'd have insisted on being stoic and shit and coming along, and that might be fine soon, but the Phoenix knew he wasn't ready for it yet. He and Penguin had done intensive physio with him the first few days, and then his fruit kicked in, and his healing, his mobility, increased. They'd both been relieved.

Furniture still in one piece had been set right, and the splintered and broken was piled into a neat stack in the corner in case they wanted to salvage it. Marco hadn't been there for any of the struggle that fractured wood, but the bruises and scrapes pebbling Law's body showed that he and the furniture had been horrifically intimate.

Marco took down the towels from the wall. There was blood streaking Chopper's face, but they'd find a way to lift it. In the tatami room the photographs hadn't been redisplayed the way he and Law liked, but they were whole — just a cracked frame and broken glass or two. He shook out the shards like granules of sugar. Maybe because Doflamingo hadn't recognised Law's relatives, had been too focused on Law, they'd been left well enough alone.

The towel with Corazon's features was also intact, and Marco thought it was just as well Sengoku hadn't given them that photo he'd promised.

The sheets of their bed had been removed but not replaced. Marco looked down at the bare mattress, coffee stains from where Law always took his drink to bed, and looked across at the chemicals that bleached Misery's pain into the floor. He packed clothes and toiletries for both himself and his partner, then he sat on the mattress, elbow on his knee, chin in his hand, trying not to hear the squeaking of the springs as Law got fucked by Doflamingo.

Marco hadn't wanted Law to come, but he hadn't wanted to go alone, and Izou leant against the bedroom door, puffing on a cheroot. He didn't ask what unfolded, though thanks to the vet, everyone knew what happened to the dog. That Hearts guy had some bad fucking luck. Was bad news. Though, as much as he didn't like Law, he knew he wouldn't have deliberately hurt Misery. The two ugly fuckers were ridiculously attached. Had been.

He followed Marco into the bedroom and sat beside him on the bed. "You okay, sweetheart?"

Marco looked over. He knew Law was tortured with what he did, what was done to him, and what he failed to stop. Who could stop it? But he'd escaped and gone back, right? He'd gone right back for more.

"It's not his fault, Izou, this shit."

For Misery. He'd gone back. For the dog.

Izou took a drag. Exhaled. Law hated smoke in the house. "Yeah, I know." He pulled Oyaji's righthand man to him "Doesn't make it hurt any less though."

Why Marco had got involved with this magnet for misfortune after the joy Ace brought into their worlds he didn't know. He didn't like Law and he'd made it known. At the same time, Marco and he were good for one another, and Law was loyal, he saw that. There was respect and support from the both of them. But then he'd freaking disappear for swathes of time. And Izou reassessed the good for him part of the statement at those times.

Supportive but selfish, and here was Izou cradling Marco's head on his shoulder because Law was
"You had to bury a dog recently." Doflamingo crossed the narrow space of the veterinarian's clinic, the bell tinkling behind him, the dulled smell of scoured urine and operations lingering, his feathers and concern owning the place. He picked out a name card from the holder on the counter, pretended to read. "Mister Moonbeam."

"Some folk shouldn't be left free to roam the world," the vet, Moonbeam, muttered without looking up, trying to balance the books and figure out his schedule for the following day.

Doflamingo walked his fingers along the counter. "Ah, we're talking about the same reprobate?"

The vet's pen pressed into the paper extra hard. "To call him an animal is to insult the kingdom."

Doflamingo examined the feathers on one arm of his coat and then the other. He'd had it cleaned. Pesky Law. Spilling his blood all over it.

"He's not free really. The old laws never changed. He's a slave, did you know?"

The vet still didn't look up to Doflamingo's unhurried grin.

"He'll always be my slave. Was on loan to Marco. That blond kid he shacks up with? On loan for a while, a poor decision. See where that led? Loose cannons should be securely tucked back into bed where they can cause no harm." And by bed, Doflamingo meant a cell floor or the sumptuous folds of his own inner chambers. Law could service and be of service in either location. "I'm sure you agree."

"That guy," spat the vet. "Is he rotting in jail?"

"Oh, he's been punished, never mind that." Doflamingo leant over the counter and turned a few pages of the ledger. The vet pulled it out of his reach. Who was this guy? Had he treated any of his pets? Rich enough to own someone? A celestial dragon?

"He should be locked up. What if he does it to someone else? To some other creature?"

"I doubt it. Show Law the right measure of discipline and he's very malleable. Always a bit too rebellious for his own good though. Only a few can successfully manage his rehabilitation."

The vet glanced at the door, then in the direction of the animals out back, safely caged awaiting tomorrow's surgeries. Unconvinced.

"He's a slave. He's got a set role."

The vet returned his gaze to Doflamingo, took that in. What did it have to do—? No, he disagreed—. But. Then again.

"You could bring charges against him as a citizen for having disrupted his betters."

"He murdered his betters."

"I must say I am disappointed my property has wilfully and maliciously damaged a life entrusted to him. But we can't trust in property, in the deaf and dumb, to take care of their own kind. Rogue
males are generally put down, right?"

The vet closed the ledger and shrank back a little. This guy was huge. "They're a threat to others. Yes."

"But given the right keeper they can be retained. Possibly a more humane solution for the imbalanced soul."

The vet sighed. "I see so many dogs needing euthanising because their owners thought they could control the savage beast." And he saw so many dogs made savage by beastly owners, but there was a limit. Some mutts were too far gone to ever regain a loving nature, even if treated right.

"A literal case of biting the hand that feeds it I'm sure." Doflamingo flicked over the panels of the calendar. A different kitten for every month. "Or starves it." He turned his head the vet's way.

"Mister Moonbeam, I see that you're passionate about your job and I like that. If we in power are not benevolent toward the vulnerable, who will be?"

The vet had seen cruelty across all social strata, but humans held the ultimate power.

"Why did you come?"

"I wanted to apologise for my errant whore."

The vet startled. Coughed.

"Oh yes. How else do you think he's kept a man as decent as Marco the Phoenix by his side all these years?"

No. But it made sense. Marco was always the more amicable when the vet visited the bar, and obviously the more reliable. It was safer to put some mongrels down.

"He was that kind of slave?"

"It's all he knows, really."

"His clinics?"

"Just a front, I'd say. You've seen what he's capable of."

Or maybe he was on medication? He must have been off his medication, or his pirate and slave tendencies were just too strong ... to do that to a helpless animal. The community only had good things to say about the clinics, but there were a thousand ways to present a respectable face. As a vet, he knew. The rich folks up on the hill just had the money to bury their crimes a whole lot deeper.

Doflamingo crossed the few metres of the tiled reception floor and lowered himself to the bench seat, draping his arms across its back, folding a leg over his knee.

"It's no good relying on Officer Smoker. Law's had his mouth around his cock too many times for the man's judgement not to be impaired. Blown, if you will."

The vet flinched.

"Sorry. Crass, I know. But so is he." Doflamingo raised his shoulders in an oversized shrug. "Slave. Y'know. Whaddya gonna do? He ran away from me when he was younger, and to say he
was the navy's bike — all nudge, nudge, wink, wink of course — is putting it politely. How else did he do so well as a pirate? Scum of the sea?"

The vet opened the ledger again. What were the hours he had to work tomorrow? What procedures did he need?

"It's sad. When they come to you, you want to give them the same rights other folks have. But they don't know how to deal with it sensibly, the freedom. You saw it. They run amok. Takes a certain kind of person to be a slave."

Law was the quieter of the two, the vet recalled, when he entered the bar. When the pirate king and his cronies visited there was always a party, well received by the community in general, but they could be loud. The surgeon was tactile in front of his friends, but still on non-party days he usually rested on the side, circled the periphery. You never knew when a beast would turn.

Doflamingo lowered his leg and leant forward, elbows on his thighs.

"As a community service I intend to approach the registrar and look into getting the master/slave relationship — the natural order of things — reinstated. As said, on the books, I still own him, but he has friends in high places."

That ridiculous monkey. That red haired emperor.

"We'll have to make our case watertight. I don't want anyone else to go through what you went through, what that poor dog had to suffer and, believe me, I rule with a firm but fair hand."

Law had his enemies too.

"I'd be more than happy to stand as a witness, to describe what I saw." That dog had suffered. Fishing wire marks around its muzzle, its throat slashed, gurgling for breath, blood all over Marco.

Doflamingo's smile was something the vet knew not to trust, but he'd need to, for the short term, if it meant bringing justice for that poor helpless mutt.

If he had his own way, the truly rogue males? The vet would tether them. Not waste the kindness of a sedation they didn't afford their victim, despite being a freaking doctor in Trafalgar's case. He'd steady his rifle on his shoulder and shoot them straight between the eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sure this is a confused mess. If it has a semblance of coherency, I thank you all for sticking with it and reading. It's developed a plot too. Probably plot-driven rather than porn-driven from here on in (famous last words).

The tea-towels and their importance are explored in chapter 31 of Repossession, as are the photos.
"They executed the ancients if they killed a cat or dog," Law said, every pop and bubble of cadence and spirit dulled like a rolling pin over pastry.

Smoker looked across at him, sitting at Robin's table, that power of his having removed all hurt except that skulking behind his eyes. It had been a bedmate of theirs in the past. It was back. Slick like oil on the water.

He wondered if Law's tongue still bore the scar of Doflamingo's strings from back when. The papillae sliced and bleeding like a scored mango, Law unable to speak. No wonder he was quiet. Utterances were costly. Had that attack killed his taste buds?

"In some lands they did. Others eat them. Good source of protein." Not that Smoker had tried. As far as he knew. He relied on the goodwill and spirit of the navy cooks.

Law thought of his crew, Bepo. His fellow doctor, Chopper. His omnivorous but mainly carnivorous friend, Luffy. Thought of the Strawhat cook who made feasts from nothing. Chopper had been lucky to survive Sanji's pragmatism.

"They want me arrested." Not a question. Law's hands were neat on the table. So still. Neither menace nor defeat in the inked skin, but a tired, distant measurement of the situation.

"Preferably shot."

Law nodded. The kitchen curtain fluttered, drew his stare. Robin knew Law had a hard time convincing himself he shouldn't take that bullet.

"He's free?"

Smoker looked around for Marco.

"Doflamingo? Still strutting around?" Law clarified.

"Yeah. I'm here to give you a double heads up. He's weaving his way through the system, rucking
all the loopholes." Maybe it was time for Law to call in Sengoku. Garp.

"Meaning?"

"Rumour is he's been seen at the civil registry, waving about old papers featuring a very fresh-faced younger you. Stamped. They're all in order, despite their age. They've never been declared void." Like warrants out for arrest for dodging conscription for wars long gone coming back to bite wannabe leaders in the arse. But Law's stain carried the greater stigma, and the slaves, the ex-slaves bore it. The owners just found new ways to make money, breed power, possess people.

Shanks hadn't given him up. Smoker had got him away. But here he was, facing imprisonment again. Worse than imprisonment. Enslavement. Now his hands moved. He folded one over the other to keep them still. Which captivity had been the worst on a bleached-bones-charnel-house scale?

"Isn't what he does a crime?" Law asked, eyes shadowed under his hat. He didn't know why he asked. He was old enough to have zero expectation that criminals were held accountable.

"Only if you're not regarded as property. Animals have more rights nowadays." Though beasts ultimately fell under the laws of property. "But not slaves."

Slaves had gone the way of the dodo with the new era, but the laws hadn't kept pace. Powerful sentient beings defined who were sentient beings (or not). Even among their own kind.

Law had chewed his bitter way through the skin of being a possession often enough for his outrage to have settled into a quiet, seething, contempt. He'd taken out some of the owners here and there. There was that. Rescued a lot of his crew. Destroyed the mechanics of a few systems.

"And the papers?"

"State clearly that you're owned."

Law's lip curled. There was no ocean wide enough to escape this fucker. He started as one of Robin's hands sat on his shoulder. It squeezed it and rested there like an epaulet spider. He looked back at her leaning against the kitchenette.

"Too lazy to walk a few steps?"

"Less chance of you dismembering something already disembodied."

Law guessed he'd been jumpy lately, but he placed his fingers on her fruit hand before releasing. He turned back to Smoker. Robin withdrew her fruit. Law's touch was warm.

"Aren't we in the age of reason? Or reformation and rationality?"

"You'd think."

"What happens if I get arrested for the dog?"

Smoker took a sip of his tea. Law hadn't touched his. Robin's sat empty on the cabinet beside her. She'd requisitioned the teapot.

"The town's pretty angry. Media's stirred them up. They'd put you in seastone, of course. Don't know that you'd survive that one either Law."

"I'd rather my chances with a two-bit law enforcement office than Joker."
Law wasn't scared of the first, that was clear. And Smoker wasn't sure if he had enough real self-preservation in face of the second. Would his friends be enough? The Heart pirate's own resolve, if he had any left?

"Yah. Maybe we could organise something. But, it's like we've lost all the advantages we've gained. If they invoke the laws of the ancients, you're looking at a death sentence."

"Or maybe a year or so in prison if I get treated like everyone else." Law spoke to the tabletop.

Had he spent more years trying to be free than actually free? If he included the years of captivity — because he was always looking for the chance to escape — then maybe. Yeah. There'd been relief in not being a wanted man during the short-lived period of peace. Doflamingo lying low for a number of years, the more vicious of the marines weeded out. Not Kizaru.

"Hah." Smoker pulled out a toothpick from a packet in his pocket, placed the end between his teeth. Chewing it was a habit picked up since he quit chomping cigars. "The folks up on the hill pay a fine to their favourite charity."

"I've got cash."

"But not the town's goodwill."

He'd had it. Uneasy as it was for any pirate. Everyone now forgetting Law treated them whether they could afford it or not. Forgetting the clinics that were a refuge for victims of assaults. All a front. Remember his past. And as for the captain . . . Doflamingo drip-fed one tidbit of Law's life after the other to the right sources and Morgans of the World Economic Journal swept down upon each delicious morsel. It was old news, but that made it all the more probable.

"Who's the judge?"

"In either case, Kizaru, and you've got three witnesses against you."

Law leant back in his chair, swung Kikoku's tassel once. "Man, Luffy and his posse go out and wipe Akainu off the face of earth and leave Kizaru in the system."

The breeze lifting the valance was just a breeze, Law told himself.

"He just got a promotion."

Law turned to Smoker. "You know he's responsible for my back." He worked to keep his hands flat.

The scarring that disrupted Law's tattoo. Kizaru was responsible for that and more than that. Yeah, Smoker knew. He'd been there, though only as an observer of the pulped bloody aftermath.

"Three?" Law circled back on the conversation. Of course the vet and Doflamingo.

"Marco."

Smoker hadn't thought the ghosts could crowd Law more, but they did. "What'd you do to him, Law?"

It was like Law of old. His gaze was hard, cold and distant, focused again on the window. He exhaled, placed his hands firmly on the table, and stood. He walked to where Robin had given him some space to display his family's photos. A small ornamental table near the doorway sported the
quartered-jagged-white-edged images of his parents and sister.

There was a snap of the dog too. He brought that one back to Smoker. Neither Doflamingo nor Marco had destroyed that one, or the frame. Misery was panting, bull-headed, clumsy. The plain frame they'd picked up from some jumble sale a white anomaly that suited the mismatch of tea towels and tack that decorated their home.

"Killed his best friend." He pushed the frame across the wood. Smoker picked it up. She'd been such a sweetie.

"You were forced to."

That wasn't the half of it. Law glanced over at Smoker and he knew there was a lot that wasn't being said but fucked if he had it in him to say it.

"She's still dead."

He fired up a Room and a pamphlet religious zealots had left in the letterbox spreadeagled in his place. A gateway to the kingdom in the sky. Robin had said she'd already been.

"He'll be in the garden." Robin walked to the table and filled up Smoker's tea, dropped the pamphlet on the table. The man flipped through the ways of redemption.

Robin walked back to the cabinet, filled her own cup, and brought it and the pot to the table. Occupied Law's vacant chair. His tomato plants were coming along, but sometimes he just lay as close to the grass as he could, staring up to the sky. The lack of connection at those times scared her.

"Marco hurt him, Smoker." She pulled out a chair and sat opposite the marine. "I don't know how, but it's serious. And Doflamingo. Well." She sipped her drink, and the smile that had met death many times over wasn't present. "Let me ask him if it's okay for you to talk to Shachi, Penguin or Chopper. If anyone should be shot, it should be Doflamingo, and you know it, and it should've happened a long time ago."

She wondered how the former navy captain was dealing with the underlying rumours of him supporting Law due to past sexual favours. It hadn't been the best relationship from what she could gather, but it had been a relationship, not Law using Smoker to get access to the shichibukai system, and not Smoker taking advantage of a scumbag, because, why not? He was one of the better looking men on the seas. Law couldn't catch a break. Not when Big News Morgans' media was on the case.

Smoker thought Straw-Hat must have held a hell of a lot of sway to not have Fujitora oppose him when he let the supposedly rehabilitated Doflamingo back into the new New World. Law had stated his case twice and when it fell on deaf ears he'd had faint trust that the reformed system would protect him, or his own fruit and strength, combined with Marco's. That he had enough friends he could call on. He couldn't let nightmares control him all the time.

Marco had been more forceful, wanting Doflamingo exiled or the equivalent of a home detention if he was to remain in the general proximity of the island, including on its neighbours. If he wasn't to be executed. And now they were bosom buddies.

If Law survived another imprisonment, or had to be returned to Doflamingo, Smoker knew they'd lose him. Even now, there wasn't much of a flicker to him.

"The neighbour's dog comes over and talks to him. They've got quite the bond," Robin said. "But
his only revenge on Marco so far is replacing tomato cuttings with zucchini shoots." She could have tried to break his neck. Law's abilities were in full swing now, and his intelligence never dulled, though his emotions could — and his confidence sure took a beating at times. Being regarded as less than human did that to you. Then, she'd not even tried to take Sengoku out though Spandine and Spandam had met their own fates.

"Harsh. They never stop propagating."

Smoker and Robin shared a smile over Law's nefarious revenge. Maybe there was more to it.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading
The story of Law’s mutilated tongue is in the second chapter of *Birds of a Feather*
Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

Dark in that it's bad Marco, but this chapter is not explicitly dark in content. Marco does not appear. Continuation from chapter 10 (Dark 4a).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Dark 4b

It was just as well she knew him so well. He smelt of grass, sun and the aftertaste of fear, the sting of anger, and the warmth of protection as the neighbour's two year old dog snuggled into the crook of his arm and rested his snout on his chest. The dog lifted his head and sneezed twice, spraying Robin with canine snot, before lowering his jaw flat onto Law again.

Robin was pushed up against Law's shoulder on the grass. He'd shambled her there as she'd stepped out to hang clothes on the line, deciding to do it herself rather than using her fruit. Now her fruit was busy though, sorting through the pegs, and colour-coding them to the garments. She should've just engaged it in the first place. The work ethic was overrated.

"He's sorry," Law said, scritching the pup's hard head.

Robin looked across at the dog, so at ease on the surgeon's chest, so unaware that there was anything wrong with sneezing all over her.

"No he's not."

Law smiled into the sun.

"And neither are you," she added.

Law loosened his jaw. He couldn't get too warm on this day. As much sun as he soaked up, he needed more.

"Comfortable there, Nico-ya?" He freed his arm from between them, the other loosely on the pup, and folded it around her shoulders. "You find my company distasteful?"

"What would Franky say?" she asked. Law's shirt smelt faintly of cigarettes. He smoked when he was stressed, otherwise he preferred rollies packed with leaf. A mild buzz. On occasion.

"Robo-ya and I are in an open relationship," Law murmured. "I don't think he'd mind."
Relief prickled through her like the lawn pushing against her blouse. He still had it. Could still joke, step beyond everything that the media, Doflamingo, his own psyche, damned him by.

"You gonna survive this one, Flevance?"

Law looked up at the sky. A clear beautiful blue, not a cloud in sight. He could be hopeful on days like this. Doflamingo was all about entrance and show. No clouds to lasso eased air flow. "Yeah."

The dog let out a small growl as Law changed position. He patted its fur absently.

"Smoker's gone?"

"He seemed mighty interested in that religious cult you swapped yourself out with."

"They won't know what hit them."

Robin's fruit hands finished hanging the clothes. She set them to work picking up fallen leaves. Dumped them in the garden bag against the fence. "What're gonna do with those zucchinis Law?"

He ran his tongue along his lower gum behind closed lips. Uni's good work had kept his teeth looking pretty and, more so, healthy. Marco had loosened a few of those.

"Nothing you're dreaming up. Pervert."

Robin's face fell, but then she hadn't known what had gone down between the two, not really.

"All up. The brand. The registry. Are you going to fight?"

"The gift that keeps on giving."

"The brand?"

Law winced. That was the bastard child gift that the returns counter wouldn't accept. "Zucchinis. Giving fruit to someone who hates them isn't punishment enough?"

"Hardly," Robin said. "Marco could always give the zuchs away. And aren't they vegetables?"

Were they? Law had to think.

"There's only so many zucchini slices between friends. He slags me off. The animal activists and those who never liked me rush froth-mouthed to their pitchforks. But he tests the goodwill of the town by foisting one zucchini too many on his patrons, and voila! He transforms from hero to crank."

Robin laughed. "Dastardly."

"And vegetables, fruit, what's the difference?"

"Seeds on the inside or out, Mr. Botany." She lifted her fingers to his warm hand draping her shoulder. Inked fingers slinked through her own. "He almost killed you, Law. Being poorly judged by the town when he's ensured you're a pariah seems light punishment."

He ran his thumb over the mound of her wrist. Didn't answer. Doflamingo had almost killed him. Both men had owned him, still did. He loosened his grip and sat up, looking down at his friend, her dark hair spread over the grass, a spare hand shielding her eyes from the sun.

"What're you doing lounging down there? Didn't you have work to do?"
"Heh."

Since Law was up the dog was too. He wandered with a far too enthusiastic swing of his tail to Robin and licked her cheek. She sprouted a few hands and held the pup's wriggly hips, the appendage shading her forehead dispersing.

"Don't break his ribs."

As if.

"Whaddya call that hold?"

"Soothing the savage beast." She calmed the dog and Law's lap looked as good as any bed to lie in. It clumsily tripped over and lay down again.

"Sleepy, little fella?" The surgeon flicked the ears, velvet like a tanned animal hide, between his fingers. The dog shook his head in a twitchy muddle.

Robin had seen him tease Bepo the same way.

"Guess I'll run."

She sighed.

"Fight?" He didn't know why he was playing for Robin's approval. He glanced her way a second.

"You shouldn't have to."

"Kill?"

"You have to ask?"

Law leaned backwards, his arms behind him. "I'm a doctor. Really hate taking life."

"Seems you're the only one who remembers that."

Law glanced disinterestedly at his upper arms. "Think it's the tatts that do it? Scream serial killer to you?"

"Murderous thug. Sewer rat. Something like that. Yeah."

"Thieving magpie?"

"You're giving magpies a bad name."

"True, they're beautiful birds." He straightened, ran his thumbnail across a bottom incisor. Liked to reassure himself of the thickness, the tactility of being. "Think I should change careers, assassin?"

"You want to be one or you insulting me?"

"Praising, Nico-ya. I only hang out with the best."

"We'll help, you know. Everyone will help."

"And then when Luffy lets them off with a pardon?"

"Don't talk with your mouthful."
Law removed his thumb, repeated himself. Wiped his hand on his jeans leg.

Ah yeah, maybe not everyone could be redeemed, she thought.

"Legal process?" Law asked.

"Benn?"

"There's few better."

Clutched. Law only imagined that word when he removed hearts and when he'd seen Robin use the technique to break necks. Twinge. Was twinge a better word? Something below the sternum twinged. Benn's cigarette shroud, swaggering flintlock, and easy confidence. His skyrocket intellect. His confidence in Law. He'd been skirting the idea of contacting him.

"Shanks and Benn helped out before." Not that he wanted to drag himself through the cesspit of memory he'd fled to find protection.

Robin knew. They'd dropped him off. Delivered him. "Law."

"Mmm?" His back was sore. He tipped to his side, head on his elbow, spilling the dog onto the lawn again. It scratched at the ground and ambled next door, back home, tail lazily wagging. Law patted at the dust kicked onto his thigh.

"Remember at Punk Hazard, Caesar squeezing your heart and..."

"Hurt like a motherfucker."

"But you survived it. Pretty easily."

"Hah. You shoulda seen the after-party with Vergo. If Smoker hadn't returned it dunno how things would've gone."

"But you tackled all that, you did all that, your art installation, screwing with Smoker's crew, screwing with our crew, taking on Vergo, without a freaking heart. You sliced up those yeti monsters, got us out of that cage. And it was hollow in here." She tapped her own chest.

"You getting metaphorical on me?"

"You and Zoro are the gold medalists of ennui, we get that. But neither of you are lacking here." She thumped her chest again.

"Neither Zoro nor I are anywhere near as well-endowed." Law rolled onto his back again.

"Fool. You been hanging out with Sanji and Brook?"

"Those nosebleeds of his are fascinating." He placed his hand on his body and felt the steady bada-boom behind his bazoomless chest. "There are limits to my powers, but yeah, they're pretty awesome."

"Fight them. Whichever way. Nowadays it doesn't have to be blood and guts. Don't let them get away with it. Don't let them libel you as a wing-plucking mouth-breather."

Law couldn't hide the pain from losing Misery, from being the agent that caused her demise. The pup that had rested beside him earlier had no clue or it wouldn't have come anywhere near him.
"Call Benn."

Chapter End Notes

Yah, it's a short chapter. There's one to follow which will include light Marco. That's fairly short too, and complements this one, so I'll post it soon. Thanks for reading. All feedback is appreciated.
Light Marco 4a - Benn

Chapter Summary

Law, Marco, Benn.

Chapter Notes

There you go, a quick good Marco chapter as promised. Chapter 11 and 12 posted within a day of one another. Follows Light Marco 3.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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Light Marco - 4a

Benn suited up was a good Benn. Capes may have been laid aside, but he could pull off a cravat in the way he could carry a paisley swirled cloak.

"You guys know any colour other than black?"

Marco looked down at his short sleeved top, his three quarter pants. They didn't wear them in any kind of mourning.

"Law's a messy eater."

Both men pulled out the chairs opposite Benn's desk, glided into their seats.

"I am," Law said. "And Marco's just lazy and looks damned good in the colour."

Benn gave either man the once over. They both looked good, Law's gold a chicanery glint under the shade. His skin was clear, apart from the tatts.

"Maybe if you sported a few more bruises, Law, you might win the town over a little more."

"Peskly fruit to have, right, Benn? All the hurt's on the inside."

"Depends on whether you want to woo or wound."

"Want to escape collecting any more wounds." He draped one leg over the other, shook out his trouser leg. It was only because of his fruit, the skill of his crew and Marco, that he could do this.

"He's got quite the collection, Benn. Forget his tea towels, the formaldehyde organs in jars, his coins. Law's pitted skin is the rarest of hues and the most spectacular of fireworks."

"They're pretty as they heal." Law lifted the sleeve of his shirt to show off a beauty. Some hand grip or blunt object. Not everything had faded.
Benn let them have their throwaway sass. The rangey light almost altering the colour of Law's eyes let him know sepsis of the psyche was quietly doing its work.

"But the most attractive design of all is seared into my bottom. A veritable English country garden on my gluteus maximus. Left cheek."

That Law worked not to hold the chair arm tightly wasn't lost on Marco. The Whitebeard sat back, a crafted look of disinterest. Law didn't want to be treated like bone china. "A rose bloom of…"

"…ownership." Law's gaze scattered to Marco, back to Benn. The bravado gone. "Can't even fucking see it properly. Have to take Marco's word for it."

He'd stood in front of a full length mirror, naked, head turned over his shoulder trying to view the full reflection of his back. He took in as much as he needed to. His skin Doflamingo's fucking rawhide.

"It's prettier than his usual design, but clashes horribly with my tatts." Law's hands were folded under his armpits.

"It's inhumane, Law." Benn tamped down a flare of anger.

Law held Benn's eye a bit longer than was polite. He wasn't going to slip.

"I'm not human, Benn, by legislation. I'm goods, a beast."

Benn was sure the hands were crushed in order to stop a shake. "By words only."

"Why didn't Luffy change that?" Marco asked. How could it be fair that one of the closest friends of the pirate king was potentially on trial for crimes committed against him?

Law looked down at his lap, to his shoes. They'd taken the sandals in the depression at the front of the house when they'd left. Law hadn't thought to ask Marco to pick up his runners or other footwear when he'd returned. Hadn't known he'd gone until he returned. He'd have to face their home again sooner or later. Get something sturdier if he was going to face the courts.

"Goal-driven, but not long-sighted." Benn let his cigarette burn in the ashtray. Law waved away the smoke. Rested the hand in his lap, the other still tucked up under his arm like a bird bedding down.

"Since Doflamingo made his claim a few more worms have crawled out of the woodwork. Roswald's descendants want Jean Bart."

Law sat full bristle straight. All the anger that should have been expressed at Doflamingo and the system came crackling to the fore for his crewmate and friend.

"No."

"No?"

"No. Those animals are not going to lay a single hand on him."

Marco sat up, as much as Law. Ah, there was the fire.

"Won't lay a hand on either of you, Law, or anyone else. We'll safehouse you if we have to. But they won't take you."
Chapter End Notes

Oh, of course in canon I know that Marco pre-Wano was in purple and aqua? Who knows what his new colour scheme is, but I like the look. In the Repossession world Law wears a lot of black, à la Zou, without the spotted jeans, tending more to roomy kinda linen trousers that would suit tropical living (never mind that black attracts the sun ;-) ).
Chapter Summary

Everybody needs good neighbours.

Chapter Notes

Follows Light Marco - 4a.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Light Marco — 4b

Law pulled the old man cardigan to him, just the right colour of indistinct camel. Marco, next to him, laughed. Law's spindly wizened old man tree fingers fiddled with a button.

"You doing a Tess of the d'Urbervilles? Trying to cloak your natural beauty?"

"Did it work for her?"

Marco's face clouded. Yeah, maybe he shouldn't have used that example. "Forget it." At least as far as he knew she didn't have Death tattooed on her digits.

Robin topped up glasses of sangria. They relaxed on her back verandah, overlooking the clothesline and the slope down to the small ornamental pond. They'd dropped in after visiting Benn.

Both reached across the table and gave thanks.

"It's just Law being Law. You know he can pull it off." His face had lit up when she'd told him about the bag of tack she'd picked up from a local jumble sale. A treasure bag that was pure trash for her. Checked golf pants, lamé vests. She'd catch him trying the trousers on sooner or later. Plus, Marco was kinda right. Sometimes Law liked to fool himself that shrouding himself in dowd made him indistinguishable.

"The mothballs negate his tatts, camouflage his earrings, dull his hair."

Law sipped the drink and smiled. "One can wish."

Marco leant over and smooshed the side of Law's neck. "Don't you dare. We've been through that."

There'd been a stage of Law going to ground. Of covering up head to toe like a ragamuffin bag lady. Law glanced at him.

"It's comfy."

"It's not quite Cora- glam."
"Nor Dofla-ming-show."

Marco smiled against the creases of Law's skin.

Law thought of his father keeping warm in his office.

"Ah, wear what you want. You will anyway. Though you're a winter. Shouldn't wear those autumn colours."

"Benn wanted us to expand beyond black."

"Not to puke."

"Puce?"

"Puke."

Robin smiled. The idea of going to court hung over them. Doflamingo's claims. The vet's allegations, and Law and Marco trying to work through whatever had gone down. She was surprised Law could even joke about his tormenter.

"He had interest in the goddamned awful before, Marco. Before all this."

Law's eyes, his expression, showed him it was so. One of his bizarre-interest love stories. Marco pushed the sleeve up a bit and took Law's hand in his own.

"You know what else suits him?" Robin asked.

Marco looked to her with curiosity.

"That pup on his lap."

"It fits in pretty well with the poo brown."

"Shh, he'll hear you."

She was a tart — too much flesh for her clothes — and the two of them, those two pirates. The dog killer, and the one who tried to rescue the dog. She, the one with the huge bazookas, she was a pirate too.

Jacey had disappeared over the last few days. He always came back happy, groomed, content. No harm, not distressed. She didn't know where he'd get to though. She kept an eye on him over the week, and one morning watched him wiggle under the fence. He'd dug a hole where a removed tree stump on the other side had left a hollow. She saw into her neighbour's yard clearly. The fence was low. Into the archeologist's — the tart's — yard.

Jacey raced across the yard and crawled all over that pierced and tattooed thing that visited just to spread-eagle himself on the grass and stare at the sky. It was strange to hear him laugh. There was no light to him. A doctor on another island she'd heard, but the papers reported he'd slit the throat of his own dog. That he'd been a slave. That he still was a slave and refused to go back to his owner. Not that she held with slavery, but you know, property was property, and now it was handling her own. The stories she read made her eyes pop and he was always visiting that woman.
What was going on? Why did she live by herself?

Then the decent one joined them. Well, they visited together. How could he stand to be with him? From what the World Economic Journal said it was their dog — the one left to bleed out belonged to them both. Marco the Phoenix. He'd tried his hardest to help the animal while that dapper Doflamingo had contained the psychosis of the black-haired one. And he was a doctor. Trafalgar Law, she thought. Surgeon of Death was right. She wasn't stupid. She couldn't confront him by herself.

That afternoon, when they'd spilled out onto the archeologist’s verandah, she noted a slight limp, that he needed the support of the blond every now and then. What was up with him? Bruises. Doflamingo must have worked hard to stop him from hurting anything more. Why was he free? Why next door and why was he talking to, holding her dog?

"Incoming," Robin murmured.

Law and Marco had sensed the footsteps. Law spat the orange slice he'd been chewing back into the glass. They weren't quiet. A woman with clipped back hair, a swarthy guy in a striped shirt. Her husband? Two strapping boys, young men, rounded the corner and stood just outside the open patio. Their sons?

"My neighbours," Robin said.

"Hands off the dog," the man growled. The prongs of a rake jutted into the covered space. The four reminded Law of the citizens of Dressrosa, gathering their cleaning mops and buckets and brooms to fight devil fruits.

"Hand him over." The woman shook a broom at him. "You're not going to kill him."

Law leant back minimally. The broom startled the pup awake and it shrunk low into Law's knees. He instinctively tipped his head and smoothed its fur. The wood shell of the broom clipped him under the chin, jerked his head back, the bristles scraped his face. His hands flying off the animal. The neighbour had some heft. His vision blackened for a second. Nothing serious.

"Hands off, we said." The young man to the right of his mother tried to sound tough, but Law saw the shake in the shovel he held. Still, it was a good weapon. The Heart wiped at the scrape on his cheek. Shook his head. Didn't need any more bruises along his jaw.

"Jacey," the other son whined. He was whipping a what? A dish cloth? through the air. Yeah, that was an action of reassurance for a skittish animal. Still, Jacey scrambled off his lap and trotted to his owners. Law didn't try to stop him. Why would he?

"Disgusting. What you did was abhorrent."

Law turned. That broom was coming his way again.

"Knuckle draggers such big men when it comes to animals weaker than them."

That's if it didn't get knocked off course by the rake.

"Let's see how you like it, shithead."
The teenager had slipped to the side of the verandah behind him and slung the shovel back, angling for his skull. They had their dog. What more did they want?

"Room."

"Cinco Fleur"

_Fwoosh._ Marco's flames.

Law was quickest. Guess he had the most to lose.

He returned them in a jumble of garden and kitchen tools, dog and dishcloths, to their side of the fence. Just near the clothesline he'd eyed a few times while communing with the sky.

Marco bent over three pairs of jocks and a bra. "No wonder you've got a reputation as a pervert."

"There's no way they'll fit me," Robin said. The boys'd be swimming in the tighty-whities.

Law brushed dog hair from his lap. "That's all they had on the line."

"Pegs?" Robin asked. "Could always do with some more."

"Didn't think."

The dog yipped from the yard over as son one or two threw a ball for him. Law was fine as long as the dog was. Marco sliced an orange to complement the fruit-heavy drink. Poured them all another glass.

"We gotta get you outta here, Law."

He nodded. Robin too. A fair hearing was not a given.

Chapter End Notes

Things start to move next chapter.
"We want him in seastone."

Crocodile inhaled, released a plume of cigar smoke. Benn wrinkled his nose. Countered with staccato bursts of cigarette.

"Why?"

"Slaves. Rightful place, all that." He waved the cigar around. "I've always found the way to trust is through a short leash and a bananawani in even closer proximity. The indentured don't seem to enjoy the chains too much. Can't imagine why." He placed the cigar back between his lips. "Except Law, the harlot."

Benn frowned. Was this another one Doflamingo had gifted Law to? That day years ago when the shattered Hearts captain had outlined some of the recent attacks he'd survived before escaping from marine prison. Head bowed, an expectation of rejection, of more of the same. Ready to flee the Red Force in an instant.

Marco had supported him then. It was the start of their relationship. Law hadn't been the picture of someone who'd gone willingly with any of these men.

"No dice. As if Doflamingo's a paragon of virtue."

"He didn't mutilate a dog."

"He forced Law to kill and you know it."

"Libel." The hook clinked against the mahogany table far more gently than Benn expected. "Second dog Law's slain. Did you know that?"

Crocodile looked up from the table at the pirate across from him, grey hair loosely held back in a tie. Ex-pirate. It was nice to be taller than him. Doflamingo got a bit much at times. Beckman suited the role of advocate. Administrative work looked good on them both. Underlings did the
nitty-gritty. "How many other defenceless puppies has he tortured for kicks?"

Benn didn't know about the previous animal, animals? He'd have to ask. No nasty surprises for the character report.

Crocodile polished the gold tip of his prosthetic. Carefully, meticulously. He knew the first kill wasn't really fair. Law had been young. Coerced. But.

"A slave must obey its master. It's written."

Benn folded his arms. He still carried his flintlock. "That life's long gone. Those affairs, condemned. They don't exist anymore."

"Yet the statute remains."

oOOo

Law stood in the dock, frightened, Robin could tell. Kizaru the judge. Doflamingo and Marco conspiratorial in their huddled corner, Crocodile between them. Only Law wore seastone. Like a slave. Like the slave they wanted him to be. Not only cuffs, but around his neck. He was the flight risk.

oOOo

Pathetic. Look at him standing there, no out, remembering, revelling in? memories of the last time he was forced to wear an exploding collar. The cuffs meant his powers were nuked too.

Private guards slouched against the walls, guns loaded with seastone nails to take down any of the fruit users who decided to disturb the peace and try to free Law. Kizaru turned a blind eye, stomped Benn's concern about the quasi-military. The courts would impartially decide. That's what courts did.

Free? Marco would've bought into the notion once, but was convinced — as Doflamingo had unpacked one story after another — that any emancipators only wanted to claim Law for their own.

Those nights staying with Benn and Shanks, Zoro and Luffy, Robin, even Law's own crew — Marco'd thought it was just friendship at the time, fortifying alliances, but he accepted as truth now that Law had put his extremely talented tongue to use on more than one occasion when he'd strayed from their home.

oOOo

Benn promised — Robin, promised, Shanks promised — Luffy, Penguin, and Bepo had all promised that they wouldn't take him, but fucking Kizaru was the judge.

They'd known it from the start. Benn'd thought they'd be allotted another judge, or magistrate, at this level due to past prejudice but the new government was fair and perfect, there to serve all. And this was a civil case but high profile. It deserved a high profile arbiter. To query was to threaten. Kizaru was their man even if private reflection questioned his role.

Plus it was a domestic affair, right? Civil. Not that important despite being noteworthy. Not a criminal matter. And all that the clerks signing the papers knew was that Trafalgar Law had slaughtered an innocent. He dealt with their children. Maybe supervision was good for some.
Someone who knew Law from the old world was better. Let the courts decide.

Shanks had been called away. Luffy too, pressing New World government business. As the judgement was made, one of Robin's hands attempted to free Law's chains, loosen the collar, but seastone. They dropped away and in the gallery she slumped from the effect, Nami gripping her.

"Trafalgar Law."

Law focused on the railing in front of him.

"I have experienced firsthand the fruits of your training and the knell of truth rings when the Heavenly Demon declares you know no better, because you don't."

Marco was growing familiar with that shake. C'mon Law, some dignity, old son. Where was the proud pirate he knew? Sure, Kizaru was a tall bastard but if Law was used to anything it was tall bastards. Guess he was only as strong as those around him, and now that Marco wasn't on his side his weakness shone. Especially when shackled. Hadn't he found a work-around those chains yet? He certainly spent enough time in them.

It boiled down to Doflamingo's brand very much denoting his personal effects — variations of it were stamped on everything he owned after all. The Donquixote brand was as ubiquitous as the seagull wings of marine justice. Photographs showed that Law sported it very boldly on a butt cheek.

It didn't matter that Law hadn't agreed to it, because under legislation property got no say. It didn't matter that photos showed inflammation, or the angry welts of a mark applied to the skin of someone well into adulthood; applied within the last six months, the logo surrounded by a litter of other bruising and abrasion.

The papers Doflamingo held went way back and were valid. Kizaru found them valid. The law was the law. He'd probably be paying a visit some time too. The papers excused his past actions. Endorsed them almost. Convenient. Property couldn't be hurt.

But Kizaru was not without heart. Doflamingo was firm but fair, but sometimes his fairness, or was it his firmness?, was a force to reckon with. It was always a pleasure to mindbreak Law, but you know, new blood kept things virile, interesting. Marco was an asset to anyone's team.

"I concur, given the circumstances, that when Doflamingo left Law tied to and branded in the equivalent of the marital bed that he was enacting a transfer of property. Restriction was necessary at the time as said property acts like a rabies-infested bobcat if not supervised and correctly used. We will rectify that situation today."

Benn had not sat down. Crocodile, Marco, Doflamingo treated the courtroom like their own cabana. Though the Whitebeard's calm was not as carefree.

"Doflamingo brutally assaulted a person, left him tied in the most humiliating of positions, and then the man Law trusted the most, Marco the Phoenix, assaulted him further."

Benn was calm, but his anger apparent. Law heard all too clearly everything washing in and out and over him. Why was he in fucking seastone? Luffy wanted the system to work. Shanks was meant to be there. Benn thought the law needed challenging. When did the most capable become inept? Useless Utopian confidence.

"Slaves are there to pleasure their owners. It's written."
"It's not right." Benn swept a palm over his temple and hair.

"Maybe not, but it is written. Imagine if you will a sleek sports car owned by two people. One treats it with kid gloves, the other runs it into the ground. Different approaches, but neither one is illegal."

"He's not property."

"Oh, but he is. Quite the sought after commodity."

oOOo

"We'll fight it, Law. Hang in there." Benn packed up his papers.

"You promised."

Benn enfolded him. Law inhaled the aroma of cigarettes and sweat.

His exhalation was a frost of unease. Why change the world if the world didn't change?

"It's Marco, Law, there's that."

"That's worse."

Law's whisper was low. What had Marco done? They couldn't get it out of him.

"Where'll the plaintiff take my client?"

Benn had dropped his hold around the younger pirate, and woven his hand through Law's cuffed one. Robin was glad. The public who'd piled into the peanut gallery had as much respect for Benn as they had contempt for the swashbuckling doctor. A few had whistled and clapped at the verdict. But maybe holding hands with a pleasure slave, doctor or no, would cast a poor light on Benn too instead of throwing positive shade Law's way.

"That's an owner's prerogative. What he does with his property is of no concern to the courts once the case walks out of these doors."

"Animals have more rights."

"Slaves by their very nature are to be used as their owners see fit."

Kizaru enjoyed this part-time gig. It was fun to not have the full responsibilities of an admiral, but to keep a nice juicy pension, and to participate in the amusing day to day trivialities of citizens and pirates.

"C'mon Kizaru. There were always a few protective measures in place."

"Like the exploding collars? Hmm, I guess you're right." Benn shouldn't have pointed that gun at him all those years ago. Law shouldn't have escaped with Luffy, and then escaped them again.

Robin, Franky, Penguin, Bepo, Nami crowded round before the jailers could deliver Law and the keys to the collar and cuffs to Marco's eager grasping hand.

Hearty squeeze upon squeeze landed on Marco's shoulder.

Law cast a look to that side of the room and they weren't there, the Whitebeards. He turned back to Benn, his head clocking in under his chin. Confirming suspicions, but Benn had always treated him right. "He's a creature of habit. He'll take me back to our house."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the quick updates. There'll be a bit of a wait for the next chapter. It's a "good" chapter, but a number of chapters beyond that are ready to work their dark way into the hearts of good men and women.

I really love Marco, and I do like the other stories I've written for these two, but he ain't the best person in this fic (in the dark chapters). Sorry Marco.

Thanks for reading. All feedback is appreciated if there's anything you'd like to ask, comment on or add, or a kudos button you might like to mash.
Chapter Summary

Morgans spreads a few more rumours.

Chapter Notes

Follows from Light Marco 4b, chapter 13.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Light Marco - 5

"Hey."

Marco crossed the room, throwing his satchel on the table and mussing Law's hair as he turned his head toward him. They'd been together long enough to not need constant contact in greetings and leavings but the touch was nice and Law's hair was messy enough to not upset him. It reassured both that Doflamingo hadn't won.

Law was standing, though Jean Bart sat, shirt off, in one of the examination rooms in the Hearts headquarters. The crew didn't always wear the coveralls nowadays. Law applied antiseptic on abrasions tearing his subordinate's skin, filling the room with the comforting scent of tea tree and calendula.

"Jean Bart." Marco nodded, receiving one in return. "What happened?" He stretched the fingers on one hand and the other, looked Law's supplies over.

"There's a nasty current out there," Law answered instead of the former pirate captain. "Jackbooted quislings baying for the social codes of the last government."

"It was great for some," Marco added, picking up one of the larger cloths Law had to the side, attaching it to a pole, swiping it through the ointment and swabbing Jean Bart's skin.

"They knew you were a slave?" It seemed all the papers were full of lately. The hidden threat in their midst.

"Knew Captain was. One had a rod with a hook on it. Seemed it was designed especially for the purpose. Lifted my shirt looking for..."


"Some puny human did that?" Marco brushed the cloth across a welt that traversed Jean Bart's back. Normal-sized human?
He let out a gruff rumble. "They called in a favour from a giant." Jean Bart could easily pick up Jinbei — three metres of fishman — as if he were a football.

Shachi had modified everyone's brands so Jean Bart's former captivity as Roswald's slave wasn't immediately apparent, but the placement gave things away. In solidarity, half the crew had tatts in the same general area, and the other half had them because they were folks Law had freed.

"They heard Captain's crew had ex-slaves, and Doflamingo hasn't been quiet about Law's need for rehabilitation, so these out-of-towners surrounded us to let us know exactly what our place was, and to send a message."

"Being?"

"Ah, doesn't matter."

Marco looked at Law.

"Dog killer. Just wanted to remind me I'm the Mongrel Murderer. Recidivist of course. And that I won't get away with it."

Marco wiped Law's arm with his cloth, staining it.

Law rubbed at the mark, smoothing the ointment into his arm, flicking out the sleeve of his shirt. What was that for? "You'll pay, First Division Commander."

"Can't wait, Mammal Mauler."

"s'not funny." But Law placed the cloth he was holding to the side of the vat of ointment and crowded into Marco's space, grabbing the loose material v-ing from the collar of his dress shirt, those few buttons open. A quick grin.

"Oh? I've raised your ire?" Marco held the back of Law's head like cupping sacramental wine, his own cloth forgotten. "I've got some meat you can beat when you've stopped torturing the tame. Sink your teeth into something a bit more challenging."

Law tipped his head downwards, pressing his lips into Marco's shoulder. "My teeth? Ouch." He wouldn't laugh even if the Body of Marco was superior to any Eucharist he'd partaken of. But there was no need for cannibalism. He just needed to breathe his partner in.

"Mongrel Murderer. Mammal Mauler. Phoenix Phucker." Marco knew that throwaway got under Law's skin in the best possible way. His arm across the Heart's back let Law know he wasn't gonna let him go no matter what was said, in the long run. He'd help him out now of course. Law snorted. "Gotta see to my crew."

Of course he and Law had a way to go in the bedroom after Doflamingo had ripped apart anything Law held close including the man himself, but Marco wasn't going anywhere. Let them both work towards rebuilding what they had, towards remembering Misery.

"Finished, boss?" Jean Bart peered down at the wash of blond and black, the tense, sinewy muscles quietly covered like a lace mantle on the head of a mafia doyen. He knew Law missed Misery. Sometimes tapped the side of his leg when he went for a walk, expecting her to follow.

"Almost," Law said and pulled himself away from Marco, Marco's hand following, gripping his forearm for a second, not wanting the ridges around his wrists from past internments to have the
chance to deepen.

The two exchanged a look, Marco proud. Too proud to be with someone beaten, and Law wasn't. Merely got caught in the storm drains from time to time.

"Just a little more to go."

**oOOo**

The town Marco and Law knew had a healthy suspicion of and respect for pirates and other authorities. Their bar and Law's practice were in the shadier parts of town, but both areas were safe places where patrons rarely felt threatened, or if they did the two pirates dealt with trouble swiftly and sharply.

The clerks of the courts on islands a few removed read about Law's exploits filtered through the lens of Underworld tabloids. Doflamingo's strings skilfully directed Morgans' own, but some of their neighbours, the regulars in the pubs, the patrons Law accepted barter from when they were down on their beri, recognised hogwash when they saw it.

Sure, some questioned whether his clinics were more hindrance than harm, they dealt with sex crimes after all. And there were macrobiotic instructors and gossipy house husbands and wives who dived into scandal headfirst because it was easier than thinking. More fun than thinking.

Those who had a brain cell or two to spare were grateful for the increased revenue the latest group of strangers brought to the islands, but they had more money than their status as drifters, travellers, explorers, and researchers implied. Better dress sense too. Were overly interested in discussing the latest headliner from Morgans' rag.

They were well put together. Well-built. Short, clipped hair. Well-spoken. Button-down shirts like Law and Marco, without the freed buttons or enticing tattoo trails, but easy on the eye in a trust-me-to-drive-your-grandmother-home kind of a way. No fluffy hats or feathered sweaters among them. No piercings or posing.

Pirates had bounty posters. The citizens knew their riches were ill-gotten, and enough of them had caused harm and havoc, but half the patrons of either of Law and Marco's businesses had been members of some crew or another at one time. Not all pirates were corrupt, not all marines upright, not all innocuous strangers harmless.

The tabloids could say what they wanted, but why would high ranking police officers and marines drop in and share leisurely drinks with Law, Marco and others if they weren't some side of legit? Yeah, Law was all brushes and kisses and light touch with some, but those who knew him knew he only let his guard down with a closed group and it didn't go beyond flirting. He always returned to Marco's side. Always wanted to.

**oOOo**

"How's Law?"

Marco grunted and set Michel's tumbler of whiskey in front of him.

"That means good, bad, or indifferent, Neanderthal man? He coming back soon?"

Marco inclined his head, lifted a shoulder, screwed the cap back on the bottle. Michel was always their first customer. He got up early to get the catch of the day, and had to turn in early. The sun was just setting and slipping through the roomy beach bar, fanning the counter.
Michel sipped. Law had fixed his daughter's knee after a skateboarding accident. He knew these two guys well. Had provided the bar with fresh fish since it opened.

"You two haven't fallen out again?"

Marco shook his head. Definitely not.

"Just the trash they're printing in the paper…"

"Trash."

"He couldn't hurt Misery."

Marco poured himself a drink. "Except if his hand was forced."

"This Doflamingo guy's got some kind of power?"

Marco nodded, short and sharp. Checked how much whiskey was left in the bottle, the mixers.

"He all right?"

"Hurt pretty badly."

"That guy's gonna keep him? Did he do those things?"

Marco knew Law didn't want him to spread his business, his past, but Michel was a friend. "Law?"

Michel nodded. "I can't imagine it, but people change," he said, for better or worse.

"Law keeps to himself for many reasons, but ask yourself why he runs the clinics, why he has systems in place to help victims of sexual assault when you want to know if he's done or not done something." Or had it done to him.

"To make amends?"

Marco rolled his eyes.

Michel finished his drink. "Cos he know how it feels."

Marco neither confirmed nor denied, but the answer to the statement was only too well.

**ooOo**

"So a Mink, an algae and a convict walk into a bar. Two jackasses confusing their own faces with their backsides follow."

All members of the table froze, though Zoro downed his bottle first before looking in the direction of the chatter. The boy scouts to their right. Were they old enough to drink?

"Lift your shirt, convict. Replaced your true master's mark with a fellow slave's? Imagine a slave helping a slave. Tugs at the heartstrings. Imagine a slave being a captain, lot number 5324, Jean Bart."

The tankard in Jean Bart's hand was like a thimble. Zoro needed nearly two hands to hold it. If he smashed it against the turd's head he'd be a goner.

"Who are you talking to?" Bepo asked, turning around.
"Not a sub-species, that's for sure," another member of the table near them stated politely, coldly. They weren't the bar's usual clientele. He dangled the neck of his beer between his fingers.

"Oi, bear. 's'true your captain's a slave?"

Their manners were slipping.

"Never. He was never a slave." Captain was never a slave even when imprisoned. Nobody could possess him.

"It's not what the papers say, and whoo-whee, what a slave. What interspecies shenanigans did he get up to on that tin can?"

Zoro wondered how they had detail about Law's ship. Then again, Morgans dug up a few facts along with the dirt.

"He take you, slave Jean Bart? Was there room for that in the sub? Or did you take him? Hear he's got a thing for it. If he can take Doflamingo surely you wouldn't be too big."

"You better leave," Penguin said, standing, pushing up the sleeves of the Hearts coverall. Flicking his cap up.

"Wouldn't want to stay in a place that let in the likes of you anyway," the original speaker said, clinking his almost finished drink to the table. "You hiding a hoof too under that boiler suit? Slaves and equality equals impossibility. There's a reason they allow themselves to be shackled and cry blue murder when they are."


"Normal people like you hanging out with tattooed freaks like that tall lunk, that bear, you make it worse. You spit in the face of nature, dilute our genetic supremacy. You bet we'll take our business elsewhere. Wouldn't want to stay where trash is welcome."

The names of the proprietors, Marco and Law, were clearly printed on the certificate just to the side of the entrance.

**000**

Bepo was an easy target and it wasn't fair that folks zoomed in on him.

The island and surrounding isles had always been pretty peaceful but a sharp tang iced the air, like the sudden dips in temperature in waters the sub cut through.

The Hearts didn't go out twenty-strong, except in certain circumstances like partying with the Strawhats. They'd laid low for a number of years, some had retired, some had kids, some stayed close to Law and worked in his clinics. If their boss needed them they were there. And he needed them now. Those who could spare the time.

Shachi and Penguin blended into the village streets, not so Jean Bart and Bepo. The four went out together, but Penguin and Shachi lagged behind due to having short stubby inferior legs. When they turned a corner strangers, folks that didn't dress like the other islanders, but also blended in pretty well, had rounded on the two. The snivelling creeps from the bar the other day.

The Hearts' policy was to not lay into civilians unless they were real arseholes and, even then, they had to be able to defend themselves. Jean Bart was blocking attacks on Bepo, and who wouldn't?
There was something suss about these guys, but he didn't use his full strength.

Bepo shielded others, and shielded himself when it meant he could defend others, but he was terrible at general self-preservation. Jean Bart could take care of himself so Bepo took a beating.

"The convict comes to the aid of his sub-human mate. Figures." An insect had one of Bepo's ears in his pincers, twisting. The Mink grimaced, but Jean Bart knew it could hurt much more.

He swatted the pest flat to the ground.

Clunk, clunk, whirr.

Morgans' media surrounded them. Cameras, video, notepads, flashes.

The blond kid, the insect, the smallest of the crew—he'd needed a friend's help to reach Bepo — rolled on the ground, clutching his knee, screaming.

"Former pirate captain, Jean Bart!"

Jean Bart turned.

"Former slave, Jean Bart!"

And again.

"Roswald's slave, Jean Bart!"

He didn't know where to look.

"Property, Jean Bart," Morgans addressed, unfolded his portable ladder, and strode up to the mammoth man so they were face to face. He sure was fierce, but Morgans had dealt with all manner of savagery over the years. His tail feathers shivered in excitement.

A flock of starlings joined him, flying about with microphones, cameras and notepads.

"Is it true, Jean Bart, that you are still owned by Saint Roswald? For all intents and purposes, you're the property of another man?"

The quislings had faded into the crowd now gathered, except the one Jean Bart had laid low with a quarter of his strength, still yelping as if he'd broken a bone. Jean Bart lifted his arm to his eyes. Those flashes were annoying.

"It's not true. Chains can never own a person, only restrain them."

"Is it true, former slave, Jean Bart, that your captain, Trafalgar Law, is still owned by Donquixote Doflamingo?"

"Nobody can own Captain Law."

"Is it true, renegade Jean Bart, that Donquixote's property stole Saint Roswald's property, namely, yourself? You are stolen property and he is a thief." Morgans' neck jutted this way and that, making sure Jean Bart could not escape him.

"Freed. From captivity." Jean Bart raised a leg, ready to move. So many people milling about.

"Legal captivity."
"You try it and see how you like it." Even the sky was busy. Birds and reptiles flapping about with recording devices.

"Only the unworthy are liable to be slaves."

Jean Bart tried again to move away. Bepo was still by his side, Penguin and Shachi watching from a shop front. The media ran everywhere like frantic ants. "The World Government didn't endorse it," he said.

"Yet they allowed it to happen. They were at the beck and call of the World Nobles."

"s'why I was a pirate and never a marine."

Morgans waved his feathered hands around and the horde of reporters moved in surges, the starlings formed murmurations, preventing Jean Bart from leaving, unless he wanted to squash them all.

"Is it true, fugitive Jean Bart, that your captain is trained in the arts of pleasuring others? That he progressed so far only due to being adept at bestowing sexual favours?"

Maybe he could set some things right, though he didn't trust a single one of the parasites milling about. Bepo remained, immovable. "He was a slave, and like all slaves was abused."

"Roswald abused you the same way?"

"No, but show me a man who wants to keep another and I'll show you a bastard."

Morgans squawked with joy.

"Pirate Captain, Trafalgar Law is a cruel man by your own admission?"

"No."

"But surely he owns you?"

"No. He freed me and I joined his crew. We're free to come and go after giving enough notice." And so few had gone. Jean Bart moved forward again, and the ladder appeared right in front of him. Was there a ladder-ladder fruit? Bepo shook its side rails.

"He recently gutted a helpless animal. Vet Moonbeam says it was one of the most brutal attacks he's seen in a long time."

"Law loved that dog."

"Strange way of showing it."

"He was manipulated into hurting her, physically, then he was hurt physically by the same man."

A giant finger loomed in front of Morgans' chest ready to bore its way through.

"The manipulator, was it Doflamingo? His rightful owner?"

Jean Bart raised his hand and swatted the bird away.

oOOo
"Assault, violence, temper tantrums, the cracked, infantile face of Utopian equality. You saw it first on Morgans' World Economic Journal News. And who is responsible for such unrest you ask?

"You heard it here first. Former slave, past Worst Generation rookie, supernova pirate, Trafalgar Law. How many other of the bonded are working illegally among us with fuses as volatile? As harmful to the public at large?

"Fractures are weakening the New World Government. Should these deviants be rounded up and driven back from whence they came? Stay tuned for expert commentary from the estimable Donquixote Doflamingo — a man who knew the Mongrel Mauler as a child. And ex-admiral, Kizaru 'light human' Borsalino."

oOOo

It aired heavily edited on the news' screens on Law's and Marco's island and all the surrounding islands, opening with Jean Bart pitching the blond boys away from Bepo, the youngest writhing in agony in the background, the Hearts Jolly Roger prominent.

Morgans' and Jean Bart's words on Law were interspersed so it seemed initiation into the Hearts was a slab of depravity imposed on all by their captain.

The vet, Moonbeam, appeared. "Loathsome case of animal cruelty. I was forced to euthanise her to relieve her pain. What pitiful excuse for a human names an animal Misery?"

Intercut with Jean Bart. "He was forced to kill."

A sharp cross to Doflamingo.

"It makes sense to be wary. Appeasement is disaster in the making. When he was a child I was forced to put down a hapless puppy he'd experimented on. His behaviour now is just as abhorrent but is not an aberration.

"On that shocking day he turned to his books as if nothing was wrong."

Doflamingo wiped a finger under the lens of his glasses, just about where the tear ducts might be.

"I was an emotional wreck but he was as cold-blooded as could be. I thought if I showed him some love he might soften, I didn't understand sociopathy then. But Law is without a conscience and only understands violence and I learnt that the hard way."

The camera zoomed in on a snapshot of a man with a family likeness to the heavenly demon, his face covered in bizarre stage paint. Obviously someone dear to the former king.

As he picked up the frame and looked sadly at the image a running footer declared:

\textit{Hairline cracks in the New Harebrained World Government.}

\textit{The menace that lies within. Be alert.}

\textit{Look for the hoof of the flying dragon or tattoos covering such a mark.}

\textit{If you suspect someone is a slave, report them to their rightful owners if known, or your local police station}

Morgans closed the report with a panel discussion of whether there should be a bounty for slaves like those given out to hunters for fox pelts. Full sized images of Law, Jean Bart and the grinning
Jolly Roger served as the background, along with a picture of Misery clumsily smiling, clearly harmless.

oOOo

It wasn't a surprise, though definitely unwanted, that a mob grouped at the sight of the towering pirate when Jean Bart and the others next set out. Man, the crew looked so meek and mild and functional, but they were all about orgies, and prostituting themselves, and animal sacrifice. The mob wondered how the mink bore it. Didn't know any better. Dumb animal.

And they protected him, the Hearts protected their captain, despite the things he forced them to do. So enough of the blow ins incited enough of the crowd to overpower the former captain-slave for long enough to inflict pain and damage. They persuaded their giant friend (who was none too clever either. Very few other races were) to whip him with a willow switch (whole branches coupled together) the way he must be used to. Either from Roswald or Law.

Maybe they should emancipate the crew from the crazy doctor. They'd give them independence before convincing them of the benefits of servitude. Servitude to the right dudes. The righteous dudes.

Jean Bart sent them flying of course. All grist for the mill.

oOOo

"Cracks in the New World Government, Marco," Law said.

Jean Bart had pulled on his shirt after Marco had run his flames to lessen the sting.

"Holy shit, yeah."

"How come you're portrayed like a saint?"

"Gotta put up with you, it's only logical."

"Hah."

They rolled up and recapped the medical supplies and ditched the refuse, working in the easy tandem of years of being balls deep in each other's business.

"How many of your crew've got skinwork that could mark them as slaves?" Marco asked Law as the latter used Room to shift the giant vat of ointment to the corner, lid on. Law turned to him.

"All of them, but not all are slaves. How 'bout the Whitebeards?"

"You know how many men we had?"

Law shrugged. A lot.

"I'm sure some do, but only one design is important." Y'know. Marco stared. Duh.

"Yeah, of course." This hideout was dank. The Heart was itching to get out into the fresh air. He'd risk it soon.

Marco dropped his gaze and pulled at the sun-bleached hair on his arms. "I'm willing to get one though, Law, a smaller Whitebeard symbol. Izou or Shachi can do it, probably best it's Izou. Right where they can claim it's concealing insignia of former masters."
Jean Bart, still in the room, looked over.

"You'd do that?"

Marco turned his way. "They're targeting the Hearts."

"We're like the Médecins Sans Frontières of the Grand Line," Penguin slouched up from the doorway, walked into the room. "We'll cut you up but it's in the operating room."

Marco wondered how long he'd been standing there. "You're not a weak crew." Marco had fought with them before, and Law was their leader. "But you're the healers of the sea. It's beyond low that they're going after you."

Law plopped himself onto the examination bed. "Doflamingo's got a lifelong hard-on he thinks I should take care of."

And Law had killed Vergo. And upset Doffy's SMILE trade. Bumped off Monet too. Though that wasn't really him. There was that.

"Yeah, fuck that."

"I did."

"Law."

Law paused. The crew and Marco tensed. He could spiral while doing anything. It wasn't always safe to approach, but all did, first checking Kikoku was on the other side of the room.

"You were coerced, Captain."

Marco sat next to him, took his hand and followed the veins along the back of it, spoke into his hair. "It's all right, Law. The whole fucking pirate world will ink itself up if it has to."

"Captain." Penguin squeezed the upper arm of his ex, his friend.

"Pirate Captain, Trafalgar Law, Captain of the Hearts. You freed me from the celestial dragons. I'll never believe their words." Jean Bart hovered awkwardly near the window.

Law came to, angered, calmed himself, then straightened, tilted his head back, kept his hand in Marco's. "Robin's still got contacts with the revolutionaries?"

"You're asking me? She's your girlfriend."

"What would Franky say?" Penguin asked.

"We're in an open relationship. He doesn't mind." Law dismissed the topic with a wave.

Captain was okay. Jean Bart and the first mate shared a smile and walked out the room.

Marco leant back on his hands. "If she doesn't, Luffy does. If not Luffy, Izou, Jozu, someone will. I don't believe Shanks or Benn have lost any of their contacts."

"Let's set this up. Keep safe and others from harm."

The Phoenix nodded. Sitting around wasn't getting them anywhere.
Law's legs hit the ground. He rested both arms over his thighs and turned to Marco, earrings bold against dark. "You really should tattoo your arse, Marco. If you want to show true solidarity."

"You asking your crew to do that?"

"They don't ever see my arse."

"We do, Captain. You know. Washroom, bath, operating table," a voice called out from the corridor. Without taking his gaze from Marco, Law spun his hand and a blue sphere enclosed the space by the doorway and condiments landed where eavesdroppers once had been.

Marco pulled at the ridge of his ear. "You wanna see Whitebeard's logo on my arse?"

Law straightened. Now there was just the two in the room he rested his ointment soaked arm against Marco's body, dropped his head to his shoulder.

"It's shit that they targeted Jean Bart."

"We'll get a system set up. Still got the Polar Tang, right?"

Of course. They couldn't be the Hearts without it.

"Don't get a tattoo on your arse. Wait and see what Shachi does with this one."

"Make your mind up."

"I hate being his prize Hereford. It must suck to be reminded." Law had been reticent about stripping in front of him when they'd had no problems before.

It did suck to be reminded, but not as much as it must to be branded. Doflamingo didn't treat his valued possessions well. Law's marks were not the man. If Marco couldn't see beyond all the ink and scars, couldn't try to understand the stories that had caused them, he'd see nothing at all.

"Thought Trinity could stencil one of her bubble-pop designs of Misery drooling. You know, like the wolf howling at the moon, only it's Misery painted over both buttcheeks, salivating over her dog biscuits."

Law laughed, his breath planing Marco's neck. "I'd rather not stick my dick into that."

"Understandable."

"Crackpot."

"Madman."

No smile but that glint in his eyes. Law stood and Marco rose with him.

"I'll get to see your glutes in their naked glory soon then?"

Law's jaw twitched.


"Of Doffy's brand?"

"Your body. And," he moved in on Law, his lover not backing away. His own touch familiar but
not invasive, "your mind. Can't hate you Law. Doflamingo's crimes cannot make me hate you."

But they could make him very uncomfortable, Law knew. "I'll try," he said. Marco had always known the lines of his body, those from nature, from his own hand, and from the hands of others.

Chapter End Notes

Liked it? Liked a tiny bit of it? Hated it? Let me know. Kudos, comment, email—all feedback is appreciated, and thanks to those who’ve left it. Most of all, thank you for reading.
Dark Marco 6 - Izou-(NSFW)

Chapter Summary

Dark, dark, dark.

Chapter Notes

Heed the tags. Rape, non-con, adult themes and content. Follows on from Dark Marco 5, chapter 14

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Dark Marco - 6

"Sorry, Law, really I am."

Izou smoothed a hand over a juddering shoulder. The other shoulder was strapped well down to stop the shake as he tied the traditional silk for the tebori tattoo around the thin piece of bamboo holding the needles. Luckily Marco only wanted one colour and the outline, but the shades would vary.

The Heart's arm was cleaned and Izou poked the skin, the nomi — bamboo stick — balancing between his thumb and forefinger, over and over, staining the skin with sumi ink, seeping below the surface. Law was lucky. Whoever did his other tatts used a machine. This was craftsmanship at its finest. Tebori — carving by hand.

"You know I don't like you, but I wouldn't wish this for you." He didn't mind the tattoo, though Marco could have dreamed up a more stylish design. That wasn't what he meant.

He'd given Law a tightly rolled cloth bundle to chomp down on for the pain. He was still in seastone of course. Everything would feel a thousand times worse. He was in discomfort, wearing the collar, lying on his stomach on the mattress, shirtless. Marco had procured an old Celestial Dragon bed that had a hollow for the collar, the sick fucks. It still put incredible strain on the neck.

Law spat the bundle out and Izou wondered whether he wanted to touch it to replace it.

"Why do it then? How about free will?"

Izou pushed Marco's acquisition's hair back. His voice grated on his nerves. The fear was there, also the rage. Not hysterical. But so much wasted energy. He was rightfully where he should be but Izou felt less pleased about it than he thought he would.

"Blood's thicker than water, Law, you know that." He let Law's head drop the few centimetres it could, wiped the excess colour on the design and dipped the needles into the ink to his side, the pirate's skin red.
"Obviously fucking not."

Family, real family, had never betrayed Law. True, they really never had a chance. It was Law who'd betrayed Lammy in the way he'd later betrayed Cora, and finally Misery. But he'd never set out to hurt any of them — except for when he knifed Cora, but he wasn't in his right mind and only ten years old. Cora had eventually saved him from himself.

But any group of people claiming to be his family had turned on him. Bonds that ignored compassion and operated on mob mentality made him wary. His crew were free to come and go and they had never left.

"Did you sleep around? We all thought you did. But Marco defended you every time." Izou thought how they branded criminals with tattoos in days of old. Adultery was one such crime. A stain smack bang in the middle of the forehead.

Law knew he'd get nowhere if he couldn't calm the panic trilling his bones.

"No. No you fucker. No, no, no."

"Why did you used to disappear? You weren't whoring around?"

Law inhaled at the pain as the needles swam under his skin like the fins of a fish.

"Because this isn't the first time he's fucked me against my will."

Izou was methodical. He wiped at the excess, dipped the nomi, pressed into the skin, kept an eye on the shade. "Exaggeration, surely Law. You're trained." Him tensing up really wasn't helping this process.

"Fuck off, geisha ya. I'm not some monkey sucking dick to an organ grinder's tune. Conditioned, brutalised, yeah, but I don't seek out my own fucking pain. I'm trained as a doctor."

"And a whore." Izou had his cheroot to the side, and paused to take a drag. "So poetic, Dr Trafalgar. You don't seek out your own pleasure? . . . You'd be a whole lot happier if you learnt to yield a little."

Law shuttered his eyes. How could he be having this conversation? Were Marco and Izou a thing now?

"Why go back to him? After the first time? Why return? I mean, we all know now you've got no legal recourse, but you could have disappeared. Faded into the night. Even now. You like it a bit rough?"

Law sighed into the pillow. How could he be back here? Seemed he'd been having Flevance-level crying jags lately. A few decades on he was a whole lot worse off. Yeah, there we go. The pillow was wet under him. He couldn't wipe that shit away.

"Don't even like sex unless it's the right person, the right time, and it sure as hell doesn't involve restriction of movement or choice. No Humiliation. Begging to be a bitch. Those people labouring in copper mines? Tortured if they don't fill quotas? If they don't work without breaks? Stolen from their families? You think they develop love for the pain and hate poured into them? If they survive."

Izou should have replaced the cloth, as mangy as it was. At least there wasn't a speck of dust on the floors. Who'd imagine the good doctor so talkative?
"Sure. If they ever get out, they and their families want the latest Den Den, and want to keep up with the latest tech. Who doesn't want some love and fucking comfort, Izou? But replicating the shit, the pain? Seeking that out? Once you've got some level of awareness? Of freedom? Not my thing. You creeps hiding your fetishes behind flimsy bits of paper can go fuck yourselves."

"Seems we'll be fucking you instead, my love." Izou finished off the design, leant over, and kissed Law lightly on the brow. "I won't be partaking. But geisha, prostitute. The fates put us in certain positions for certain reasons, Law. Best not to question them."

He sprayed the new tattoo with soap and wiped away the blood and plasma, Law hardly inhaling, his pain threshold sky high. "Your masters have marked you. You belong to them."

He ran his graceful fingers over the scars on his neck, under the collar. It was useless to try and fight destiny, but he had to give Law credit for trying and trying damned hard. "It's prettier than the other one." He traced a cursive M on the Heart's muscled back, the arm too tender and raw to do it there.

And more fucking visible, thought Law. How did European calligraphy, directly below the tatt on his upper arm, complement his own markings?

It didn't, of course, because his will was of no consequence.

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It was like being back in the Family, both times, chained to a wall with a bit of room for movement. But Marco had dumped him on some blankets where Misery used to sleep instead of throwing him in a cell. A huge chemical stain spread across the floor where they'd cleaned the blood.

He was to use his fingers for eating, his tongue to drink. His water was in the fucking dog's bowl. Marco had assured him he'd cleaned it. Of what, Law wasn't sure. Misery's saliva, hair, blood. His and Doflamingo's excesses. Seemed the feathered prick had rendered the house with his body.

Food was biscuits, some kind of cracker. At least they weren't dog bone shaped, and Law guessed Marco wanted his breath to be somewhat palatable if he was going to force his tongue down his throat later.

His arm, the new brand or mark underneath, was wrapped in muslin. Marco had removed his earrings. He wasn't sure why. Law was sick and miserable and trying to think, pushed up against the wall, on the floor, the blankets gathered around him (they were washed too). He'd let him keep his clothes. Something to be grateful for. He didn't know for how long.

He glanced up as the door opened. He'd heard Izou and Marco enjoying tea in the living room, just adjacent to the bedroom.

"Need the toilet?"

Law looked away.

"You won't get another chance."

Law knew this drill, and he knew they were right. Leaving a prisoner to soil himself and not allowing him to clean up was kind of entry level into fuck-the-captive-up-good-and-proper-ness.
Marco would also need to let his arm be cleaned if he wanted his brand to keep.

Law nodded.

"Yes, Marco," Marco said.

Law looked to the side again. At least it wasn't master. Marco crossed the floor, nudged his foot.

Law stared at him. "Why're you doing this, Marco?" Was there any of the man he knew in the man in front of him? He heard the steps across the adjoining room, the slide of the main door to the house. Izou taking his leave.

"You slept around on me, Law."

Law shook his head, the collar scraping his jaw.

"You calling me a liar?"

"Someone's feeding you lies. No. Never."

Marco yanked him up by the neck chain. Easy to do with his strength and Law's depletion. He looked down at him. His beautiful hair matted, the skin around the bandage on his arm, red, the slight sheen he got to his flesh when seastone poisoned his system. They'd have to be careful with that with the tatt. He'd run his flame over it later.

"You calling me a liar, Law? Slave?"

Amateur. "I am."

Law caught a second of doubt flitting across his ex-partner's face before it was replaced by his new resolve.

He gathered Law's arm, released the chain from the wall, and pushed him toward the bathroom, his hands still linked together with a shorter chain. Law figured the wrist cuffs would never come off.

"Do your business, finish up. I want you to help me in the garden."

Marco was into gardening now? He'd maintained the garden when they'd split up after the one and only assault so many years ago. That'd been to get back into Law's good books, about the furthest thing from the Whitebeard's mind at present. Before he pushed the door open he turned.

"Marco?"

So cold. He stared him down.

"It was fucked. What you went through. What you had to see. Losing Misery. I understand not wanting to touch me, to be with me, hating me after it. But I didn't instigate it. I didn't fuck myself against my will. There had to be a chance for the old girl. Had to be. I'm sorry you saw that shit. I didn't enjoy it. Not for a second."

Marco sighed. His anger like embers. "You came. You came and you came. You kissed and caressed him. You did everything he told you to, and you led, Law. Why didn't you fight with me, you fucker? Why didn't we fight together? And why don't we ever fuck like that?"

"We had to try to get her some help." He ignored the last comment. They didn't fuck like that because Law hated fucking like that.
"We might've saved her but you were too busy being stuffed with cock."

"If you'd gone earlier she might still be breathing."

But she wasn't, and she wouldn't be. Both men knew it.

"So you could enjoy yourself even more? Laughing it up with your so-called Master, your nemesis, at my expense?" Marco walked forward. Crowding Law into the bathroom. A space they'd so recently shared. Law saw his toothbrush where he'd left it.

"You fucked Sengoku, Robin, Benn and Shanks every time you went off to visit. How many times have you had Zoro up your arse? And we know all about you, Luffy and Smoker."

"No. I was scared shitless." Law pressed against the doorframe. Was there any Marco left?

"Fucked shitless." And he was. Marco'd seen the sheets. "You need to pay, Law. She was innocent."

"Why not make Doflamingo pay?"

"The knife was in your hand."

"You didn't even see it. Joker was the one with a string around my hand. You ever been controlled by him?"

Marco thought how easily he'd burnt off Doflamingo's string. How he didn't see her throat being cut cos he was sleeping. Had slept while they fucked beside him. "The weak don't get to choose, Law. I've always had choice. My error was allowing you the same. Thinking you knew what to do with it. Get going, cunt. Empty your bowels before I think of more creative ways to do it for you."

Law held onto the door jamb, one joined hand following the other.

"Why didn't you get Luffy, Vista, Smoker, get someone to fucking help us once you left?"

Why hadn't he?

"To help you, you mean. Was too late for the dog. What's the point in aiding a disaster? Maybe you needed to pay, and still disobedient too, despite everything." He approached and hustled Law into the bathroom. The fucker stumbled of course. Seastone and somehow thinking he wouldn't be pushed around. Marco tugged down his pants and shoved him onto the toilet. "Sit and shit. We've got work to do."

In the yard, Marco left the cuffs on his wrists but unchained the links between them.

"Incinerator. I've sorted them into piles for you. Everything goes in there. Everything gets burned." The wood-fired oven they'd decided on and built together.

Robin had told him of the remains she'd seen in the yard from their devil fruit visit. He eyed the very healthy zucchini vine growing under the tomato bush.

"Medical dictionary first, Doctor Trafalgar." Marco plopped the brick of a book in Law's hands. "Why was F missing? F for fucking? Was it some word game you and Doffy played to get
yourselves in the mood?"

Law flicked through. It was salvageable. "Were you even there? You flew overhead for long enough. Dofly was clearly looking to get the most out of a triple letter word score."

It was F for Flevance. Doflamingo made him read the entry then rip it out of the volume. He shoved it in Law's mouth, clamping his lips as he chewed it up, and swallowed it down.

*You can take the white monster out of the Flevance, but you can't take Flevance out of the white monster.*

Marco lifted his chin, eyes grey like ballast, dull gold speckled through. Enough insolence. "That was a birthday present, Law. All pretence. How happy you'd been to receive it." And look at him standing there, as if he had some right to the back yard, to the book.

"No pretence."

"Shut the fuck up, and get the job done."

Law looked down, then worked through the piles Marco had gathered on the wall near the oven. His medical books, reference books, notes, the herbal remedies Chopper had written out for him. Some patients' records he'd brought home. He shovelled them all into the incinerator. One of those clear blue skies, birds chirping, garden blooming, Marco supervising, days. Suburban bliss.

He placed fire-starters in Law's hand and matches. "Destroy yourself."

Law's hand shook as he lit the match. The paper curled and burnt. Both men watched the goods disintegrate into cinders and ash.

"Now this."

Again with that questioning look. Law took in Marco's expression — unbudging — then sorted through the items he'd dumped in front of him.

It was a much smaller pile. Law thought he and Robin had salvaged everything but apparently not. Maybe Marco had got replacements. A whole picture of Cora. An un-mangled snap of his family. Photos of him and Marco lounging around, laughing, from when they'd meant something. He picked those up, ripped them in two, and threw them straight in. They caught quickly, but the photo of Cora...

Marco came up behind him, put a tingle through the collar, pressed into the healing tattoo. Not too much. Didn't want to ruin it. Law's breath quickened. "C'mon. Tabula rasa. You're mine now. New playing field, new rules."

Law knew he was going to get fucked. It didn't matter what he did, so he placed the items on the brick wall where Marco had originally put them and shook his head.

"The alternative is better?"

He popped the top button of Law's pants.

"As if I have a choice."

"Oh, there's always a choice, and your way is always the way of the whore. You can't help it. Who were you more loyal to. A dead man? A dead family? Or those who really cared for you? Me?"
Doflamingo?

He’d lost it. Law was lucky to keep a hold of his own sanity across the years, and it'd slipped through his fingers a number of times. Marco had broken. "You just want me for your own use."

"Yeah. It's a pretty good deal." He ran his hands along Law's arse and thighs. "You're not trying to run." So familiar, and Law responded to the touch the way he did when they were good together. They were good together. When it'd been good, when Law didn't have his priss on, it was mindblowing, like Law and Doffy. Now he could have all that all of the time.

"No."

"You can't say no, Law. You belong to me."

Marco gripped his arm behind his back, the one with the new tatt, and frogmarched him down the yard. Law fucking tripping again. His feet were dirty in the soil. He'd hose them down before they entered the house. Wash the tatt too.

Marco enclosed the both of them in his flames and pushed Law up against the outside wall of the house. Right next to the tomato plant. Law was pliable with the kairoseki but there should have been less resistance. Stubborn as always.

"You can keep your top on. That's some kind of consideration, isn't it?"

"Stops my nipples from getting scraped off."

Law's fucking dry humour. Marco didn't see why he couldn't have it all.

"You gonna prep me or just let your slave be fucked up from day one?" Law's heart was hammering into the warmth of the bricks his face pressed into.

"You were fucked up from day one, Law. You know that, but I'm not an animal, so let's get you loosened up, or better yet, do it yourself. You know how."

And Law thought it'd be better than Marco jamming into him — fingers or dick — in his current state.

Marco jerked Law's dominant hand back and dipped his fingers into the lube that any master of a pleasure slave should carry at all times, consistent training was paramount, resistance needed to be met with a crushing show of force.

He then watched him — tattooed back rising and falling with the movement, front up against the wall — silently prep himself so Marco wouldn't break him. His fingers were so elegant. A criminal's hand obviously, but fine-tuned. That most pathetic of the wrong side of the law, the gentleman thief.

Law entered a finger slowly, breathed deeply a number of times, nose then mouth, as if they were practicing fucking Pilates. Man. What a pro. His buttocks, marked and bruised as they were, contracting as he squeezed his own fingers stuck up his own arse for a few seconds, then let go, repeat. Marco crowded in and Law growled. The Whitebeard knew how this felt from when they prepped each other.

"Not fucking yet."

As if they were still something. He must want it. His Law.
Marco chased out the images of Law lying on their bed, the light dim overhead, his body gradually relaxing as he loosened all of his muscles from his neck down to his hole as Marco had prepped him. It was bizarre seeing him up against the wall in chains, his pants pooled around his ankles, acting as if they'd negotiated and settled down for a lazy afternoon of fucking. Hot though.

Law's hole continued to grip and release the finger and he eased in a second. Law had talked him through the technique when they'd had some trouble at one stage. He knew he'd be imagining his anus widening, circling, getting ready to accept Marco's cock. He'd be up to three fingers soon. That flexing was driving him crazy. "So gorgeous, Law."

Fully clothed he pushed against him, breathed over his shoulder, took his ear in his teeth. Familiar yet strange without the earrings, Marco's cheek bumping into the collar.

Law twitched his head away and that wasn't right.

"Make those noises you made for Doflamingo."

Law wouldn't open his lips beyond grunts as he moved his wrist and fingers at such an awkward angle, in such an invasive way. Harder now with Marco pretending they happily shared a space. The Phoenix's teeth and tongue on his skin was vinegar in milk. Law's body tautened with excitement at the familiar and just as quickly tensed with revulsion.

Marco marvelled at Law's technique, his skill. Really, they'd been lying in waste all these years of non-use.

"Noises, Law." Marco's breath cascading down. He untied his capris. They sat so easily on his thighs His erection nudged the cleft of Law's arse. Doflamingo's brand so in your face. Fuck me here, it stated, and so he would. If anyone visited, Law would be flying his true colours, but Marco could easily dress.

"If you didn't want it you wouldn't prep." Wouldn't be branded. Twice.

Silence. Law dropped his hand. Ready. Rested his forehead against the house.

"Like old times," Marco laughed. He shoved Law's face into the uneven brick and scraped it up and down and back and forth. Ill-bred shit, and it'd stop him from bewitching him with his fine features. Law cursed in pain, no calls of attraction.

"Noises, you fucker."

Silence. Heavy, shaky, breaths, but silence.

Marco increased the pressure, the buzz of the collar, the remote in his shirt pocket and Law clutched at air, then he put an arm above Law's head, the other palm still pressing his face, and entered his hole quickly and suddenly, not letting Law adjust, and the Heart yelled despite preparation. Three fingers couldn't compare to a dick not wanting to learn the pathways of his canal.

"Better, mi amor," Marco breathed. "Much better. That yell translates as fuck me? I'll let Kizaru know, and about the prep. Your dick hurt pushing against that surface? Imagine the pain Misery was in. Hope she forgives you. But let's get this over and done with, shall we, babe?"

But, as he'd said, he wasn't an animal. After the quick entrance he sat there for a while. Kissing Law's shoulders, like he used to, those new scars on his neck, as if he wanted to ease them. He had a lazy arm around his belly and it sat so right, so at home. He could drop his fingers down, pull at
the pubes, at the recoiled penis.

"I missed you, Law."

Law hung his head and he dared to, what? Fucking cry again? How long had they known each other and he was still denying his partner? He shivered under him.

"You've still got work to do, and me having to service you, having to discipline you, so that you do it is not how things should work, but you like it, don't you? It's the only way to get you off. You told me yourself so long ago."

Law kept the photo of Cora in mind. Of his family. Marco could chop his arms off. He wasn't putting the images the fire. If he did chop his arms off, of course he couldn't.

The brick did fucking hurt. He was cut up, and Marco didn't squeeze the bandaged arm too much, because he wanted his signature to look magnificent, but he'd known Law so long he knew all his weak and sweet points.

He grabbed a handful of the tomato leaves from the bush near them, scrunched them up and placed his hand just under Law's nose, held it over his mouth as if it were a chloroform cloth. Fuck Law, not returning the attention, as always.

"Remember how I sent these to you, before I knew you were screwing anything on two legs."

"I wasn't. There was only you." Law's voice was muffled. He wasn't going to get sick. Marco moved. Law's hole responded the way he always did, though his dick remained scraped, small and disinterested.

"Kuzan brought them to you. You were visiting Sengoku. You saw him just because you knew he killed Ace and it killed my heart?"

"No. Because of Cora." Acid ripped at the back of his throat.

"And you fucked Kuzan and Sengoku cos' you like to be fucked by giants, you poor wee bairn." He imagined Law between them.

Law's arms were braced against the wall, and Marco pushed against him.

"I'll make you hate this smell, Law." And he held the leaves over Law's mouth and nose as he drove into him and drove in hard.

"Gonna be sick." Law tasted the leaves as he spoke.

That was fast, but Law was weak. Without withdrawing, Marco dragged him closer to the garden and pushed him down on all fours.

Leaning over Law, he pulled his hair back, and the collar, as much as was practical, and helped Law empty his guts out by driving into him so hard that all that was unsettled inside had to come spitting out. Who said he didn't take care of him, like always?
So, I have the self-control of a gnat, and am unable to stick to a posting schedule where things go up weekly (or longer). My idea is always if I get this creature out then I can concentrate on other things I should be doing, but neither end up getting done.

Anyway, I'm not sure whether to have dark 6a, b and c, or alternate with light. If you've got any ideas on that let me know. Light's probably best.

Thanks for reading.
"Cora?"

"Law." Cora felt the kid's forehead with the back of his hand as he carried him along the snow-laden path. At thirteen there was no way Sengoku could have done this with him. Law was tiny for his age. Damn disease. The kid had only let him carry him trussed up in rope or by the back of his shirt, legs kicking in outrage, before his condition had worsened.

"Cora-san?"

"Law-san." He bit down a smile. Couldn't afford to drop Law onto the icy ground in a fit of joy.

"I'm not a monster."

A gust of wind blinded the two with snow. Law was still in his short shorts. He was warm. Should have been freezing. Cora wiped the biting pellets from his face. Was the boy trying to convince himself?

"You did stab me."

Law smiled. Angered, and then coughed. "You hurled me out a six storey building." Into a yard of scrap metal.

"Muddied that face of yours a few times too."

Yeah, so much that Baby 5 and Buffalo took bets on the time of the daily beating.

"I was only..."

"You were only..."

"Ten."

Both felt they'd made their point. The kid had come to them strapped in grenades. Law wiped his
nose on the feathers of the black coat wrapped around them both. Cora'd truly have to get it cleaned when he got the chance.

Law's parents had never treated him that way. "You burnt up those hospitals and attacked the doctors and nurses."

Cora kept an eye out for shelter. The Barrels Pirates' hideout teetered high on the hill, matching Sengoku's description. Yes. They'd fix things for Law.

"I bet your mother and father never turned anyone away." He gripped Law a little too tight thinking of the panicked, self-serving faces of the hospital staff. The kid had been the one to try to get him to stop.

Law shook his head, not protesting the pressure. Cora's fingers would loosen soon. "My parents wanted to save Lammy."

Law's sister, Cora recalled.

"Dad worked on an antidote. The condition, not disease, it wasn't contagious. He told us again and again. Lammy and me weren't scared of any of the patients, only of their pain." Law's hold tightened on the coat for second as a squall of hurt pushed up the back of his neck.

"What happened?"

"World Government killed them all."

Made the townsfolk dig up the lead despite knowing it was poisoning them, and then killing them for being poisoned. Encouraging rumours of contagion or not correcting them.

"Cora-san?"

"Hmmm."

"Doffy told Jora amber-lead wasn't catching. He told her not to spread lies" Buffalo would have hated him if not for Doflamingo.

Cora pushed open the wooden door to a small cabin at the base of the hill Diaz Barrels' hideout perched on. Minion Island used to be a bustle of coin passing from purse to merchant but was a ghost town now. Another town with so few people breathing. The snow speckled the floor behind them.

"He did say that."

"He knew I wasn't a monster."

"You're not."

But what about Doffy?

Cora didn't want to think about it. His brother recognised the inhuman and the human in Law. Encouraged the inhumane, funnelled the humane. "One kindness doesn't alter the truly monstrous."

oOOo
"Marco."

"Mr. Phoenix."

"Former first division commander."

"Doctor Marco."

"Phoenix! Yoo-hoo!"

The photographers caught up with them stepping away from their house as they picked up supplies. Law, closing the gate behind him, reached for his hood, remembered they lived on a tropical island, and dropped his hand from the collar of his t-shirt. Kikoku was close, though he appeared relaxed, even with possessions bundled in his arms.

The pack crowded them, curtains fell back into place in their neighbours' homes, and light filtered through the shade from branches overhead. Marco and Law didn't sense any armoury nor those bearing arms.

"Taking your slave for a walk, Marco? Exercise? His chains…? Wise to have him unbound?"

Birds fluttered, pecked the ground below them, called out from the trees. Morgans' employees.

"So benevolent," cooed a lovebird.

"What?" Law and Marco, hands full, stared right back at the gaggle of gawkers.

Marco turned completely around to face them. "No. Doctor Trafalgar's not a slave. He's free." If they could remember one title they could remember them all.

"Surgeon of Death," some turkey gasped.

It had been tough to return to their house but they'd managed. Law's only reactions a grimace at the stains left from cleaning, and the stains that couldn't be cleaned, but he didn't dwell. And silence. He was silent. But he was never verbose.

He'd snipped cuttings from the tomato plant and packed them away in soft paper. Marco watched him drive his thumbnail into a leaf and then hold it below his nostrils. Almost an unconscious action. That plant, that summer-soaked aroma, really grounded him. Tension softening around his eyes and jaw.

Cat biscuits rained upon them, the street a whole lot quieter.

"Law!" Marco laughed.

It took the blink of an eye and didn't improve Law's reputation as the kingpin of animal cruelty, but the food bowls left out by the crazy cat lady a few doors down emptied. The ferals she fed prowled, excited at the sudden influx of plumage and down.

"What's the issue? They've got wings, right? Surely they know how to fly."

And Morgans' employees were vicious with their rumour-mongering and scandal. If they didn't know how to defend themselves from a straggly pack of moggies what good were they at hunting down the undesirables, the untouchables, they wished to expose?
Chopper had sneaked them by proxy into the zoo through a side gate with a word to the director. The director was a friend and Chopper assured him there was a heart no softer when it came to animals than Law's. The zoo had a breeding programme to save certain species from extinction, and Law could observe his brethren dip and swim and splash and play for hours.

Marco enjoyed the raptors and that was next on their list. Law liked them too, but Marco knew how much watching the seals calmed him. And at the moment he needed all the peace he could get.

It was too risky in these pitchfork times to queue like everyone else, so he was grateful to Chopper for pulling the strings. Being stuck inside the nondescript but airless Hearts' safehouse was good for nobody's psyche, and none of them were currently officially criminals.

But shouty public opinion certainly wasn't on the side of Law or the Hearts or ex-slaves. So it was kind of magic watching him away from all that noise, bathed in the blue light of the water spilling from the tank, the light melding with the navy glints of his own hair, hand flat on the glass, rapt attention on the mammals swimming around and around, Kikoku against his shoulder.

Marco sat on a nearby bench, scanning the map of the zoo, though basically they trod the same route each time they came here. There was an hour to closing, so Law had the viewing platform to himself.

"Mr. Phoenix? How can you bear to be in the company of someone so monstrous? Is it because of your very good nature that he can be around animals without hurting them?" A stork sat beside him, kicking its spindly legs back and forth, hushed concern swathing his face.

Marco jumped. What the hell was wrong with his observation haki? What the hell was wrong with these goddamned reporters? Wasn't there some starlet, newly shorn of her tresses, they wanted to harass? Law's stillness amazed him at times, though the fear and anger were also apparent — to his eye. He couldn't wrap his head around acclimatising to persecution.

The seals couldn't see out to the people peering in, but one flashed back and forth in front of Law. So entrancing, gliding through the water, silvery bubbles behind it, yawning up against the glass. Law didn't want to deal with whatever names he was still called to his face all these years later.

"We hear Master Donquixote bequeathed Trafalgar to you and you have full proprietorship, which is certainly a relief to our readers and the citizens of the islands." The stork beaked one of his feathers from his breast and spat it to the ground.

Spurts of blue flamed Marco's skin. Three children entered the viewing area and banged on the glass. Their mother tried to stop them. Law's friend swam away.

"Who feeds your bullshit meter? You're reporters. You're supporting ownership of a person. How's that right?"

A quail popped up. A number of them. Stenographers, telegraphers, marketers, and gofers for the World Economic Journal. Marco wasn't happy with their pestering, but at least they weren't circling Law, beaks clacking like piranha teeth. The sanctity of freedom of movement probably meant nothing to a bunch of Aves who found themselves under daily threat of winding up on the dinner plate or in cages. He could see why their sympathies lay with Misery. But Law hadn't put
her there. He wasn't the root of her torture.

"But your dog. The vet says you tried to rescue her from the Surgeon of Death's sickening savagery."

Oh man, he'd been so cut up when he saw the vet he didn't know what he was saying. His words haunted the two of them now. But Doflamingo had visited the vet too. And he was the one who'd urged Moonbeam to submit a civil claim.

"You know what's savage? Research the ito-ito no mi and its use of forcing loved ones to knock off loved ones. You think I'd remain with someone who set out to hurt me and those I care about?"

The quails were not writing, or only scribbling sporadically. The crane nodded.

"Have you asked yourselves why I haven't sided with Doflamingo and am with Law? Asked your readers that?"

The crane, excited, bobbed it's head. "That's why we're here. Serving the community. We have a duty to inform the people, to protect them." He slapped one feathered wing in the other. "Do you keep him in sight to also protect the populace? Doflamingo said he was unhinged and needed close supervision."

Law walked to Marco's side. The quails tumbled all over his feet, tried to climb his legs. So much for being terrified. The crane looked uneasy. Marco stood up next to Law, close enough for their arms to rub. The mother and her children, bored with the no show of seals, stared at the commotion of birds and brutes. Wasn't that the guy the papers had warned them about? Public enemy number one? What was he doing so close to her sons?

"Room."

A racket of squawks and chirps rose from the photographers and their support team.

The sphere was pretty. Marco enjoyed the show. The blue of the holding tank, Law's own fine streaks highlighting his angular face, and the dome spreading over the space, encasing Morgans' employees.

Marco decked himself out in blue flame for the hell of it, even though he really should have felt more of a connection with his feathered friends. Law glanced at him with a laidback smile. It was always fun playing like this.

"Not the polar bear enclosure," Marco said.

Law's face fell, but he tilted his head in accordance. "Otters?"

"Otters are good." Birds could swim as well as fly, right? Quails excepted. Maybe Law would deposit them on the rocks.

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Whole fish grilled to Sanji's high standards sat to Law's side as the monster trio argued whether Zoro's sword strokes were stronger than Sanji's kicks were stronger than Luffy's punches were stronger than Zoro's sword strokes. It was like an endless game of rock, scissors, paper. Except Nothing could beat Luffy's punches, excluding Nami's. Luffy was so caught up in being declared
the strongest that Law's fish went unmolested. He picked at it with his chopsticks, removed the vertebrae, and swallowed a few mouthfuls of meat. Delicious, of course.

"Monsters. Shut it. You're all monsters, right? We've even got the posters to prove it." They shied away from Nami as she knuckled her hand. She tapped at the wall. "Monster Trio. Wanted. Dead or Alive." A ludicrous amount of Beri ran below. That poster was a collectible now.

Law watched them smile and bicker and kick back, sleek and preening; content like shags on a rock. They didn't mind the description at all.

Maybe Law truly was monstrous but he'd not believed the doctors back then, though the treatment he got was the treatment he'd expected. It was easy to blame those alone and different — a child. And Law would never forgive himself for Misery and Lammy's deaths. But if soldiers hadn't set fire to the hospital, Lammy would've gone from amber lead if his parents hadn't found a cure, and Law soon after her. She would have died surrounded by loved ones, or survived surrounded by loved ones. He knew that.

Doflamingo had broken into their house and trapped Law in strings and directed him like a puppet to slay their dog. What Law had done was monstrous, but it was monsters that drove him to it. He couldn't forgive his negligence in failing to wake in enough time, in closing that closet door. But he knew he hadn't acted alone. The atrocities were not his doing alone.

"This was your idea, right?" Marco asked Law, sweating a little in the controlled environment despite being used to the general humid air of the island.

"They're cute," Law shrugged, though he didn't wander over to pat one.

Marco spread out on the lawn, staring at the sky, head on Law's lap. The surgeon had woven long grass into a loose crown and placed it on Marco's head. They could pretend. Law's weaving and paper skills helped hone surgical dexterity, as did the crewel work and quieter embroidery that decorated his clothes. Despite his domestic skills cute wasn't a word that sat well with him.

"What are we doing in the koala enclosure?"

"If they're looking to cage me, they'll never look for me in a cage."

"Hah." There was a logic to it. The enclosure was open plan, a bit like their now desecrated house. Vegetation indigenous to the marsupials' original environment crackled with the scent of eucalyptus.

It was peaceful in the sun, Law's doctor's hands tweaking a clump of his hair here and there. Oh, he knew how to apply pain with precision, but also its opposite. When the doctor was in the house the sadist remained in the cellar.

Law laid a hand across the side of Marco's neck, the skin usually covered by his collar.

"You didn't tell me about these."

"Shouldn't you have noticed?"

"Sorry." A Room whirled at the tips of his hand. "Was busy licking my own wounds."
"Yah, it's okay." Marco touched Law's fingers, warm against his neck. "I kinda don't want those scratches to disappear."

"Ah." Law dropped his hand, the Room, and leant back. Marco could heal himself, anyway.

"She panicked as I flew higher. Must've had a moment of awareness, of strength. She scratched the hell out of me. She would've plummeted below if I'd let her go."

Law understood. Misery's bite marks on his own face had healed, but he'd wished for years that he hadn't been so quick, when he'd been mastering his fruit, to clear the scarring from Vergo's initial beating.

For one thing, it proved useful to the Family when they recaptured him and had no issue with rearranging his face, but didn't always like being reminded of their handiwork. Law could cleanse the canvas for them every time. He'd wanted to get stronger too of course, so they'd release him from seastone for as long as it took, and then resackle him as he truly got the hang of his power.

The more important reason was that even that blackest of recollections imprinted on his body was a memory of Cora. Things survived, things left behind.

"Did she have peace, Marco. Know you were there?"

Marco sighed. That was a tough night. "She was in shock, but reconnected now and then. Mostly she was so confused."

Of course she was. Why would Law do such a thing? Marco felt the change in energy in the Heart. Anger. Sorrow. It ebbed away.

"Your idea of a joke, Trafalgar? Arranging to meet Koala and me here?"

You had to watch Law. You never knew if he was waving at you or in the process of removing a body part.

"Noo, you creepy surgeon."

Obviously the latter. Sabo's head now rested on Marco's chest, Marco still lying against Law's thighs.

"No, not a joke," Law said.

The damn bastard couldn't be any more smug.

"But this is." Law maintained the room of course. He didn't want Sabo to be permanently separated from his body. "Thanks for meeting us, Sabo-ya." Plus, yeah, he had thought it was kinda funny to meet them here. Where was Koala?

"Marco," Sabo said, peering down at the Whitebeard's face, looking up his nostrils. "You really should invest in a hair trimmer."

Marco lifted a hand in greeting. "Law says that all the time." Sabo's top hat remained securely in place.

Law had to give it to this group and their friends. Sabo's headless body sat cross-legged against a eucalyptus, lightly tapping a pipe on its palm, keeping its cool. Law's own crew were used to
floating around in one of his Rooms, but were usually nervous because maybe only they understood the true reach of his inventiveness.

The Strawhats were calm or excited, except for Nami and Usopp who channelled anger and panic respectively. Once Nami realised Law's Room could double as an amusement park ride, so long as his energy was up, she warmed to his skills and charged a fee for the out of body experience. She split with Law, ten percent, ninety. She was generous with the ten because regular maintenance was a must for any reliable piece of machinery. He remembered to thank her.

Koala entered the enclosure and strode over to the trio.

"Who said they were flea-ridden, piddling, stinking, scratching, rotten little things?"* she mused, sitting to Marco's side, and scratching Sabo behind the ears. He looked cute without his body. She wished she had Law's powers at times. She could cart Sabo about like a bowling ball and prevent him from meandering away from their missions.

"Some politician somewhere."

"Sounds like Garp."

"Too many words for Gramps."

"Iva?"

Probably Iva. Koala stretched over and shook Law's hand. "Looking good, Trafalgar."

Marco coughed.

Koala sat back down, smiled, and tipped her hat back slightly. "You'd look good too, Phoenix. If not for that strange growth protruding from your breastbone."

Sabo figured that Koala was a little too pleased about his altered form. Could he use the mera-mera no mi while his body was separated? He concentrated. Marco, peering at his scrunched-up face, wondered if a headless body could fart. Under the eucalyptus tree a puff of smoke rose to the sky.

"Steady," Koala said. Sabo's power was still volatile, despite the years passed.

"Eucalypti are highly combustible." Law was tiring anyway. He transported Sabo's body to their group, his head to the body, and dropped the sphere. Sabo stood, hands wrapped on either side of his face making sure everything was correctly aligned. He patted the top of his hat, and dusted his coat down, loosely holding the pipe.

He was thankful Law hadn't combined him with a koala. Luffy had described Brownbeard the Pirate's alligator lower half in great detail, from his adventures on Punk Hazard.

He glanced down at the Whitebeard, the Heart and his steadfast Revolutionary comrade. Luffy trusted this guy and the two had fought hard side by side across the years. He wasn't a hated or discarded ex, and that meant something. Either one rescuing the other over time. Plus, Marco was stand up. And the Revolutionaries had been itching for something to do. Peace was nice but could be boring. And there was Koala.

Marco sat up, his circlet slipping back to the grass. That display of Law's powers was unexpected but fun. Sabo had given Law some shit when he'd been with Luffy, but they'd mostly worked it out, and recognised that either party had strengths that aided their own agendas. Sabo sat down, picked up the grass wreath and ran it through his fingers.
Law's parents had been loving and present. Amber lead would have taken Lammy and Law before it took them, but they had tried their hardest to find a cure before that inevitability, and they gave their children the best life they could. As such, Law was a bit of an anomaly in their rag-taggle group of New World orphans and miscreants.

He'd known love from his birth family, and peace before Flevance fell ill and the city targeted for it. Sabo had no such luck. His luck was in being picked up by Dragon when he was a boy. And the years between being kidnapped from her family, rescued and returned to them would always shape Koala.

As she'd grown she relearned how to cry, grimace and laugh. The Sun Pirates — Aladine and Fisher Tiger, delivering her back to her home island — had given her space to express what she wanted to, not what she had to.

Fisher Tiger had rescued her from slavery three years before that. Did the fishmen have anyone they could safely show their faces to? She left Foolshout Island when she learnt how Fisher Tiger was fatally injured by the marines, the attack quietly endorsed by the villagers so the world government didn't come after her as an escaped slave.

Hack had helped her assuage survivor's guilt when she'd joined the Revolutionaries, letting her know that Fisher Tiger had refused the human blood that could have saved him. Jinbei shared a few secrets now and then.

Koala knew that a select few marines might see the humour that razored Law's face at present, that lightened the anxiety she knew the media frenzy stirred up — she was in danger of succumbing to it herself. Doflamingo wasn't quiet about the barely legal actions he'd taken against Law. Legal due to the laws not having changed, not in their intent.

He'd spoken casually about rebranding Law as a kind of public service. Her own burnt flesh was seared into memory. Both in Mary Geoise and later when Fisher Tiger had modified her slave brand to that of the Sun Pirates. She wore the second mark with pride.

Not all tattoos hid or altered the seal of ownership, but many did. She often wondered about the vines of ink climbing Law's skin.

He smiled now, but she'd seen his face flattened of all personality, due to so-called training, of anything that marked him as an individual — an equal, a superior — when faced with jailers and would be slaveholders. They never kept him down for long. She admired and feared the scorn that pinched his fine bones and curled his lip sooner or later, inviting beatings, torture.

Fisher Tiger and Aladine had it too. Jinbei, even Arlong. The defiant fishmen. She'd been captured for short periods but never undergone prolonged imprisonment again. She didn't know what it would do to her; if she'd clean the cells until her fingers wore through and her attempts at appeasement caused rictus.

Law briefly caught her scrutiny, tilted his neck back. Defiance to them, the motherfuckers, not toward her. But yeah. No-one wanted that pity shit, though it was a hell of a lot better than abuse. Her captors hadn't been sick enough to use her in any way other than a workhorse and as a means to prop up their own egos.

Again, media, marines and Doflamingo didn't care that Law's particular form of slavery was widely known. The spin was that it was justified. Every person had a service to offer, a need to fulfil, to be fulfilled.
She'd slice off a few heads, legs and arms to showcase skills too, meeting those he hadn't seen for a while, not sure how they'd treat him. He and Jean Bart were the targets of this new witch hunt, but it could as easily be her or Nami or Robin if the wrong people wanted to stir things right up.

"Koala-ya?"

She nodded.

"Bepo wants to learn fishman karate."

She knew they hadn't come there to talk karate, but there were upsides to everything.

"Sounds good. I'd like to know Mink-karate."

"Think it's more of a Bepo thing than a Mink thing."

"Either way." She lifted her shoulders.

Sabo and Marco were trading flicker of fire for flicker of fire. Was it a dick-measuring contest? Law was curious how Marco felt seeing Ace's fruit. Relieved should be the answer, but humans were messy. Luffy's family wasn't necessarily Whitebeard's.

"Why the Koala enclosure, Law?" Sabo asked, looking at his fingers and the flames within like a half-lit candelabrum.

"I like marsupials."

"Why not meet in the platypus house then?"

"They're a special type of marsupial. Lay eggs, plus, nocturnal. Wanted to see who I was dealing with."

"Koalas are nocturnal." Koala knew all about her namesake. She watched Sabo out the corner of her eye in case she needed to use her water bottle as an extinguisher.

"Not always."

"True."

"They're about as active as Zoro when he's not drinking or fighting," Marco said.

The four glanced around at the grey bundles cuddled up into the leaves. Just like Zoro, they were protecting them from a threat, though with their own jail and cuddliness and sloth, rather than three katana and haki to die for.

"Law likes mammals." Marco wondered that marines and enemies hadn't figured out his partner's tendency to just sit and hang out with whichever furred creature caught his attention. Fish and certain birds were okay too, though not flamingos nor Morgans' crew. He particularly liked tanuki and polar bears.

Sabo recalled his flame. It wasn't the worst place to converge, and the rise of belligerence belonging in the last era needed addressing. No-one wanted to see Law or Jean Bart returned to slavery. Any of the Heart's crew.

Law had never been officially affiliated with the Revolutionaries, but they'd been aware that he loosened chains and provided individuals with shelter, a place with the Hearts. The Revolutionaries
did the same, but on a wider scale. Law's aims in destroying factories of artificial devil fruit manufacture had tied in with their own. They had more in common than not.

From what Sabo understood of the restrictive outlooks poisoning Law and Marco's island, and the surrounding areas, this new conservatism wouldn't last long but was dangerous for those singled out until things could be rectified.

His sources told him that Benn Beckman was on the case, challenging the outdated legislation and Fujitora and Luffy scoured the books for similar anomalies of justice on paper, injustice in practice. Sabo smiled thinking of his brother. Fujitora was scouring. Luffy was x-ing the spot when his signature was required.

Sabo had heard that Marco and Ace had been happy together and so he trusted the guy and his choices. They'd all shared a few drinks across the years.

"At your service." Dragon always liked to help out the friends of his son, and everyone liked helping Nico Robin — she'd been the one to place the call — and no-one could stomach slavery. And there was Koala. It was time to set things in motion.

Chapter End Notes

Things I've taken liberty with: This is set post-canon, so some time between current canon and this story Koala and Law have briefly been up against the powers that be. I don't think that's out of the range of possibility.

I know that we don't know if Koala is aware of how and why Fisher King died, but I'm sure people talk to one another. Same with Jinbei sharing information with Hack.

Luffy's hands are also a little tied with the new responsibilities that come with being the pirate king, maybe not as free a role as he would have liked.

Canon will obviously bite this story in the bum, but it's always been a canon-divergent AU.

* An Australian politician, also an ad-man, described koalas that way. If you google the phrase you'll find the source.

Thanks for reading.
The next day Law had to stand in the yard and sort through what was left of his clothing. Marco stood in front of him and placed his hands over Law's, pressing Law's fingers into the symbols his then-partner had embroidered into the cloth as a way through darkness, as a hidden letter of love, as an affirmation of self.

Marco's own fingers slipped between Law's to run along the familiar stitches with him. He'd known what they were, had adored them, once he discovered them — the black thread embroidered into the black hems and seams of Law's shirts. Mythical birds, hearts, compasses, letters, submarines, polar bears, curlicues.

"All that labour just to gaslight me, Law?"

Law shook his head.

"Even went as far as wearing one of your shirts when you were gone."

Law focused on the ground. So fucking impassive.

Marco knew his former loyalty, his own delight, had been pathetic. All for this faithless shit. Law was wired wrong. Some haphazard, half-arsed DIY job. Ends frayed, blackened fuses.

"Means nothing to you?"

"Meant the world to me."

"Cos' you had a bit more time to fuck around with Sengoku?"

Law didn't respond, dug his toes into the earth.
Marco dropped his hand. Disgusted. "Go on with it. Cut them up, and into the fire."

Law did as told. They took an age to rip apart with blunt scissors, and longer to catch and burn than paper, but they did. The fire had been stoked.

"Now this." Marco tapped the pictures of Cora, of Law's family, of some tea towels he'd salvaged of the decent Donquixote brother.

Law refused.

"No?" Marco walked closer and ran a finger over the grazes on Law's face and chest that weren't mending. "Benn's putting in an appeal, but it's taking time. I'm sure we can do a lot with you before we have to face the court again."

Why didn't he look at him?

Law remained rooted to the spot. They were just photos. But there'd be something else. And they were all he had. He had the cobbled together copies at Robin's, but how could they be struck out of his life again?

"Lammy died by fire, right? You put her into it?"


"Killed Misery and murdered your sister, couldn't save your parents. Bumped off Cora, basically."

Law's exhalation was audible. He lifted his head and kept Marco's gaze. He kept the fucker's gaze.

"Kinda poetic justice to burn the photo, isn't it?"

Which was exactly why he didn't want to burn it. He wasn't going to erase his sister from the face of earth again.

Marco shoved the prints and cloth into Law's hands and the Heart let them drop to the ground.

"Tchh." Marco circled them. Circled Law. Shirtless today. They might have burnt the last of his tops. The bruises were pretty, his muscles still tight. "You didn't hesitate to incinerate our relationship yesterday."

"Wasn't me," Law said.

Marco remembered when that copper gaze sought mutual respect. When it was hopeful and uncertain, grateful. Now it blazed with wasted energy. Did Law really think tattooing the grim reaper's name on his fingers repelled fate? That a look could do anything?

"Well, it certainly wasn't me. On your knees." He pushed the back of Law's head down. "On the photos, on your knees."

Law dropped.

"Look at that." Marco was impressed at the obedience despite the misplaced hostility. "Is it reverence or repulsion? A bit muddy down there."

It was better than the photos and images being burnt, Law thought.
"Stay."

Law did, hands by his side. Marco walked to the tomato bush and plucked leaves, ground them into a poultice.

He settled himself onto the brick wall. He'd always wanted to do this when Law and he were a thing, and sometimes he did, they did. He'd do Law, Law him, but the Heart was such an old maid. Always wary about the neighbours, about the dog — yeah, the dog always got in the way. She wasn't here to interrupt their fun now, and the trees provided cover.

"Good boy."

Law had to loop his arms over Marco's thighs to prevent the collar from getting in the way. It pushed him forward like an eager, tumblely puppy trying to crawl into his lap.

"Get me off, Law." He stroked the hair over his ears. "Do a good job. Noises."

Law silently went about his task, and Marco tossed the leaves back and forth in his palms as Law expertly licked him up and down, sucked along his length, withdrew, fondled his balls with that Donquixote trained-tongue and stained fingers. That tongue trained on Donquixote. Marco's head tipped back as Law's lips rippled the skin of his dick again. Ah fuck, he was good.

"Noises, you cocksucker."

Law ignored him. Despite that new tattoo in Marco's line of vision. How could he even begin to think he had the upper hand? He was asking for it. Marco grabbed Law's ears, the scent of the tomato plant surrounding him, and forced his head down on his dick and pulled it back up. And again. Again.

Law's hands, weak from seastone, dug into the skin of Marco's thighs to keep balance as he choked and struggled for air. The cloth, the pictures below tore and muddied.

"That's more like it."

Law didn't have to be told to swallow though he'd always spat out when they'd been a thing.

The ancients stoned them, didn't they — adulterers — after fucking them first? Buried them up to their necks in the sand. Let ants crawl over them. Law was too fine to stone, but Marco was satisfied he followed the initial protocol.

He'd lit the fire. It was scorching. They stood in front of it. Sweat seeping through Law's clothes. His other garments burning to a cinder. They'd cleared out the hamper, the bags put aside to drop off to whatever charity would take them. Not a scrap of the man's style remained. Marco liked the idea of dressing him. He'd been in touch with the Family, and Jora was creative in her suggestions.

By the third day the tattoo was ready to be seen. It was still red, still sore, scabs forming, but it was beyond immediate danger for the most part. Marco had been applying salve, and running his restorative flames over it, and Law looked magnificent, standing in the garden, the blue in his hair, the blue on his arm. Without the flames he'd be more vulnerable. Blue rather than magenta, matching the Phoenix power. M for Marco. M for mine — Marco's unruly little adulterer well and truly getting his cum-uppance. It was fitting.

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Misery had always been trying to get him to loosen up.

Marco held the streaked and tattered photos and images in his hand. Law looked worn out. Not defeated, but not really happy with his lot. He'd been sleeping well in Misery's blankets. Marco had fucked him there. It was difficult to hold him with that collar, and while taking care of the arm with the tattoo, but they did well enough.

Law didn't have the privilege of sleeping in the bed they'd shared yet. Maybe once he'd learnt how to behave he could sleep at the foot. Wasn't quite housetrained yet. He didn't complain, but the floor must dig into his bony hips.

Doflamingo had told him how it had been Law's job to service whoever came to his cell in the second captivity. Marco didn't want to bring that into being yet. He knew the stories behind most of the scars, and they were cruel. Were morning fuckings really a requisite of discipline?

"Why don't you fight, Law?"

Marco was fucking him at the back of the house, up the knoll where he'd buried the dog's body. She could witness his punishment. He hoped she felt vindicated. Her spirit.

Law was on all fours and Marco had strapped an open bag around the back of his head like a horse's feeder. It was packed to the brim with crushed leaves. He pulled the slave's head and hair up like breaking in a brumby and slammed into him, knowing just where to glide over and again. He'd do it until Law met him with lowered head, licking lips with nerves, excitement or suggestion — willingness — chewing fodder.

"Noises, Law."

The fucker didn't respond. Too busy chowing down. Couldn't win them all.

Marco reached around as he fucked him and worked Law's dick in the way he'd become so practiced at over the years. It hadn't worked after the initial Doflamingo attack, cos yeah, Marco figured there was too much of a good thing, but there was a response now. Just as he sensed Law about to come he pulled out of him, dragged him up, both of them engorged, and picked up the photos from the nearby bench and threw them on the ground.

"Take aim, babe." And he knew Law wouldn't, so he grabbed the slave's cock and his own, almost tipping both of them off-balance, and pumped, the two of them spurting shots of creamy white over Cora's smiling face, over Law's mother and father and Lammy.

He cried. Such a fucking big girl's blouse at times. Tears trickling into the vegetation he better have fucking eaten by the time they finished. He pulled Law to him and smoothed down his hair like he used to. "That's it babe. Let it all out. Make some noise. Good boy."

He pulled the nosebag off. Not finished. Green mushed all over Law's face, and the poor hiccuping thing was trying to spit out leaves and breathe. He kissed softly at the side of his eyes. Noticed Law stop his head from jerking away. Stop his hands from pushing Marco the fuck away from him. The Phoenix took his lips, slipped his tongue inside. It was like kissing a dead body sprinkled with basil, but slaves only responded when ordered, and Law hadn't quite got to that point.

oOOo
Doffy fixed it of course. He and the vet popped in for catch ups on how best to maintain and instigate discipline of the delinquent. As if Doffy needed any pointers. But Marco did.

A casual flick of the wrist laced Law's hands with string. Of course he was weak. Marco wasn't feeding him the best, and his only exercise was of the jaw, hands and anus, apart from the housework — that he did pretty well — and that seastone didn't help. Doflamingo knew that it had a heightened effect on him due to the two years of captivity after Dressrosa when they'd chipped him with the stuff. It never treated a fruit user well anyway.

He stared at him, his true master, it was stamped on his arse after all, with such hatred. Doflamingo's grin was that of a man who always won. He giggled. Law shook and now, now, there was a struggle, and now there was noise. No use.

Not only did he take the photos to the oven — the earth stained, cum-splattered photos — under Doffy's very gentle persuasion, he first ripped them into pieces, after kissing each and every one of them. Doflamingo thought that was a nice dramatic touch. He was all about the show. Plus Law liked the taste of semen, of dirt. Just as well he couldn't control his eyes. The slanted rage blinding his vision was magic.

It wasn't lit. Law, shakily — the strings weren't one hundred percent attuned to fine motor skills — picked up the matches and the fire starters, and burnt to ashes the few remaining images he had of treacherous Cora, of his family. Doflamingo stood him in place and made sure he watched them disintegrate. Then the strings drew Law to the heavenly demon. Law knew this drill.

He climbed on his lap, legs wrapped around Doflamingo's lower back, crossing those tree trunk thighs. The giant rubbed his hands up and down Law's spine, supporting him. If he let go, he'd fall to the ground. Such trust.

Marco spiked with jealousy at the familiarity. Doffy would be hardening against Law. The vet had left long before. Doffy tongued the new tattoo, the curative powers of these two fruit users were a wonderous thing. He smiled. Marco was an excellent pupil.

Law's hands — the strings were very hard to see — slipped under Doflamingo's open shirt and he massaged his chest, put his lips and tongue to his nipple, pressed into him a little closer.

"So hungry, whore? You've got a new master now. So deceitful. So fickle."

Doflamingo sat back, arms over the back of the bench as Law worked down his body, so adept. No strings now. Law adjusted forward.

"He does that. Cries when he's happy. Remember that. Tears of joy. You'll discipline him for it later, right, Marco?" His palm sat on Law's hair like a spider. "Imagine pleasuring me when his new master is less than a metre away." He twisted Law's head Marco's direction. The slave's eyes were narrowed and dull. Doffy dropped his grip and Law went back to work.

"Why not now?"

"Why not indeed?"

He pulled Law's head up from where he was now nuzzling the soft hair leading down to his pubes. "You just burnt up your family, Law. Again. Cremated Corazon. We're all you've got left. We're all you are. Who are you, Law?"

Law sighed. A sigh for Hades. Charon and every ferryman crossing the Styx felt it sweep by like a sweltering breeze.
"Yours, Master."

Doflamingo’s eyes thinned and Law had nowhere to run to anyway. He punched him and sent him sprawling to the grass, hacking and sputtering, hands hooking the grass, dirt sliding under his nails.

Marco strode over and kicked him in the guts. Who’d been looking after him this week? Disloyal little shit. Law struggled to all fours — that fucking collar — still coughing. Marco pulled him up by the crappy t-shirt he’d dressed him in. Something with a palm tree and glitter spelling out *Market Price* in cursive.

"And yours too, fucktard," Law spat.

He woke the next day, chained to the wall, on the blankets, dry retching on fucking tomato leaves, and foul with the smell of Donquixote and Phoenix. Something about having ripped up photos of Fire Fist and Whitebeard, and Doflamingo shocked at the gall of it all. Whitebeard was a fine man. A mighty man. As if Doflamingo hadn't fought on the side of the World Government at Marineford.

*Have you ever spanked him, Marco? He enjoys a little paddling.*

Law pressed his head to his shoulder best he could, lying on the blanket, as chained as he was. Fucking collar. The sun was a chunk through the blinds. His feet were clean. Marco ever vigilant, even when he'd screwed him into blackout.

*I've entertained the thought.*

Oh, have you now? Law thought at the time. Of course you fucking have. All these years of equality and you were dreaming of having me over your knee. Slaves. Nothing if not children to be kept on short leashes.

Sucking one off here, being taken by the other, Doflamingo and Marco, like Vergo before him, had a kink for each other using Law as the conduit. And why infantilisation? So *l'enfant terrible* could get his superiority on.

Bruises did not fade, gashes did not close, the smash of Joker's and Marco's palms across his arse while they laughed and spun back porch homilies at him did not diminish. Go fuck yourselves, phoenix and flamingo. He'd never have touched those photos, no matter how petty he got. Guess Robin's anger had got the better of her.

Chapter End Notes

The next dark chapter is lighter, if you know what I mean? Kind of. Compared to. And we've got a light Marco chapter up next too. You can pop back to the last chapter if you want something kinder. Thanks for reading if you made it this far.
Law sat at the table like old days, as if they were having Shanks and Benn over to celebrate their friendship and history. Only difference was that he still wore the collar and the manacles. Marco sponged him down, removing one at a time then replacing it, to keep him clean. Fuckable. Doflamingo had advised him to feed him better, to exercise him. To run his flames if he didn't want the ridges to be permanent.

"He'll use it to his advantage. Of course he'll look to ways to keep his strength up. Always a fighter, our Law, but seastone's formidable. Keep him restrained, and you'll be all right. You don't want him so broken you can't use him. What a waste that'd be."

They sat outside. Law was even allowed a glass of wine in addition to the daily dog's bowl of water. If it tipped over while Marco fucked him, he had to drink from the basin in the bathroom. It was better than nothing. Worst came to worst he'd grab himself a cup and a drink while he did the chores, but it came at a cost if he was caught.

**oOOo**

*Whoo-boy*, Law was seething. Shanks felt the anger rolling off him as he sat at the table, leg shackled to a strut, near enough to Marco for supervision. Shanks remembered sitting out here negotiating with the Kid crew, Marco at his supportive best. How things had changed. Something cold and hard had snapped off in the Whitebeard commander. Law was wearing more than the brunt of it.

"Get me out of here," Law stated before anyone had done so much as pick up a salt shaker. His head shot back as Marco backhanded him. He put knuckles to his jaw, eyes on fire, cuff hitting his skin. Grazes over that face, bruises on his body. That cursive M so blue, so out of place on his arm.

To the right of Law's plate was a little mound of ground leaves that Marco had also sprinkled across his prisoner's dinner. Dinner Law had made, and that Marco had made good on his fantasy of pawing him all over while he prepared it. Extra delicious knowing it was for Benn and Shanks. Law gagged at the smell and memory. The fucker. Stripping him of everything he loved. At least
the zucchini plant had flowers. He'd seen the bees pollinate it.

"Ignore him," Marco said, picking up his knife and fork. Law was left with a spoon. Marco had cut up his dinner in front of Shanks and Benn as if he was two-years old. "Can't trust him with the cutlery."

"We're not here to ignore Law," Benn stated.

"Put your cigarette out."

Benn blinked and did. Truth be told, they rarely smoked in the house when they visited because Law was set against it, but new circumstances called for habits that established just who they were. Plus they were outside. Law kept his eyes on his dinner.

"We're here to take him. Unchain him."

Law looked up, a mouthful of mush halfway to his lips. He'd cooked a meal he wouldn't mind eating for the others. Grilled fish, light lemon, parsley, garlic, butter. Marco operated on the prison mind-break of blending what he could find and pouring the slop onto Law's plate. It always contained bread.

Marco leant Law's way, and sprinkled a little more of the leaf mix over his dinner.

"Law loves the smell of tomato leaves, you know that? Used to be a kind of love letter between us."

Cruel. Shanks watched Law try to eat without throwing up.

"The appeal's been approved. We've come for Law so as not to contaminate the process."

"Where are the papers?"

"You'll get them tomorrow."

Marco shook his head and Law eyed the buzzer that controlled the electrical impulses to the collar. If he had his powers, he could pull it to him. Benn stood in an easy movement, taller than all of them in the room, and pocketed it.

"That's government property."

"For those who use it wisely."

"And we've never seen it used wisely," Shanks said, hand under his chin.

"Keys, Marco. Unchain him."

Marco had given the two a tour of the house earlier. They'd all sailed together after all, and in prior times were a support and team for each other, Law included. The three had been pivotal in his survival.

When they'd arrived at Law and Marco's house, Benn and Shanks had pushed open the door to the master bedroom. Law had always kept it comfortable and clean, both men really, but it was regimented now.

The afternoon sun slat through the blinds, and Law sat on the blankets, spine against the wall, knees drawn up, chained arms draped over them, head back. The dog bowl of water and — were
"They fucking dog biscuits in the other bowl? — to his side. Closer inspection showed they weren't, but slavery was an excuse for egos so far up where the sun don't shine that abuse was inevitable. It was abuse by definition. Mad profit too of course.

He'd stared at them. Maybe there'd been a kick of hope, but it was gone as soon as it arrived.

"Pleasure slave." Kizaru had hit the gavel to the counter for every syllable and he'd stretched the last word out so it had two. "Pleh-shzure slay-uv." As if he were talking about the differences between the fine detailing on a luxury car and a family wagon. Semantics and service. Law's role as property was abundantly clear.

Then Marco had whisked the Red-Haired pirates away, plied them with drinks. "He preps himself," he let them know. "He's totally into it." He tossed back his ice. Crunched on it. "Should've realised sooner."

He'd gone back to the room, loosened Law and set him to work on the dessert. They'd already prepared the main meal before when Marco's interest had been both carnivorous and carnal.

Law was surprised he'd been allowed to eat with them rather than serve them. But they'd been a team, even if not Benn and Shanks' main team, and not the main team of their own respective crews either. But both had found alliance and strength intermittently sailing with the Red Force.

Benn pressed the release button on the collar and it fell to the floor. It was deactivated if properly removed. Law's surprise and relief was a hurricane through still waters. The collar's underside was coated in seastone as well as being explosive. He raised a hand to massage his neck and Marco took hold of it. "No."

"You've got no choice, Marco. He's coming with us. You got a bag packed for him?"

"He's got nothing. He burnt all his clothes in a fit of Law preciousness."

"Explains the t-shirt."

It explained nothing, Law thought. He'd never choose this monstrosity for himself. M on his arm. How fucking gauche, and he was the king of gauche.

"Destroyed the tea-towel of your anniversary. Burnt it to a crisp."

Law hadn't even seen that one when he'd been forcibly returned here. He guessed that was maybe one of the ones that had been incinerated beforehand.

Shanks watched Law's face to see if he'd give anything away, and the guarded responses, the flat sheen, the refusal to participate in the conversation, possibly the rule set up that he couldn't speak unless given permission, had him questioning everything Marco said. He'd have to anyway. How could he have claimed Law as property?

"There are copies," Benn said.

Marco flamed up.

"Don't Marco. You won't win." Law dared to rub the back of his neck once the Phoenix let go of his hand. "Don't call Joker either. You've had your fun. You've proven your point" More than fucking once.

He hardly felt any residual pain from that afternoon, or from the more recent backhander. The
seastone absorbed it and made it a constant. "You'll hate yourself more the longer you keep me. Let me go."

Marco whitened. Rage. He still couldn't get the cunt to obey. Shanks was surprised to see the fury in the usually laidback commander. Whatever happened that night screwed these two up well and good.

"You don't get to tell me what to do." He cupped his hand at the back of Law's head and drove his face into the plate of mush, grinding his head down, back and forth. Law's fettered, tattooed hands braced the table, trying to push himself up, pushing against the seastone."Slave."

"Not very nice, Phoenix," Shanks said.

Marco let go as Benn stared at him, Law, rising, was too fucking done to be ashamed. Spluttering, spitting, he swept his fingers across the goo, flicking it to the floor, avoided spraying it Marco's way. God forbid it touched his precious skin. No doubt he'd have to resourcefully clean it up later. Benn unfastened his cravat, moved across the table, and gave it to Law.

"So wasteful, see? That cloth cost you and Law's wiping fucking food all over it because he can't keep his trap shut."

Benn lit a cigarette.

"He'll pay. I'm mortified by his manners. You want him? I'm sure you've had a taste before."

"Release him, Marco. It's over."

"Does he have anything to bring home?" Shanks asked.

"This is his fucking home."

"Not anymore," Benn said.

Law felt a shake of relief go through him. Too soon, too soon. He was still cuffed.

"Law. Tell him. It's our home."

Law wiped mush from around his lips, his eyebrows. Stared at Marco. Was he for real?

"How about his earrings?"

"He burnt them, the ingrate. Burnt his books, clothes, your tea towel, photos of loved ones."

"Mm-hmm. He burnt only things he loved, is that right?"

"The way of a slave is perverse, and Law's always been the far side of normal. Just ask at the bar. Look at the register notes from the hospitals he visited as a child."

Yeah, the only perverse thing was sitting right opposite him, Shanks thought. He sent out a tiny wave. Enough to wipe out lesser men. The kind that laid low the crew of Whitebeard many years before. Marco could withstand it now like he could then. "I'm being polite," the emperor said.

And he was. He could snap those cuffs with a power burst if he put his mind to it. Why hadn't they got Law earlier? Not wanting to interrupt the path of the new government. Faith in the new system. Faith in Marco. Law hadn't gone into detail about his ex.
"When the laws change it will be noted that you freed him willingly."

Marco stood up, left the room, and returned with the keys. Law wasn't sure where he kept them though he was always on the lookout. Wasn't sure this wasn't some kind of hallucination.

"I'm not freeing what rightfully…"

"…archaically…"

"…belongs to me. I'm following due process in order to have him returned." Really, Law should be sucking his dick in thanks for keeping him. For not turning him over to the town. For letting him go now. What had Morgans said about Slaves? Donquixote?

Yeah, not going to happen, Benn thought. Not likely, Shanks thought. Not in a million fucking years was Law ever coming back.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I can't leave Law to suffer too long in the longer works. Even so, I'll run with the dark storyline for a few chapters.
Dark 7c-(NSFW)

Chapter Summary

Safe and yet not safe.

Chapter Notes

**Warnings**: Contains mature themes, but not entirely. Explicit rape and sexual assault from the second oOOo break to the fourth oOOo break.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**Dark-7c**

He was so quiet in the car driving to a safehouse. Marco knew the Hearts’ hideout, knew where Robin lived, knew how to stalk the halls of Luffy's government and it was easy enough to pinpoint the location of Shanks' and Benn's houseboat, though he'd have trouble getting through their defences.

Shanks handed him a bottle of water, and Law was so grateful to be able to drink something he didn't have to lap from a bowl, that he gulped down half at once, holding it with two hands as if it'd be ripped from his fingers if he relaxed. The chains had been long enough for him to pick up the container, but if Marco caught him it was a repeat of head, bowl, water. He couldn't afford for it to spill. It only got filled once a day.

He didn't thank Shanks. He didn't trust himself to talk. He didn't know if he could. As always, since that second captivity, his powers took a while to return. When he could use them then maybe he'd communicate knowing he had defence against fists and words and fuckings.

Benn loved Law's conversation. Hated to see him silenced. He'd promised him, and Kizaru had seen to it that Benn's word had been broken.

"Cold, Law? Blanket next to you."

Law glanced down, capped the drink, and placed it on his lap. He shook out the blanket as much as possible in the enclosed space. Wrapped it around and hooded himself. Leant his blanketed head against the window. The vibrations of tyre over bitumen thrummed against his temple.

It was a blessing that they hadn't taken Kikoku to the courthouse, so the nodachi remained with Bepo and Shachi while Law was detained. They'd given the sword to Benn and Shanks to pass on. It was adjacent to Law, diagonally across the back of the car to fit its length. He rested a hand over the hilt.

"We can't change the legislation while the trial's taking place, and other fuckers are jumping on the bandwagon trying to get their former slaves back."
Law looked up, growled out a worried block of air.

"Jean Bart is fine. He's running safehouses to help keep everyone underground and out of the limelight. Shanks bought up a few deeds. It sucks, but he then emancipates. Roswald's a shit, and so is Doflamingo. They won't sell."

Of course not. They had enough money to justify their actions to others and themselves. They didn't give a shit.

"Boa Hancock and the Revolutionaries with their governments and ministries are helping out. It won't be long, Law. Fujitora is going after Kizaru hard, and Luffy's not standing in anyone's way."

Law looked out at the dark whipping by. Would they stay on the island or take a ferry to the next, the next, or the next one? He turned back to the interior of the car and looked at the two in front. The doors could be opened. There weren't locks in place. He wore no restraints.

He slammed his foot into the back of Benn's seat.

He'd promised.

He was surprised at the strength. So was Benn. Benn grunted, cigarette almost falling from his lip, paused, put his hands behind his head and tightened his hair; a simple gold ring placed over the elastic kept it in place.

Law leant back in his seat and flexed what he could. Felt so good. "I'm still the pariah people'd most like to pelt with pebbles?"

Benn had promised.

Shanks' right hand man smiled in the front. "Probably, you alliterative prick." Law let himself a small smile in return, neither seen by the other. It hurt. Those loosened teeth hadn't had the chance to heal this time around.

"And boulders, Law. Not pebbles."

"Sorry." He stared at the black streaming past again. "Haven't been allowed to think for myself lately. Let me recast." He traced condensation down the window. "They want to bloody me with boulders?" Brutalise, bowdlerize, bugger up, bugger? Definitely the last.

"Yah. Morgans hasn't really been fair."

You think?

Law shut his eyes for a moment and Benn's frame shadowed his vision. He promised. Benn had fucking promised. But training, it was all training, was life. It taught Law to suck it up. Keep moving.

Benn had put his hands behind his head and tightened his hair, a simple gold ring placed over the elastic kept it in place. A simple gold ring with. What? What was that pattern in the shadowed light?

"But that's because of Doflamingo, and what sells. Fujitora was all about keeping within the exact lines of the law, but he's sending out his own media counterattack now. Allowing slavery again undermines everything the new government has achieved. One of those archaic laws they thought no-one would contest." Benn traced a runnel of condensation of his own.
Fujitora. In Dressrosa, Fujitora could've released Law from that chair Doflamingo had tied him too. He'd saved Law's life earlier, after putting it directly in danger, but he upheld the shichibukai system, even while hating it, and had left the newly deposed shichibukai shot and shackled, allowing Doflamingo to do what he wanted, under stoic but ineffectual disapproval. He didn't know the half of it. How much influence did the admiral have now?

"Robin and Bepo are your media spokespeople extraordinaire, not to mention Chopper."

Chopper's blue nose.

"The dirt didn't stick to Smoker," Shanks added. "He doesn't give a fuck, and no-one around him gives a fuck." The public, as reported by a gleeful Morgans, just thought the marine had also taken part in a past service once Law had legally been delivered to Marco.

Benn grabbed the wheel for a second and steered them straight. Shanks had got his license just a few years previously. Pirate crews had their own levels of indentured servitude. There'd always someone willing to chauffeur before. Time dispersed the crew. Shanks had to learn. Plus, driving was fun. But not if you were the passenger on his shift. The car was modified, though if there was a will, Shanks was sure to find a way.

"Anyway we've got our own plans."

Law hemmed himself in, no more kicks, but he felt as if Blackleg himself was stepping up and down his rib cage. He had his own plans too but for now all he wanted was to lash out. He tapped the window with a closed fist, harder than he thought. Just a whisper. A click of hail against glass, right? Shanks and Benn shared a glance at the noise. The force was strong enough to fracture.

"Get him to stop. Buggy'll have my head if this clown rattletrap gets dented."

Law's breath wrapped around his throat, squeezing. Benn had put his hands behind his head and tightened his hair, a simple gold ring placed over the elastic kept it in place. Etched into the gold. *That design etched into the gold.* Why was he wearing that? Where had he got it?

He'd thought he could trust Marco. Benn too? Benn was in on it too?

Law kicked the back of the seat again. Both feet. No shoes. Poor bastard, Shanks thought, glancing in the rear view. The black tatts on his bridges were just visible as the car rode a slipway of streetlights. Dried blood over that? Fresh? Law seemed not to notice.

"Law."

No response. Benn almost lost his cigarette with a kick worthy of Sanji. And another.

"Stop the car."

Shanks did.

Thank god the road was deserted.

"Pull over first, Red."

They'd straddled the dividing line for the lanes.

Shanks all embarrassed and flustered wasn't common so Benn made the most of it when it happened. He smiled as the yonko started the engine and bunny-hopped the car down a side road
and up onto the verge.

oOOo

Benn pulled the door open.

Law's power wasn't up but he was out and at Benn's throat before he could ask what the problem was, the bottle of water falling to the floor of the car. Even with extra training over the years — some of it from Shanks himself — and even with his natural fighting skills and powerful devil's fruit, Law wasn't a match for Benn. He wasn't a pushover, but Benn would win in the end.

But the first mate didn't want to fight him, so he did nothing as the sharp edge of Kikoku pressed under his chin. Law in the hideous t-shirt Marco had him wear, and capris that looked a whole lot like more like Phoenix's style than the Heart captain's.

There wasn't too much muscle waste, but Law'd obviously been beaten and affected by the seastone. His blue dome was nowhere to be seen. Whether it meant that he wanted to truly inflict pain, or that his powers were still at the low ebb of a sputter, Benn didn't know.

He trod on the gravel as if stepping on grass. Law hadn't been with Marco that long, but whatever he'd been through had desensitised more than one surface.

"Law?"

Shanks came around the side of the car, and Law looked his way for a beat. Shanks. Shanks as well? In on it too?

"It's Benn."

Law shook his head, eyes not quite focused on the lulled stretch of side roads and curtained houses. Shanks doubted he heard the night call of the magpie overhead.

"In front of you. It's Benn. Look at his hand. Cigarette."

Benn had a hand near his flintlock, but hadn't drawn it. He ashed his smoke, pulled it to his lips, inhaled, held, exhaled. No jewelled rings on his fingers. Just the band he wore; Shanks wore its partner. Fucking gold.

"Cigarette."

Law looked back at Shanks again. He knew it was Benn. Why was Shanks teaming up with that other cancerous bastard? Collusion?

Benn also glanced at his shipmate. What was up? Shanks touched the side of his neck, indicating Law's own, hoping Law didn't take it as a sign to move his nodachi.

Benn peered at Law under the shade cast by the street light. He was marked by the removed collar, but there was also a puncture that hadn't healed, infected for sure, on the side of his neck. The skin around it radiated like the sun. Vertical stripes stamped the skin at the front of his neck. The kind made from pressing into a barrel-shaped prosthetic and golden hook.

Benn paled. It shouldn't be surprising. It wasn't really. But it didn't make it any better. He thought Crocodile had more class. Payment was a word on everyone's lips when it came to Law, his body footing the bill. But what did it have to do with him?
He blew the cigarette smoke across the night into the younger pirate's face.

"And again," Shanks said.

Law coughed. The fuck? But…

oOOo

Over the desk. Hadn't even cleared the courts yet. The exchange room, the handling room, just outside the holding cells, whatever the fuck it was called. A transaction, goods passing hands. Prisoners whisked away. Goods taken. Marco watching. Civil cases were tried in the same building as criminal. Legal papers swept to the side.

"Still fine, Law. You're still fine." Crocodile already had his hands under his shirt over his abs like he had when Law had visited Alabasta with Doflamingo. Cora dead a number of years, Law enslaved. So young.

Even in the seastone Law had swung the two paramilitary dragging him into enemy camp into one another so hard they'd fallen to the floor. They'd made a mistake in not chaining the cuffs together. Doflamingo had sent strings flying Law's way.

"Rigid, though."

Law spat at him. Of course he was fucking rigid. Though he'd writhed like a mess of maggots trying to get away from him, but there was only so much he could do against the seastone and strings. So he opted for second best. There was a spot to the right of his vision and he was chasing that baby down the stepping stones of obliteration. One wrongly placed foot and he was gone. Some lucky folks pass out from stress. He hoped to be one of them.

Croc was the one who'd wanted him in seastone. Though he wouldn't have met any resistance from the other two, or that pathetic vet, wherever the fuck he was. Obvious why now. Law had let Benn talk him into it.

No restrictions. The other side had no restrictions whatsoever. Law had felt more optimistic facing Doflamingo, Fujitora and the navy on Green Bit. Fujitora had revoked his shichibukai title and Law's plans fell about his ears as it became apparent he'd be shovelling Doffy's shit and getting blamed for the defecation. Hell, at least he hadn't been in seastone.

Croc pushed his head to the table after Doflamingo had whipped his individually shackled hands behind him with his strings. Law's cheek skid across the polished desk. Mouth open, breathing hard, he could taste the polish. He avoided all eye contact with Doflamingo. He was surprised he wasn't forced to greet the demon's unheavenly pubes as part of their victory conga.

He locked onto Marco's impassive gaze, long phoenix legs crossed, back leaning against the balusters of some ornate piece of fuckery masquerading as justice. He felt Crocodile's rings against his arse and hamstrings and hips and lower back, as he yanked Law's courtroom best so it sat at his knees. Doffy had him spread and tied with strings by this stage and his clothes could go no further. Crocodile's jewelled hand crept up Law's back, the snub of his wrist srunching up his shirt to view the wrecked tattoos. Up the back of Law's neck until it gripped his hair, releasing only to inhale, roll his cigar on the side of the desk, and to slip it between his lips again. Releasing only to slide his hand down his back, to rest a hand in his lower back, tapping his fingers across his sacrum. Pausing only to half-heartedly prepare him.

Marco was his new owner. Doflamingo showing him the ropes. What you can and cannot do with
common property in shared places. Seemed there were no restrictions. Crocodile's hand wandered to the Donquixote brand.

"He's as close as you'll get to a husband, isn't he, Marco?" Crocodile gave a curious squeeze of the buttck, smiled at the quiver in Law's leg, adjusted it for better display like a hooked carcass in the butcher's, a brood mare. "A fine piece of cattle. You've done well. It's been years and yet he takes me as easily as he did back then. Born for it. More fun now. More meat to him."

"Gutless sack of shit," Law yelled out across the room as Crocodile entered him, humiliated him. Blond fucking useless prick. How could he ever have...?

Doflamingo had retied Law so his arms and legs were wide, both tethered — by long strings in the case of his hands — to the sturdy legs of the table. Seastone still on his wrists and ankles.

The scent of the cigar wafted over his body as it moved across the table and his face smashed into the barrel of the prosthetic, the hook jagged against his neck. He only remembered to breathe in bursts. Could only breathe in bursts when Crocodile eased the pressure.

Benn had wanted to challenge the court. Civil rights trumped all other rights, he'd said. Law challenging would change the legislation so they could never try this bullshit again. So no-one else had to go through it.

Hadn't worked.

And Marco just stood there.

Crocodile had broken a light sweat. Desire. Nothing like the slick unhealthily bruised delightful skin under him. "You're in your rights to punish him for sleeping around like this, Marco. Naturally, how you treat your slave is up to you." He grunted and pressed the hook into flesh again. That wet gurgle and tightening of the neck muscle wasn't something he'd extracted from Law before. Intoxicating.

Both of Croc's hands had been intact the first time he'd had the pleasure of viewing Law's lower back; his then slim but not so muscled hips and arse. The brand hadn't been as prominent that time around.

"I was always fond of letting anyone take my slaves, anywhere, within reason. Keeps them on their toes and lets them know their place. Plus, they need it as much as we need it. Keeps everyone healthy. I'd venture they need it more. It's why they're slaves. Urges. A satisfied slave is almost as fulfilling as a hungry one."

Still strapped down, his shirt pushed up his back, and with no way to pull it down, drool and blood on the table below him, Crocodile having emptied himself into him, and the Alabastan imposter and Doflamingo now having some polite, amusing conversation to the side, Marco had walked over. Strolled. Perambulated.

He'd put a finger to the bleeding wound the hook had left behind, and run the same stained hand through Law's hair. Then — Law watching his every move, and Marco not breaking eye contact with him — removed his earrings.


"No questions, Law." Marco trilled his fingers across the table in front of Law's face, over his...
mouth, dipped one into the soft membrane of Law's lower inner lip. He rubbed it along the recess between gum and flesh, pulling out the flesh, withdrew, and had then walked to the ex-warlords, wiping his finger on his pants. Three government dogs in the same building. Being with the Heart had corrupted him.

He dropped the earrings in Crocodile's hand. Crocodile turned them between his fingers. Doflamingo smiled like there was one cliff edge he'd forgotten to dangle Law over.

"Souvenir. Thanks from our Law. Payment."

"Expressed like a true master speaking for his slave." Doflamingo squeezed Marco's shoulder. "You're a quick learner, Phoenix."

Croc nodded. "I'll get a new hair clasp made." He turned Law's way, the fool glaring up at him from the desk. "Thank you, Law. For the memories. Always were a fine piece of ass." It would eat him up that he contributed to Crocodile's fee.

The wood under Law's ribs, hips and pelvis dug into the bone. It was, what? A month, two, less, more, since he'd last been draped over furniture like a mosquito net, and used just as perfunctorily. Though the net was at least mended when ripped, and handled with care.

Doflamingo released the strings and Law rolled himself off the table as much as he could, trying to pull his clothes to him, aiming for the window, one of the two doors.

Kizaru was behind the one leading to the courts, but maybe so were Benn and his friends. There was no dignity in his movements, but rape and escape were rarely dignified. He felt Crocodile's jizz against his clothes as he yanked his trousers upwards, and that's where he went wrong. He should've stepped out of them and made a break for it with everything hanging out. Even if Morgans' photographers were circling outside.

It took two seconds for the guards to step in and for all three fruit users to immobilise Law. Nothing worse than feeling Croc's sand against abrasions, and Doflamingo's strings had his head pulled right back. He tied Law to the guards. All a whole lot more intimate than any party wanted. Marco burnt blue.

Doflamingo strode over to the door Law had almost reached, Law's head tilting up, showing his neck like the whelp he was, baring his teeth like a pretender. Doflamingo had the collar in his hand.

He reached around Law's neck. The two guards quaked at Doflamingo pushing into their space, against their bodies. He trailed fingers along Law's empty lobes. "I can't say it suits you to have your own branding removed." He placed the collar around Law's neck with a quiet click. "But this more than makes up for it."

He released the strings and walked away, and the two guards immediately expressed their fear by jabbing Law in his side and neck with their guns. He didn't resist. Doflamingo had let him off lightly.

Crocodile mentally wished Law luck with Marco. He really did. Things got messy when emotions were involved. He was a whole lot mouthier when he was a whole lot younger. Fitting though, that dumb animals remained dumb.

**ooOo**

Cigarette smoke. The fuck. The gravel hurt under his feet. The fuck. Benn. His ride outta hell and he was about to decapitate him. But the gold tying his hair into a ponytail. That gold.
He lowered Kikoku and slunk back into the car, slamming the door behind him. He pulled the blanket completely over his head, only his hands visible, gripping his sword; willing the world away and for the oxygen to be used up so he could forget the last five minutes, and all the weeks before them.

oOOo

Benn sat in the back. Worried for the mummy next to him, and worried because Shanks couldn't drive to save his life or any of theirs.

Shanks gestured, turning around and veering the car halfway across the road, traffic around them blasting their horns, Law not reacting, Shanks gestured for Benn to light up, taking his hand off the wheel. As if Benn had to be told. Usually he wouldn't smoke in the car with a third person, and not always with Shanks either. It depended on how generous Red was feeling.

Law, buried away from it all, inhaled the smoke like resting his head against Cora's coat, the taste of the blanket against his lips. Man, he hated cigarette smoke. It did a number on the lungs and his clothes stank like shit. Not that he cared about his current ensemble. At least it wasn't cigar. He let out an audible, shaky, confused, breath. It wasn't cigar.

Benn looked over. The kid looked like a human-sized tent.

Law breathed in the wool surrounding his mouth and remembered the last time he'd been shrouded and it was as bad as remembering Croc. But hey, Law had put the blanket over his own head, and Benn was puffing away on cigarettes to his right. He pulled the blanket away from his face in a quick movement. Panicked if you knew him. Calm and controlled if you didn't.

"Bedbugs?" Benn asked, looking out the window at the houses slipping by.

Law tipped it so it covered his shoulders but he wanted his face free. He pulled Kikoku a bit closer, breathed into her grip.

He side-eyed Benn, and the gold of his hair clasp caught in the dark so Law drew his attention to the red end of the cigarette. Cigarette. Then back to the clasp. His hand went to his own ear. Where the fuck had Benn got that gold?

Benn watched him with an indifferent gaze like he would a cat he was trying to woo. He was intent on, what? His hair? Benn's own hair? And was Law trying to pass some secret kind of message by tugging his ear? Benn's own fingers, cigarette in mouth, reached back to the clasp.

"Oh fuck no."

Law had never been without his piercings in all the time he'd known him. Benn untied his hair and slipped the band off the tie, kept it in a closed palm while he turned the elastic a few times and had his hair away from his face again. He unfurled his palm. Held the clasp out to Law.

Law took it. Folded his hand around it. Ran his fingers over the etchings.

"Why'd you keep the design?" It'd been on the inside of his earrings, near the back to the top of his lobe where it couldn't be seen. Must have been some work to keep it before fastening the hoops together, and the design was now on the outside. Maybe they used a fruit to invert the gold.

"Mother seal and her pup? Course I'm gonna keep it."

"Who gave it to you? The clasp? Where'd you get it?"
Benn inhaled deeply on his cigarette and spent some time sending tar to his lungs before he answered. "I thought he was better than that, Law. Especially when he gave me the clasp. He just said he had one extra. A souvenir from the North Blue. That he was looking forward to our day in court. No hard feelings. Mutual respect...Course I didn't design it."

Sick fuck. Crocodile knew Law would see it, sooner or later.

"Mutual respect and all that," Law said, clenched the band. His four earrings secured to make the one hair tie decoration. Now they knew his animal. But it didn't take too long to figure out anyway. He'd just had so few things he could keep truly close to himself, knowing that they were his alone.

And now every time he'd look at the band...it wasn't in Benn's hair any more...Crocodile had kept the design. To fuck with him or Benn or whoever of course, but they were still intact. His seal family, as far away as could be from mythical creatures that soared the skies.

Benn shot his foot across to the vacant passenger seat and pounded it. Law jumping. "Hey, hey!" Shanks shouted. His driving didn't need to get any worse and Buggy would have his guts for garters.

Law tied the clasp to Kikoku's thread and put a tired and scarred hand out Benn's way. Garden and oven fun with Doffy and Marco. Benn took it, was glad to. Law was still as angry as fuck, of course he was, about everything, staring straight ahead, but Benn hadn't betrayed him. He had to remember the people who didn't make it a sport to trip him up while he was walking. And he needed to let himself know that Benn had been wrong, but he was safe, and Benn could make mistakes.

He didn't say anything more, but soothed down. He pulled the blanket closer and rested his head on the window, and closed his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

We go light next. Thanks for reading. Got a fair bit of this written out (except for the next chapter, lol). I'm looking forward to posting it. I've got a few IRL things to finish up first. Would love to know your thoughts :-)

Those IRL things will probably stop me (I hope) from editing this too closely after uploading, but I will come back and fix inevitable clangers.

What canon divergent thing do I need to explain (apart from everything)? I feel there's something. Oh, yeah, Croc doesn't really tie back his hair from what I can see. It's not quite long enough. But this is post canon, and he's got himself a casino paddleboat, slicked back poker shark, bolo tie kinda hairstyle going on, that he wraps an elastic around when he feels like it.
"Where's Law, Marco?"

"Gone, you know how he gets."

"Misery?" She often sat behind the bar, or near the door, her tail lazily hitting the floor as patrons stopped to talk to her.

"Also gone. Law slit her throat." Marco wondered if the guy asking had been hiding under a rock.

"He loved that dog. Got all of us to adopt a rescue pet as well. Doesn't measure up."

"Imagine how I felt after all these years."

The quisling at the table nearest the bar sipped his drink, eavesdropping, failing to notice as the visitor passed a slip of paper to Marco.

The Phoenix walked to the very last keg. He pulled the handle to fill a pint of Rebel Ale. Izou, in the corner, stood, signalled Vista. They surrounded the Brownshirt as he lifted his beer to his lips — surrounded him before he could message his base — then slit his throat. After the deed, Vista threw him, rolled up in a carpet, over his shoulder.

"Afghan thread, what a waste."

They'd patted him down, pocketed his contacts and cash, left a love letter of dismembered fingers, toes, arms and legs on the doorstep of the interloper's organization. Face intact.

_Grusome Stranger Death_ the paper crowed, and Doflamingo, eating marmalade lightly spread over toast sticks, didn't know whether to growl at the news or smile in admiration. He swallowed his orange juice. Sounded like Law's work. If so, he was doing well, though he was surprised — and not — that he and Marco had acrimoniously separated, or so he heard on the grapevine. Considering he'd fucked the brat in front of his man, and Law had been a very enthusiastic participant, it wasn't that much of a shock. But he had thought the two had something not quite so
ephemeral. Marco must have really liked that dog. Shame. He hated to hurt innocent beasts, but an example had to be made. Law, always striving way beyond his station.

Sabo broke the code to the hall. A group, all button down shirts, polished shoes, and gleaming blond hair, met in the Friendly Society building. Not a strand out of place. A few variations in hair colour, though not style, here and there, sitting in fold out seats, listening to a charismatic orator. The outsiders had taken over the society and infiltrated its books and membership, installed security, so their extreme policies became an imposed norm for the organisation, and gradually the community. That was the plan.

The Revolutionaries and friends dimmed the lights and slipped into the meeting room. The imposters knew how to manipulate the media and how to run their mouths at those likely to protest. They attacked in packs but weren't ready to deal with being attacked. The spirit of Cora was with the assassins that night. Silently, they left a pile of neat bodies, bloodied floors. Nice corpses for the camera.

The people of the island were more relieved than scared. These creeps had shut Law's clinics down and his practice. They had nowhere to go. Their children had nowhere to go except the mainland where they charged an arm and a leg if they were allowed in the doors at all. Men, hurt, bruised, confused and angry had no-one to turn to. Chopper and Robin helped out, and Law's crew tried to lend a hand where they could. But the Hearts were targeted too.

The journalists came knocking.

"What was their relationship like?"

"Good, But obviously there was something wrong. We couldn't believe Law would do that to their dog. It's the quiet ones you have to watch."

"Do you sleep more easily knowing he's fled the town?"

"A slave is a slave and we hear you can't trust them, but he did good work in his practice, so we miss that. But who knows? We trusted our sons and daughters with him. It's hard to imagine now. Makes you shudder thinking what might have happened."

"Here's our card. If you see him, give us a buzz. Let us know."

"Sure thing."

"You got it."

"No worries."

oOoOo

Michel met the ferry arriving from the far side of the island and picked up the first man to disembark among those tumbling down the ramp. He took the card handed to him and drove to the bar. The man entered via the back door and Michel phoned Marco to warn him.

oOoOo

Law and Marco had broken the camp bed on more than one occasion so they sat against one other, amongst the potato sacks brushing the wall. Right near the door leading to the beach; two peasants
in hunt of a yodeller.

"You safe?"

"Unnh."

Law turned Marco's face his way and the Phoenix's skin tingled at the confident and familiar hold on his chin as Law guided his face down to his own and kissed his lips in absence and acceptance.

Marco pulled away. "Hungry?"

Law nodded.

"You hurt?"

Law shook his head. "You?"

"No."

"You murdered a quisling."

"Technically speaking that was Izou. You slaughtered a hall full of them."

"Technically speaking that was Sabo."

"The guy's a psycho."

"Tell me about it."

They couldn't get the man himself yet, though Roswald had been embarrassingly easy to eradicate; too reliant on outdated World Government policies to protect him. It was worth it to see Jean Bart breathe easily. Law was worried for himself of course, but a hell of a lot more concerned that Doflamingo's obsession with him would bring harm to his crew and other ex-slaves. But it was apparent that Doffy wasn't the only one with a superiority complex. His ideas weren't fostered in a vacuum.

"Fujitora got Kizaru out yet or revoked the laws?" he asked.

"Working on it, babe."

Marco flicked Law's earrings back and forth, and he let him.

"Once the noise dies down it should be easy to pass."

Law tipped his head against the wall and let Marco's closeness breathe into him. It merged with the ocean washing up to shore outside the bar.

"The council of elders are standing in the way."

"Who the fuck are they?" Law asked.

"Seems the Gorosei never really went away."

"They feeding a ravenous god or something? Have to sacrifice virgins to placate the tempest?"

Marco shrugged. Who knew? He missed having Law beside him, but fleeting visits and knowing he was safe made up for it.
Law let the topic fade. He twirled one of Marco's spikes of hair. "Keepsake's okay?"

Marco looked across at Law, his face tightening. The doctor at his creepy best held his scalpel in one hand, his finger pulling strands of Marco's hair in the other. Strands still attached to his head. He sat up straight, bumping Law's shoulder away from him.

"Hey! I'm not your enemy here," he said.

Law met his eyes for a second. He let go of Marco's hair and spaced his thumb and forefinger. "Just want to cut about this much."

"Because?" Marco ran his palm over his head.

"Keepsake."

Oh, that's what he meant. "You'll put it in a locket or something?"

"Something like that."

"Doesn't sound like you."

"It's not. Something like that I said."

"It won't hurt me?"

Law shook his head.

"Go for it."

O0O0O

Law had just blown his load, coaxed by Marco's lips. Marco didn't mind swallowing, so long as Law gave warning, and it was rare that he didn't. Law spat. Marco too sometimes, but Law always. Control thing.

He knew they were both murdering their way through shock. He didn't know if it was working, but it helped protect people and ideas they cared about. Law had other ways of coping as well. Scent. Earthy smells that grounded him, and the stones. Both still kept talisman.

They only had these borrowed moments now, and sex was dirty and messy and they were always on their way to meet others, and there was so much to say beyond the grunts and flashes of pleasure (and trauma) the act brought them.

At times an ale and conversation was better. Sometimes they lay against each other, boners nudging, and they tried to tuck their dangly bits out of the way so they could just draw in the skin of the other. Sometimes it was a really bad day for Law and no-one was touching him anywhere, particularly if random comments from uninformed folk or Morgans' hyperbole had crawled under his skin.

The first time after Doflamingo's night of brutality, after Misery's death, after physical recovery and necessary distance due to the dysphoria of the times, Law led. Marco knew how hard he worked not to be Doflamingo, he couldn't help his churlish nature with those he didn't know or who annoyed him, but he was considerate, a really considerate lover.
Robin’s rendezvous points were always classier than the annexe of the pub, though Law and Marco had the confidence of familiarity there. The room was a place usually reserved maybe for Dragon and Belo Betty, or Sabo and Koala. A bed with enough room and firmness to encourage separateness, if they wanted, and its opposite. Even equipped with a shower, and Law able to shake a crumpled but clean t-shirt from his travel bag to sit comfortably atop the loose pants left folded on the bed for nightwear.

After checking for assassins under the bed, behind doors, they’d dimmed the lights. Marco put the book he’d been skimming on the side table — another of Ikkaku’s mysteries — as he felt Law move beside him. Against him. He smelt good. Travel weary, but soaped down. Dirt scrubbed from the creases on his knuckles, blood from under his nails. He looked across at his partner.

"You up for it?" the Heart asked, a leg loosely over Marco’s own.

Marco tipped his head, not sure of "it".

"Sex."

Terminology was important. Fucking, shagging, going at it, all came under the same umbrella. But Law had to remind himself that Doflamingo’s assaults were as far from sex as stabbing was from surgery.

"Are you?"

Law nodded, positioning himself on top of Marco as he slipped further down the pillows propped behind his back, to lie close, to feel the mood.

"We'll stop if it's shit."

If Law couldn't cope.

"Okay?"

Marco nodded. He didn't feel like a receptacle that Law needed to jab into to regain confidence, but he knew he needed to let the Heart set the pace. Law lay there for a while, his hands cupping Marco’s face, his cheek against his own. Law had shaved when he’d come in from some dusty journey, after wiping down his boots at the door, and bringing them inside so they wouldn’t identify him. Marco did the same with his sandals.

He thumbed the grazes on Law’s face from long ago scars and the Heart shunted against Marco’s hand, his own forearms pushed into the mattress to keep him balanced.

"Scratch?" Law asked, his breath warming Marco's wrist.

Marco rolled them so Law was under them. They always argued about it, but Marco went into sex, planned or unplanned, with his stubble and tufts in place. Despite his grumbling, Law dug a little chin to jaw action. Marco brought his face closer and pressed into Law. Eye contact wasn’t possible, that close.

Law tensed under him as he felt the weight of another, and Marco slid down and rested his head against Law's chest, feet stretching beyond Law's, and listened to his heart pump blood. He took Law's hands and stretched them either side of his frame, his own fingers entwined. And rested. Tattooed muscles eased, tension lessened, Law's toned body called.

The Heart squeezed Marco’s hand and Marco raised himself to his elbows and scooted forward and
brought his chin against the side of Law's face, Law leaning into it, and moved ever so slightly so the bristles crosshatched his lover's skin with just the right bite of nettles blended to bisque.

Marco grazed his flesh against Law's own goatee to make sure the captain wasn't the only one benefiting from hirsuteness, Law raising his lower jaw toward him, and pressing upwards.

"You're such a manly-man." Hand free from Marco's, Law tugged up at that chicken-scratch beard with a laugh.

"Morgans can call us what he will, but gotta say we're more cavalier than tom cat," Marco replied.

"As in attentive, not dismissive?"

"You got it." Marco leant over Law and teased at his lip. "Like knights of old."

Law smiled at the idea of either of them being welcomed in the halls of silk and finery, though it was fun to swagger through and plunder, recline and enjoy. Law's lips prickled against Marco's as he spoke. "Never was a fan of spraying my scent." Being marked as Doflamingo's property had soured him on the idea long before. "Thank god we don't operate that way."

Marco lifted his face away, but Law clasped his head close to his own now, hands behind the blond's head, and it was true, even if he was speaking for his partner. They had each other. If it got their kink on, sure, rough play could come into it. Marco liked to spice it up at times. But they had each other. Knew each other. Everything Law wanted was everything Doflamingo wasn't. Bluster didn't interest him. Even Luffy's need to conquer everything wasn't part of the Heart's mentality.

"Why'm I flat on my back again?"

"You wanted your face scratched."

Law grinned and looked to the side. Just like the dog and her endless seeking of affection. Or was it pleasure? Or both.

"Thanks."

"What if I ride you?"

"You're not prepped."

"Seems someone should do something about that."

Law pushed up, thigh to thigh. "On your back."

Marco gripped Law and engaged his devil fruit, flew them a little way into the air, rotating mid-flight, and landed on his back, Law sliding beside him with an oof when released. He elbowed him.

"The day you grow a little more aware of the comfort of others when they're guests in your Room is the day you'll experience the delight of the Phoenix 747."

"No turbulence?"

"Smooth sailing."

Law laughed and sat up. True. He took care of himself when he transported himself within the spheres of his Room. If he transported someone else, it was up to them to take responsibility for their own landing. Especially a mythical flying zoan.
"Pants off. You know how it goes."

"How about a little less doctor and a little more doctorine." Kureha was their role model for living wildly and beyond life expectancies. Law made for a very poor scholar.

Marco eased out of his cut-offs and Law stripped down. Equality was equality. They hadn't fucked for a while but that didn't mean Marco hadn't seen Law naked. All the same, he cast an eye over the skin and old ruptures, looked for discoloration for bruising, any careless self-repair done on the fly. He had no clue if Law was still fissured and torn. Both fruits had been applied to his healing, but time and nature's own restorative powers were the best treatments.

Law checked his man over too. He held out an arm, a mark colouring the flesh over the ulna near the inner elbow.

"Hit it on a keg at work."

Law nodded. He could accept that. In terms of prep Marco was lucky to have a doctor as a lover. And a former sex slave, as fucked as that was. Law knew how not to hurt, how much pressure to apply, and knew the fucking fear that swept over anyone from having objects shoved into orifices not ready for them or wanting them. Knew firsthand how much hurt it brought, and just how much like a car spinning its wheels in a bog it felt to be used. Muddied, dirtied, stuck.

Doflamingo had demanded he prep him sometimes. Not to fuck the mighty man, of course, but to further both Law's medical and servitude training. For Vergo perhaps? Who knew. It wasn't out of the question for any pain to be returned a thousand times over if Law did something wrong, and he'd find himself face down, pushed into a pillow or the hard floor, and ripped apart.

So Law got Marco to where he wanted to be, but sometimes at the expense of passion. Marco wouldn't give him up for the world. Ace had been easy to stop as he charged in all gung-ho and, truth be told, he rarely topped, but the Whitebeard learnt from Law. How to concentrate breathing, and crook lubed fingers, and glide, and wait.

Waiting was its own kind of turn-on with Law's fingers inside of him, and his mess of hair sprawling over him, as he sat tight. A tweak just as Marco thought he'd got used to it, then another, Law's eyes seeking his own, any scowls of discomfort. If he wasn't in doctor mode. In practitioner mode he'd sneak peeks at whatever research article he was currently reading while perfunctorily loosening him up. The fucker.

"You ever sleep with Zoro?"

Law shook his head. "Nah, man. You know he crossed boundaries on the Sunny. Sorted, but by the time we levelled things he was with Luffy and you and I were a team."

"Yeah." Law was loyal. Marco knew it. "How do you think prep would go with him?" Marco tensed as Law… "What'd you just do?"

"Like it?"

The downside of prep for Law was not being able to drape himself all over Marco, but the ambling grin that crossed his lover's face indicated he'd done something right.

"Fuck, yeah."

"True Master never tells."
"Can do it to you if I learn."

Law kissed the side of the zoan's kneecap while still lubed up, fingers sliding in Marco. "The pleasure's all in the surprise."

"You don't like surprises."

"Can't abide them."

Marco, however, was another matter.

"Zoro would definitely be the practical type. Three strokes of this, four dashes of that, a twirl of his tongue, and he's done." Law positioned Marco's legs wider. Marco was happy to just blob like jelly into the mattress and take it. Stress evaporated in waves, the anxiety caused by ensuring the safe passage of the fugitives they moved from point A to B lessening for the few hours they had together.

"His tongue?"

"Some guys are into that. I think he'd take one for the team if it got him where he wanted to be."

Marco lay back, hands behind his head, and tuned in to Law's breathing, and to the less than sexy necessity of his actions. Let it wash over him. He gripped and released as Law opened him up. It had to be a two way street.

"Chatty today, nana."

The nickname brought relief. Marco hadn't used it for a while. "Nervous."

They were more out of each other's lives than in at present, and Marco had been there. He'd witnessed Doflamingo break in dawn with his body, or, he hadn't been there then, but he'd witnessed Law's most subservient, most ingratiating moment, moments, leading up to it.

"Ready?"

Marco nodded.

Law removed his fingers. Shambled in a towel and wiped them.

He could lean in close now, and he sat over Marco's muscled body, straddling his lower belly, arms pressing the mattress near his head. Marco rested his hands on Law's hips.

"Sure am. Don't want to be ridden?"

"Maybe later."

It was fine. Marco lay back, relaxed, let his hands drop, let his dick do whatever it wanted, which was to get pretty excited. He closed his eyes.

"I wasn't into it, Marco."

Law slicked himself up, lined up and nudged inside, Marco's sphincter gripping, rejecting. The Whitebeard inhaled and exhaled deeply, regularly, willing his body to slacken further.

Just like Law to discuss trouble when he was hardly part way in his partner, but sex was the time when everything was on the table. If you could share your shit on the tip of someone else's cock,
you could share anything.

"I know, Law. You did what you had to do," Marco said after a breathing cycle, abs fat with air then deflating. "You can edge in more."

"Thanks."

"For what?"

Law pushed in watching Marco for a grimace and there it was but it faded an eyeblink later. He pushed again. Marco's feature's scrunched but his fingers circled indicating Law should get on with it.

Law on his knees, with Marco's legs hooked behind, moved. Marco strengthened his grip, his heel pressing into Law's lower back.

"I'm sorry too." His voice disembodied like leaves floating on the surface of a river as Law's rhythm joined both of them.

Law leaned over, both bodies moving, brushed his hair back, the other arm supporting his weight. "For what?"

I asked first, Marco thought. "Couldn't return, once she was gone. I should've gone back straight away." Marco kept Law's gaze now. If they couldn't get beyond this they wouldn't get anywhere.

Law didn't want to think about it. He wasn't sure what he would have done in the same situation. But then, he knew Doflamingo and how he could turn anyone inside out like intestines to tripe. He would have returned.

He didn't want that night to govern their first time since, and he was the one who'd brought it up, so Law channelled all his energy and concentration into the broad Whitebeard tattoo spanning Marco's chest. Focused on arms toned like the dormant folds of a mountain range, tremoring with threat, with pleasure.

Law clasped Marco's dick as it bobbed against his own belly and — one hand supporting himself along Marco's raised hips, — puckered and straightened the skin as if creasing silk into bunches. Firm, but not so much he'd fray the thread, rip the cloth.

"Unnh."


But Marco was still there. He'd seen Law at his professional slutty best, bent double and fucked until his teeth shook, absolutely under duress, but that didn't matter with some. And Law had held the knife and used it. And Marco was still there. Letting him be his vanilla self.

That was a poison oleander between them that needed its petals distilled to figure out what had really happened and what either one of them could really cope with, but tonight wasn't the night to ready the tools of the apothecary against memories of Doflamingo's onslaught.

For now he let Marco build and blow and didn't complain when he came all over his hand. Law painted Marco's seed over his tight flat tummy. The Phoenix gripped his wrist. Law glanced down. At this point stopping would be fucking difficult, but he would if he had to, always.

Marco watched Law. It was okay. The pain wasn't physical for either of them, but this… Marco
had come back and Law wanted him there despite his cowardice. Both chased the image of Law trussed up out of mind. Law was old enough and too much damaged — had survived too much — to dwell on what-fucking-ifs. He'd dodged a return to slavery and they'd change this ugly blip of history, they would. They'd done it before and they'd do it again.

Marco let his jealousy, his possessiveness prance its useless way around his mental paddock for a while — after all, it had no place in their bed while Law was driving him into the mattress. He had to give it somewhere safe to feed if he didn't want it to grow toxic. And he did that thing Law told him about — thanked the ungenerous emotion for protecting him, but he was a big boy now and could take care of himself, and leave judgements floating for the seconds it took for them to fade to benign if he acknowledged them. He didn't have to act. Didn't have to give importance to the flashes of colour Law's branded arse fired up.

As his discomfort — with himself, with Law, with Do-fucking-flamingo — slipped away, the force of Law within him ratched up and he gripped into his back and pulled the fucker to him.

Law's muscles had a way of contracting like the sleek snow leopard he was, striding, striking, into action just before he came — the shy animal in pursuit of prey just before it leapt for the kill. Sex was dangerous. Even the most chaste of relationships called for laying the neck bare, and maybe Law and Marco were more dangerous than most because they demanded that the other open up, give, trust and to trust the other to do the right thing. It didn't always work. Law was often a mess, Marco had screwed up in the past, and hell you couldn't always control the boiling water others plunged you into, but with that danger came the hope, the eighty percent belief, that they'd catch the other if they fell. And Law was upfront with him, even if his decisions weren't always the ones Marco wanted to hear.

That aspiration of their own selves that pushed them to try. It wasn't everything. Law and Marco and sex weren't everything to each other, but they were part of the whole.

"I know, babe," Marco said before Law wove words into contact, "Inside. It's okay." And Marco loved — remembering those moments when Law was away, or when the everyday threatened anything good between them, or when the fucked-up extraordinary shredded it into pieces — loved how the yellow in Law's eyes flecked just that bit more golden, and the only gaze Law had was for Marco, and it was right, what they had together, it was good. They utilised the jagged edges and smoothed them down.

He leant right over Marco, both slick with sweat, and the Phoenix raised himself up on his elbows to meet the mouth, still hungry, still curious, still sharp, still his, still theirs.

Tongues and dicks were one multi-tasking activity too many, so they crushed lips, flesh, bristles — damn Marco for not shaving, Sabo would give Law hell — and they lowered to the bed, Law's mouth half on Marco's because breathing was important, noses squashed and in the way, and Marco curving the ridge of his ear with his fingers the way Law liked, and he came, not really saving Robin's sheets cos Marco had enjoyed himself too. Law stayed that way for a while, his heart zipping along, trying to match it to Marco's steady beat.

Marco held him near, arms tight around his back, as Law collapsed on him. Soon they'd shower and sleep, but for now this togetherness, even as Law withdrew, was almost closer than the act itself. One wasn't possible without the other.

"Welcome home, Law." Marco pushed a clump of hair behind his ear, a lock of black curling into a gold hoop. "Missed you."
Okay, I'm not always the best at these scenes. Apologies if this is as perfunctory as Law when he's in doctor mode (good Marco puts up with a lot, lol). Hopefully it's a bit more tender than that.

I think I have to bring Smoker back into the fray too. Where's he been hiding?

Sorry for any repeated themes. It's kinda unavoidable when you've written a fair amount on the same pairing/world. For those who haven't read the other works, Marco nicknames Law 'nana' because of his conservative hobbies and vanilla approach to sex in particular, and Law loves him for seeing beyond the definitions and expectations the marines and Doflamingo have saddled him with, and for allowing him to be subversive with his straight-laced quirks. This is especially explored in *Repossession*, but also *Teaspoons* and *Gimcracks*.

**Thanks so much** for reading.
Dark but not so dark 8a - Zoro

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

Follows from chapter 20.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Brought you some tea."

Law thought he was going to leave, but Zoro sat beside him on the practical narrow bed they had in the safehouse, plonked four bottles of beer on the side table. Tea in Roronoa's dialect. The beds reminded Law of sailing.

"Thanks."

When they'd arrived he'd remained sandwiched between Shanks and Benn and held the blanket tight around him, staring ahead, through everyone, even though he was surrounded by allies and friends. The light was too bright.

His own crew was on reconnaissance but Robin understood and led him to the darkest room in the house, and showed him where the window could be tipped out, the light switched on. He'd been in there for hours. Chopper fretted, but had some of the new new-world fugitives to attend to.

Law sat cross-legged and turned something small around and around his fingers. A flash of gold.

"You're not too fucked up," Zoro said. He meant physically. Law didn't look too patchwork.

Law turned his head Zoro's way before dropping his sight to his hands again. "Nah, man. I'm fucked up."

Zoro gave him a once over. It was dim. Marks on his neck, perhaps. He'd taken something to the face recently. A target who couldn't move was an easy one. He didn't think Marco was like that, had it in him. Not against Law.

"Your fashion's taken a turn for the worse."

Law closed his hand around the clasp in his hand and pulled at the ridiculous t-shirt Marco had fucked him in that afternoon. The stupid three quarter pants. Swamped in self-hatred, he returned his gaze to Zoro.
"Market Price? What the fuck's that mean?"

Law's lip curled. "It's what fruit users go for at the human auction house" He rested the back of his head against the wall. "Marco's idea of a joke."

Tailings still smeared his skin, were encrusted in the clothes, though Marco had sponged him. Before dinner.

Zoro couldn't fathom it. He removed his jacket. The surgeon dug fluffy things, right?

"We'll getcha something." He passed the fleece over.

Law really didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Story of his life lately. The lime green looked great on Zoro, but he'd look like Bartolommeo in that shade. But it was soft. Would cover...

"What's that thing on your arm? Good taste and Trafalgar don’t gel, but this? M?"


One hand held whatever it was. Zoro bet Nami could sniff it out. The other palmed that Ozymandias seal of seals on Law's arm under the jacket. King of kings. What had Phoenix been trying to prove?

Law's energy was dangerous, wounded. An unsettled torsion of strength, focus and release. Wouldn't want to poke him with a stick. Zoro took in the words, nodded and sat back on the bed, mirroring the Heart.

"Do your room thing. Bring Kikoku here."

"Clothes?"

"Do your room thing for Kikoku, and while you're at it get a set of clothes from the shelf in the entry." They kept a supply for the stream of escapees travelling to Boa Hancock's island or revolutionary outposts, or places guarded by the fishmen.

Law had cracked the window open. He knew he could walk, move, had freedom of movement. It took getting used to. He knew from experience.

Zoro had hit the light as he'd come in. A dim light. They were dealing with some traumatised people here and Chopper had the rooms set up not to startle. It was a fine balance. Darkness triggered some, clear light others. Law stood and increased the brightness so they could see more clearly.

He wasn't sure he had enough power to even get himself in a change of clothes, but it was useless sending Zoro. He might never see him again. That would give him peace, but peace might not be what he needed right now.

"You can do it, man."

Law had zipped the jacket up to his neck so the fleece softly covered his bruises. He slipped the clasp into a pocket, and rested his chin against the high collar, rubbed a cheek along it. But doing so ... only faint, probably in his mind ... but dinner, Marco, the spilled food, their garden after rain, wafted through the fabric. Tomato leaves. The Room he'd started to form faltered, sputtered, extinguished in a fizzle of blue.
Zoro observed the threat on Law's hand curving down as he conjured his magic. The fuck? The D on the right had been coloured in with some furious sharpie scribble.

Law followed Zoro's gaze and drew his fingers against his palm. One of Marco's side projects. He'd been going to black them all but had decided Law's inked fingers doing things he didn't want to did something for his inner sadist.

Law unzipped the jacket and slipped it off, dropping it on the bed. Then he grabbed the t-shirt from the neck and pulled it over his head. Scrunched it into a ball and flung it Zoro's way. The swordsman hardly moved as he shredded it with the blunt side of Shusui's blade.

"There better be clothes in that closet," Law said. He shrugged the fleece back on, smooth against his skin. As good as it felt, a jacket alone wasn't practical. He'd learnt that in Dressrosa. He checked the band in the pocket.

Anything could be a threat but Zoro knew Law wasn't attacking him. Remove the immediate object of distress, and anxiety lessens. Yeah. Law was bruised and marked from the glimpse he'd had of his front and back. Any lash marks were bygone, so that was something. Stripes around his neck, a puncture mark. The physical was important of course, but with Law, with any fruit user, the stronger worry was the mind.

"Where is she? Kikoku?" Law asked. He'd lost hold of her from the car to here?

"By the front door." The hilts of Zoro's two other weapons pushed into his hip. He pulled them from his haramaki and placed them on his lap to sit with Shusui. "You really are a shitty swordsman."

Law smiled and flared up a Room, and swapped Kikoku with one of Zoro's beers. She landed neatly against him and he stepped back with the nodachi over his shoulder for a beat before straightening and placing her against the wall. It felt right. Zoro's assessment was probably accurate.

"And a shitty person!"

Law laughed. Or not.

"Clothes?"

"Not gonna tell if you take away my supplies."

"Rather I used one of your swords?"

Just try, Zoro thought. "Why not a scrap of that obnoxious t-shirt?"

Why not indeed?

"Sizes?" Law asked.

"They gave me stuff from the second shelf when I needed to change once, so you're probably the next one down."

"Hah." Zoro didn't mind being a shorty, and Law didn't mind being a shorty by New World terms. They both towered over Luffy after all, and Law over Zoro. Size meant nothing much. But if he was going to insult his swordplay Law was going to ridicule right back. Whatever it took.
Zoro described the closet, also by the front door, though he got his left and right confused, so Law needed to send out a second scrap of cloth. The clothes were functional and suited his style, bar the absence of the Heart Jolly Roger. A t-shirt and simple black pants. Even a pair of jocks in uniform black.

After stepping out of the three-quarter length trousers Marco had bedecked him in he threw them Zoro's way, and he happily scrapped them into cleaning rags. Law used to be a little cautious when young when changing because of amber lead. Doflamingo had taught Baby 5 and Buffalo it wasn't contagious, but their curiosity and reaction to growing lesions wasn't fun.

As adapting to all circumstances became more important he let go. He couldn't let that kind of worry take precedence in his life or over it. Not if he wanted to survive. He was marked up and scungy as fuck, but he was breathing and alive, and Kikoku was near, and Zoro was one of the good guys. He slipped the hair clasp, his bonded earrings, from the jacket and into the pants pocket.

"Bepo and the guys took care of your sword, but you know she's cursed. You gotta give her attention."

Law felt the slightest of tension leave his frame. Zoro was good. He always remembered. Law lifted the nodachi from the wall and sat on the floor, back against the bed. Zoro slid from the bed and sat beside him, bringing the beers, his swords, the nuguigami papers and the uchiko ball.

He couldn't forget, no matter what Marco or Doflamingo or anyone else tried to do to him, he couldn't forget that he had a demon to nurture and keep in check, and that no-one could wield Kikoku the way he could, shitty swordsman or not.

As they had on the Sunny, in Law's own house, and many times before and after a spar, Law and Zoro pulled their blades to them and, with steady hands — no matter how bruised or calloused from training or attack — papered away the rust of humidity, then powdered and polished the blades to a gleaming finish, tapping the uchiko ball against the steel.

The sweep of the paper was a small respite but it was a respite. Doflamingo used his fists his guns his strings, his goddamned acerbic tongue and ... no. Law cleared his mind. He wouldn't think about being filled by that man. Marco favoured hand to hand, and Kikoku thirsted after either of them. They couldn't tame her though she let them hold her, but they weren't swordsmen. They could handle a sword, and Law handled a blade better than both of them, and Zoro, of course, outclassed them all.

Once they were both done, Zoro having drained two bottles and Law one, he stood to leave. "You want me to stay?"

Law shook his head. He wanted his own space.

"Can I send in Chopper? You know he won't stop worrying."

Law nodded.

"Cook'll plate you up something too."
"Blackleg?"

Zoro tipped his head.

Law looked forward to it. Sanji always provided a rice gruel with a Cantonese hint to take away from the blandness of the traditional dish. But it was still soft and unobtrusive enough for a digestive system assaulted with wheats and yeasts it couldn't handle. Except in beer. Maybe Doflamingo was right. Maybe he did have selective allergies.

As Law's health returned, the gruel increased in spices and morsels from the sea.

Sanji was a fusion master and he'd include a bowl of miso too, red, showing their north blue roots. A gently seared fillet of white fish, rice from the purest of waters. But when it came, the thing that almost had Law bawling over the tray of food was the glass of wine set to the side.

Zoro returned later that week.

"Hear you've been walking the yard."

"Fresh air."

"Yeah, it's good for ya'" But not if Morgans and his crew and the upstart fledglings marching around got wind of it. "Keep an eye out."

Law nodded. Of course.

Zoro pulled out the cleaning and polishing supplies, Sat on the floor. Law joined him.

"Just did it a few days ago."

"Practice makes perfect."

"You think I don't know how to look after my sword?"

"It's not the sword I'm worried about."

Law had to admit it was incredibly soothing to just sit in the room that was a little bit lighter today than it had been yesterday and swipe the paper along Kikoku's blade.

"You can cut paper with that blade?" he asked Zoro.

"Or not. Depends on my purpose."

Law nodded. "How about gold?"

Zoro quirked his eyebrows, that scar more expressive than his working eye at times.

"Sure. Steel. A building. A mountain. But so can you."

"With my fruit. This needs to be cut without fruit. It was given to me before I had my fruit, and somehow I kept what I want cut away from Doffy."

Zoro glanced at Law's strangely unadorned face.

"Doffy pierced you?"
Law jolted. He hadn't mentioned anything. But that was always the way. Anything you wanted kept quiet crept to the forefront.

"Yeah, with designs similar to what I wear, but he never saw these items. They were sewn into the band of my hat."

"How does that still fit you?" Law wanted him to cut earrings? Were they on the same page?

"Guess my brain was huge from the get-go." Law lifted his hat, turned it in his hands and pushed it back onto his head. "Plus, this one's a replacement, but I kept the other one till I was mid-twenties."

Up to Sabaody if not beyond.

"Nerdy creep, yup."

"Jealousy's not a good colour, Roronoa-ya."

And the easy banter shriveled as both thought, fuck no, there was no way Zoro would want to be Law. Law didn't want to be Law lately. He felt the gold in his pocket and dug it out.

"I need these separated." He held his palm out to Zoro.

Zoro picked up the band and weighed it in his hand. Light as. Law kept a close eye. Hmm, this really meant something to him.

"Your earrings, huh?" Zoro turned the clasp around. He hadn't noticed that seal and pup before.
"How'd they end up like this?"

Law shook his head and the shadow was so dark Zoro knew not to press further.

"Usopp could do it."

"Kinda cool to see your skill at play." Plus, Zoro kept himself to self. Too much of a risk of Usopp letting slip what he'd seen. "I'll get him to put the stems in," Law added.

"Might be able to whittle something in," Zoro said.

"Yeah."

Zoro turned the clasp again.

"It needs precision. See those ridges?" Law leant over, a black-clad arm pointing. He'd returned Zoro's jacket, and one of the Revolutionaries had given him something to warm him. "It needs to be sliced just there. Precisely there."

"Or you turn into a frog?"

"Perhaps."

A challenge was a challenge. Zoro concentrated and felt the way the gold used to sit on Law's skin, in his earlobes, against his face — the seashell echo of blood circulating under flesh. An earlier time, a younger time, far before any seafaring days. He sliced four times, then again. He could fashion the clasp. Could sense where it had been before the adornments had been altered.

What did he mean, Doflamingo pierced him first? None of them came from easy places, but Law's was a bit more fucked up among the fucked up. But how can you hate a flower, judge a colour?
Painful experiences were just that.

"Pattern hidden or obvious?"

Earrings were small by their nature, so nothing was too obvious.

Law had to consider this. After all, Croc and Benn and whoever had done the work for them — Doffy too probably — knew all about it. Fuck them. Let everyone know, then they couldn't hold it over him.

"On the outside."

It wasn't a massive design. It's not like you could see it unless you were pretty close.

Zoro sensed ... Jesus, he almost dropped the jewellery. Law had gone through some heavy shit wearing these, recently. He felt, more than heard, the choked breath, the pain, the movement, the intrusion, the humiliation. Man this guy needed a Luffy hug. Or not.

The residual trauma lessened with the division. Ah, man. Rain on a hot road.

"Law?"

Law stood up and paced to the window. Anger was fear. Not all fighters realised it, but those in control of their power, their will, did.

He looked out at the yard from the edge of the frame. As if someone was still after him (which they probably were). Zoro imagined bars.

"Metal keeps memory, huh?" Law asked.

"Depends upon who's manipulating it."

Law gazed out at how the foliage so neatly secluded the house from the street.

"It's strong," Zoro said, "The energy."

"Croc."

Zoro winced. There was white heat at the name. "Croc?"

"He refashioned them," Law told the sky.

Zoro paid a quick visit to those unusual marks on Law's neck. Yeah, what caused them? He scratched at his own scars. Law's wouldn't scar, but there were some you wanted to and others that needed to leave you the fuck alone.

He could've levelled that courthouse. They'd all let him down, but maybe Law the most by letting them put him in seastone. But maybe that was like blaming Kuina for not being more careful going down the stairs. End result was fucked whichever way you wanted to hang the blame.

Law was steady, but he pulled the nondescript sleeves of his jacket over his arms. Goose-pimples pricked his skin.

"Nah, not Croc or any other fucker you obviously hate. You, Law. Your energy in the gold. The seal. Mammal kinda seal."
Law looked at him, the darkness lessening. "You can feel her?"

"Them."

Law wandered over and sat on the edge of the bed like a kid waiting for a bedtime story. Zoro tipped his head upwards. "The Mother is ferocious. Man, she's really angry for you, but not disappointed. Just interested in getting her pup away to safety and ploughing right through anyone who gets in her way."

Law had an image of a mother bringing live easy prey to a young seal again and again. Encouraging it to hunt for itself, to fend for itself. The ocean was vast and very cold, but bountiful and they had that thick layer of blubber underneath their fur.

Zoro liked the way Law's eyes lit. It reminded him of their drinking sessions at the bar before Marco had turned rogue.

"The pup's playful. Like Luffy. Won't listen. Just wants to swim and swim. I bet he's missing out on some important lessons."

Law's smile showed teeth this time. He leant backwards on the bed, arms behind him.

"Yeah, he was a shitty pupil. Too interested in studying the krill and seaweed to actually eat them."

Whatever that meant, but Zoro figured Law was one step closer to being grounded to himself, to them again.

He got himself up from the floor and sat close to the surgeon, legs touching.

"Here, put your hand out."

Law did and Zoro tipped the four piercings into his palm. There was something more in the earrings. Zoro wasn't sure what, and Law wasn't telling, but it was important to him.

Law turned them over for a bit and then separated them, his pinky sliding across his palm. Zoro's skill was out of sight. They were intact. Separately intact. Separately whole, and together. They belonged together. He slipped two into his left ear, passing the other two to Zoro.

So much settled inside him. As a surgeon who literally saw and felt his way into people's bodies, it fascinated him that no matter how much he removed parts of that person — even their personality — their essence, remained. The personality swap was never a perfect match. Too much of the original inhabitant remained for the transformed energy to completely control the host.

If he ever performed the perpetual youth surgery he'd have to locate that part of himself in order for someone else to make use of it. No way Doffy was having that, and no matter how much he or his proxies tortured him, he wasn't getting it. Even if they killed him. That choice was his and was also out of his hands, because he existed. Even when they fucked him over a table, they didn't erase his being.

"The other two." Law turned his head, his ear, in Zoro's direction.

The swordsman could have protested, could have seen it as plunging into personal space long ago settled as off-limits between them, could have viewed it as a betrayal. Instead, he angled the stem at the piercing, slid it in and clicked it shut. He did the same with the other. He squeezed Law's shoulder.
He was still with Luffy. If Marco hadn't blown a circuit, Law would still be with him. Zoro was land sea air and water, and Law was an anomaly who belonged in the water but couldn't swim.

Law reached across with a grip of thanks, almost breaking the hand Zoro had used.

He stood easily, picked up Kikoku and jerked his head back at the yard.

"You're on," Zoro said. Law waited for him to go ahead of him so he didn't get lost in the house, and Zoro reflected how much better Law looked when that gold flashed against his skin. How much better life was when Zoro could communicate through his swords, the way he best knew how.

Chapter End Notes

That section about the uchiko ball was lifted from one of my drabbles in the Nuts in a Nutshell collection. Hmm, so why are the Strawhats at the safehouse? Helping out of course.

Would love to know your thoughts. Like it so far? Don’t forget the kudos button. Too dark for you but think it’s well-written? Drop a guest kudos. All are appreciated. Thank you for reading.
"They're back," Robin said, taking a seat next to Law on the bench seat at one of the communal tables in the house. Koala and Sabo pored over maps, etched out routes, took calls from Revolutionaries underground, at another.

Law looked up from the paper he was reading, a smile she hadn't seen for a long while across his face. A quiet thing.

Doflamingo was not beyond lying. He made a career out of it, but the barbarity he passed off as Law's just deserts and as proof of Doflamingo's own immaculate and disciplined character were enough to let her know that Law had gone through assaults a thousand times worse in shame and denigration than the feathered bastard detailed. Who decided that pleasure slave was a legitimate occupation? Not those holding the title. Humans made her sick.

"My crew's here?"

"Ha, not yet." She sipped her coffee and tapped the back of her earlobe. "All your pretty things are back in their rightful place."

When Shanks and Benn had brought in his bedraggled self he was worse for wear. At least he was conscious this time, though he probably would’ve preferred to have been knocked out. Then again, Law liked control. Of course. Robin understood.

It wasn't comfortable to see him bruised and marked from having been chained, and the ugly new tattoo, but the lack of earrings rattled her the most. Even rousing from a bed-rumpled nap they'd offset his cranky just-woken face. Usually she didn't pay the hoops much mind, but it was wrong to see him without them. Almost as if Doflamingo or whoever had shaved off his goatee or scrubbed him free of ink. They had tried that in various ways at various times, but never succeeded one hundred percent. Ultimately.

Law returned to his paper, turned the page.

"The zucchini's gonna be Jack-in-the-beanstalk huge."
"Yeah?"

He didn't want to think of the plant covering it, but it was covering it, protecting it. The plant had never betrayed him.

"What are your plans?"

"Zucchini plans?"

Robin nodded.

"Don't know yet."

They'd take over the tomato plant eventually, but for now they remained hidden below. The leaves weren't pungent, or not the kind you scrunched up for fragrance. Marco had kind of lost his elegance with that heavy handed shit. Law had no desire to repay in kind. Not to say retribution was out of the question.

He ran a finger along a column outlining Tony-ya's latest medical breakthrough. His tanuki friend was amazing.

"Your clothes don't look bad but they're not really you," Robin said, assessing him with a frown, gaze dropping to his hand. Some of his ink seemed coloured in. Law continued to read. "It's why I'm so happy that you're sporting your primitive body modification trinkets again."

"My doohickeys."

"Your thingamajigs."

Law had a tiny dimple, an indentation, when he smiled. It usually passed off as a wrinkle, a blemish, vexation. It twitched.

"That's why I hoped my crew was back."

"They have a supply of captain-only clothes?"

"In a way."

"Why's it only you that gets the chance to be cool?"

"Saves on the laundry." Law licked his thumb and turned the page. Luffy and Ussop grinned out at him. He closed the paper, folded it, and pushed it to the centre of the table. Turned to Robin. "I'm honoured you'd consider me cooler than Bepo."

"Let's not get carried away."

Law slumped. "Yeah. No-one's cooler than Bepo." How could he compete?

He extended his arm. Ah, he was open to that. Robin moved in and felt his pulse beating strongly under his skin, his blood skating about. It was a relief.

She hugged him so he had to fight for breath.

"Put away your extra arms, Nico-ya."

She did but not her actual arms.
"Hug me back, you bastard." Her hair shone as blue-black as his own under the bald light of the meeting room.

"You've got me pinned."

She released her arms and re-established them once she felt his own arms around her. His grip was firmer than she expected and he rested his head on her own. His breath was steady, and pain rose along with that which floated away.

"Oi, oi! What would Franky say?" Sabo called out, glancing up from the compass he stilt-walked across the map in front of him.

"Don't sweat it, bro," Franky called from an adjacent room. "Law and I are in an open relationship."

"You brought my boyfriend here?" Law laughed into Robin's hair. "And then hugged me in front of him?" Words for her only. She didn't say anything. Just squeezed him tighter. Stupid surgeon.

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Tape held the images together and Robin had used Koala's camera snail to take a photo and send it to some kind of database so there'd be images somewhere a little more permanent than the rages of an ex-lover. It was always good to have something tangible to hold as well.

Law generally got a bit maudlin looking at these pictures but Robin didn't expect the shutdown, the withdrawal — castigation?

He sighed and rubbed at the back of his head, a tremor hidden by his hair. Cora's face, Lammy's face, his mother and father, smeared in white and then the paper bubbling in the fire to liquorice blackness. In his back yard, in the oven he'd had built. His hand hit the earrings and that helped a bit, but then the circumstances over them being removed kicked in.

He stood, chair scraping across the floor, and strode out the room.

Zoro looked over.

"Dunno," Robin answered his gaze. There must be a million triggers. She picked up the photos and slid them in a folder where she had a copy of her mother's birth certificate and her own doctorate, gained at the age of eight. Copies of them. A few items had survived the fires of Ohara. Sengoku, bastard that he was, was good for some things. Law would want the pictures. She knew he would. Just not yet.

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Koala was busy shoring up a trellis for some of the garden's flowers, hammer and nails nearby. Law worked next to her, t-shirt sticking to his skin. How did Koala remain so unaffected? The Revolutionaries might even be cooler than Bepo. Than Stealth Black.

This place was in need of a herb garden. A gnarly rosemary bush, handy for flavouring and health, was about the extent of it. Some extra plants wouldn't hurt.

Robin's hand tapped him on the shoulder and disappeared and then tapped him on the other. It
never got old. Law was too chill for tricks so he turned right around. She sat on a bench flush with the outside wall of the house and waved.

He wiped a palm up across his forehead to chase away the sweat and wandered over, paint-splattered work boots clomping. Neither one knew who they belonged to before.  

"Glad to see you're not holed up in your room."

"Vitamin D's good for you."

"No, really."

She'd brought out three drinks and Law took one of them. Some pink frothy number. Robin sipped on a blue concoction. Law eyed the umbrella.

"Sanji's here?"

He noted there was an umbrella in his drink too, but not in the iced barley tea, cool brown but unadorned.

Robin nodded. "You're sipping Koala's drink. He's gonna kill you."

Law laughed, towelled moisture from his neck. He fished out the umbrella and put it in the other drink. "I don't think fifi drinks are her style."

Robin peered at the post-atomic blue of her drink, and the iridescent pink of Law's. Unlike us. The Heart smiled, sat next to her.

She pulled a bag onto her lap. "Franky and I have to help some folks out west tomorrow. We'll be gone a while. The pictures are in here. You want them?" She released the clasp.

The drink really was iridescent. Law considered firing up a room to see if it outlined his intestinal track like barium. He stared a thousand miles into the yard. Did he want . . .? "Yeah." He hunched over, forearms on his knees, hands clasped, drink to his side.

She didn't reach for the folder, but took his hand instead, shaking his elbow to loosen it. He sat back, and folded his fingers over hers. Koala looked on. That drink looked good. Very cute with the umbrella. But what was more, what was the story between these two?  

Law didn't reject. Pretty easygoing. Like her and Hack? Though Hack was a lot older than Koala, more avuncular. This intimacy went against what she knew of Law. She resumed her task. Not her business, except that everything was a revolutionary's business.

"Pass them over?"

Robin removed the folder and did so.

Law took a deep breath and shook the photos out. He and Robin had saved them from Marco but he couldn't save them from himself?

Cora.

He laid them all out between them.

He stacked them. Robin waited. Law lifted the picture of Doflamingo's brother.

"Marco had some new pics. Individual ones of my family. A new one of this print of Cora-san."

Law ran a finger on the image, along his cheek. It was unconscious, Robin knew it, otherwise he'd be self-conscious. He did the same for his father, his mother, Lammy. He wasn't them. His tormentors. He wasn't them. He'd never be them. Thanks to Cora, to his parents. Thanks to Lammy's excitement and impatience with him when they set out together. He must have had some good in him if she wanted to hang out with him.

He returned to his benefactor. "Sorry. Sorry, Cora San."

"Law?"

Holding the picture too tightly would tear it again, and Law's grip was just shy of doing that. He spoke to the picture on his lap, to his hands.

"Marco wanted me to burn copies he'd made of these images." He tapped the back of his fingers on Cora's face. "Got me to burn my surgery notes, medical dictionary. Pictures of him and me." He glanced over at Robin. Law wasn't scared but he'd lost belief that things could work out for him. Robin hated to see it, but had felt the same when she'd encountered Aokiji again the first time.

"Setting a match to pictures of me and the Phoenix was a breeze. I've been living a lie all these years. Wasn't hard." Strange, Law thought to himself, that Marco used almost the same wording. Either they weren't made for each other or were peas in a pod.

"Dictionaries can be replaced, it's shitty to lose useful notes and remedies, but I couldn't, wouldn't burn the pictures. The tea towel he had of Cora." That smile. Damn it. "At least we've got that one right?"

Robin recalled the monstrosity her fruit had picked from the wall before the trial.

"Yeah, hon. It's in there."

Law nodded. Good. He tucked the photos into a pocket Robin passed him, the dishcloth inside.

"I had no choice, finally. Doffy's strings."

He didn't look at her. Couldn't tell her about the overwhelming odour and taste of those leaves while being fucked like an animal, dressed up as one too with that nose bag. Heat crawled up the back of his neck. But Marco had brought him to ejaculation and he had, Law had, desecrated the photos, the people he loved.

"Robin. I keep hurting those I care about in the most heinous ways."

He looked at her for a flash before remembering the photo. When would Cora's expression change to disgust, anger?

"Law." The Heart was pragmatic but proud. He didn't bend on certain elements and he definitely wasn't one to sell out another to save his skin. Others forced him. She knew it'd be force. The man Law had loved forced him to commit heinous acts, but the most appalling act of all was that it was a man who had once truly loved Law.

You couldn't hide the kind of connection they had. And it pained her to see Law believe again that anything could change in an instant so it wasn't worth investing in any one thing. But she'd seen
him invest in others for the very same reason.

"What you had was love. What you had in the past. He loved you and it was real and respectful and reliable."

Law didn't want to think of those days. They were a venomous spider masquerading as a dormouse. There were too many good memories.

"I gave him a chance in the past, Robin." Law's hands formed a loose cradle on his lap, legs kicked out. "He crossed a major line, but we worked hard to fix it." So fucking hard. Law drove a heel into a loose brick in the pavement.

"At that time it was working." Poor brick, just like Ryunosuke.

"Feel so stupid." He'd put his family at risk again by letting his guard down so completely, and they were only pictures. If they'd been around would he have even looked twice at Marco? The man was a doctor. Smart. Their paths might have crossed.

"Not for trusting, Law, no. It makes you better."


"How's Franky?"

Robin pulled her bag to her. "A bit jealous."

Law's smile unfurled like a sweets wrapper into something a little less bitter.

"Of me," Robin added.

Koala laughed, blowing her revolutionary poise.

"Some spy you are," Law murmured, letting his resentment and fear fade out.

"Sabo's jealous too." Of whom, she didn't say. She turned back to the trellis.

Law knew he was lucky to have them, to be free. He couldn't verbally let them know. Not yet. Couldn't feel it yet. Couldn't trust it wouldn't go away.

"There's this too." Robin shook out a small packet from the last page of the folder.

"Shinobu—, remember her?"

Did Law what. There'd been bad blood between them. Shinobu talking smack about his crew. All in the past. Water under the bridge now.

"You know she has the juku-juku no mi?"

"Yeah." It allowed her to speed the process of maturation.

"Got her to work on your seedlings."

Law stiffened, then forced himself to relax. Marco wasn't going to take everything away from him. He wasn't going to make him hate himself any more than he already had.
"They bore fruit and we sped the process to the end and beginning of their cycle. The tomatoes were delicious." He had a green thumb. Even Shinobu was impressed, though she claimed her enhancement jutsu also helped.

It was all right, Law told himself. It was all right. Don't blame the tools but the wielder.

Robin couldn't read him. "Dried the seeds." She dropped a small pouch in his hand. "The smell reminds me of you." Earthy, dependable, spicy, nurturing, sharp, sweet, sour, adaptable.

Law curled his fingers over them in a death hold. He'd always grown the fruit. Doflamingo had forced him to kill Misery and the pup. Marco forced him to mar his family. Plants could be poison and potions — it depended on the physician. Zoro had sensed Law's stories in the properties of gold. The leaves he'd been forced to inhale and ingest while Marco fucked him had no ill-intent against him. Misery, Cora, his mother, his father, Lammy, didn't hate him.

Even so, Law pocketed the seeds, picked up the photos, and left Robin and Koala passing glances again. Koala repeated Aladine's words on conditioning, slavery, and to Robin they rang true.

The demand to please the odious and deny your worth; to align with the lowest-common denominator in the hope of survival; to recognise yourself as lower than the lowest common denominator until it was second nature to equate self-esteem with none. You didn't even know how fucked up persecutors were until someone helped you out with a strange laugh, a weird smile, even with a new brand burned into the skin. Robin hoped he could use the seeds. Law's garden was a solace of power and peace.

Chapter End Notes

My two favourite dark-haired pirates. The next chapter will follow the dark theme for a while. Hope you enjoyed it, and thanks for reading.
Something dissolved at Marco's core with the soft, torn exhalation Law pressed against his breast bone, the way his arm hooked around the back of his neck. The lines of Law's inner elbow webbed in action and retraction against the rhythm maintained. Marco knew those folds well. Envisioned them clearly. He stared down at the black mop. He'd wash it today. So pretty.

Law helped Marco keep his pace with just the right balance of resistance and yield. Thinking how co-operative he was, how well they worked together, blood rushed to Marco's already swollen dick. He didn't know if this was fun but it sure felt good. Right.

The spurts of breath Law scattered into his skin corresponded to how Marco fucked and angled him; how each plunge into his tight welcoming hole brought a little kick to the end of each wet puff of air, slightly different from the last. Marco did that. Created that. Drew that reaction. It was a great feeling. Men lead. It was written somewhere. A man who couldn't lead was what? Getting fucked.

Doflamingo had told him what to listen for. The pre-dawn call of a swallow testing the morning air. The infinite pleasures of using this elegant, pathetic, needy whore. Always trying so hard to be all grim-lipped and mute. No wonder the pink feathered freak was constantly grinning.

_Don't trust anything he says. Learn to read his body. Even when he protests — and he always does — he's yearning for it._

Law was barefoot. He dug padding around the hardwood of their house shoeless, and Marco threw a quick look over his shoulder at the crossed flash of tattooed heart bridges, feet gripping into Marco's lower back, heels pressing in.

"Fuck, yeah."

Law's spidery fingers tugged his hair like Marco loved, the tingle right at the scalp. Marco's breath thickened as follicles zinged with the threat, his own fingers digging into Law's sweat and slip and slap and skin.
"Motherfucker."

He'd pulled it out from the roots again. Was that a smile he felt against his chest? Couldn't see his face this close, Law totally pinned between the wall and Marco's pectorals. Pleasure or perversion at hurting him? He'd pay. Spoilt rotten brats no longer got indulged. When would Law learn?

Marco hoisted him again as he slid minutely, buttock slipping down the wall. He repositioned, like a current rejoining the river after clearing driftwood, and Law helped him, angling for better access. Both leant into the space between them, gripping onto flesh at hand, and both pushed back against the paint as Marco fucked Law, splattered him against the wall, for hurting him. Those damp swampy rasps never let up.

_Unless he's in a lot of pain he'll try to stay quiet. Attune yourself to the register of breath and grip._

Man, the cunt was so into it — staggered chunks of air fat in depth and volume and speed. His nails? His nails in Marco's neck?

The Phoenix couldn't wait to tell Doflamingo. He'd always wanted to do this. His power was stronger and Law responded to domination. Just look at him lap it up, his vain foppish hair lifting and settling against his head as it almost cracked the plaster with every propulsion until he'd had to, he just had to rest it against Marco's chest. Where it belonged. Who else could take care of him? Who else knew what he needed when Law himself had no clue?

The wall mostly supported Law, and the rest was Marco hauling him around his hips, below his pelvis, and Law's legs and hands holding on. He looked down at the black hair and its few strands of grey, and at the way that mess pointed every which direction, and the way it usually curled around his earrings like grass poking through roadside drains.

But yeah, there were no earrings now. He was never the man Marco thought he was, and there he went pulling on his spikes knowing how much Marco liked it, and, apart from the fact that Misery was gone, Marco could see very little not to enjoy in this new arrangement.

He was so good, such a good slave. His tattooed embrace, all limbs patterned, like having a scroll unfolded in the corridor. The best decoration. Who wouldn't want a Law to show how far they'd come, how much they weren't to be messed with? To reflect an owner's finesse, his understanding of high art?

Law dropped the matted mess of hair, gathered from the drains and basin of the bathroom, gathered from the time he'd yanked at Phoenix's head in hate and anger (not a wise move. Anger didn't make him stronger when he was in chains. Still, he drew blood).

From the times he'd scrambled to clutch onto Marco's moving, muscled back, his bull neck, his hair, as if he cared for him, needed him, when he'd gone all carry, lift, and fuck-up-against-the-wall humiliation route, Law's legs around him, like he and dickwad were both willingly playing out some Hollywood fuckfest. First over Marco's arms, then around his back as he'd freed his hands to play, experiment, explore. He'd ripped Law's cut-offs down first. Threw whatever he'd dressed him in to who knows the fuck where.

Marco had been keen on driving into him so hard that the wall and the back of his own head became firm friends, so he had to grip him for balance.
Marco had smiled as Law had to, *had to*, breathe down onto his chest, his pecs. Had to drape the cuffed tattooed arms, the strength still felt under the seastone, over his shoulders, fingers pressing into the bristles at the back of his neck, then muscles below that. He knew that body so well.

He'd taken off the fucking collar and Law still couldn't fight him. The weak don't get to choose. He never saw it, but he wondered about the soldiers who sacked Flevance. Did they rape? It was a weapon of war.

Collateral damage, the fucked, the wages of war — like jewels in a sack of loot. Cosmetically damaged. A crumbled brick wall from a car careening through a road barrier into a sleepy suburban house. But the foundation never recovered. No matter how much persecutors rationalised their actions.

Marco massaged Law's skull and that screwed everything up because Law and his body recalled all the times the touch had been one of trust and he craved more. Physically. Mentally, he itched for the safety he used to know. But that wasn't now.

Now was the salt of Marco against his lips and tongue as he tried to draw in air, and he wasn't going to share his breath with his *Master* in a parody of what they once had. He wasn't going to lift his head and bring his face close, his lips over the other. If Marco pulled his head back, tipped up his chin, leant in, he'd have no choice.

"Huh." Knew him too well. He was drooling over Marco's front, and the blond squeezed his earlobes between his thumb and forefinger. He could now. Pressed at the holes as if to release the secret doorway to Ali Baba's cave.

To invade a country, oust a people, dismiss an identity, you got up close and personal and didn't learn a thing. Law hated that he needed to hold him to not fall to the floor, but he also kept hold of those strands of hair, his fingers and hands flopping about behind Marco's neck as he felt himself once more lifted up and pushed back and fucking impaled. You let someone in an inch and they thrust the whole length in and then some. Again and again and again.

Acting any way they wanted, Law wasn't free to act in any way at all.

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He was allowed to garden in peace at times and especially near the tomato plant, as Marco thought olfactory torture would reinforce Law's awareness of his true worth as nothing much. Fucked if Law was going to let that fucker win.

Just like Brer Rabbit and the briar patch Law's eyes grew wide and his body rigid when Marco instructed him to train the vines, or clean or whatever the hell you did with tomato plants — Marco had no idea. And he did have to relax and let the burgeoning conditioning sweep over and past him. All you had to do to survive the sting of nettles was boil them and throw the water away.

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Summers were sweet in Flevance. It was a white city but had moments of warmth. The fireworks festivals were held in the hotter months. Lammy and Law tended their garden patch, a first for both. Their mother favoured tomatoes, their father broad beans, both were pretty easy for
beginners, or maybe their mother helped out when they weren't looking.

Lammy was so proud, and so was he, when they got their first fruit. Two misshapen tomatoes not quite ripe. They'd been so excited to watch them form on the vine and picked them at the first hint of red. Lammy really enjoyed tying the plant to the fence, or trellis, or whatever they'd used, and Law pretended to help but those slaters and beetles and worms and butterflies and living, crawling, creeping things drew his trowel and attention.

"Law!"

"Hmm?"

Third prodding he looked up and Lammy couldn't reach to get a wayward creeper tied to a higher bar. He stood, dusting his hat down, wiping the seat of his pants, though both his and Lammy's clothes were stained grass-green. Summer surrounded them like a trumpet burst. His sister's spots had only just appeared, discoloring the ridge of her hands closest to the wrist. You wouldn't know. She knew Law needed to study, wanted to help their parents, but she'd drag him out of bed before the sun was hardly up, to watch their garden, to water before the heat evaporated their efforts, to see if they could catch the sleepy flowers tipping their petals to the sky.

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It wasn't even their plant. He'd grabbed a clump of leaves from before he'd snuck in — before he'd lifted the arm of a corpse and slipped underneath, Law's skin slick with blood, other people's guts and waste, their bodies' last sighs. Movement was limited, but every now and then he could raise a hand and bury his nose into the crushed leaves and remember and try not to remember Lammy and him in the garden and Lammy in flames.

Marco ripping him apart and the panic and confusion of being treated like a cow and just the fucking intent behind the blond's actions left Law jerking his head away from the smell and texture when he tied the leaves to his face. The cartload of jostling bodies returned, but along with it — along with a flick of Marco's hips, with the sudden bump of the cart going over potholes — was the memory of how he got through it, and buried deep in the suffocating aroma was the tang of what he and Lammy had loved. He recognised that it helped keep him alive and a tiny bit less crazy in that cart than he might have been.

He veered way into the furrows of flatlined emotion, but when he sat in the haphazard garden Jora had drawn in Spider Miles he ached for the scent of the tomato plant and leaves, and if Marco thought he could use them as negative reinforcement, he had a lot to compete with.

When he'd crawled from the bodies, out of the mass grave before it was filled, needing to step over limb, and hand and head, he sat by the river. His wrists were discoloured with Amber lead (a few white dots just where Lammy's had appeared), and the leaves he'd crushed, and effluent.

It was too soon to think of Lammy, so he pushed everything away, but many years later he recalled the particles of peace he gained from the scent of the leaves, laced with sadness in the way the leaves themselves were deeply veined, pushing nutrients to fruit. When he remembered, he was grateful that his sister and that day were clearly implanted. He couldn't bring her face to mind, but her smile, the dark soil, the sun, the timbre of her voice, were all there when he broke a leaf between his fingers.

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As he worked by the tomatoes, recent associations scurried about and away in a mad willy-willy,
until the garden in Flevance in summer bled into the forefront. He scowled. As long as Marco thought he was punishing him, he'd leave Law be to drop the hairs into the zucchini patch directly under the tomato vines, letting the flowers and sticky leaves absorb them. Leave him free to push and dig them into the ground where the roots would assimilate and consume them.

Chapter End Notes

There you go. Have two chapters this week. The Marco stuff is a flashback, natch. Hope it's not confusing. Thank you for reading. And yeah ... there are always flashbacks, right? Law will be safe eventually.

All feedback is appreciated and motivating. Don’t have an account? Don’t worry, the kudos button (and/or comment box) still love you. Too dark for a comment? Guest kudos are welcome here.
Chapter Summary

A noble metal for a noble lost cause.

Chapter Notes

**Warnings** for implied underage/ non-con. Past child abuse (late teen). Not explicit or detailed.

In this AU Law was recaptured on Minion after Cora's death, and returned to/recaptured by the Family. Following ideas inspired by *Worth* (in my bookmarks) and explored in *Repossession*, Penguin (who is also part of the family by this stage) and Law escape when Law is 16.

I know Oda has the boys and Bepo meet on Swallow Island. In this AU, Penguin and Law find Bepo when fleeing, and meet up with Shachi soon after.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**Chapter (8,9) 10: Light/Dark: Past Law and Doflamingo**

He didn't know why he wasted money on that scrappy kid, but such a pretty piece of trash. The gold he'd pierced his ears with was the best. He couldn't be seen with alloy or tin draping his arm, and Law's fruit was powerful. It deserved a noble metal complement. Too good for him really.

The kid knew from the books he spoonfed him that his fruit was something else — seemed too that Cora had let him in on more than he should've. Every now and then he thought Law even knew about the perennial youth operation. Let him be a worthy accessory until that knowledge was required. Until he was sturdy enough, old enough, loyal enough to gift his rightful king his life. Until it was as natural an action as breathing.

In a manner, Law had made him shoot Cora, and Cora had made him shoot their father, and their father had killed their mother through his neglect, and commoners like Law — despite being the son of doctors — were the reason everything was fucked. Commoners and celestials. Everyone was fucked but him.

Sometimes when Doflamingo leant and breathed over that frightened, blank or hateful face, (he really got the treatment when it was hateful, so that didn't happen often), all he saw were the jeers and rumble of indignation — the vigilantism — that glinted and flinted off the fire and pitchforks the rabble had used to back them up to the tower, where they suspended them. His father in the middle, Cora to his father's right.

He should've left Homing up there. It was only Cora's pleading that had him pull him down.
Snivelling twit.

Conqueror's haki didn't work on the kid, on Law. That was extraordinary. Even Gladius had swayed when he was that age. Not to say Law remained totally unaffected but he remained conscious. Gladius had been older. Baby 5 had grown used to it in training, but it had regularly wiped her out once. Buffalo couldn't handle it. Doflamingo's closest and oldest were fine with it. To Lao G it was like passing wind.

The villagers, that night, were all reflected in Law's gold. Of course his own ears sported hoops as well, but a king had no need for ostentation, duplication. There was only one ruler, born into glory. All Law had were his wits, his brains, his looks, like the merchant class prostituting itself to a sniff of popularity.

His training once he got old enough was an asset. His simple-mindedness. In slave terms, like all animals, maturation was attained once the creature gained height and filled out, as Law did so beautifully with the training Doffy allowed.

The benevolence of the heavenly demon, and the double piercing indicative of the valet class of his mother's clan in Mariejois, was fitting. Law's trinkets demonstrated both. The slaves had died out on the maternal line, or were sent into exile, or sold to the knackers, or whatever you did with the washed out and weary, once the matriarch, the last of that line (not having any sons), passed away.

Doflamingo remembered the loyal valet from when he visited his grandmother. Obsequious. Trailing behind his younger self as he carelessly carried a salt shaker, demanding that not a grain fall to the ground or … What? A whipping. A footstool. Piggybacks for the rest of the week? Something dull and childish no doubt, but that man grovelled, bent in two, with his hands cupped under the shaker Doflamingo held upside down. He'd stepped so heavily that more than a pinch or two left the container.

The valet wore doubled up hoop earrings. Law should know his place. No-one else in the Family, in the circles of executives and officers, had ever been readmitted as a slave, and Law never really was. Reassigned, perhaps. If he hadn't eaten that fruit his fate would've been worse.

Vergo did the brand. That was early days, the boy still covered in white marks, though he gradually learnt how to remove them. It was a fine balance — developing his strength and not letting him get too robust. No point in him having the fruit but dying from Amber Lead or fleeing before he could use it.

Doflamingo had no interest in exploiting children until they were man enough to be resilient, but pliable, under his power. And he worked within the definitions of the current legislation of just what was expected of a slave. They were branded as children in the way that the iron was pressed into the hide of a cow when it was older than two months, younger than six. Sure, a baby wasn't the same as a calf, but they could survive the iron from about eight years onwards. The property laws for livestock and vassals fell under the same umbrella.

So much was convincing the captives of the great honour to be had in serving, and that they brought any shame they felt upon themselves. Law had reminded him of himself, but that's where the comparison stopped. Had. That bandolier of grenades and the drive to destroy everything. Cora had leached the killing instinct from him.

People with strength and will and the right to govern became kings, like him. Those destined to obey joined his family. It was a good life. The rules were clear. Those who didn't know their place died alone in the snow, as much as it pained him, or were put in their place. Like Law. There was no escape.
Doflamingo had enjoyed branding day on Mariejois. Both Homing and his mother tried to prevent the children from witnessing it, and though Cora loved gold you couldn't get him to visit the stockyards. Not all belongings held equal weight. The kids fascinated Doflamingo. Dressed neatly, plainly. Usually clean if they'd come straight from the auction house, scrubbed up for the bidding.

Some were about the same age, but they weren't kids really, and they were humans, not gods. Whining products for the use of gods. When the iron sizzled into flesh, the kids cried out the most, but were the quickest to recover. Adults cried out less, and many were tight-lipped until beaten into a response.

The fishmen were the most stoic. The older subjects often fell to infection. It was worth observing to know which stock to breed with which when the times were right to propagate a tough, durable and loyal workforce.

Slaves branded fellow slaves. That was standard practice. Very few wanted to do the children, but some did it to minimize the pain. It was rumoured that Roswald, that fool, got in there with the branding iron on one of the recently netted mermaids. He ruined her beauty as her scales fell away, and ruined any functionality or hope of survival she may have had. His family threw her back into the ocean, wrote off the loss.

One of the Donquixote slaves had worked up the ranks. A brutal guy. He taught Doflamingo a lot. So little regard for his fellow captives. He let Doflamingo hold the branding iron once or twice. Well, Doffy insisted. That slave he branded didn't survive, and even at that age the future king hated to see capital squandered, so he observed closely how to mark and maim effectively.

Vergo was good at what he did. Law was still weak and would always be a traitor. It didn't take much to hold him down and press the brand into his skin just below the hipbone. They applied the colour later when he graduated into his speciality, keeping within government regulations for pleasure slaves. Doflamingo made sure he was old enough to not only bear it, but to be good at it.

Baby 5 didn't want to watch the branding though she'd warned Law what would happen if he betrayed any of the family. Buffalo winced, but yeah, the kid had been cautioned. Gladius loathed anyone who bit the hand that took him in and fed him very generously. And as for the executives. Law was both a threat and saviour for the young master. He had no choice but to accept his post.

On its way out, Amber lead ripped through his system. The iron pressed into his skin. Beatings purpled his body, and later his new position brought attention that turned his stomach. Law often thought the only way through was out. To give up. To end it.

He'd thought he'd only had a few weeks to live when he was with Cora, severely reduced from a few months, and he'd been at the end of the diagnosed three years of life left for him. When he first walked through the Family's doors he'd been preparing to die. He'd hardly had a second to understand he'd been given a chance after Cora shoved the devil fruit down his throat, before the man was taken from him. Law was then captured and here he was, Doffy's slave.

But, there was possibility now, as fucked as everything was. Dying some time soon wasn't inevitable. Cora told him to heal. Heal others. Like his parents. He had a window if he could only open it. Law couldn't say he'd been through worse, but he'd waded through pig shit and minefields, and though he wasn't given a moment to think straight once his 'official' duties came in to play, there was part of him that played Cora's words over and over.

And how disappointed would he be if Doflamingo managed to wipe out the two of them? How disappointed would Cora be with what he'd become? The lowest of the scrapheap. Doflamingo said
he brought it on himself. That he crawled right back where they’d found him.

He wasn’t strong enough to flee yet, but, as his power developed, he’d fire up a small room and replace a book from the pile on the edge of his desk — his designated weekly reading — with one of those Doffy kept off-limits in his library. Only when the executives went out on business and Law’s sole duty was to study. And he did. He turned pages quickly, memorising the depths and reach and limitations of the *ope ope no mi*, paying special attention to parts Doffy had asterisked with the Donquixote Jolly Roger. *Causes fatigue.* That explained a lot.

He read beyond these items. Always careful to swap out just one item with another, and to leave a good hour either side of the transaction. He procured inside reports on the World Government, on the ruling class, past and present, of Dressrosa. Ohara. Just what had happened there?

The documents he read on the regulations governing ownership of slaves stated there wasn't much protection of property, except if someone else hurt or used him in a way his owner hadn't granted prior permission for. Slave and property were interchangeable. Human was saved for the non-dragons, Gods for the celestials. Law guessed he should be grateful the world nobles hadn't got him. He couldn't imagine his life as much worse, but the tales his fellow drudges told him prickled the skin along his arms.

He didn't know about, or how to find, the top secret reports of the young boy, (a very short eighteen year old boy), who'd been taken in by the marines. Sengoku had grilled the kid about his connection with Rosinante. He was in bad shape, though not dying, and it was soon established that he was Barrels' son. Doflamingo wasn't sure why Sengoku was so interested.

Law didn't discover the classified knowledge Doflamingo had brought back from Mariejois when he'd presented the Nobles with the head of his father, though not on a plate. It'd be many years before the then Heart captain heard any of that from the man himself, fighting on the roof of the Dressrosan palace, the reasons for Joker's other moniker, Heavenly Demon, revealed.

With the new age, Robin, Franky, Doflamingo, and Luffy himself all held some key to the puzzle, but Law had never pieced together the whole. The celestial dragons lost their divine status, but they still governed behind the scenes. Why? None of them had cracked it.

As a young man, a boy, sitting in his room, the open door inviting him to stroll the mansion or ship, within the confines of his role, he studied as much as he could about his power. He held out hope of defeating Doflamingo and the World Government, even if people like Cora had fought for them, even if he was both a Donquixote and a marine. One day, beyond his captivity, he held hope.

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**oOOo**

Shachi swore by him, and the redhead was a good kid, had inked over those giveaway Doflamingo brands on the back of his friend’s thin hands with skill and artistry. The price the pawnbroker gave him for the gold was below market, but with those earrings the kid was blatantly property and hunted. He ran a huge risk helping him.

The posters were tacked to the walls of a few places but no-one was a fan of Doflamingo, no matter how poor they were, and Shachi had the trust of the town. Particularly with his fortunetelling skills. Could read your hand, your leaves, the cards. Even your Turkish coffee. Was a pretty good barber too. He vouched for him. But the runaway kid wouldn't part with the hat, and he replaced that gold with four almost identical earrings. If he was trying not to look like his poster he flat out failed.
The Family descended on the town every now and then and brought with them an entourage of slaves and lackeys. The slaves, along with being branded, wore double hooped earrings. Around the world, people wore the same style for many reasons, but in this region it marked you as belonging to Donquixote. Possibly as a runaway. Man, the government had hefty fines for assisting a fugitive. The kid didn't part with the shiny stuff though.

He gained strength. He'd been a skinny runt when reports came in there were malingerers on the edge of the forest. That bear helped hide him, and his medical skills really were pretty good. They were without a doctor for a spell. He was quiet and guarded and downright creepy when angered. The two older boys did nearly anything he asked and none of his requests were outlandish.

There for as short a period as it took to get the cash for the gold, some warm clothes for Law, and to figure the best way to traverse a semi-safe passage, by the time someone desperate for money tipped the Family off, Law and his crew were long gone.

The pawnbroker had the gold melted down, along with a bunch of other loot. Proxies for Joker occasionally sent work his way, so Law's former slave identifiers were amalgamated into an ingot of gold, the mark of the Donquixote Jolly Roger rendered invisible. The kid got lucky.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. All feedback is appreciated and motivating. Thank you so much to everyone who has already dropped a line, a kudos or both. Bookmarks and subs too. Yup, even the private ones ;-)

Like the writing but it's too dark to comment? Maybe a guest kudos is calling you ;-) Liked the story but don't have an account? The kudos button and comment box welcome you.

I've got an endgame in sight with this one now. Considering the alternating chapters, there are probably about 5-8 chapters still to go. I'm not sure. I'll set the counter when the trajectory is more defined. I was researching Kyudo, Japanese archery, all day for an upcoming chapter (picture Law in the archery hakama), and our favourite sniper makes an appearance soon too.

Oh, also, I know it's officially Mary Geoise in the manga, but I'm going to stick with Mariejois.

Law and Penguin's flight can be found in Repossession. Meeting Bepo is covered in Bepo's Wedding.

Sorry for the massive A/N.
Chapter Summary

You can lead bovines to boudoir, but can't convince them *not* to think.

Chapter Notes

**Warnings:** Past underage child sexual abuse (late teens) referenced and implied. Not explicit or in detail.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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**Light/Dark: Chapter 11**

Risa combed out a few strands of her daughter's fine hair and snipped it. She'd done the same for Law some years before, just before his first haircut. They'd grown his hair long, the tradition for baby boys in Flevance.

Her mother had done it for her and her husband's mother had done it for him. Just after Law's third birthday they'd sat him in a chair and cut off his baby locks. She and her husband took turns to clip his curls. The neighbours popped in too and, wielding the scissors, snipped his crown here and there, but mostly she or her husband did the job.

Lammy was the more outgoing of the two, but she wanted only her mother to touch her hair when it came her time to have it cut, and Risa had obliged.

She'd braided the strands, as fine as they were, removed the back of a hooped earring and eased the weave under the gold. She'd had the earrings made in Flevance's headier days and one was inscribed with the ferocious mother seal — representing herself, her mother, and her mother before her — wrapped around a pup. The motif graced items, like placemats and cutlery, about the place. But this was private. Between her and her children. The pattern etched into the inside hoop.

She wore the earrings containing her own locks and her husband's — not everyone chose to display them. She kept Lammy and Law's aside for when they were a little older and could make a choice.

Then they'd fallen sick. The town had fallen sick. The royal family deserted them. Despite her husband's and her own best efforts to find a cure for a non-contagious condition, the profiteers said Flevance was a bearer of plague and they opened fire on its citizens. Promised evacuation while torching the buildings.

Risa wanted to see her children live to an old age or to die fighting the disease, not fighting soldiers sent to exterminate them. Neither option was good. It snowed. It never stopped.
When it seemed genocide was going to get them before weakened immune systems could, she removed and retrieved the earrings and sewed them into the lining of Law's hat. The kid loved that seal fur bowler, and it would encase the mother and her pups until the time was right. Law cared so much for his sister and had a way of slipping out of sight whenever he was needed for anything, so she had to put faith in the slim chance he'd survive.

"Don't lose the hat, Law. It's special." She pulled it so hard on his head it slipped over his eyes.

Bepo had sniffed out the gold. He, Penguin and Law chatted with the new member of their crew, Shachi. Shachi — a tattooist, a hairdresser, a fortune teller, and caster of spells. Only, his spells never worked, but it was fun to have your palms read, and his inking skills were impressive. He saw hope in Law's hand. Trouble too. It was enough for Law. To have a trace of breathing space. Enough for now. Having Doflamingo's brand on the back of his hands inked in did the same.

Penguin sat at the edge of their small group in a tumbledown shack on the border of the forest. Shachi had brought them some blankets, and they'd knocked the twigs and nests down from the long unused chimney and lit a fire in the hearth. A stash of dry wood covered by a tarpaulin, pooling water and leaves, sat just outside the door. Luck was on their side. The tarpaulin owner didn't show their face, and time hadn't weakened the vinyl. After a few attempts the flue drew the smoke, and the boys managed some kind of cooking and warmth. Bepo's fishing skills kept them full.

Penguin watched the light from the fire flicker over Law's face, and the small smile that tipped the corner of his mouth before he caught himself, and worry and disinterest replaced it. He brought his blanket closer around him. He was putting on weight. He'd filled out a little with training, but Doflamingo was all about uneven footing. No rations, or bread rations, was commonplace. For Law. Not for the rest of them. He was creeping up in height too. Would soon shadow Penguin.

It was a waste of their very limited funds, but Law had spied a pair of jeans patterned with black patches. They'd entered town to bargain for goods with the few things they'd lifted from the ship before escape. He bought them and, in the safety of the shack, changed into them almost immediately. Bepo gazed with a carnivore's hunger. Penguin too, if he was honest.

Along with the bowler, the jeans gave the boy, the young man, a completeness. They sat well on his long legs. Kikoku — the sword Diamante had practically thrown at him as a punishment — rested nearby. She didn't swing with anyone else.

The Family had found it hilarious. When Law was younger, the sword eclipsed its puny, sickly, owner in height. The visual had been too hard for them to resist, and a traitor didn't deserve leniency. Rather, better to make sure he was further handicapped in training and competition. Then he'd never have the confidence nor thought to use the weapon against them. He'd struggled even to remain upright while holding the nodachi.

She sang to Law though. And berated him. She was as bad as they were at times. But Diamante couldn't help but teach properly, even while he undermined him in every other way. Pushovers were no fun. And as Law gained power over his fruit — from Doflamingo's own urgings and as his scalpel wielding puppet, and also from Law's own quiet acts of subterfuge — Kikoku became as much a part of him as his hat.

In the shack, fire crackling, Bepo sniffed around the seal fur. The animal skin made the Mink
uncomfortable, but it was practical. It kept Law warm and there was an energy which shielded the kid, safeguarded him almost. Against what he wasn't sure, cos he'd plainly gone through a lot, but that hat was important.

"Anything hidden in this, Law?" He wasn't their captain quite yet.

Law looked up as the bear loomed over him. He sank a little into his seat. Bepo was kind, but huge. Law was through with people crowding his space. It never ended in his favour. But, it was Bepo. He hadn't known him long, but he treated Law with respect. Bit of a strange concept.

He'd been practicing his "Room" technique. His training with Doflamingo was thorough but now, away from the influence of seastone and strings, he really let rip.

Law shook his head in answer to Bepo's question.

"There's something, about here." Bepo lifted the hat, too curious to think about his actions. Law raised his arms to stop him, but let them drop. Bepo showed Law the underside, pointed a claw to a space where the material was a different shade.

Law took the hat, and really, he'd held it in his hands many times over the years, this one thing from Flevance other than himself, searching for any trace of who he'd once been. He knew every square millimetre. But Bepo was right. There was an indigo patch, slightly darker than the material surrounding it, sewn into the lining.

Tracking device? He looked toward the window, the cloudy skies. Perfect weather for Joker to traverse the Heavens. Everything tightened.

Bepo noticed the flash of alarm. "Not harmful." He took the hat again and studied the lining. "The stitching isn't new." It was good though. Very thorough.

The stitching didn't have to be new. Law'd been with the Family a lot of years now. But, he believed the bear's words. Didn't know why. Bepo put the bowler back on his head and Law moved it to his lap. He couldn't sense any darkness, any black hole that might absorb him. Just as well, considering how rarely he left the room without it.

He arched his fingers. A small blue dome lit up and spluttered. Strange. He wasn't tired. He'd had the fruit three years now. Doffy wanted Law to forfeit his life to prolong his own of course. Training was intense. Law had to be on top of his game — to make is seem as if he'd be willing to sacrifice himself, and to make sure he never did. He turned the hat. The stitchwork was neat, precise and regulated. Familiar.

Just not concentrating enough. Removing the amber lead from his body had really required intense focus. So he gathered all his strength, as he had then, like a drawstring, then loosened and dissipated it throughout his body, imagining the flow aligning with the objects and space around him. He tipped his fingers and ignited the blue sphere. Penguin, Shachi and Bepo looked on. The wind pushed at the cardboard they'd fitted into a broken frame, licks of fire danced into the room from the hearth.

The dome died at the ends of his fingers. Law looked at the bunch of damn worms. He'd get them tatted. Visuals helped him direct his fruit. The hat didn't have the same uneasy depletion as seastone on his energy, but this patch wasn't going to cooperate with his powers.

He torched up a larger Room. The hat floated. Bepo and Shachi stepped back. It landed on the bear's head, then Law curved his fingers before he could pull it securely over his furry skull.
"Takt." It rested a lopsided jumble on whatever mess of a cap Shachi was wearing, the redhead kid batting at it like a fly. Law brought it back to where he sat.

Okay. So his powers were okay. He could transport the hat, as he had a thousand times in the past. He dropped his Room. Looked like he'd have to do this the old fashioned way.

They hadn't pawned the knives he'd liberated from Doflamingo. It was on the list, eventually, but they'd been designed to match Law's skill, and Doflamingo used only the best materials. Still, he knew that if he were caught he'd be arrested as an escaped slave and a thief. A thief carrying dangerous weapons, with the intent to harm. And whatever else they could inflate the charges with. God knows what powers the marines would grant Doflamingo. He already had a free and brutal hand over him.

Law stood and walked to a corner of the room. He rummaged through the bag he and Penguin had packed. Spilling the few items of clothing onto the floor, he pulled out and unfolded a belt that packed five blades. A log cracked in the fire, and Law's shadow swayed against the peeling wall of the room. He lifted a knife and his shadow peered at it, inspecting it for sharpness.

"Mother of a marine!" Shachi yelled, Penguin looking up suddenly.

"Sorry, mister! Sorry, Law!" Bepo bowed a few dozen times. Seemed to be a tic. "Didn't mean to touch your hat."

Law, squatting, returned the scalpel to its place, and spoke to the bag. "Yeah, I know it's best not to use professional equipment on items that unnecessarily dull it, but it's not that different from removing stitches."

The newcomers both turned Penguin's way. The naked eye could see that steel was capable of slitting any of their throats. Shachi's hairdresser's toolbelt had six kinds of scissors. He shot a look at the barely upright table, tottering on its three legs. He'd left his bag nearby, and crossed the floor to retrieve his tools, only to let his arm fall to his side. He'd left the belt at work. Don't talk to strangers, they said. Why did he never listen? He craved adventure. This town was so small.

"He's a doctor," Penguin said, wondering what was in the hat.

They turned back to Law. He stood, turned around, gave them a questioning glance, and Shachi and Bepo released a sigh. They weren't going to have to fight for their lives today.

Law sat back in the armchair, stuffing poking through the sides, cushion long gone. The wooden slats of the seat dug into his arse. He drew his legs toward him. Turning the hat upside down, he pulled at the careful sewing, unpicking and slicing through stitches, and removed the square of material. A piece of coarse silk, dyed indigo.

The patch had a further pocket sewn to its underside. It was slightly weighted.

"Bingo." Law looked Bepo's way and he shuffled closer.

Law returned his gaze to the pocket and tipped it over his hand. Four golden earrings fell out. He stared up at Bepo, and released them into the Mink's paw. What about them had attracted the guy's sense of smell?

oOOo
When Law and Penguin had fled from the Donquixote ship they'd come across Bepo. His body colour, size and weight had provided them with shelter and disguise against the snow alone, never mind larger menaces hitchhiking clouds across the sky. He'd warmed the skinny kid, his eyes far too dark for his years.

Law had pierced ears then. Some reward or cattle tag from Doflamingo. If he'd fallen out of favour enough Law knew it'd be a bullring, or tattoos across teeth like Buffalo. Older men found beauty in his not quite adult face, but adult enough for them to think their actions were justified. The double hoops designated his trade. It made him sick. He scratched at his arms in the cosy, threadbare, shack, and stopped. He wasn't allowed to scratch.

For the thousandth time he wished he wasn't so curious and knowledgeable — beyond his years. Innocence might have saved him. Though it hadn't saved Sister and his classmates from being gunned down. How could he have got caught after Cora's death, considering all the klutz had done for him? He missed his goofy smile every night. The warmth of Penguin nearby was somehow similar but not the same.

He never forgot he had parents, even if his memory was sketchy. And he'd never forget he'd had a guardian, with two left feet. No matter how short their time together had been. Like Shachi peering at the crevices on his hand, telling him there would be peace some of the time, Cora's words and actions steadied him.

On his escape with Penguin he'd wanted to throw Doflamingo's tagging into the ocean. Doffy had called it that. Explained that Law was almost an adult and that he kept his adult cattle, his commodities, in specially built chutes with head gates when it came time to clip them, to stop them from moving too much.

Law sat in front of one of Doflamingo's grand mirrors instead, on a heart-shaped love seat, the corner of the bed reflected, the mighty curtains sweeping across the room. Doflamingo stood just behind him, and pushed his hair up, tugging the roots for a bit, and then pulled out the cartilage of his upper ear, pressing hard to signal exactly where his livestock was tagged. The pressure of his other palm against Law's frontal lobe indicated just how the cow's head was pushed down but back, to keep it docile. Law's eye and brow rose diagonally as Doffy's hand cinched his skin.

He explained that erratic movement could make a mess of things, so Law would do best to remain still and relaxed throughout the procedure, no matter what. As quiet as a mouse. "Shh," he said, letting Law's head go and putting his forefinger against his own lips. He gave the cartilage an extra squeeze and strode across the room to close the door. Baby 5 grew squeamish when it wasn't a battle. He resumed his previous position.

"Stroking the poor dumb beast's ears and muzzle helps calm it, helps it submit." Doflamingo's hand practically covered Law's face as his fingers toyed with the lobes and ridges of his ears again, and playfully brushed his nose. Law breathed into the flesh. The smell of Doffy's lunch, whoever he'd murdered, the pen he held, Law's own hair, gunpowder, the salt from his eccrine glands — all were worse than those fucking corpses. Law's breath sat like a light shawl across his shoulders. No substance against that tissue.

Doflamingo withdrew and pulled up a chair behind, and doubled right down. He rested his head on his subject's shoulder. "The cattle is far less likely to kick up a fuss if it doesn't feel frightened." He draped his arms over Law's chest. "Hemmed in."

Law willed himself not to shake. His flecked eyes stared back at him. Relax. His breathing deepened, but quickened. Quiet as a mouse. He was breathing too loudly.
Doflamingo bit his ear. Softly. He pulled away from him and walked to the bathroom to get the piercing supplies. "I insert electronics into the tags I use for my livestock. Helps keep tabs on them."

He returned. A glass bottle full of rubbing alcohol clinked against the counter. The piercing gun next to it.

"But you," He dabbed the alcohol onto a swab and sterilised the fleshy part of Law's ear. "You're not much higher than livestock, but I've got to let them roam sometime. It's necessary. They live in pastures."

The alcohol was cold and Law kept his hands on his lap, willing himself not to clench them too tightly, stared down at the laughing Jolly Roger inked into his skin, and imagined that cancel mark removed and Cora's smiling face staring right back at him. He'd cancel the smile, horizontally, if he ever got his own crew, so that there was a set of teeth.

"Your place is with me, Law. No need to roam. No need to track. Your run is necessarily limited. For your own good." Doflamingo soaked a cotton ball in alcohol. "Parts of this ship, parts of the mansion, your cell, my room, and when you're good, even your own room, but it's all that you require."

He swabbed out the kid's inner ears, Law jerking away from the touch.

"There, there." Doflamingo's hand clamped his shoulder. "Calm now." He twisted Law's face back so he'd observe his owned self in the mirror. "Just taking precautions that investments don't fall prey to infection."

Law blinked and looked down at his hands again. Doffy discarded the cotton to the side and tipped Law's chin up, straightened his face so he stared right at himself. Again.

"Thank you, Doffy," the great man warned.

Law blew out a puff of air. Doflamingo tilted his chin up as it began to drop.

"Thank you, Doffy," Law said, feeling the forefinger boring against his cheek.

"That's more like it." He planted a kiss on Law's temple. The hair on his slave's arms was standing up. Hadn't he instructed him to be placid? Well, you could lead bovines to boudoir, but couldn't convince them not to think. His grin displaced everything else in the mirror.

Doflamingo walked over to the applicator and loaded it, squeezed the handle to see that everything lined up nicely. "Calves are tagged from a day old until a few months. Guess I should have laid claim to you when you first begged to be let into my Family. It might have cured you of your more unsavoury, sentimental habits."

He marked precisely where he wanted the earrings to go with a felt tip. "I tag the cows with the Family's Jolly Roger. Anyone who wilfully takes that property without a purchase note knows it to be stolen." He marked Law's other ear.

He lined up the gun and pulled the trigger. The first stud broke Law's skin easily, and the clasp fit as it should. The other four pushed through without a hitch. It was painless. A lot less painless than Doflamingo's proximity. His steady even breath. Delight fucking lacing the concentration of his inhalations. Law not knowing if he'd be free to go once the modification was done. Free to leave the room.
"Not all farmers mark both ears, but it makes it easier to identify the proprietorship." Doflamingo placed the gun on the bench ready for sterilizing later, and once again dabbed cotton with alcohol to clean the now inflamed area. If he had to raise Law's head one more time he wouldn't take it easy on him. He'd been intending to, because a wound was a wound, even if it was a nick.

"What do you think?" He moved Law's face this way and that, and couldn't help but notice the delicious blaze of resentment the boy tried so hard to dampen. "Matches your hands, na?" So handsome.

Four smiling Jolly Rogers, a cancel mark through their visage, sat neatly against Law's lobes. "I'll take care of them for you. They can get mucky. Disinfect and turn them three times a day and always have them set the right way, or…". He squeezed Law's shoulder again, and Law's hands cramped, he'd clenched them so tightly, unable to keep them relaxed.

"The executives, the lackeys—" the uniform police, "—they'll inform me of any infringements. Be wary." He knew the officers were not as forgiving of Law's transgressions as he was. "Appearances are important."

Six weeks later Doflamingo had replaced the Jolly Roger studs with gold hoops. It marked slaves of the highest, and often most special, order in his homeland. The Donquixote studs obviously delineated livestock too, but Law must know his toil and grind was a little more specialised.

"Do you understand the privilege that comes with wearing these?" Doflamingo had asked, clicking the hoops into place, and keeping the piercing studs aside for the next intake of captives. Law sat in front of the mirror. He'd spat out sass to Trebol the day before. His skin was nicely purpled across his clavicle, and he'd been put on bread rations, a few hours in seastone. It always made him so much more manageable. The gold was too good for such insolence.

"Thank you, Doffy." Law looked straight at his own face in the mirror as he spoke, his eyes giving nothing away, turning his head Doffy's direction, as instructed, as Doflamingo inclined it toward him.

As satisfying as it would have been to throw anything related to Doffy into the ocean as they rowed across it, hoping to hit land, Law let common sense hold out. A friend of Shachi's, who knew how to keep his mouth shut, melted the piercings to a smidge of gold. They didn't get much for it, except Doffy used the best, so better than expected. It went toward a few needed supplies, the jeans he now wore.

The posters Doflamingo littered the area with clearly showed his earrings against his skin, complementing his gold-grey eyes and olive skin. The group of four stayed low, kept out of sight. It was better not to wear them.

"Something's inscribed, Law," Bepo said.

He passed the hoop with the etching. Then the other three.

"A mother seal and pup," Law said, turning it, flashes of sitting on his mother's lap and playing with her hair. Of grabbing at a heart brooch she wore, the same design the Flevance miners displayed as arm tattoos.
He rotated the ring again and again. Why on the inside? The motif was his animal. Outsiders had wiped out Flevance. You didn't want everyone to know.

He ran his finger along the fine grooves, and…a bump. Tiny. He tried to use his powers to zero in on it. Nothing. Used his tactile senses. A bump, and a —?

He pulled the jewellery near, and lifted a pinky nail under a latch on the back of the earring. Lifting a minute band of gold away from the main earring, he ran his finger along a soft, textured cord.

Sitting at the table watching his mother cut Lammy's hair. Lammy squirming in her lap, his mother held her with an arm across her chest to keep her still, much as Doflamingo had restricted his own movement.

"A rancher keeps the cow's head between his knees, Law. I know you're used to the position, but I think you're old enough to not wriggle. To buck in panic. We shouldn't need to take such measures."

He'd had to visit Doffy's office or room three times a day to have him turn the studs and to line them up just so. If Doflamingo had business, the executives took care of it. Sometimes they deliberately left the piercings askew after sterilizing the area. If Law wasn't on his toes he paid for it.

He shook his head and felt the cord, the plaîted hair…that's what it was…again. Soothing. Doflamingo dispersed and Lammy ran away from the table to get the bowl of ice-cream she'd been promised, their aunt taking her hand and leading her from the room.

Law, precocious as ever, was busy labelling the parts of a frog from a huge book his father let him use. He glanced up at his mother.

No wonder she was a doctor. Such a precise touch. She plaîtéd a few strands of hair together. He wasn't sure how she did it, then ran her fingers along the incy-wincy woven fold and tucked it, where?

The colour of the braid in front of him, in this dilapidated shack so far from his parents' home, but too near Doflamingo's, was brownish red. He located the latches on the other three earrings. Two black plaîts and another red were looped into the earrings' hollows, the last so fine and soft.

"Oh fuck."

Bepo and Shachi weren't sure Law had spoken, but Penguin knew he had.

His best friend had seen Law cry. Not often, on board the pirate ship, except in physical pain, and begging. So maybe often enough, but not in sorrow. Law was forbidden to express himself, except when commanded to, or the punishment was too much to bear. He tried hard to comply. It just spelt more trouble when his pesky feelings inconvenienced Doflamingo. But he'd lost Cora, lost a slave friend, his childhood, to Doflamingo and the Family.

When they escaped together in the small boat they'd pinned their hopes on, battling through the dark ocean guided by the dark sky, he'd broken down. In the blackness. Sitting next to Penguin, waves tipped into the boat itself, the spray of the ocean splashing the wood. Penguin hadn't seen him tear up since. But now.

The older boy stood and walked to the other side of the room, his own shadow cast on the wall. He sat on the flat, bony edge of the armchair. Law turned his way. "My mother's hair," he said, showing Penguin the hoop. He located the latch on the next one, and opened it again. "Dad."
Then opened the next two.

"Lammy and me."

Bepo confirmed from smell it was indeed the hair of his soon-to-be captain, and some furless Minks related to him. Law smiled. Fucking tears running down his face and he smiled. Penguin flopped down in the chair beside his skinny-arsed friend, glad there weren't any cushions, cos they'd be full of loosened springs. Law dropped his bent knee onto his friend's leg, and Shachi and Bepo weren't sure he was aware they were in the room.

"It'll be all right," Penguin said. He put an arm behind Law's back and slanted that black mop of misery to his shoulder. No resistance. Lots of snuffling.

He patted the spotted thigh draped over him.

"Thought there was nothing left," Law said. Leaning into Penguin for warmth as they never dared to on the ship, as they'd needed to on their getaway dinghy. He rested for a while, eyes closed, the fire spitting as a splash of rain hit the grate from the chimney.

Law heard Shachi's boots tap across the floor. He picked up the impractical lump of wood they'd been using as a poker, and stoked the flames. The fire consumed and sought anything edible, reaching for the new log on top of the pile. Something heavy dropped to the floor. Law guessed it was Bepo.

Penguin's hand cupped his ear with none of the intent Doflamingo's fist held.

Penguin had privileges on the ship that others didn't, having declared his lack of interest in males, and therefore Law. He'd been offered to him like a piece of meat once as a reward for actually protecting Doflamingo's property against some of the other boys a bit older than either one of them. He'd declined, stating his sexual preferences and Joker thereon trusted him around his charge. Only he determined who would abuse Law, and Penguin had proven himself unlikely to betray either.

It was a lie that helped both the boys.

Penguin came across Law in a tiny, forgotten room in the hull at times, or sometimes was on duty to bring him food as he lay curled up in Doflamingo's giant bed, beaten immobile after yet another escape attempt.

He never noticed at first. He'd figure Law was just being anti-social in that dark corner, or he'd really learnt how to keep his mouth shut, but there'd be no noise. No movement. Then he'd sat next to him once in the small room, blackness around them. The ship was going mad looking for him. Pica was going to have his hide. Penguin had put his hand on Doflamingo's chattel and felt Law tense, but also felt the tremble below the skin.

He touched his t-shirt sleeve edge and it was wet. Maybe a bit sticky. From where Law had wiped his face, not able to stop the tears. Quiet fucking silent tears. The jailbird's litany.

He'd exited the room. Told the crew he thought he'd seen him in the crow's nest and bought him some time until he could force himself to face them all again. Better that they didn't drag him out of there. It was maybe the only space he had.

In the future when he brought food to the room while Law was recovering from whatever, if Doflamingo wasn't there, he'd turn away from his friend. Not always, cos Law was ninety-nine percent grit, but if Penguin shifted a pillow he'd find it soaked.
Law wiped his forehead now, his eyes still closed, against Penguin's shoulder.

The cloth wouldn't be dry. Probably had a bit of Law's snot too. A pain when they couldn't really wash their clothes, but whatever. He kept his hand on his head, threading through, massaging his scalp. He was shaking. Slight, but it was there. He kept Law's face hidden from the other two.

Penguin knew they were all right, and Shachi at least had some idea of how cruel Doflamingo could be, but they didn't know everything. Hardly anything. They couldn't know. Law was wet but quiet, so for all they knew he'd had a drop in blood sugar and needed support.

But then. Law breathed into the side of Penguin's neck, and planted a kiss, the other two boys a little wide-eyed, but pirates were a strange creature. Law sat up. He gripped the earrings in one hand, and pulled his t-shirt up to wipe his face with the other. He secured the earring backs to cover the braids, and slipped all four stalks, one after the other, into his ears, wishing he could see them. Wanted posters for escaped slaves be damned.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. Would love to know your thoughts.

How was the flashback in a flashback? Worked? or too confusing?

The Penguin/Law escaping from Doflamingo is based on a similar set-up in Worth (not my story. In my bookmarks). That story has Peng as het, though and in mine he swings either way. The Law as reward trope is in both Worth and expanded upon in Repossession (that one is mine). The original idea of Penguin denying his attraction to Law, and Law being offered as a reward is Dr Cyance's.

Anything else I have to clarify? Cos' I obviously write non-canon (or AU). Let me know.

Oh! I forgot to post where I got the inspiration for the hair braids. How cool is this?

PS: Should I tag Penguin, or Pen/Law, or the Heart pirates in this fic? Apologies to the early readers for a few mistakes in word choice here and there. Hopefully all fixed :-)

Extra PS: Law delivering piglets by C-section from the 3rd section of the Law Novel, or just generally from the latest One Piece Magazine. I'm not sure. The translation isn't out yet, that I know of. I'm figuring that's a young Law, if it's tied in with the novel. The artist is a famous Korean artist, Kim Jung Gi.
Dark but not so dark 12a - Doflamingo

Chapter Summary

Drunken Sailor

Chapter Notes

A quick reminder: as this is loosely tied into the *Repossession* world, Doflamingo avoided capture by the marines at Dressrosa, but was captured two years later, Law (his prisoner) captured with him. Just some background.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Dark – 12a

"What'll we do with a drunken sailor, what'll we do with a drunken sailor, what'll we do with a drunken sailor, earl-aye in the morning."

Doflamingo lurched across the sky, securing strings from one cloud to the next, a soon to be sunken tailor tucked under his arm. Dunkin' tailor.

"What should we do with renegades, my friend?" he asked the weeping man. Hauled him up as he slipped a little in his hold. At least he'd stopped kicking his feet. The imbalance was such a pain, though his aerial abduction skills weren't too shabby even if they were a little rusty. Hi-five, Doffy. Hi-five. He leered into the breeze. Positively bracing.

Slaves had been recaptured in a boat heading back along the Grand Line. Imagine. The pathways to Amazon Lily and Fishman Island were not easy for those without permission to traverse. The fishmen helped them along, and the Revolutionaries patently had a hand in it, and it wouldn't surprise him if a very degraded cum-streaked whoreson was also involved. Worthless property but *his* property.

The fugitives were all clad in a similar black outfit. Great for the night. Not terrific for day or avoiding the sun. A red x was sewn in a corner of the clothes — you had to examine closely. The tailor's brand. They'd swooped down on the dinghy the escapees had tried to battle the ocean's currents on; some huddled, others fighting, so much useless screaming and cursing.

No match at all for the out-of-commission navy boat (seastone still intact) that had been used to apprehend them. And the pursuers could not be proved wrong because possession was nine-tenths of the law, and the law had never been changed.

Some slaves were returned to owners. They were very pleased to see them. A few fruit users threw themselves overboard and drowned before anyone had the presence of mind to fish them out.
Annoying.

A few pointed questions tracked down a factory owner whose daughter had been kidnapped and sold to the Tenryubito years before. He mainly provided workers with sturdy baggy tobi trousers — knickerbocker pants — shirts and tabi boots, to best suit climbing scaffolding and enduring working outdoors.

And nondescript comfortable functional escape care packages to fugitives fleeing this new mood, the rising entitled class.

Law had his own style for sure, but Doflamingo had witnessed him burn most of it under Marco's instruction, and he knew he wouldn't remain in the tack Marco dressed him down in.

Had he had enough time to reconnect with his own crew and to re-establish that mockery of a heart symbol? Corazón. Or was he wearing slave-garb similar to those lost souls on the ocean? He wondered if they'd successfully fucked the self-worth out of the Surgeon of Death. Best they caught him before he regained any deluded sense of identity.

Where had Shanks and Benn taken him? He growled thinking of how easily Marco had let him go. Some protégé. Shanks had some connection with the elders so Doflamingo and his quislings couldn't touch the emperor. Even Morgans was a little hands-off.

Shanks and his courtesan claimed Law had jumped from their moving car, and the cliff he tumbled over was a deep drop to the sea. He hadn't been able to use his powers, weak as he was, and his nodachi went with him. They thought he might have still had a bit of seastone in his system. That was the end of Law as far as they were concerned. Fruit user. Ocean. No brainer.

What a crock. Doflamingo scoured near and far for any news of the reappearance of the ope ope no mi and there was none. Law had slunk into the shadowy black belly of the underground like the cowardly prick he was. And Doflamingo would have him returned. Knew he'd been too optimistic leaving him as Marco’s charge. It had just all been too delicious to resist, but one could learn from one's mistakes. Except for Law. That one lived to rue them. Over and over.

He'd have to be licking his wounds. The latest sessions with Croc, himself and the love of his life must have him holding onto the flimsiest thread of sanity. It was important to have him returned before he rallied, physically and mentally. Beat them down and keep them under the heel of the jackboot.

Doflamingo had kept a casual interest, almost benign, in Law once he started to make a name for himself after his escape the second time. The first escape being with Cora, the second with Penguin, the third, rescued by the marines, and then the most recent — whisked away by Benn and Shanks. The guy had no agency of his own. Those who allowed themselves to be captured deserved to be captives.

As he'd grown into a man, Doflamingo was curious to see how far those wings could spread before he'd have to clip them again. He called off his search when Law had fled the second time, as reclaiming the throne in Dressrosa was the more pressing concern. The traitor would show himself again sooner or later, might even realise his place was by his side.

And so it had been Law who'd come after him. Blowing up his factories, stealing his scientist, murdering Vergo and Monet, and putting him in the direct path of Kaido's wrath. It was a cunning plan. Brazen. He tightened his grip on the tailor, ignored his yelping.

The years of unease were Law's fault. Even if the marines hadn't got their hands on his royal
feathers until two years after Dressrosa, his kingdom and reach had crumbled. His wish to destroy Law now was no less than it had been then, but like the boy himself, he'd been willing to bide his time to make the whole catastrophe work for him.

Law *would* be the catalyst to dismantle a system that had favored him and others of his feeble generation for a brief misguided spit of time. The weak never got to choose for long. The moppet had foolishly declared he'd broken the gears of the regime that kept him pushed down (right where he belonged) years previously. An anomaly. Things were correcting themselves now.

Law was sentimental. Had freed that pirate captain and other slaves and he faked savagery well, sometimes committed it. Doflamingo's heart swelled a little with pride at such moments. But he was fundamentally soft. Loyal to losers like Rosi, and that bear he carted around. He'd be nothing without Mugiwara. Law didn't know what self-taught and self-reliant really meant.

If he was with the Revolutionaries and other insurgents, and surely he was, it'd only be a matter of time before Doflamingo spied the telltale glow of his pretty little snow globe.

Doflamingo had threatened the wife and child of the tailor, shown pictures of the dog Law had slain. Really, the man would be doing the public a service by ratting him out, but all he knew about the slave clothing was that he dropped the newly made items, along with laundry, into a chute that dumped them in a van waiting below. Once a week. Whether the contractor knew what was in the bundle of cleaning or not, Doflamingo hadn't established.

What could the tailor tell him? Better that he waited for the contact to drop into the factory at some point.

He wasn't a total bastard. He flew over water. The sea to be exact. The ocean caps waved. Surf was up. He released the tailor. There weren't too many sea kings below and he was good with scissors.

"*Put 'im in the longboat til he's sober, put 'im in the longboat til he's sober, put 'im in the longboat til he's sober, too-oo-rye-aye.*"

That one, that Law, couldn't stop himself from interfering. He saw, when he'd been at Marco's place, the sheer confusion that washed over him when he was commanded to look at his new master. There was still some kind of feeling there, even if it was muscle memory or Law trying to figure out just who he was to give so much of his life to someone who pointedly despised him.

The reckoning was a long time coming, but witnessing Law's awakening that he was as servile and dull as the rest of the rabble was gratifying. Any sheen he had, wore the Donquixote name. Which he betrayed. Just looking at him was an invitation to hurt him.

The fact that Doflamingo and Marco both desired Law mingled beautifully with the repulsion they felt at just how common he was. Always a thrill to slum it. Anyone else would've exploited all the opportunities he'd been given, would've made it work for them.

Haah. Much freer now, zipping along and high above freeways, and cityscapes, and landscaped parks, he hurtled to the ground, spying a blue flash lighting up and dying.

"Hey big boy, we got something you after?"

The pulse of a steady blue coloured the pavement as the ladies and gents of the night strutted their
stuff. A hooded miscreant bent over in a corner. Shooting up? Maybe they had broken him. Doflamingo strode over, lifted him by his jacket front.

Blond hair.

He threw the panicked flail of spindly limbs down the alley. Kicked his bag after him. Yeah, he didn't sense Law's brand of arseholery here. He turned back to the main drag.

"Red light. It's meant to be the red light district," he snapped at a tarted up, fishnet stockinged whore, reapplying her lipstick.

She raised an eyebrow and closed her compact. Turned his way. Ran her gaze from the very top to bottom. Too big. "Cops are our best customers. Thought we'd combine the two."

She pointed out the police station, just a block over. There wasn't much they could do against him, but Doflamingo wasn't in the mood to take on some baton wielding buffoon who felt his territory was being threatened.

He took to the sky again, that canker on legs emerging from the street he'd thrown him down.

If anyone knew how Law operated it was Doflamingo. He could not help himself. It'd show. It would have to show. The Room as Law operated or teleported or dissected or disassembled. He was wanted and he was nothing without his fruit, so he'd have to use it to stay one step ahead of the hunt.

The minute Doflamingo sighted it, he'd zero in on his game.

Chapter End Notes

**Thanks for reading.** Please excuse any geographic inconsistencies. The One Piece geography can be confusing. If I've made any huge clangers that way, please let me know.

Oh, just wanted to give you all a visual for the [Tobi-wear, Tabi-wear (knickerbockers)](link) that construction workers use. I've used that towel around the head in a few pieces too. Also [here](link).
Usopp was a little jealous. Usually Zoro was his Kyudo partner, both stepping out in the black hakama, and the crisp white gi; the elegant ties of the hakama folded to the side or slipped under the bands at the front of the trousers, as if wearing a skirt. True, the long bow, the yumi, seemed too tall for him, really, it almost dwarfed Zoro, and he had to be careful not to trip over the voluminous pleats and folds of the pants.

When Trafalgar glided out, the clothes and the bow suited him perfectly. Long swords, bows, arrows — they weren't the same! He'd never seen Law handle a gun, but the guy fought on all fields and fronts, so the kyudo bow and shaft had probably been part of his training too. Even so, each of the seven pleats of the hakama had a story and Law told them well.

The safe house was peaceful. A Moreton Bag Fig tree dug its mighty roots into the ground, the shaded earth below it smooth and free of grass and most foliage. Law and Zoro had the targets set up where Usopp and he usually practiced. Zoro swigged from a long neck bottle.

Law healed fast but was still on the mend and didn't need to give the swordsman any edge, so he sipped a lemon drink. His lip lifted from the sourness and from acid sinking into abrasions left from his teeth cutting into his skin as fists had slammed into his face.

Both placed their bottle and glass on the bench with a measured carelessness. Law tipped up his hat and shook out the legs of the hakama as he stepped into the yard. Zoro the same.

Zoro maintained tradition with the white gi underneath his hakama off one shoulder, nipple on display. Master of one art, master of all. Sanji would bawl at him to get dressed if he was there. He'd be right. The swordsman was only practicing. His nips…nipple really shouldn't be on display.
He scratched at his chest. Belched.

The safe house's supply of martial arts wear was minimal at best, so Law had borrowed a gi that must've fit a narrow-chested but long-trunked long-leg at some stage. It filled the side gaps of the hakama nicely, covering his tush, Usopp guessed. A muted drop of blood stained a sleeve, and the pits were light yellow. It wasn't pristine, but was clean and sat well.

Zoro wore tabi and zori on his feet, and if he'd been indoors he'd be barefoot, Zoro style. Law wore flip-flops, black rubber separating his big toe and next. The guy was too much, but Usopp admitted the tattoos on the backs of his hands and tops of his feet matched the simple black and white uniform. In concept, there wasn't that much between flipflops and the straw sandals.

You wouldn't even know Law was hanging loose and easy under all that material. Nothing got in the way of budo. It made sense. Commando was just a lot more breezy in these humid kinds of weather. The long shirt — the gi — and the hakama got stuffy.

Or maybe Law had wrapped his schlong in a fundoshi. Some did. But the traditional g-string for martial arts and festival mayhem wasn't something you found just lying around. The safe house wasn't a dojo. Plus fundoshi could get uncomfortable wedged into your crack. Smelly too, but who cared about that when it kept you cool?

Zoro was definitely enjoying the breeze. Yet another thing the cook would chew him out for. That said, conflict was always a possibility. Usopp had seen him tie the folds of the undergarment at times.

He looked on from the tree, avoiding the sticky seeds caught on the fig's broad branches, the sun streaking his arms and hair; blending with his yellow t-shirt.

Law and Zoro powdered their hands with rice husk talc and pulled the three-fingered leather gloves, softened from wear, onto their drawing hands, and took their stance, facing two targets set up at the end of the yard. Lifting the arrow and bow above their heads, setting, drawing — then lowering them, to centre and line up with the target and tune into their own energies. The shafts sat just below their cheekbones.

A whipbird pierced the quiet with its call. The back door of the safe house opened as that day's kitchen staff put out a crate of empty bottles for later pick up. A vacuum cleaner fired up, and both men tensed slightly as a car drove past outside the walls.

They drew the bow back further, aimed for the two separate targets — Law's technique was good. Both concentrated on their bodies' alignment with the ultimate trajectory of the feathered bamboo arrows.

Everything taut, Usopp held his breath as the inked fingers, Zoro's calloused hand, let go of the strings and arrows, almost as an afterthought, aiming high. What? Aiming high. Zoro too, shooting the ya into the air at the same time. Both with precision, but Zoro a little faster and a slice more exact. Important in combat.

How? Usopp tumbled from the tree. And the Tabasco starburst he'd catapulted still managed to open over the two because they'd sensed a threat but didn't know what kind. With the hint of chili on the wind and the danger of burning eyes, Law formed a room and teleported himself and Zoro and their gear a few centimetres away from the downfall. It was a still day. Then he stuck his arm into the path of the fallout.

"No!" Usopp yelled. Law was going to kill him if the pop green didn't take him out first.
Gi were short sleeved, and Law didn't wear the longer black arm protectors. He was a visitor, a fugitive, at the safe house, and they only had so many supplies of bushido bullshit. But he tipped his fingers in rakt and drew all the chili and phosphorus and whatever the hell else Usopp had mixed together to one area. Usopp knew what it was.

Quaking, he looked on as Law dispelled the… dispelled the…. What? He dispelled… Nononnoono. Masochism was fine. Masochism was fine. Some people got into masochism, didn't they? Nami liked folks who were into masochi… He dispelled the goddamn…. If it was your kink, it was fine, it was fine. But permanent disfiguration? He dispelled his goddamn dome.

"Law!"

Zoro raised his hand like a traffic cop. Usopp quieted.

Law turned to him for a second, then pinched his eyes in pain before reopening them to watch the mixture discolour his skin.

Zoro wasn't sure whether he should step in or just let the surgeon do what he was doing. Appeared to be in control. But who ever knew with Law? Usopp's concoctions could do serious harm. He'd witnessed it. Those leopard eyes were charred through with certainty though.

"Mother of God," Law drew in his breath, but didn't brush or force the mixture away. Usopp scrambled over.

"The fuck, 'sop?" Zoro growled, but he couldn't be angry at the guy for long, even if he had just threatened to coat Law and himself in the equivalent of caustic soda.

"Why'd you shoot it? Why'd you guys shoot it?" Usopp pulled at his hair.

Law and Zoro looked at the sharpshooter, puzzled.


"Let it hit the target," Usopp wailed, turning back to Law, who sat down now. The smell of his flesh burning was a thing, and he bent over, spreading the tented legs of the hakama, and pressed his good hand down on his inner thigh as he bore the pain.

"Us? We were in your sights? You think we'd let that happen?" Zoro sipped his warm beer.

"As if I'd aim for you." He'd totally aim for them. But not with something so lethal. "I was aiming for the bull's eye, the target, the mato, so when your arrows hit it. Poof! Bang! Surprise!"

Law had a small room up now, and looked a little pale, sweat rising along his neck, as he worked on not extracting the powder, but making sure it didn't eat too far into his skin.

"Huh. Real big surprise."

Usopp turned to the quiet words, but Law wasn't looking his way. The surgeon's voice maintained the promise of bad things that happen in dark rooms after gambling your paycheck away. Only the staccato rise and drop of breath at the end of his statement gave away his discomfort.

Some of his tattoos had been defaced across the years but they still covered most of his upper body and arms, and the shivering spice attack had burnt into the skin at the base of the one on his right bicep.
"Gonna do that with the one on your arse?" Zoro slouched back on the bench, wiping his bow with a dry cloth. The humidity ate into the bamboo if you let it.

If looks could kill.

Zoro laughed. He finished his beer before resuming maintenance of his equipment. Doflamingo, the trial, Crocodile, had been very clear about where Law had been branded and why.

Law dropped the room, took a swallow of the lemon and looked out into the yard. His arm hurt, but he'd been through worse, and the ache wouldn't increase. The damage was done. He picked up the long bow and the ya from where he'd rested it against the bench.

"You know God-ya," he said as he fit the arrow to the bow.

Usopp's stomach tightened. He rummaged in his bag for a few accessories that could be hurled as weapons. "Law, really, I didn't mean anything by it. And you're the guy who can separate sand from salt." He took a deep breath and folded his arms. "So don't blame me for your self-mutilation kink." A decisive nod. His lips fighting the urge to smile. Nerves.

Law lined up. He shouldn't be speaking, Zoro thought, and Law would've agreed with him, in principle, but times were shitty now. Tradition kept him a slave. It could go fuck itself.

"This arrow, this ya, needs to be specially made. So you know what I call the maker of this arrow? How I address her?"

Law glanced at Usopp for a second. No. He wasn't a master. He was competent. He respected the tools of defence and attack, of meditation and reflection, but he wasn't beholden to them. Except Kikoku. She got as jealous as hell on days like this. Maybe even more riled up than Usopp, though she didn't drop too many surprise attacks on him.

"Heh." Zoro also stood.

"The feathers she uses, just the right balance, y'know." Law raised the bow and arrow over his head. Zoro did the same. "The way she cuts the bamboo handles the humidity so well." He breathed, centred, aimed. "Still have to be wiped down though, but Ya-ya is easily the best arrow maker on all of these islands."

Usopp knew. He went to the same artisan.

"Huh? What's up with you and Ya-ya? You just…?" You just cooked half the skin off your fucking arm and now you're talking about how you greet craftsmen? And he thought his captain was crazy.

"You're a funny guy, Law," Zoro muttered, also breaking with tradition as he lined up, centred, and settled into his core.

Law released, hit the target. Not a bullseye but that didn't matter.

"Sha!" All three shouted as if it were the next step in breathing.

Zoro, after letting everything flow and focus, aimed, eyes shut. It hit the target of course.

"Sha!"

Bullseye. But that wasn't the point.

Usopp didn't notice this one time he was unified with Law. Anything that hit the target was
acknowledged. That was the way.

Law walked across the yard to fetch the arrows.

"Ya," Usopp added under his breath. "Ya-ya. Ha." The guy was funny. Law could crack jokes. Though you'd never know it. Did he crack a joke? He looked across at Zoro, confused.

"He'll heal," his crewmate said.

"Why'd he do that?" Usopp hadn't wanted to hurt either one of them, not that seriously. Law's skin would scar.

"Had a vector under his flesh that needed purging."

Usopp looked across the yard. Law shouldn't be fetching Zoro's arrow either, but in true times of battle and attack propriety could get you nullified. His arm was red and angry where the powder had seared. It'd leave a smoky cloud that Shachi might be able to work around some day.

Usopp scraped his fingers over his head trying to remember what had been there. Law was proud of his tatts. Why would he disfigure them, even if it was just the edge of a design? True, when he first saw the doc, back from Marco's, he hadn't paid that much attention. Not a pleasant stay from what he gathered.

The Heart captain was close with Robin and Zoro, in their own ways. Was Luffy's ex. Chopper's colleague. Despite all his achievements all these years later, Usopp still thought one look from Law could obliterate him. They hadn't struck up a close friendship, but neither was there dislike.

He tapped his arm. That's what it was. There'd been a flare of blue, out of place amongst the swirling monochrome.

Law had a few settings. Glower, ablaze, and low burn. He returned with the arrows, handing Zoro's to him and placed his equipment again on the bench. Usopp sat on the edge. Chopper really got into this guy, but Chopper was cute. Kaya thought he, Usopp, was cute. Perhaps. But he wasn't a reindeer.

Zoro rummaged through the silk bag housing the powder and cloths, extra strings, anything a practitioner should need. Law missed his own bags. He had two. One marked with the crew's Jolly Roger, and the other with the fish Bepo loved. He kept them at the Hearts headquarters, so they should still be intact.

Zoro passed a spare cloth to Law as he sat. They wiped the arrows and bows, steadily and easily, removing resin and moisture and dust. Usopp kicked his feet out. He'd fetched the first two arrows and returned them to the rightful owners. Maintenance was one of his favourite parts of practice.

"You're a sharpshooter, God-ya," Law said, staring at, but not really taking in, the film of dirt from the yard over his feet as he continued to clean. The pain of his new injury was dull and constant, like the breeze that had picked up now, moving the leaves above them. "You're seven years younger than me." And he hadn't experienced Law's levels of hell, as far as he was aware. Though anyone who'd travelled the new world had to have been on the receiving end of more than one beatdown. It went with the territory.

That's right, Usopp thought, Law was an old man, but he'd aged too. Was he calling him immature? He didn't have to be told. But admirals were geezers and they were powerful.

"You'll always be competition for him." Law tipped his head Zoro's way. Zoro had finished
cleaning and rewrapped his bow, re-bagged his arrows, secured his glove. Arms splayed behind his head, he napped, eye closed, one ear open. "But it's just practice for me." It wasn't about rivalry, but dick measuring contests were unavoidable.

Zoro smiled and Usopp almost clamped Law's new wound in a show of comradeship. Maybe he really did think the great Captain Usopp was a god. Law's eyes narrowed. Ooh, that one would shrivel pickled plums. He sat on his hands.

Law wrapped the cloth around the bow. What was it with this crew and their desire to intensify pain? Curiosity to see if new limits could be reached? Dealing with them took perseverance to a new level.

Zoro knew the surgeon was in idle mode, but still on high alert — concentrating on him and Usopp, the activity in the house, worms burrowing in the earth. Listening for any crack of wood, or change in the air currents. But they were all like that, and had to be like that.

All the same, he'd taken a step back into himself. Law was one step closer to being Law. If anyone was gonna fuck up his skin, it would be himself.

Chapter End Notes

I'll just play it safe and link a how-to drawing of fundoshi, but if you google fundoshi and festival, or something like that, you'll find the type of fundoshi that Law and Zoro might or might not be wearing ;-).

I'm sure you all know about zori and tabi, but just in case you don't both are in this link.

Fundoshi are meant to be really comfortable, actually, but I wouldn't know. And I'm sure you're aware, but Law's -ya is kind of like referring to someone by their trade or distinguishing characteristic (usually). So that's where the ya-ya came into it. The kanji used is the kanji that denotes a shop. There's a good discussion about it here. Sorry. Law can't help it I can't help it with the puns. Ja ja, I know. I'll show myself out.

Anyway, thanks for reading! Would love to know your thoughts. Next chapter, some good Marco. Sorry for the long A/N again.
Chapter Summary

Law, Marco and Chopper explore the hypothetical.

Chapter Notes

No warnings. A monster chapter though (for this fic). Hope it's not too long. Follows from chapter 26/11.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**Light Marco - 12**

Law was so cool, and the Polar Tang was so cool.

"Your colleague's a tanuki?" Aladine asked. The furry guy was kinda familiar. The merman looked around the sub. He could easily swim under water. It was a bit weird being enclosed in the tin walls. Then again, the sub wasn't submerged. He could slip overboard any time he felt like wetting his fins.

"Unh," Law said.

"Reindeer," Marco corrected.

And Marco. Wow! Marco was so cool. He could get his species right. Law was hopeless. He'd send him the stink-eye but he was too excited. And Aladine. Here he was among medical greats. The Polar Tang's crew were medics. He knew Shachi, Bepo, Penguin and the rest of the crew well. All they needed was Doctorine and Hiriluk to make it perfect.

Law scooped Chopper into his arms.

"You can't do that when I'm in Kung-fu point." Not that he was. But it was kinda cool being at Law's level and seeing all the medical equipment, and how he laid out his surgery and consulting rooms. Couldn't let him in on it.

"I know. Wouldn't dream of it," Law nuzzled into his hat, "You beast."

Chopper's heart skipped a beat because he hated being adored, but even more so the strength and energy he felt from Law let him know that the Heart captain's capability was in full swing. He wore that silver bangle, and always thought how to angle it so it didn't press sharply into Chopper's hide.

Oh deer, he'd been told of Law's crew dragging him half-dead into the operating room after Doflamingo's assaults. Marco helping out. And Misery gone. Law covered in blood. Covered in everything. It'd been hard.
Chopper assisted later, and he, Marco, the Hearts, and Law himself, all contributed to reinforcing his tattooed grip on cliff faces slippery with volcanic rock. He always managed to pull himself to solid ground, one dirtied, jagged, split nail after the other.

The distress that oozed from Law's glands after the attacks lingered for days. Chopper still sensed it at times, but at this moment it was gone. The scent had caused his own anxiety to fly off the charts. It was tough for a zan. How did Marco cope? But Phoenix was a human who became an animal, whereas Chopper was the real thing. A wounded human was more body than brain.

Law's loved ones had watched him closely. He'd promised Chopper that he wouldn't let them win, wouldn't waste the sacrifice of others by wasting himself, though he'd contemplated it across the years. At times of imprisonment. Cora's words wouldn't be for nothing.

Chopper knew Law was as rash as the rest of them. He'd probably die trying to reach some ideal or revenge; die from having shaved one too many years off his life span. And the reindeer had witnessed Law shut down in the past. It was a natural reaction to what he'd gone through. Survival didn't mean engagement.

"I'm not a monster"— Chopper's blue nose sought the earrings as he had in the past, sniffing, bumping up the seal hat. Definitely something in them, but he'd never asked — "You jerk."

He blushed as Law inhaled Chopper's wholesomeness. So soft. "Yeah, sorry Tanuki-ya. I know."

"Or a reindeer, Law," Marco corrected. Should they have that conversation? About adopting? Law had never brought it up, but was all over animals and fluffy things, even when such things were adults. Granted, it was hard to remember with Chopper and Bepo, and babies didn't have fur. Law's cluckiness wasn't the stuffed animal variety, but hide and feathers and tea-towels suckered him in every time. Marco shook his head.

Law glanced at the Whitebeard for a second as he placed Chopper on a nearby table. The Strawhat doctor could see the procedures of the Heart doctor and the other two from there. A podium where he could offer advice, tips, observances and participate — waving a scalpel in a cloven hoof.

Chopper was so thrilled to work in the rooms where Law had rescued Luffy and Jinbei — modernised over the years. Four practitioners on board seemed overkill, but the Polar Tang was berthed.

Celestial dragons and underlings, trying to reclaim and replenish human cargo, had attacked lands that had been used in the past to harvest slaves. It caused an upswing in both random attacks and targeted injuries on those struggling to remain free, and on anyone supporting them, or just standing near. The new forces didn't differentiate. The manacles former slaves had been locked into when night fell still hung on the walls of many houses.

The darkness had been unexpected. It was peacetime. People hadn't been ready, but the fishmen in particular, and their allies, were not going without a fight. The Kuja too. The Revolutionaries. They had to band together. Resist. Assist. Heal.

At the moment it was more plan than practice, and hopes that persecution subsided. Disappeared. Amassing and taking stock of their tools and skills was necessary. Being prepared to help when the wounded trickled in, poured in?

Jean Bart had been hurt and others. Doflamingo had twisted ancient rules to get away with bringing Law to within spitting distance of death's door. The four doctors intended to return to their individual ships and crews soon. Some would accompany boats fleeing, some guiding, some
preparing for hostilities.

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Law sat in the mess with his crew. Aladine chatted with Ikkaku. He towered over her, but she used the same conversational tactics she did with Jean Bart. You had to sit on the table. Sometimes stand, sometimes rest in his hand. Chopper waited on Luffy's arrival. Uni stirred garlic and onion in a pan, awaiting him too.

Marco was across from Law, observing his partner take the tiny blond plait, lay it on top of a black one, and ease it bit by bit into the hollow of one of his earrings.

Law concentrated on the task, but looked across for a beat, then down, and smiled to himself. Marco couldn't button a shirt to save his life. Got hot being able to produce fire on a whim. Even if it was to heal and fly and not to burn.

The troubles also hadn't scared him into covering his feet any, his sandaled foot kicked back and forth. Law now wore boots. He itched to take them off. Later perhaps. Both fruit users could levitate out of trouble, but Marco might need flexibility under pressure. Law guessed the loose footwear suited the Phoenix transformation.

"Strange customs you seal folk have," Marco said. Was Law notching the bedpost?

"Mmm." The task was finicky, but so was surgery, as were the designs Law embroidered into his own gear. Wished he could use his fruit, but every time he tried, something from the gold — from the hair itself perhaps — repelled it.

Someone lost their footing on the ladder leading from the hatch to the innards of the sub. A manic giggle. He'd think Luffy got high every morning if he didn't know better. His laugh and the slap of flip-flops let Law know he better grip onto something, fast. Maybe Nami had punched him down there. He'd fallen heavily.

Law sensed his crew part like the Red Sea as the pirate king roared down the passage. The path started wide, but narrowed quickly. "Oof." That'd be him bouncing off the walls and slamming into lack of space.

Law braced, discerning the rubber arm extending, seeking its target. Him. He stuck to his work, though he closed a hand over the earring to protect it. He'd held onto the keepsakes this long. No way he was going to lose them to Luffy's bulldozing.

"Damn!" Luffy landed on his arse, his arm retracting right back to him like an electric cord, punching his own face under the chin back against the wall. He shook his head. Whoo. That smarted. Hadn't he just sent his body snaking into the mess? Seeking out the Heart's heart? "Damnit, Law," Luffy's words echoed through the sub, "You packing seastone or something?"

Law examined his hand. Reopened his fist, and repositioned the piercing. Bepo's murmured concern outside the kitchen seeped through.

Mugiwara scrambled up, determined to smother him. Nothing quiet about that clanging of limbs. The arm snaked through the room again. Law's fingers dug into his palm, and the gold pressed into his skin. Blam. The appendage shot right back to his owner. Law grinned briefly. Evil thing, Marco thought. But yeah, Luffy was rarely on the receiving end of Luffy's affection.
Law stared at the earring.

Marco looked over, leaning across the table, pushing his mug to the side.

"Luffy's got one too?"

Law shook his head. "No." He closed the latch of the hoop, securing the blond and black braids within. "Put your hand out."

Marco did. Law heard Luffy mouth-breathing behind him.

"Penguin's sandwich is unattended," Shachi called out. Law grimaced at the thought of bread, and Luffy zipped away and descended upon a table in the centre of the room.

"Oi, oi!" Penguin had only gone to the sink to grab the salt from the cupboards above. Uni plated up stir fried vegetables.

"Why's he here?" Marco whispered. He was still mad at the pirate king for the bureaucratic laxness that had endangered Law, but didn't dwell on it. They were working to change the system. The Heart closed his hand over Marco's.

"Came to steal Chopper back."

That was understandable. Everyone wanted Chopper. Luffy probably should have first dibs.

"Don't lose this, Marco." Law tightened his death-death grip. He meant it. "Give it right back after we try this."

"Yeah?" Whatever this was. "Of course. You look kinda lopsided without it." Law stared at him, three earrings in his earlobes, two on one side, one on the other, the fourth in Marco's palm.

"But sexy," Law said.

Marco pushed his glasses up his nose. Frames were loose. "As a tripod. Yeah, I'll grant you that." What did Law want him to do?

"Hah." Some of his best friends were photographers. He'd take it. "Hold that gold tight. Fire up your Phoenix. Can you?" Law dropped his hand.

Marco tried. Yeah, no probs. His body flickered. Though the gold felt a little warm in his palm, the flames covered everything.

Okay. Law struck that hypotheses off the list. Chopper scuffled over, clicked his ballpoint pen, flicked his notepad open. The kid was observant. Hyper-vigilant. Had a blue nose for experiments and trials.

Law held out his palm and Marco dropped the earring onto his skin. He curled his fingers over it and Marco was so pleased they hadn't faced Kizaru. Just taking in the stunted nails let him know there was no hope of a fair trial.

Law eased out the weave of his own hair. Marco, pinching and straightening the arm of his glasses, marvelled at the concentration. Law passed the piercing back across the table. It only held Marco's hair. "Try now."

Marco fired up.
The zoan fire lit for a while then sputtered to nothing. Law took the gold back and formed a Room over his hand. It wasn't as strong as usual, but he could do it.

He inched his own braid back in so Marco's and his own hair touched within the earring. Law's dome was useless, but Marco easily ignited his power when he held it.

Law took the gold back and closed his hands over the earring again making sure it contacted his skin, was completely ensconced. "Restoration." Law tapped the top of his clenched fist.

Marco was always up for giving Law a bit of healing, and testing the limits of their powers. He felt the flames course down his arm throughout his body, into the area he occupied in the sub, stretching into Law's and then — not like seastone but — he renewed his efforts.

The fire was fine, dancing with the white hairs on his arms, painting his nails blue. The transfer to Law should be a given, but some wall, some force. It just stopped. Everything shut down. As it had when his was the only braid the earring held. Law pulled away.

"Try again, but not me."

Marco did. No problem. He engulfed his own form.

Aladine had taken his and Ikkaku's mugs to the sink. A refill for him, and to rinse out hers. He looked on at the two in the corner, wondering if it was wise to play with fire in the sub, but they'd been together long enough that they must know their limitations. All the same, he'd seen men do stupider things in the name of convictions and bravado.

Marco dropped the flame, took a sip of his coffee. He folded his glasses into their case, keeping it away from Law's. His eyes had grown weaker than his lover's over the last few years, but the wonkiness was annoying. There must be tweezers or a tiny screwdriver on the sub. He'd ask later.

Law popped the earring back into his ear, no part of the gold hoops touched his body. The stalks of course went through his earlobes. "Try again."

Marco loved the bliss and peace that crossed Law's face when he encased him in fire. They had fun with Law's Room and Marco's power. He was trying to be all serious and doctor, but now he slumped in his chair, grinning like a puppy scattering leaves. The tapping of Chopper's pen on the table drew their attention, and Marco dropped his flames. Law straightened his face and posture.

"Fascinating," Chopper said. He lifted his pen to punctuate points. "One: Marco's flames work with the black and blond braids, Two: but not with the solitary blond threads when he holds the earring. Three: Law's powers work on the blond, but at a lesser strength."

Aladine ticked off the points on his fingers. The webbing between them acted as a counter. Chopper's pen, pencil? had a Bepo shaped eraser. Cute. Law reached for it and stopped himself.

"Four. Marco's powers don't work when Law holds the earring with the black and blond entwined, but, Five: work if Law isn't touching the earring."

Law wasn't surprised they had an audience but hadn't invited one. It wasn't too large and at least he'd have a record if he and Chopper were on the same page. Luffy entertained the Hearts and others in the centre of the room, the cooks working hard to meet his hunger. Shachi had trained them well. He twisted and looked at Aladine leaning against the counter, arms now folded. A doctor's curiosity? Or just stretching his tail?

Law turned back, facing Marco, and faltered for a turn. The earrings were important to him. Were
him in many ways.

"Your animal," Chopper said, scribbling down.

Law stared. Had he spoken?

"What?" Law now glanced his way. Marco knew his animal, but.

"The mother seal, on the back earring. Inscribed on the inside."

Law lifted his head. Quiet now little tanuki. Chopper fretted. Animals weren't always the kindest to him. But reindeer beat seal on land. On a sub, he wasn't sure.

"Law?" Marco asked.

Law breathed out. Ah well, he was the one always picking up the reindeer and pulling him close. Damn mother seal probably wanted him to do it. Some maternal drive. He unclasped the back earring and dropped it into Marco's hand.

"Look closely, on the inside." Marco pulled out his specs again, and peered at the earring. Yeah, there you go. A motif.

"Keeping secrets, babe." He felt the engraving.

"Never hid them." The earrings.

Marco's schoolmarm frown was something else, even over crooked frames. "How far back?"

"From Flevance." Law flicked the remaining earring on that side with the back of his nail, eyes steady on Marco.

Law's stories came out. Sooner or later they'd come out. In a room with Chopper's eagerness ready to spread Law's business all through the Strawhat crew, and Aladine having some kind of identification with the animal part of the conversation, even though his cup of tea was holding his attention at the moment — and now Penguin glaring from one side of the room, Shachi from the other, and Bepo just hanging by the door, Marco let it go. So this was how Law felt when Vista, Jozu and Izou crowded him at their bar.

"And you've got that strange hair custom."

Law lifted his head minimally, tilted his chin. That was right. Flevance freak. He took the earring back, reinserted it and clicked it into place. A shipload of his crew and the revolutionaries and all the other cogs and wheels of wider rescue didn't need to know. He'd tell Marco later.

"Speaking of which," he clasped the hoop of one of the earrings while it sat in his ear.

"Being coy?" Marco asked. The other earrings must have braids as well.

"Lopsided and sexy, remember?" Law sat back in his chair, still holding the piercing.

"You're kinda equilateral now."

"Rhombi have their charms."

Aladine laughed. He'd try these on Praline, though he might have better luck with confectioner bon mots.
"You never stop being sexy," Marco said. He sparked up without being asked. "No matter which geometric form you take." He tried to encase Law in his flames. No go.

"You're saying I'm your rough diamond, your sweet angle?" Law held another earring.

Chopper was rapt, and put a hoof to his own ear, wondering if he should get them pierced. He was a pirate, after all. Nothing. He didn't get the jokes. It was so hard just keeping up with the actions. Marco's ability died. Law looked kinda funny, uneven or not.

"Yeah, you're the acutest angle I know." Marco said. His tea-towel collecting weirdo.

Law held the third earring separately, then the fourth. His fillings glinting. "Heh. Who was the real oyaji on your crew?"

"His jokes were better." Marco slipped his glasses back to the table. Pop's jokes really were pretty terrible. He guessed he'd learnt from the master. But Law had started it. He lit up his fire and it faltered. What was stopping it?

"Not seastone, or you wouldn't be moving," he said.

Law shook his head. "Does it hurt?"

"No pain. No energy depletion. Powers just don't work."

Law pinched two piercings on one side, then the other, then three, four. Chopper tallied whether Marco's flames of restoration worked or not. No, no, no, no.

"You'll look pretty weird going into battle like that," Aladine said to his cup.

Law turned his way, fingers still on his earlobes. He dropped them to the table and shrugged.

He hadn't been able to access this energy when he'd been Doflamingo's slave the second time because of the seastone chip, he guessed. And who knows if it worked on everyone? Luffy and Marco were just two people. Two fruit users. There were exceptions to every rule.

Plus, Aladine was right. Holding his ears wasn't going to win him many fights, and if Doflamingo took these from him…. He'd survive. But they meant more than any of the photographs Marco and he had gathered across the years.

Law kept the hoops close at all times, rarely taking them out, though he cleaned them at times. Hadn't reflected on how they affected his power for years. It was handy to know.

oOOo

Aladine wasn't sure what was going on. Law's crew was respectful and quickly dropped heads in a bow, or squeezed his shoulder, as they passed. Or Jean Bart squeezed his shoulder. Even Bepo was a third the merman's size.

"What's that all about?"

Koala shot him a look. He didn't know? She stood up from where they sat in the mess, and inclined her head toward the door. Aladine rose. He towered over her. She hadn't grown much across the
years, but she was healthy and strong.

They exited from the loading bay. No way Aladine could get down that hatch. On the top deck the crew scrubbed, mopped, mended and sweated as if the Polar Tang usually sailed on top of the water. Okay, some were just exhibitionists.

There were few crews as heavily tatted as Law's. The Sun Pirates had ink of course, but the Hearts were inked all over, then wore boiler suits hiding it away. Shachi was skilled with design and many wanted to copy their captain. For others it was the practice of their homeland, and the rest just liked tattoos.

"You think I need to work out?" Aladine asked.

She laughed. Most likely. "Look closer."

"Sabo doesn't mind you ogling?"

She punched him. She knew fishman karate. Despite their size and strength difference, Aladine felt it through his brotula tail. He might not be covered in scales, but it was still as tough and flexible as Teflon. "Look closer."

"Hey, Koala." A crew member walked past and the tip-of-the-finger salute to Aladine was almost a forelock tug. Merfolk had excellent eyesight, otherwise he would've missed it. Resting, Aladine's tail curled a few times, and his height dropped a metre or so.

"The Celestials would say a lot of capital was gathered here. Stolen property," Koala said, rubbing at her back where the Sun brand still warmed her skin.

"Fisher Tiger freed them?"

"Nah. The mark'd be different, but the idea's the same." Ah. Well, not everyone joined the Sun pirates, and not everyone who did was an ex-slave. And not all had been held by the Celestial Dragons, though Jean Bart's design was familiar. He focused more deeply.

"Like what you see?" Uni sauntered past, his t-shirt removed and tucked into the back of the boiler suit. The boiler suit was zipped open to his hips and loose from his shoulders. He carried a sack of flour (to keep out of Captain's sight) over one shoulder, and one of rice over the other. Sea urchins, inked in at the centre, spines interlocking and projecting outwards in monochrome mandalas, covered his right lower back.

Clione hit him with a clipboard. "What're you saying that for?"

Cheap to hit him when he couldn't strike back, Uni thought. He rolled his eyes and they kept on their path. How'd Clione get the auditor's job? "It's what they say in those stories when someone likes your body." He threw a cheeky look back across his shoulder. "When you're hot, y'know? And you know it."

Clione elbowed him. "Got your sights set on Aladine-sensei now?" It wasn't like Uni had much to show off anyway, despite what he thought.

"Seems he's got his sights set on me." He didn't work out for nothing.

The fishman doctor finally noticed as the two tried to squeeze into the door at the same time. To a landlubber, Clione's designs, swimming around his upper arms, and circling the left of his lower back, might appear to be summer dragonflies buzzing from one puff of air to the next.
But Aladine recognised them as nudibranchs lifting and settling in the ocean's currents, and more specifically, the poisonous blue dragon which had very little to do with the sea angel sea slug from which Clione drew his name. Both scared off predators with poison they drew from others though. They were clever creatures.

His designs were monochrome too, the ink darker as the dragons swirled the centre of the mark on his lower back. Uni dropped the supplies against the wall of the elevated room of the loading bay, and both men pulled on their t-shirts for the cooler temps of the sub. Cooler at that time. It got damn hot in that tin can when it was under water.

Ah. Aladine understood. Though it didn't seem Law had any fishmen on his crew, anyone who came to the new world obviously had experience with them. Law's hadn't been so pleasant he guessed. A shadow of annoyance — and was it hate? — crossed his features when he'd asked Law of the merfolk or fishmen he knew.

Not all humans were good either. He got that. Knew Law was rational enough to not let experience become a personal dictate. He had saved Jinbei.

The Heart captain wasn't Fisher Tiger, but in his quieter way, taking advantage of chaos and circumstance, Law had freed a lot of men and women from the savagery of the world nobles and other human traffickers. It was Doflamingo's Jolly Roger that marked many of the human auction houses. And a lot of the uneasiness of the time was because Doflamingo wanted to lay legal claim to his protégé again.

Aladine hadn't forgotten the Heart captain was an ex-slave. There was something the three sought out in the other when they sat and supped, Koala arranging and rearranging cutlery, none of them speaking beyond the currents of water and air and politics. Law held his head high, despite having been part of a specialized trade so few of them wanted imposed on them. The Sun pirate admired him for it.

Sure, he could have stayed and pleased Doflamingo in all the ways the Dressrosan warlord wanted. He was a sadistic master, Aladine knew that, but there was power and a measure of luxury that came with his protection. It wasn't without its perils, but Law could've taken it. Many did and had before him with their oppressors and, although Aladine was not one to do so, he didn't blame them. Especially the ones captured so young. Organisms were driven to survive.

Law was a courtesan, an oiran, much lower than a geisha, as Izou was always clear. Aladine had shared a beer or two with the Whitebeard across the years. The Heart could have passed on the indignities a thousand times, probably gaining approval from his owner.

But he was also a doctor. Like Aladine. As slaves it didn't count for much, except when someone from the precious households wanted help after a sudden injury. Like Fisher Tiger, there were those who wouldn't let a merman, a fishman, a slave of any origin, touch them. Even though Tiger's prejudice had been against humans.

But Aladine never forgot he was a doctor and ran through the charts and body parts and muscles as he laboured in the fields, or carted a noble from point A to B. He was useful. He knew exactly where to crush them. Or heal them.

Law was surely temporarily too broken to practice at times, but he was the Surgeon of Death. That was how they knew him. And so he shut out the noise and experience, and defined a path for himself with what he wanted to do, and with what he did best. The merman had witnessed many seek solace in a noose despite emancipation. Law wasn't one of them.
He'd watched Morgans' breathy reports before switching off the broadcasts in disgust at the hack job. It was obvious Law was skilled in other ways, the propaganda was readily available, but Aladine was skilled at breaking rocks, too. At not harming those he was forced to transport. It didn't mean he had an aptitude for, or love of, carrying them on his back. Celestial dragons and others who owned slaves were more fucked up than most could begin to imagine.

And Law had that same smudged expression Koala sometimes got under her too bright eyes. Imprisoned far too young and having seen too much. The marines, Doflamingo, and the media unpacked his background for all to see, and those least likely to judge were the ones whose chains he'd unlocked.

Brands were inked-in in various ways, but the placement let Aladine know they were there.

"Not all of them were captives," Marco said, stepping beside the two. "I've got one as well." The Whitebeard symbol, as he'd promised Law. Oyaji could not be replaced. "It's a risk, but if the Celestials and government are arresting ex-slaves due to the placement of tattoos, then we're all ex-slaves. Let them come."

It was an idea born by the Sun Pirates, and pirates and freed slaves before them. Not everyone could climb the rock faces of Mariejois the way Fisher Tiger had, but there were other ways to add to the right fight, the right path, and the Polar Tang's course veered away from it as much as any did, but the sub never failed to pick up a few in need of shelter and home. In recognition of their humanity.

Law, coming up behind Marco, squinted his eyes against the sun. He rested his head on the back of his shoulder. Tall bastard. He really should date Roronoa. Do wonders for his confidence. "You should see the one on his arse," Law laughed into his shirt, Marco whapping him away. "It's like Buggy on acid."

"Pretty conservative then?" Koala asked, thinking that the acid would surely neutralise Buggy's showiness.

Law, now pulled to Marco's side, smiled at his partner. Marco rapped him on the noggin.

"Mmm, but tacky. If the Celestials find him, that eyesore alone will encourage them to release him."

"Or lop off his head." Aladine's input was useful.

"They use guns," Koala said.

"Pay him no mind." Marco made sure Law stayed close, not possessiveness, but reassurance.

Misery was a memory of loss and love between them. Trinity had printed out the stencilled images that Marco had suggested for a tattoo, but they printed them onto dish cloths rather than inked into Marco's skin. They'd run the idea past Shachi, and he'd figured it was the grief speaking — or that couple's morbid sense of humour, he could never tell — and talked them out of it pretty easily. Once he'd stopped laughing.

He passed by now, sea-animal-cap-deep in conversation with Penguin. They both dipped their head at Aladine. Law coughed. They raised their fingers and continued on their way. On their middle fingers were polar bear erasers, just the head. Bepo. Just like Chopper's. Law's ire dried on his lips. Want. He swallowed. Where'd they get them?

Bepo, trailing behind, and carrying all their goods, apologised. "Sorry, Captain. Sorry, Law."
They've had too much sun." And then he practically prostrated himself in front of Aladine. Before tripping after the first mate and cook.

All four relaxed on the deck, Law and Marco side by side, against the wall. Aladine and Koala opposite, the merman pushed up against the balustrade.

"What's your secret, Aladine? You gonna shanghai my crew?"

"Can they breathe underwater?"

Law slapped the sub wall behind him.

"Like, without apparatus?"

"They can swim." He only had a few fruit users in his crew.

"Nah, man. It's good. They're good. We're good." You're good. Bepo though. Polar bears could swim underwater for a short while. And Law's team had something to do with the sea.

"Your crew's getting mutinous." Marco pulled out his whittling stick and knife.

"Obedience is overrated."

Especially when it was forced and enforced. Koala rested on a tail fin, and took in Law as he looked up at the merman. Aladine flapped his tail slightly to rock Koala like the current of the port below. Felt nice.

The merman enjoyed the sun warming the deck, and thought of Praline's song somewhere deep in the ocean, spinning tales to scramble the surveillance sea slugs. Reinventing, reimagining, reshaping, the past and present prisons into spaces of growth and hope. Law had given his crew that. Fisher Tiger had given it to Aladine, and helped him along the way.

He didn't know who Law's saviours were except by name, the strawhats excepted, and only because they were exceptional. If someone sold their body to another, allowed it to be used, it was argued by the ancients that they were willing to sell out their country, their people, to anyone. Weren't to be trusted.

Slaves weren't citizens in the past. Whores neither. Were fauna and flora. A slave who was a whore didn't stand a chance. Yet, the ones who bought and sold and used the bodies were the upholders of piety and patriotism. What choice was there but to take to the seas?

He flicked his tail again, and Koala's laugh was sweet as she held on and let herself go with the sway.

Marco passed Law the whittled stick. It was shaping up, nowhere near finished, but Law ran his finger over the gouged wood detailing a rotund mother, and the rough heads of two pups encased in her folds. Marco was good at this stuff.

That smudge of tiredness charcoaled his eyes again, just for as long as it took for a cloud to dash past the sun. Law was the captain and his crew knew how close he was to Marco, especially his three closest friends, but he was still their leader.

He stood, and passed the stick back to Marco with a lift of his head to indicate thanks.

"It's good."
He picked up Kikoku and walked to a group of his men supposedly scrubbing the deck by holding a game of two-up. They scrambled to work as Law stood nearby, one knocking over a bucket. A coin rolled to the edge of the boat, almost tipped over. Law shambled it back, just in case they'd been through his commemorative collection again. One pounced on it.

He leant Kikoku against the wall, both Marco and Bepo keeping an eye on her, and retrieved a brush from the dump of supplies on board.

The crew were used to it. He pitched in now and then. It helped keep his hands dextrous. Important for surgery. Not fine motor skills, but general use. And when he was cleaning he generally didn't have to think. He was a leader. He was a captain. He had subordinates. But no-one was his captive or slave.

The suds swept across the deck and the scratch of his scrubbing brush and others — the guys and girls cursing but working — blended with the birds circling above and the strange rigging the sub had, clinking against the flag pole. Their Jolly Roger emblazoned the side, but they didn't fly the flag at present.

"You invite Revolutionaries to scour the floor?"

Sabo's heels clicked topside.

"Some habits are never broken," Aladine said. Law and Koala, both on their knees, cast a quick look at one another. There was no shame in it, and they cleaned for different reasons. Law's men were another matter, and he shambled a few away who happened to be swabbing a little too close to her bent figure.

"Galley," he growled at them, sitting on his haunches. "Potatoes. Peeling."

These ones wouldn't dare flip him off. They grumbled as they traipsed inside, but it was fair. Law always drilled them about respect and boundaries as if they were two-year-olds.

Sabo flopped down next to Marco, Marco flicking the knife over wood. Aladine flapped his tail up and down, stroked his long moustache, impatient to be below the surface, swimming with his crew. There wasn't much else to do. Law's team had taken a break because work was almost done.

Law dismissed the remaining members, instructing them to take most of the cleaning items with them. They did. All burnt skin, high spirits and body odour, racing each other for the showers before they hit the town. They weren't travelling yet, and they weren't sure if they would, but being on board sure brought back memories. Many of them had sailed with Jean Bart when he'd taken the Polar Tang out on cruises and medical journeys after the crowning of the pirate king.

"You too," Law said to Koala, brushing his hair from his head with the back of his arm. "It's okay to finish up. You're a guest. Almost done."

She continued scrubbing. Law glanced at the metal surface. There was just a tiny patch, and the sub was as clean as it should be. It lived outdoors or under the sea. There'd always be wear and tear and, though maintenance also strengthened Koala physically, obsession wasn't good.

"Finish together?" he suggested.
She flicked her gaze up again, dipping the brush into the bucket. Law pointed out the dry patch just one over that, once scrubbed, would mean a job well done. She nodded. When they reached the end of the area he took her brush, and his own, and returned them to the bucket.

Koala stood and stretched and Sabo walked over. "Her skills far surpass cleaning, Trafalgar." His pipe rose behind his shoulder, strapped to his back. He clicked his nails against the bottom rim of his top hat.

"Lack of sanitation's the leading cause of death in the world, Sabo-ya. Most of it's avoidable," Law said, one hand holding the bucket and the other wiping a hand on his jeans. He turned to Koala. "Thank you, karate-ya." He shambled the supplies inside.

She smiled easily. "Yeah, no problem, Tora-o." Both she and Sabo laughed at the wince.

He walked back to Marco and Aladine, lifting an arm in farewell to the Revolutionary couple. With the crew gone, he slid down the wall next to Marco. He took the carving again. Marco always thought Law's skill with needle and thread was something he'd never master. Law watched the mammals come to life — two of them, two pups — and knew whittling was a talent he didn't possess. Maybe with his fruit.

"Thank you, Phoenix."

Marco took the stick back. He was all groove in all senses. He nodded, and got back to work. Law's shoulder against his own didn't impede him. Law crossed his hands over his drawn up knees, and rested his head against the wall behind him. Closed them to the clear sky.

Law thought of standing, going below. The shower wouldn't be free, but there was one attached to his room. Plus, he had to see that Shachi hadn't given the guys all the onions to peel.

Aladine noted the marks on Law's wrists, resting almost daintily, as he napped. He knew as well as Law that he'd always fight self-recrimination over having been owned. It was sold to them as a given of nature, but there were the rich, not necessarily the strong, who avoided such imprisonment. He watched Sabo. The rich could be cruel to their own too.

Another few of Law's crew passed, coming in from the town, and nodded to Aladine. Their gaze on their captain held no fear. Nor disrespect. Nothing to indicate he ruled with perversion and fear.

He didn't know if Marco sported that tattoo. It'd be an amazing thing for a Whitebeard to do, even if it was an image of the man himself.

Law yawned and pulled himself up by cupping his hand onto Marco's knee, Marco paying absolutely no mind.

"Don't work them too hard," he said as Law turned to go below deck.

Law nodded. "You too."

"Yeah-yeah." Marco had no crew to work, but this carving was consuming.

Aladine's tail whumped the air around them this time, as Law went inside, lifting Marco's shirt. "How do the flames of restoration work?"

Marco nicked the wood a few times before he rose, and joined the Sun pirate against the railing. Hand in his pocket, he ran his fingers over the engraving. Good. He wanted to know more about methods for helping fishmen and merfolk too. Law had his books and had saved Jinbei, so his
knowledge was deeper than most. Marco was an expert on the healing of sphinxes. Of course they shared, but if Marco could learn from the source, all the better.

A flock of starlings swirled above, one or two falling out of formation, lagging behind. Shiny things, flashes of blue, the sunlight gleaming off railings, caught their eye — news had been quiet lately. That vessel was tucked into a cove in a bay that the neutral news coo would never divulge. Gregarious birds, fond of gossip, starlings stuck their beaks into any corner of the world and opened it wider, forcing all information out of hiding, procuring tasty morsels for news-hungry hounds.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! BTW, the third instalment of the Law novel has been translated and it says that Law isn't such a great cook, but Shachi is. Shame on the former, cos I always have Law as a competent cook.

Blue Dragon. Clione wishes he was this. But he's actually a Sea Angel Sea Slug, though some images do look more fierce than that one.

Aladine is a goatsbeard brotula merman.

If there's anything that I've forgotten to explain from the AU, that I've got wrong, or that you've got a question about, don't hesitate to leave a comment. Oh, it's Cora Week next week. I've got some drabbles lined up. They'll have Law in them, so keep an eye out.
"What're they doin' all huddle-huddle in the corner?" Sanji, drawing on a cigarette, stood at the back of the kitchen, looking over the yard.

"Under the mango tree." Zoro helped out for whatever reason, he wasn't sure. Gave him something to do while Luffy was away on king business. Kept his strength up.

He hauled a crateload of empty bottles—awaiting pickup—to the outside wall. One of their benefactors from the north had donated a case of the purest sake, made from rice grown in the purest of waters. They'd made short work of it the night before, and before that, and before that. Though not everyone drank. Enough sipped barley tea, watching the windows and doors, anticipating the knuckled rap of trouble across glass and wood.

"Moreton Bay fig." Sanji stood on tiptoe, trying to make out if there was any making-out obscured by its shade and shadows.

"Yeah, whaddever. Big and leafy and romantic, hmm?"

"That shitty surgeon." Sanji itched to light another cigarette with the one in his mouth, but he figured he should finish the first before beginning another.

"What's it to yah, brow?" Zoro pulled over an empty crate, tipped it upside down and sat. "Robin and Dr. Death getting snuggly in the shadows?"

"The expression's bro." Sanji rearranged the handkerchief in his suit jacket pocket, ashed his smoke.

"Bruh."

The cook kicked at the swordsman. He dodged back against the wall with a scowl, pulling his legs up, hand resting on his swords.

"Robin's there, that's what. Don't care what Law's gone through, but he upsets one single..."
"...cell of her epidermis?" Zoro wonder if there was any sediment worth sniffing out in the all-but-drained bottles.

Sanji flicked his hair, let it settle. What did that moron know about dermatology? "Ladies don't flake."

"Curly-bruh."

The cook side-eyed him. Chomped down hard on the cigarette, "Shut it, lichen-breath. What would Franky say?"

Zoro shrugged. "Dunno. Hear he and Law are in an open relationship."

Sanji peered across the yard where Law was practicing his Room with Robin's many hands. Looked like they were playing a weird version of three cups and a pea, Usopp observing. Who was conning whom?

"Usopp?"

"Nah, man. Law's not into him." Zoro lowered his legs.

"Shithead. Usopp's with them too."

"Not cool," Franky said, stepping out from the back door of the kitchen, "Usopp and I are exclusive."

Both the swordsman and cook glanced back. "Thought you were in an open relationship."

"Only with Law."

"Robin?"

"She's my true love." He flattened and crossed his hands over his chest, then began his Salute to the Sun, and other early morning poses. Luckily he had trunks on. Sometimes he felt more comfortable doing exercises naked.

"Law?"

"The brother's cool, just needs a cuddle now and then." He slid along the ground, and morphed into the cow pose.

Sanji gaped. And not at Franky's speedos. Law needed hugs?

"Didn't think your eyebrow could shoot any higher," Zoro said.

"Tch."

"It's true. I'm metal an all, so he feels like he's admiring a car or a blade, or a cyborg when he leans into me, only the cyborg's admirin' him." Franky winked. "Instead of trying to kill him like that crazy-arsed sword he carries around. Heh."

Robin had put Franky up to it. When Bepo was away, he had the role of emotional support with substance. Subtle and all. It was difficult not letting on that he was but a teddy bear, albeit with the force of a metallic tsunami.

Sanji and Zoro both nodded. The cyborg had eyes for Law? Couldn't dispute it. The Heart captain
was sherbet to the tongue.

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Usopp prepared the fast growing mix and sifted it into the canister. Blood and bone sure had a whiff to it. And there was another concoction mixed through with seastone powder. Had to keep it away from Law and Robin, but had to somehow get it into the garden.

"What happened?" Robin had called her spare hands in, and Law's Room lay dormant. She took in the smear of grey on the Heart's arm. Usopp looked insanely guilty. The burn had blistered and smelled of honey.

"Purification rite."

"Don't let Luffy know."

"Hnn." Law glanced down at his arm, imagining Luffy zeroing in on the damage. Turned back to Robin. "Fixed most of it with my fruit, but needs aftercare. Honey helps. Anti-bacterial. Sweet-talked Sanji into sparing me a bit."

"Good," she nodded.

"Good?" Usopp asked. Law sweet-talked Sanji? Was that even possible?

Law stared at Robin. She almost reached for the earrings, but settled for a light tap on the latitude and longitude of the ink on the back of his hand. "Good."

Law with his own tatts—singed, in need of retouching, some repair, but not concealed with the ham-fisted contempt of another.

Law in clothes that didn't freeze his ankles and shins, that weren't lurex declarations of how low the bargain basement could go. He wore items that weren't too dissimilar to his usual style, even if they were underground stock. A black short-sleeved button-up shirt, open to show the tips of his chest ink. Black full-length trousers that flowed in his island style.

Sure he had his own quirks, but they were more a flash of colour on a blackbird's wings than the fairy-bread sprinkles of a toucan's beak. Marco had stripped him down by dressing him up like a circus dog in a frilled collar and tutu.

She'd caught him with a needle and thread, and her eye dipped to the hem of his shirt where she distinguished symbols he'd sewn into the cloth. Black on black. Law on Law.

Law's laugh as he pitted his carnie wits against her sleight of hands—seeing who could move the Room, the cup, fingers, the peas quick enough to fool the other—was like a raft of cinnamon air butting a cliff face with its wiles. Thimblerig. They'd hoped to sucker Usopp out of a few Beri, but the sharpshooter had trumped them both. It was good. Law's burnt arm. Not fixed, but good.

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She'd slept in Law's room at times, with Franky's blessing. She would do so without, but no need to upset still waters.

Wrapping his arms around her gave Law comfort and, as long as he knew it was her, he didn't mind
touch in return, or when she initiated it. She had no trouble with the contact between them.

But he'd almost floored Luffy when he'd tried to pin him down with his usual show of exuberance and—she had to admit—ownership. He hadn't come out of his quarters for hours after that. Luffy not understanding the darkness that had swept Law away, though he once had. Luffy's pure acceptance back then was something the Heart had needed. But that optimism that freed so much of the world allowed pockets of uncertainty to exist, and Law had been ensnared in one.

She got it, or part of it, Spandam chaining her in seastone, dragging her by her hair, and Spandine doing much worse to her mother. And Law hadn't had the chance to break anyone's neck. The trial had been so public, the surgeon cornered and without defence, despite Benn's efforts. You recovered. You had to. But that level of control over you corroded your heart.

The last thing he needed was being flushed out of his lair before he'd recalibrated. She wouldn't be there if not for Luffy, neither would Law, but one size fit all until it didn't.

"Robin. Nico-ya?"

"Hmm?" She'd sat at the small desk in Law's bedroom reading. It looked out across the lawn, and Law had the curtains wide and the window open. The sea breeze blew in. Law stood behind her and lifted a few strands of her hair. She stared at him.

"Can I plait it? My mother did it for Lammy and me."

"Your sister?"

Law nodded, and trailed his fingers through her mane.

"You had long hair?"

"Until I was three."

Cute, she thought, like the three headed hybrid-mongrel-Cerberus they'd encountered at Thriller Bark. The curtains swept across the table. Law grabbed them and fastened them to the sides of the window frame.

"Tiny plaits. Small things. It was custom in Flevance."

He didn't tell her about the strands in his piercings. Not yet. Maybe never.

"Can I read?"

"Sure."

"How long will it take?"

"Dunno." It was soothing. Sometimes Ikkaku let him, sometimes a few of the longer-haired members of his crew. He didn't play stylist often. He'd tried on Baby 5 when he was with the family as a kid, before being forced to rejoin as pariah of the century, but he didn't have the patience then. She'd loved it, though Jora had been a tad too interested in his own involvement.

"You don't have to keep them in. Really, traditionally, there were just one or two sections plaited before cutting." But he wanted to play with her hair. Maybe it was a way of assuring his mother that her efforts hadn't gone to waste. Despite him almost having lost the hoops she'd entrusted him
with.

"Origami. Stitching. This—" Law lay out his tools.

Did he have a regular ordered hairdresser pack liked the one holding his surgical knives, Robin wondered. That's right. Shachi had been a hairdresser, and still styled the stumpage and cowlicks of that ratbag crew. Maybe he'd gifted Law his own special braiding pack at some point.

"—Keeps us sawbones dexterous."

But he hadn't seen his crew. He must've salvaged bits and pieces from the human traffic that flowed through the safehouse.

Law could tie a knot one-handed. He couldn't rely on his power all the time. He'd practiced over and over and over as he developed his fruit and ability. Doflamingo deemed it amusing, and generally pretty useful, especially in the Underworld—either to stitch up a snitch or to help out a member of the Family. Law could play good doc/bad doc with a scalpel in one hand and a suture in the other.

Robin planned to take most of the plaits out. Or Law would. But he was good, she gave him that. Why did they need to be so small and tight?

"The royals in Flevance wove them through with threads of gold." He turned the tail comb to isolate a few strands, and to then lift and braid them into the plait. "Had time to have petals and flowers entwined into their dos."

"Your sister or mother?"

Law had one of the larger ties at the base of Robin's scalp, and secured the finished strands with a much smaller one. He vaguely remembered attending a parade before the monarchs skipped town. The royal highnesses bedecked in filigree and lace. Ephemeral and magical as gossamer wings. And as reliable.

"Too busy."

Robin took a sip of her tea, moving minimally.

"I picked some Black-Eyed Susans from a neighbourhood garden once. Thunbergia alata. For Mum or for Lammy. For the vase in the middle of the table, though those flowers would only be good for floating on water."

He'd liked the bright orange flower and its deep black centre. Law tied a braid and started another. "Some kids a few years older than me said I was a thief and they were going to call the sheriff and send me to jail."

Robin laughed. "Did you believe them?"

"A bit. We didn't even have sheriffs. Reading too many adventure tales or watching too many old movies." Right strand over, middle strand under, left strand over. "I didn't pick any more flowers from that garden, anyway. They spilled into the laneway. It wasn't like I'd gone onto their land."

"It's the thought that counts."

"I stuck to giving my sister frogs after that."
She didn't know what Lammy was like, but Robin didn't see that she was any worse off with Law substituting fauna for flora. Especially if he was going to take all the romance out of petals with botanical names.

"But I didn't encourage her to wear them in her hair."

Threading amphibians into a weave was a bitch.

oOOo

"Did you ever meet Luffy's brother?" Law asked, using the tail comb again to lift more strands of Robin's hair into place. Fingers of his other hand securing them in order. Shachi had plastic handles that avoided digging into the crew's skulls, but Law had to make do with the long skinny steel spiked comb he'd found. Beggars couldn't be choosers, and he was careful not to scrape Robin's scalp.

"Ace?" She bookmarked her page. She glanced behind but Law was sorting through the tiny elastic bands he'd talked one of the staff into getting for him.

"Yeah."

Something heavy in his reply. He was aware she knew Sabo. "I saw him once, outside of Alabasta. Marines and Baroque Works on his tail," she said.

Law nodded. Continued steadily. Fastidiously. He got Robin to tilt her head forward a little as he approached her nape.

"Another time he fell asleep into a plate of food. He was under surveillance. I wasn't with the Strawhats then."

Law drew in a quiet breath instead of expelling the puff of amusement she expected.

He'd rested the comb to the side, part of Robin's mass of hair clipped away, and kept plaiting in silence. Hands steady. So steady. So proud of his steady, steady hands.

"What happened, Law?"

He completed another few segments before he answered.

"To Ace or me?"

"I know what happened to Ace."

Law tied off, then selected another three strands of hair, following the curve of Robin's skull. He ran a finger over the texture, tight enough, but not so tight it'd cause her headaches.

"You know what happened. I came to you first, then the trial lay out the blueprint. The blueprint lay down the foundation, and I was in fucking seastone with an exploding collar, and more than two fucking megalomaniacs with a hard-on for me."

His hands remained firm with her hair, but gentle. She was impressed. She imagined him operating under stress. Folding those paper cranes really must work. More than two? Croc?

Law paused for a moment. Took in the changing light before resuming.
"Sorry, Robin. Just wondered. What he was like. Wish I could've saved him."

Then he never would have ended up with Marco.

But he always had wished that, the saving part, even before he committed to one of the worst mistakes of his life. That there were a number was saying something. Born under an unlucky star.

She reopened her book but couldn't find her place. "Met Luffy's grandfather in the early days."

"Garp."

"Many times since of course."

Law had encountered him more than once as well.

"First time we see him he walks through a wall, he and Luffy exchange words, he starts pounding on his grandson, then both fall asleep."

Now there was a laugh. Law had witnessed the same.

"Standing upright. Garp's hand clasping Luffy's collar, the other arm coiled back, ready to strike."

Law paused separating Robin's hair to scratch at his own. He'd love some blue or red thread to weave into the pattern. That one-handed proficiency meant the braid kept its tension.

"You broke their pictures, didn't you? Whitebeard? Ace?"

Robin glanced behind her, finger holding her now found page. Was this the point of Law's questioning? He steadied her head.

"After what Marco did to your loved ones?" She spread her nails. Might paint them later in the day. "Yeah. I did."

Left over centre, centre under right. Right over centre, centre under left. Law waited for the sweep of feathers and blue fire to pass. Robin thought of asking if she should use her fruit to help him, but she'd hate to get in the way of a surgeon's training.

"Sorry. They used it as an excuse, didn't they?"

He used his fingers to comb her hair out to prevent tangles. "The courts said they didn't need an excuse." Began braiding. "But I was punished, yeah."

She sprung a few hands and brushed his face. He tapped one of them lightly, losing the stretch on the twist for a second, then resumed.

"They said I didn't deserve to live, Law. That I should die, I'd be happier dead. Their lies imprisoned me and didn't let me breathe."

"Know what that feels like," he said. She wasn't seeking pity. Just letting him know. "I'm sorry."

He meant it. Having gone through it. She could tell. Was aware. True, not through to adulthood. Though he'd told her Sengoku was always weighing up if Cora's sacrifice was worth it.

"Me too," she said. "I couldn't be more sorry. I think Ace would've liked you. He met the crew once, but I wasn't with them then either."
A group walked past, down the corridor, muffled laughter as one bumped against the wall.

"We set out offerings for him every Obon. To all our loved ones. Cora. Whitebeard. My family."

She sometimes dropped by at that time of year. They always invited her. Anyone. The orphans of the ocean.

"I'll do it for Misery this year." He released the hair he'd clipped back. He would set out offerings for what he remembered of Marco too. You could mourn the living. "I never disrespected Fire Fist, Robin. Never."

The ash smear on his arm, the skin blistered but Phoenix-free, matched the recesses under his eyes.

"I know. You guys had me over more times than I can remember. Neither of you intruded on the memories of past loves."

Law lifted the hair, separated. "At least someone remembers, huh?"

Robin wasn't sure what Law meant but guessed the answer burnt somewhere below his skin.

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Usopp's haki was phenomenal. Law used "God-ya" to rile him, but there was truth in the utterance. The chaos the sniper wreaked, sight unseen, was superlative. Next to Nico Robin, he was also the perfect card shark to have as your partner in a game.

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"I've loosened the soil, Usopp," Robin said.

Law sweated, maintaining the Room.

"A few ceramics and bits and pieces in the ground, Law."

"Leave them there."

Robin was no expert, and the soil around Law and Marco's place was fertile, but the earth between her fingers had definitely been corrupted. Hair. Was there blood? Semen? She'd experienced her fair share of corpses and their discharges.

She'd scrub her hands when she drew them back in, and it wasn't like they hadn't fondled a guy's balls before. Just wasn't the most pleasant of experiences—dealing with bodily fluids when she wasn't expecting it.

The soil had absorbed the mixture well, too, so it was more mind over matter. Croc had disposed of bodies in fairly organic ways, but there was a bleakness to this damp dirt. A smothered disquiet like the last few miserable squeaks of a mouse in a trap. Law had loved this garden.

She'd prepared the area near the wall and the one closest to the zucchini plant. It really had come along since she'd crept into the area to dig the seedlings into the soil—not that long ago.
Could Usopp channel his haki through Robin's sight, Law's Room, and his own skill?

In the safehouse yard, Law focused his attention but kept the gardening glove he'd warped from his old abode in his field of vision. Robin hurt. If anything scalded the limbs she sprouted and sent ahead of her to spy or spike, it hurt the physical embodiment of the woman. Law was aware.

She'd opened up a visual portal, an eye, into the garden of his old home. She placed an ear next to it, her hands in the earth. The sphere of his devil fruit spread atop the house, the island, the ocean between the two landforms, the island they stood on. He never doubted her. Had faith no harm would come to her. Had to have faith.

"I've got about ten minutes, God-ya."

His abilities allowed him to battle and for a length of time and fiercely. But they had a limit and stretching them so far tripwired his heart. Though everything was clear for now.

He'd not tried this before. Was it possible to teleport second sight, Usopp's accuracy? The sniper had to explode the two pop-greens into the cradles of soil Robin's hands had hollowed out. The one with seastone closer to the house, and the other nearer to the zucchini. They'd speed up growth, but were slow release compared to his usual weaponry. Marco didn't have much of an eye for horticulture, but even he'd notice a Day of the Triffids, Jack in the Beanstalk, vine suddenly sprouting through the house and surrounds.

On Dressrosa, when Usopp's newly awakened haki had rescued Luffy and Law from Sugar, he'd had a vague idea of the location of the window he'd needed to shoot his missile through. The rest relied upon Viola's direction and his own vision. The way of the bow was the way of access. Now, he only had Robin's guidance, though he'd visited Marco and Law's house many times. He tapped into the memory, recalled Law's description of how he'd recently left the vegetable and herb plot, and tuned into Robin's surveillance.

Law's Room was poised to capture Usopp's trajectory as he launched the first missile, the one with seastone. With three images crowding in, Usopp visualised the Mediterranean wash and the leafy tomato bush pushing against the white.

"It has to fall below the tomato plant and adjoin the wall exactly where Misery used to bury her bones. She dug holes there so often it weakened the plaster some. I chipped away at it when I could."

Law didn't want to inform them how he'd spied the flaw. On all fours, flattened forearms and elbows pressing into the grass, he'd wildly searched for any distraction to drive what was happening out of mind. An advantage of Marco fucking him in front of the tomato bush so often was that he could keep an eye on the progress of the zucchini plant. Every cloud had a silver lining, huh? The vomit and fluids had enriched the soil. Sometimes you had to make your own shit work for you.

"Hmm," Robin added. "The plaster's peeling, and there's a crack, and that appears to have crept into the cement of the wall underneath."

"More precise." Usopp's voice was tight. Would Law kill him if he couldn't do it?

"Down four centimetres, across six, adjacent to the threshold."

"Got it." Usopp took a breath and aimed.

"Robin-chwan!"
Usopp didn't waver.

Sitting next to Law in the yard, under the fig, Usopp standing, his goggles tightly fastened, Robin conjured another hand to cover Sanji's mouth and one to pat his head. Another pair pushed at his back, and directed him to sit on that empty crate Zoro had vacated. He did so, happily. Robin had touched him! And if she had the power and inclination to do that, Law probably wasn't disrespecting her.

"Oof." Usopp released his kuro kabuto slingshot, and Robin's eyes—against Marco's wall and away from where that canister would land—sent a message to the trio gathered under the fig tree. In the safehouse yard she yelled out, "Now!" as the tiny pop-green unfurled, spiralling into Marco’s garden. A hand threw up a patch of dirt, a flake of paint, and Law concentrated on vacuuming the air from the damaged area of the wall. The pop-green hit the soil where it should and vines ran along the lip of the crack and settled into the earth. Robin saw it, and Law and Usopp felt it.

"Shit!"

Zoro, stepping out of the kitchen, perturbed that the ero-cook had taken his crate, glared across. Were they practicing kyudo without him?

"Victory," Robin reported. Dust and plaster speckling the ground in front of them.

Law took a deep breath.

"One more to go. Hold on Tora-o."

Strange they gave him the nickname of a tiger when he was obviously leopard. Even if it wasn't intentional, Usopp thought. At least Luffy had blessed him with a name, instead of associating him with an object. He was still surprised Law hadn't been dubbed 'bear-guy'. He lined up again.

The gate scraped across the path in Law's old home.

"Stop." Robin tensed.

"Shit." Law could and would hold up the Room, but for how long? Robin's eye peered from the wall. Four hairy shins clomped into view. She tipped her gaze upwards. Marco's plain cut-offs, and Doflamingo's candy-wrapper pants. His laugh.

Under the fig she held a finger of her crossed arms to her lips for quiet. The noises of the safehouse yard didn't carry into Law's garden, but she couldn't give herself away. Couldn't draw attention to the ope-ope no mi.

The legs paused, right near the door. Fuck, that fuchsia was garish. The first pop-green, hidden by the luxuriant tomato plant Marco had insisted Law tend, had established itself well, but its growth would be gradual.

"Vegetable patch's a bit scrappy, Phoenix."

Robin's eye in the wall blinked, grateful for the summer foliage obscuring it. They wanted to talk gardening now? Wasn't there any murder and mayhem to discuss?

Marco scanned the yard. Yeah, weeds, dead flowers, hedges in need of pruning. "I'll set Law to it when the courts return him."

"He's disappeared."
Robin couldn't take in all of Doflamingo, but his words filtered down as if he'd cupped a hand over his mouth. As if he ran a toothpick between his pearly whites.

"He'll show. Loves getting his hands dirty." As if that'd bring him back. "Animus to anima. All that stitching and slicing needs a balance with the corporeal. The cerebral with the profane."

"Mighty confident, Phoenix."

Both men walked toward the genkan, stepping out of their shoes. "He bears grudges. Pretty vengeful."

"Ain't that the truth. But his petty little head can hold that grudge for years before he acts." If anyone knew it was Doflamingo, and that was far too long to deny himself the joys Law could offer.

Usopp's muscles strained. He'd aligned the pop-green. Law couldn't hear anything said, but waited on Robin's signal. His hand slipped a second before he readied it, palm wet. Concentrate.

."He can't stay away."

"That's true, but what conviction. Even if it's six weeks, six months, I'd recommend getting a gardener. A nice flower bed's like a good hairstyle. Folks judge a man by the cut or lack of it."

The door closed behind them. Robin waited a while but knew neither Usopp nor Law could sit tight much longer.

"Okay."

Usopp readied his sling. "This one doesn't have to be so exact."

"But it still has to land under the tomato bush," Law breathed out.

Usopp reassessed. "How tall, how wide, how much space?" He pushed his goggles flat against his face. The sun flashed through the leaves above and he shook and scrunched his eyes to chase away the glare.

The sliding door clickety-clacked over the runners. Marco stepped out and tipped tea leaves onto the patch of soil—just in front of the shaded recess the tomato plant's lower foliage created—before re-entering the house. The dregs skirted the dip Robin had scooped out. They were organic. It was fine.

She exhaled. Couldn't they kick back on the side deck and drink ale like real pirates?

"Okay?" Law asked.

"Nnh." She nodded and focused. "About two metres tall."

"It's grown." Law guessed the special ingredients mixed into the soil had helped it along. That was some height.

"Be more precise. Haven't seen this one," Usopp said, brusque.
He hadn't, Law thought. "Not that different from usual, God-ya." Just taller.

Usopp nodded sharply.

Robin calculated with one of her hands, judging from the span. She'd had years of practice. "One-point-eight metres and the space underneath is thirty centimetres." She sized up the distance from the bush to the door. "Half a metre from the nearest edge of the threshold, and the zucchini vine is set back from the front lower edges of the plant eight centimetres." She eyed the tea leaves. Should be able to clear them. "The tomato bush's foliage hangs over the undergrowth, like a curtain, about four c-m."

She'd always been good at maths. Usopp was better. He mentally tallied and then, feeling the images both Law and Robin projected, he centralised the inner and outer worlds and released the pop-green.

The door slid open. Again?!? And Doflamingo's softest-of-Italian-leather loafers stepped into view. She kept an eye on the incoming pop-green. She prayed that everything was enough a rustle of breath and breeze that they wouldn't get caught.

"Now."


"Now!"

The earth she'd thrown swapped out with the pop-green and it flew below the tomato bush, into the undergrowth, under the umbrella leaves of the zucchini plant, picking up a few of the tea flakes, but they were cold and light, and didn't affect it.

"You must have Croc over for a cuppa." Doflamingo leant into the house, arms stretched on the door frame. Robin heard Marco's murmured response but not the exact words. "You brew a nice drop, Marco, and he's in town. Shame I couldn't partake this time."

The pop-green unfurled, spread, and lay down roots.

"Now, Law," she said in the safehouse yard. Be careful. The glove returned to the space the newly landed pop-green took up, the earth damp enough that no dust rose. Robin joined him in pulling in her power. She could send it a good distance, but needed Law's help to cross an island. Plus, if they caught her when she was in the Room, any injury wouldn't be lasting. A curious side-effect of casting such a large dome was the number of miraculous escapes from accidents recorded across the two islands. Scientists scratched their heads for years.

She dropped her hands and sat back, blood rushing. That was fun, but she didn't fancy being used by either Doflamingo or Marco against Law. Law pulled in the blue convexity, then doubled over and then back, arms wrapped around his long legs, breathing heavily. Usopp collapsed on the ground. On his knees. From relief.

"He was there?" the sniper rasped.

Robin nodded.

"Marco?"

"And Doflamingo."
Doflamingo peered up at the sky. Strange moving hue to it. Was his little protégé out there playing with fire again? No clouds, he couldn't investigate, but maybe he'd ask Morgans' starlings. He turned his head to the tomato bush again. Marco had dreamt up some pretty unique corrections for his errant slave using that plant. He'd have to pick his brain when he had the time. It was starting to bear fruit. This area grew the sweetest tomatoes. He'd be sure to get a few from the Phoenix when they ripened.

"Oi." Zoro wandered over, wondering that the three panted like they'd just finished some kind of decathlon.

Sanji's footsteps kicked up dust, and Zoro heard him before he felt him. He brushed past the swordsman, past Usopp, in his haste to get to Robin. She was exhausted, poor thing. Her hands had suddenly stopped stroking his face. Something was wrong.

Law sat back on the bench now, eyes closed, chest rising, hand on Kikoku, legs stretched out, about ready to slide to the ground.

"Sha!" He murmured under his breath.

"Sha!" Usopp chimed in from the ground in front of the four. He picked himself up, patted himself down. He tucked kuro kubota into the back of his jodhpurs.

"Sha!" Robin laughed. They'd done it.

Zoro scoured the groundcover for the targets, the arrows. Didn't see them, but, whatever, all seemed good.

"Sah?" Sanji asked. Was Robin about to say his name?

She rose and tousled Law's hair. He'd taken his hat off in the shade. "Thank you, Nico-ya," he said quietly. "God-ya."

She pressed her fingers into his scalp then lifted them. "Would you whip me up one of your summer cocktails?" she asked Sanji, linking her arm in his.

"What would mademoiselle prefer?" Sanji blew his cigarette smoke away from Robin, fully attentive as they strolled to the house.

Usopp launched himself onto Zoro's back "I've got can't-walk-any-more-today-i-tis."

Zoro shrugged. It was only a few steps to the kitchen. The sniper was a lightweight. He stared down at the still resting surgeon. "You need a ride too, Law?"

"No space!" Usopp emphatically cut the air with his arm, a karate chop to rival Bepo's.

Like the sun slipping and sliding through the branches of the great tree, touches of gold rimmed Law's irises as he looked up. He cut the air with a little less energy, waved his hand in the negative. "Thanks, Zoro-ya. I'll just enjoy the fresh air a bit longer."

"Stop wriggling!" Zoro growled at the man-child on his back. Usopp slumped with a sigh against his body. He turned back to Law.
"Your powers up?"

Law's gaze trailed his forearm, and he tried forming a small sphere. He could, just, and maintain it, but it wasn't easy. He dropped it and shrugged.

"Get inside soon."

"Don't tell me what to do, Roronoa-ya."

Zoro walked away with a jerk of his hand. They'd just got Law back. It'd be a waste if he was taken again, so soon after. Wasting his power on vengeance when he should preserve it for battle.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. Yes, Law has sexy jeans in canon. He wears pretty loose-fitting clothes in the Repossession verse. These are Black-Eyed Susans, from South Africa, not the U.S. flowers with the same name. I know there are some things I'm forgetting to mention. I'll edit them in. Ask me if something doesn't make sense. I know Luffy's still OOC in some aspects, but he doesn't have a big action role in this fic.

I gotta write that fic about the royals of Flevance at some stage, right? I mean, they got away, so Law isn't the only survivor...

That's a gestimate on the number of chapters, but I think it will take about ten, with the alternating storyline, to wind up.

Anyway, yeah. If you want to drop a line about what you thought I'd be more than thrilled. Next chap is still on the dark theme, I think.

Still reading 95,000+ words in and haven't dropped a kudos? Guest kudos don't know your dark reading habits :-D, and they let me know something's working, even if it's just getting punctuation right. Thanks again for sticking with the fic.
Doflamingo thought the Strawhat most likely to sleep with him willingly was Nico Robin. They shared a mutual acquaintance after all, and he didn't mean Law.

Every despot should have a bucket list and his included fucking a member of all of the high ranking crews, or the high ranking individuals themselves. There was some sharing going around too when he had Law in hand. The boy was popular. He'd toyed with the idea of setting up a shagging roster. It brought in a bit of coin in the past. But, even without him, Doflamingo never found himself short of a partner.

Except when Law killed Vergo.

That was shitty. Not only had he run away, depriving him of his main source of non-consensual fun, but he'd offed the guy most likely to fall into bed with him any time he asked. Cockblocked on all sides. Annoying.

Crocodile, Mihawk, he skipped Moria's crew. Too creepy. Hancock's was problematic, but Bonney, he could do her. Had his eye on that green-haired thing among Eustass Kid's men. Bege was fun. Had to watch out for his wife.

Katakuri. Occasionally he liked someone taller than him, and Amande. She was all very long-necked woman. The cigarettes reminded him of Roci. He could take his pick with Blackbeard's hangers-on, and often did. Luckily neither he nor the big man found the other attractive. Ze-ha-ha-ha. They just weren't compatible.

Buggy, not worth thinking about, and Shanks was incorrigible and incorruptible, though he sometimes suspected that Law had more success than he'd had in that regard.

Whitebeard's men.

There were so many of them. It became easier after Law took up with Marco. A lot of the men were not happy and Doflamingo could sell it as a kind of revenge fuck. A way of maintaining Whitebeard's honour, Ace's memory. Plus, Doflamingo was very talented when he put his mind to it.

And now, here was the First Division commander, his cohort, a man who had grown up in a similar world to the one he knew, underneath him.

He hadn't seemed too worried with the loss of Law, not knowing how cunning the child was once he threw on his self-preservation cloak. Ah well. Doflamingo kept grudges, for sure, but that was
the beauty of them. They could sit and simmer while he entertained himself in other ways. And when two grudges meet? He looked forward to the day.

Law obviously was the reason Donquixote and Phoenix had merged, but neither pirate was hard on the eye. Doflamingo had left the bed to sit at a nearby table and peruse the empty bookshelf.

"Law's books."

"Gone," Marco said from the covers. He'd agreed to being tied up. His arms above his head, tied to the railings, but Doflamingo had pulled up his trousers. No need to humiliate him before it was needed. He'd rather have him on side than not.

Doffy pranced around the house as if he owned it, which he did really. Or its inhabitants. Very sparse. He remembered it being more homey when he'd broken in. There, Law's neatly folded blankets and dog bowl awaited his return.

He went to the bathroom and took a long piss with the door open, urine raining down into the bowl. He shook. Flushed the toilet, washed his hands a number of times, wiped them on the fluffy towel, eyed with distaste the laundry piling up. If Law came back he'd have his work cut out for him.

He returned to the bed—a good size, especially for a man as tall as him. Maybe Law had anticipated visitors when they'd picked it out. Marco certainly seemed to think that he and his subordinate had been having a fling for a number of years, and Doflamingo wasn't one to dissuade him of the idea.

He stood by the mattress, and Marco lifted his arms a little to indicate he'd like to be released. They weren't seastone, so Doflamingo didn't know why he just lay there. A kink perhaps. Still naked, he dawdled his fingers back and forth, and wrapped a few strings around Marco's ankles, tying one foot to either side of the bed.

"Arsehole." Marco burnt them off and sat up."Put some clothes on."

Doffy lowered himself to the snarl of sheets. "Was hoping for round two."

Marco glared at him.

"And considering how long you stayed restrained, I think that maybe you've been missing a little action of late? He's skilled, isn't he?"

Doffy stood up and pulled on his g-string and cropped trousers. Couldn't stand having a visible panty line. He checked the room to see where he'd dropped his jacket before having picked up Marco and marching him to their love nest. With Marco's permission of course.

"Speaking of which, Marco."

The Phoenix was now crossing the room to the bathroom.

"You lost my property." They still hadn't properly discussed it.

"Law's not..."

"Not what? Not property, or not my property? Both statements are false. You were at the trial." Doflamingo cradled his hands on his lap, looked down at his palms.

"You're twisting the regulations for your own perversion, Doflamingo."
"And you're partaking of the spoils." Like he had to twist his rubber arm. Wait, that was the pirate king, wasn't it? What was he up to nowadays?

Marco shook his head, walked into the en suite, and shut the door. Only the muffled flush of the toilet was heard through the walls. He was out soon after, shaking his hands dry. Hmm, a bit shy, Doffy thought.

"Of course when he is returned I'm still willing to share, even if it's a little less. Let's draw up a custody agreement. We can seal the deal with a nice glass of champagne, and I'll tie you up again if you like."

Marco rested a hand on the back of his own head, and pulled his neck this way and that, loosening the cricks. "Not today." He was hoping Law would return of his own free will. They had something good together, and even though Doflamingo called him spoilt, he'd ruin Law past salvation if he fell into Doffy's hands again.

"Hmm." Doflamingo flexed his hands, turned them over, examined his nails. "As you wish, my love. But just remember, it is by my good grace that you were able to sample his wares after the trial, and so it will be after recapture."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry Marco fans. Hope you're not too squicked out. Lol. Doffy is definitely fun to write. A quick update. You know me and my non-existent posting schedule.

Doffy would totally wear a g-string. He might draw the line at a mankini.

Oh, also, been dying to gush over chapter 950. Worked a bit of it (appearance-wise) into an upcoming chapter. Thank you, Oda!

Thank you for reading.
Dark Marco 13c (past)-(NSFW)

Chapter Summary

Doflamingo's legs-over-easy rent boy.

Chapter Notes

**Warning:** Rape/non-con, adult themes, proceed accordingly.

Dark 13a, 13b and 13c all posted close together.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**Dark Marco 13c**

In bed, Marco beside him. Marco, crying, shaking. Bed a mattress under him, under Law. In bed on a mattress. He pulled Marco near and circled his back the way he liked it. The blond turned to him when he realised his partner was awake, and pushed into his chest, Law's arms immediately around him.

Yeah, that was pretty fucked up what he'd had to see. "Shh, shh." Law's clucking was calming. "'s'all right. 's'okay. Shh." Half asleep. He couldn't seem to get his hands to settle quite right, but his neck had been killing him lately and at least that had eased up.

Marco found his face, his body wanting more than comfort. Law hinged his mouth open in a half awake show of consent, and Marco's lips were all over his, still kinda bawling, but nothing wrong with his tongue. Bit more insistent than usual.

Law loosened his lips and jaw, and let him lap at him like a kitten at a bowl of milk. Marco's hands gripped the three quarter length pants, Law's skin sleepily uncoiling in pleasure as the Phoenix's thumbnail ran under the waistband of his capris. His quick fingers unbuttoning them and pulling Law forward, rubbing his body up against his.

Law spread and relaxed his legs slightly. He enjoyed it even if he wanted to sleep. Marco worked quicker than usual. With a little more ownership than usual. Man, no need to be so rough on the waistband. Sometimes got competitive if he thought he had something to prove. Law arched a bit, loosened and spread wider to indicate access. He yawned into Marco's lips.

Wait. One knee hovered just above the mattress, slowing the path to broad-legged wantonness. Three-quarter length? Must be having that dream again. Where Doffy got him and Marco turned against him and Law ended up murdering their dog. Dreamscapes crept into his reality too often. Marco tugged his pants down to his knees. Law started to kick them off. But wait—didn't he wear boxers to bed? Capris?

"It's so hard, Law. I miss her so much. Couldn't save her. I let you both kill her," Marco whispered
against his chest.

Law stiffened and so did Marco in a different way. And though he was grateful for a softer surface he wasn't grateful at Marco plunging into his mouth again, like a cormorant diving after fish. He ground down against him.

"Mmphf…Marco? What?" Law pushed him away and the Whitebeard lit up a little in zoan, the strongest form there was, and made sure Law stayed put, keeping his head firmly between his hands, his talons on his legs, his lips covering Law's mouth. Law bucked up and tried to bring his own powers into a low ebb, but there was nothing.

What was around his wrists? Marco pulled away and slimed over Law's chest, his nipples, his cheeks, his mouth again, with loose lipped attention.

He squirmed away, but couldn't. Marco's hands were now on Law's chest, and the Phoenix was glad to see it rise suddenly with desire. Like the old days.

"There was only you, and you were fucking Doflamingo every chance you got."

Law's breath dragged like wind caught in a turbine. He'd got him off the floor. Collar removed, cuffs still on, and they were sleeping in their bed, the one Doffy fucked him over, the one Marco and he had shared night after night.

"No. " Law tried to pull away again and the Phoenix fire, talons, gripped him tighter. He wasn't fully transformed yet. That laugh of smug fucking proprietorship.

"You hurt me so much."

Law knew Marco wanted him to continue circling his back, inhale his hair, grunt in thanks at the slobber trailed over his skin from one end to the other. To count upon the cock hardening, hardened, against him.

Marco started working Law's junk, a little more gentle than usual. Law was turned on his back and Marco's talons pinned his legs down and widened them from where he'd brought them together when he'd roused himself from drowsiness. Shredded the fucking hand-me-down trousers, scratches along his thighs. Law hoped he didn't get a beating for that tomorrow.

"Comfort me. You know what to do." And Law's arms reached to the back of the still weeping, partly transformed, man in horror. Was he gonna prep him? Half awake, still half awake, stuck in a world of when everything was good between them.

"Only you can make me feel better."

Marco's tears weren't going to cut it as lube.

"Use your powers to get the slick." And Law even tried for a second cos going in dry just wasn't going to do anything for any of them, and would damage him even more than he already was.

"Hah. Forgot about the seastone." No sneer in the humour. Phoenix rested on his chest for a second with the lazy smile Law knew so well, and Law ran his hand in his hair as if Doflamingo was using his strings to make him comfort this prick.

What the fuck was wrong with him? It was worse, this normalcy, worse than having that fucking
feedbag of tomato leaves strapped around his head. Was he having a nightmare in a nightmare in a nightmare?

"In the bathroom. Go get it." Marco lifted his claws, and Law felt his way out of bed, tattered clothes around his legs, not tripping him up, and the collar was gone, so maybe he had enough strength.

Stepping out of the pants, the floor a little more solid than his mind, he almost made it to the door leading to the living room. Phoenix had dry humped him? He knew it was a power thing, but he stood, shrunken, cold and on display, that day's t-shirt exonerating him to break on through to the other side. He was fucking trying but Marco crushed his hand on the doorknob, bent his fingers back, and slammed his head into the wood.

Easier to do without the collar.

Law shuddered, his bed hair flying out, a trickle of blood from a graze as the Phoenix pushed him up and against the grain. Dragged his cheek across it. Liked his face pretty but marked. Law's hands pressed flat against the door because there was nowhere to move. Marco gripped him by the arm, pulled him away, standing and stumbling and punching him across their bedroom floor.

"Give an inch and you always take a fucking mile, Law." Didn't he know how pathetic he looked? Scrambling away from him. Doubled over from a kick in the gut. Trying to stay upright. At least the bruises wouldn't show against all the damn tatts. Strange to think that someone without two brain cells to rub together kept trying to rub them together, causing all manner of friction and harm.

Law lifted a hand to show he'd behave. Wiped his palm over his forehead, the skin red. His toes curled over the floor. He tried to avoid spying his naked lower half bobbing about, in and out of his vision, as he marched ahead of Marco to the bathroom. And yeah, there was his slave's nest of cozy blankets bunched up against the wall. As they passed in their uncoordinated goosestep—Law trying to just get the fuck out of his head, the house, the room, whatever situation he was in—the bowl of water upended, soaking the covers.

"You were having a bad dream, so I let you into the bed." Marco was a good owner, a good benefactor. See how patient he was?

Law stared at him, slow, wary. Had he just followed in some kind of somnambulist trance? He couldn't remember being unchained from the wall, the neck collar coming off, getting into the bed.

"Plus you've wet the blankets now, and children who can't control their bladders need special treatment," Marco sighed. Really, Law should be well and truly past potty training, but slaves had the behavioural impulses of two-year-olds. He couldn't have him bare and standing out in the cold because he was already stripped naked. And he had other plans. Never truly got cold on the island anyway.

Phoenix fired up again and, with a zoan's strength, shoved Law into the bathroom. He lurched forward and stopped his fall with hands spread on the marble counter, the cuffs letting out a metallic clang, vulnerable with his baboon arse on display. But, Marco didn't touch him.

He had spread Law's arse cheeks in here before, admiring that beckoning hole, and gripped his hair so he'd had to face the mirror to witness being owned. Pummelled into. Something so poetic about the way he moved under him, the expressions darkening his skin. The colour in his face. Not tonight though. Law had behaved himself lately, the last mishap aside. The bed was a treat. He'd not make him sleep in soaked linen tonight. They'd do it right.
"Lube. Get it."

Law picked it up off the top counter where it was kept cos it was used so fucking often, and Marco plucked it from his hand, twirled him around, back to the bed. He slapped the branded buttock in front of him, then—fingers between shoulder blades—propelled Law before him. The fucker shrugging them off.

His slave got into the bed. Rigid. Marco slipped in on the other side. Law should be grateful for the comfort. Lube in pocket, he pulled him near, needed the comfort. He hugged him with an intimacy long lost, Law on his back.

Law couldn't stand the way Marco resumed slavering the parts of his body he'd already marked. His sweet spots. The bed moved as it had when they created their own groove way back when. The spring that always knobbled just below his middle back prodded him. Much quieter than the frantic pounding of Doflamingo's cock furrowing the mattress with his body.

"Kiss me back." Marco found his lips again and Law opened them but he couldn't. Law couldn't even breathe. Misery was gone?

"C'mon, you're used to it, you know what to do, and you made me feel we could work again when you held me before." Fucking cocktease. He put a hand between Law's legs, pushing them apart and palmed his dick, but it did nothing. "You knew your place." It was progress. He only wanted what was best for Law. "It was nice. Don't tell me it wasn't."

That earnest, fucking, honest smile again in Marco's voice as he ran a thumb over the slit of his cock. Law had offered comfort. What did it mean? He'd been disoriented, thought the past had reclaimed the present. Marco's touch was like cold custard.

The Whitebeard dropped his hold. So unresponsive. It didn't mean anything. He hovered over Law again. "Kiss me back, babe." It wasn't like this was anything new. But it was. In the bed. Like they were lovers. Marco smushed into his lips again, keeping Law's hands pressed to the side. Some time, at some time it'd be over.


"As you like."

He twisted the cap from the lube, squeezed some onto his hand, prepped Law almost gently. His fingers tucking into his hips, thumbs trailing over the fine tight abdomen, moving to his arm, tracing the new tattoo for a few seconds, dropping to his butt, and then loosening him gradually.

He propped one of Law's knees up, relaxed and leant against it as his fingers probed that sweet, alluring hole. Trusting Law not to drop his leg. A first in their new relationship of owner and slave.

"Why'd you cheat on me with Doflamingo?" His voice was light, his touch just pressure enough. Law's silence maintained his guilt.

Marco sighed and slipped in another finger. He increased his effort but Law relaxed around the digits. Marco wasn't forcing anything.

Both men matched their breathing, steady, calm. Marco sweated a fraction. He slipped in a third,
scissored and explored, and Law adjusted to help stretch his body. Almost instinct.

When done, Marco extracted his fingers. Wiped them on the sheet instead of Law. Capped the lube and threw it onto the bedside table. Almost hummed. Like they were having some picnic. The weather fine, the ants absent. No wrinkles in the tablecloth. Law steadied his breath to avert hyperventilation. Marco positioned himself.

"Legs around me."

Law obeyed. If he was going to get fucked, he wanted to survive. Hated staying conscious but knew they got even more inventive when he passed out.

Marco ran fingers down his face.

"You won't kiss but you so easily let me screw you?"

His fingers found Law's lips as he pushed the captive's knees wider, and eased himself in.

"Hmm?"

Law took them so he wouldn't have to fight the alarm at yielding, at having no power—maintaining some control reduced their control—but the joy glazing Marco's face iced his stomach. What the fuck did he think Law was?

Marco pushed into his arse a little more—Law relieved he wasn't being ripped apart, but it fretsawed his psyche. He twirled his tongue around his thumb as Marco dunked it in and out of his mouth.

Marco bent down took Law's lips and Law returned the kiss this time, so blissful. Though truth be told, he also liked him just opening up like a spotty snot-ridden fly-blown scrap of land, letting him mine all resources. But he missed him, he missed him so much. Their quiet evenings of shared space and snuggling under covers.

Inhaling Law's air and the soft shift of the sheets underneath them, the dip of the pillow under Law's head as he welcomed Marco's weight—the Phoenix loved it all. Was he humming, as his kissed him? Hadn't heard that for some time. Those noises, the clicks Law made at the back of his throat. Growls like catching nails cut to the quick on a new surface.

Marco pulled away, wiping the back of his wrist over the corner of his lips. He sat up and placed a palm on Law's fast beating heart. "Scared, baby?" And those strafed eyes told him yeah. Scared and nettled. An exotic slave was better than any other. That gold.

A bit of blood from the door and the basin decorated Law's face. "Don't be." He played with his ears, his hair. "I know best." How many times had he heard his own father use the same words with his mother? "I know what's good for us." Except his mother was a saint, his father a bastard, and Law was a whore. "I always have."

He nudged further into Law's canal. Lifted Law's arm from his face where he'd placed it across his eyes like the melodramatic queen he was. "Playing virgin?" There was nothing further from the truth.

He pushed in a bit further. "Zoro."
More. "Shanks."

That sure wasn't bliss crossing Law's face, but the fucker was so insolently quiet it was hard to know what he felt. And Marco was so tolerant.

"Benn."

Again.

"Robin."

Law's intake of breath, tenseness, told him he should wait a while. He would. Livestock treated well lasted longer. Even if Law must be used to it by now.

How many women had he screwed? He always claimed he had no interest. Did he and Robin do it doggy style or plain old missionary? Or got inventive? When Law's thousand-yard-stare seemed to be his only expression he pushed in again.

"Kid."

Pain streaked across Law's eyes. None of them had believed Kid when he'd said Law had thrown himself at him, when Zoro had found a seastone-cuffed Law, like now, being fucked in an alleyway. Marco had spent a great deal of time with Law sorting through the fallout from that one.

And what fallout? Law had just been a two-timing bitch, seeking out everyone's cock but Marco's own. An adulterer and Marco the fool. What had Doflamingo said? Ever the cuckold. About right. Law was lucky he didn't invite all the Whitebeard troops to participate, but he'd opened his legs so willingly before, it'd hardly be a hardship.

He pushed the blue-black spikes back from his forehead and rested his own against it, loving the familiarity of Law's heels against his lower back, staring into those eyes he couldn't quite read any more, but could he ever?, and he backed part way out and in, and felt Law will himself to relax. Must want it. Out and in. Easy. He glided over Law's nerve endings. Out then in.

Law felt he was chewing on ground glass.

A gentle rocking motion, the kind Marco knew Law liked best, and it brought Marco a quiet peace to join with his chore boy the way they used to. True, he said nothing, when there was usually some quip or laugh or a nip at his face, and hands playing with his hair.

However, as inanimate as Law was, he was still a very accommodating and attractive hole. It didn't matter what he wanted. He'd lost the right to choose. What his master wanted he had the duty to provide, to also like. A good master knew what was best for his chattel.

Law still hadn't learnt though. What was with the look of unending shock? Whatever. Law's appreciation was usually silent.

Marco punched his face as he closed his eyes, would like to have been more gentle, but it was difficult while fucking him to control the angle and force. The yell of pleasure. Law was soft for pain. Breath thickening. Good. He should get into it. Be enthusiastic.

Marco rearranged Law's legs, folded them back, the slut hooking them behind him again. Marco's belly folded over Law's hamstrings and buttocks, and his arms and flattened palms supported him on the mattress as he thrust. Law's hands rose to meet his face.
Marco slid his upper body along the slick flesh below, in and out of his canal, Law's feet parted and resettled as Marco moved. His thighs were completely pushed into his abdomen, his knees almost clipping his chin. Marco. Marco pushed down on him, the First Division Commander. Folded Law into himself, rearranged him for his own use and mileage.

Zoro, Shanks, Benn, Robin, Kid. Zoro, Shanks, Benn, Robin, Kid. Zoro.

Law's hands dropped and his legs slid off Marco's back as the Phoenix fucked him harder—he'd been watching Doffy. That guy showed no mercy, and Law ate it up. His puffy hole stretching wide for that ginormous cock. One inked hand now hooked behind his head on the pillow, and the other supported his fucked and bruised tailbone. The band got in the way, but the elevation helped entry nicely. He'd have a sore wrist.

"Whose cock was best, Law? Kizaru? Akainu? Aokiji? Garp? Did you let even that old man fuck you?"

Law spat a bitter chunk of air to the side.

"Oh? Not good in bed?" Marco pressed into his forearms and made sure Law knew what it felt like to be on the end of a man in the prime of his life, balls smacking against his skin. Sure, Garp the Hero crashed through walls, but Marco bet he had no staying power. Law's grip and legs were loosening, swimming across the sheets.

"You know what Marineford did to that man, so yeah, he'd lost some power," Law snarled, voice vibrating, weakening its pitch. The sheet and cloth under him rubbed against his face.

Marco slowed a touch and draped himself over Law's body again, urging him to lift his knees and press them back, and place his legs around him again. Was the fucker joking? Could never tell with Law. But basically shove a dick in his face and he was conditioned to take it. Marco had to keep that in mind.

He kissed his slave's peeled, chapped, lips thoroughly, continually. Euphoric. If Law wanted to breathe, he had to peck and bite to try and loosen his hold. He didn't let Law shave as often as he used to. The bristles added a touch of astringency, a buzz of acerbic, to the mix. He'd be a dangerous man out of seastone.

"I only ever loved one." He held Law's throat. "Pathetic that you thought you could replace him, that your friends thought I wanted you as much. That I could forgive Sengoku."

Law shook his head a little. Marco was so close. Breathe. Maybe he could take him away from this shit by asphyxiation. He pressed against the Phoenix's thumb, but he released it. "I wasn't replacement." His words were constricted. "I knew that. We did." Why try to explain himself? Seeking approval? For what?

"Shh, now." Law met him, so good. He was so good at this, clenching the cock in his arse as Marco rammed it. "I knew a taste of Doflamingo's concubine would help relieve the pain. Ace would've wanted that. Had to use kinder words, though. You were a pretty and talented screw, but I never could've loved you." The statement was swallowed, actions more effective than words.

Buzzing, shouting, screaming—sucking in all the white noise. Law considered them all. Familiar. The pit was so familiar.

"You were so wounded."

Wounded and impaled at the moment. Law's backbone ached, his butt bright red. He'd been forced
to watch enough videos of his captivities to know.

"And your lips were so skilful around my cock, you helped me forget. Who wouldn't want that at all times? Such a cheap fucking screw. Pander to your trauma and you open your legs right up."

Marco felt his buildup. Surely Law could feel him distend inside him. And on top of that, Law's smell. Marco isolated stress, shock, worry—outrage?, resignation?, desire?—lifting from Law like steam from the pavement. "So, why did I stop when Ace fell asleep in the middle of sex, but with you I took what was offered when you came out of those nightmares waggling your arse in the air?" The thought made the nerve-endings of his cock, snuggly encased in Law, sing as he rubbed along his passage.

Marco's sweat dotted fraught muscles and inked skin, and he helped himself to a mouthful of lip again. Law articulated. Some panic attack kind of thing. The staggered breath was a summons to blanket his mouth. How long before Law lost sight? He pulled away, but grasped his throat again, fingers pressing in at the side. Law fidgeted under him. Not just from propulsion. His arms....

"No, no, no. Don't stiffen up now." He dropped his arm on Law's neck and grabbed his cock. Probably needed to get off. "I respected Ace because he wasn't fucked in the head. Wasn't Doflamingo's legs-over-easy rent boy. You truly believe I could love a diseased hooker?" A leper? Marco was almost ready, but this fucker still wasn't responding. Whatever.

"Why d'you think Luffy dropped you so fast the minute something better came along? What made you think I cared about sloppy seconds? The world's leftovers? To fuck, yes, but regard? Properly love?"

Don't make him laugh. He sped up. Law's schooled face meant that Marco was swimming right under his skin and Marco wanted to add his healthy sperm to the mix of every decaying thing that lay just beneath, beneath him, right now. Something rotten in the state of Trafalgar.

Everybody wanted to be loved for themselves, and when you were a whore, well wasn't that what Marco was doing? Had done? Despite Law's attempts at playing house.

Keeping momentum, he angled himself on top of Law, pushing his legs further into his chest. "D'ya like my cock, huh? As good as all the others?" Better'n Garp?" His strength kept Law pinned there. Little flanks quivering, hole greased with lube and Marco's pre-cum.

Doflamingo had shown Marco how to tie this wild creature like a brisket and, with his mariner's skills, he had a few knots he'd like to try. Next time perhaps. But he liked Law to touch him. That was always the best part of sex. Though his hands were just flat on the sheets now. He'd beat the shit out of him if he started that grounding thing with his fingers again. Didn't he know how bad that made him feel?

"And it never stopped, Law. I just got better at hiding it. I never stopped fucking you when those dreams gripped your world, despite our plays at counselling. Despite your earnest reassessment of whether you should have stayed or gone. As if I cared. Cared about dipping my wick, but as if I cared about you."

Ah, that was definitely a groan, a moan. Law loved being used. Begged for it. Marco jerked to climax, his cock so at home in the warmth and welcome of the fucker's rear, and he pumped his load deep within, filling Law. Paroxysms of fuckthatwasgood shooting through him.

That tick along Law's cheekbone let him know the slave felt it. He pulled out before he finished.
Had to mark his possessions. Either with Whitebeard or his own likeness. Doffy's brand was still there, but it was the seed of the son of Newgate that coated Law's stomach. He took it. He laid back there and took it, Marco having pushed his feet to the mattress.

Marco sat back, regarded his work with a craftsman eye. Fucking gorgeous.

Law couldn't stop the rise and fall of that rib cage, muscles, just how loud his breath was. Stunning. He could glower at him all he wanted, but Marco knew it just masked desire. Was a sign of contentment in its own perverted way.

"Of course you should've left. The fact you stayed shows how attuned you are to life as a pet, pet."

Just over the abs and chest. He'd have to touch it later, and he wanted to keep Law's face clean for now. Huh? What was that appalled expression? Priceless. Did Law think he wasn't hanging out with pirates all these years? The Heart crew were some sweet strange brand of naive. He traced an 'M' in the white.

"No, no, don't move away." Law always trying to get out from under him, twisting up the bed. Marco's knees kept him in place.

"I got wise, of course. I didn't ram you up the arse after that one time, but you'd do anything asked of you, and man do you give good head when you're forced to, even when you're in a dream state, specially cos you think it's Doffy or Vergo's balls you're lapping up, and you're a cockslut for either one of them."

They both knew the nightmares crossed the full range of Law's sexually active life, which was most of it. His consensually sexually active life a smaller proportion. If, and it was a big if, if you held that slaves were sentient beings with the ability to make decisions for themselves.

Marco sat back from Law. Shaking? Wasn't he used to this shit? His role was to take it, to like it, he fucking well should. But Marco was a gentle master, though no pushover. He sat with crossed legs, lifting Law's thighs behind him so he could lean over and play with his hair.

"You initiated it, you know? Coming out of those dreams. You wouldn't know the number of times I woke to find your mouth wetting the cloth of my jocks. I was just helping out, Law. You had a need. I filled it. Especially after Kid."

What was the tremble from? The fucking or the reveal? Ah, silly boy. He smiled down at him. Couldn't get enough of those lips tonight. So nice to have him in the bed. Law's hands clawing at him. Easy to push them down.

Marco came up for air. "You were so disoriented, the nightmares so frequent. Really, I could've rutted you a thousand times over and you would've thanked me for it. But, I usually just let you suck me off. Except that one time. Did us both a favour, I think."

Because Law didn't release, so there were no tell-tale signs in his clothes or on the sheets. Fucking him meant bruising, so Marco learnt pretty quickly not to go that route too often. Especially when Law found out one time and left him for six months.

"Every time?"

Marco was surprised to hear Law's voice. Low. He'd had to drag himself across coals to ask that one.

"Folk hook up with someone so sex is on tap, right? That's what spouses are for. It's why everyone
wants a wife."

He'd pushed that ridiculous shirt up Law's body when he'd suckled his nipples, and Law pulled it
down over his cum-stained belly now. He hit the edge of a cuff over and over against the railing to
the side of the bed, the one Marco would secure him to soon, staring at the action, ignoring his
master.

What was he trying to do? Marco knew that gesture was meant for him, but he'd be overpowered in
two seconds, and then what would happen? He couldn't answer Law over that racket. Couldn't hear
himself think.

One had to secure a slave, that's just the way it was. He clicked the cuff Law wanted to destroy, or
maybe the arm he wanted to break—he could easily screw him with a fracture, useless gesture—
and ordered him to stop, roll onto his side, and face the wall.

He pulled his own pants on so the cum wouldn't stick against his legs, but Law was in the wet spot.
He lay down and pulled his lover to him again, spooned him and breathed into his shoulder. So
still. So unnaturally still. Except for that lurching breath, and the profanity slipping out like a
prayer. Unconsciously, Marco thought. He'd let it slide for now.

He brushed Law's, hair back, kissed into his neck. So nice to have the collar off. "If you'd just
given it up when asked, like Ace was always happy too, like you wanted to, I never would've had
to use extreme measures. Never had to entertain ways to discipline you. If only you'd been a good
boy."

Law's hair was clean. Marco hadn't messed it up with any emissions. He breathed it in.

"When you blew me, you were so good. I did love you in my own way." Especially then. "You
always swallowed."

Law pulled his free hand to the arms wrapped around him and tried to remove them, but Marco just
dug in deeper. Separated the cunt's sticky thighs with his clothed leg, and rested his knee between
them.

"Even if someone came to get you right now, you know they'd pull over on the journey from A to
B, pull over somewhere and take you, because you put out so beautifully, Law, and there's hardly a
pirate or marine out there who doesn't dream about having your legs thrown over their shoulders,
fucking your hole or mouth. The only reason they haven't beaten a path to your door to sample the
goods has been my protection."

And you still have it, babe. Be grateful.

"You know I'm right" Marco's palm circled Law's stomach. Sure, his cum was underneath, but that
just linked them. "Think how quick Croc was to bend you over that table after the trial. All those
eyes on you, Law. The guards. Bet they went home and fucked their wives just right, thinking of
their cocks inside of you. That they still jerk-off with you in mind."

Law took Marco's hand. Shut up. Shut up. Just shut the fuck up. Held it as if he loved it, as if he
needed it, as if every vile word made perfect sense. As if Marco writhing in him like a cluster of
maggots had been acceptable. As if he could melt the bones in it by holding it. He concentrated on
remembering the techniques for gamma knife. Marco squeezed back.

"Night, Law. Sleep well." He'd known he'd come around. Marco dropped into a content sleep
almost as soon as he shut his eyes. Law drifted off too, terrified of where his dreams would take
him, but not knowing the next time he'd have a mattress beneath him. Marco's arm wrapped him like a band of steel, constricting all air and movement.

Chapter End Notes

This was at about 7,300 words. I'll post the follow up in the next few days. I decided to break it into two chapters, so this is about 5000+ now. Looks like dark 13 will have 4 parts.

Marco's pretty chatty in this one.

I know folks have lives, so I do appreciate people taking time out to read. Remember that this is a flashback, so Law's not in this situation any more, but damn! Who wrote this this? Poor bab.

If anyone needs any context for Marco's references, it's the basis of Teaspoon Collectors, albeit dealt with from a healthier perspective (perhaps). It's also summarised in the three-chapter Birds of a Feather.

Thanks for reading.
Dark Marco 13d (past)

Chapter Summary

Law and Marco spend some time in the garden.

Chapter Notes


See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Dark Marco 13d

They enjoyed the sun the next day. Vitamin D was good, and a pasty Law was not easy on the eye. Law had washed himself down and Marco had picked him out something muted today. He knew Law was blue, down, a little sad—he’d certainly had a wake-up call—and he’d been so good for him the night before. He let him have a bit of understated class as a bonus. The ankle-freezers remained though. They made him look all piratey, as he should. Marco’s brass with class.

He sent him to work on the herb garden which just happened to be near the tomato vines and bushes. Marco enjoyed his book and the rays while Law pottered about. It was tough reading without the arm to his glasses though. How did it get so loose that he’d lost it?

Was it his slave? Could the arm be refashioned to a pick? Trying to get out of the cuffs? Law actually had to tamp down the bile, Marco could see that, when he’d refastened the collar that morning. The seastone seared Law like barbed wire ripped through guts. Marco got it. Sometimes he accidentally brushed the unprotected part of the cuffs or collar and it laid him low in and for an instant. But Law got used to it quickly. It didn’t really hamper any of his duties. Kept him weak enough to fulfil them.

A few of the shards of the tea ceremony set that had been in Marco’s family from one generation to the next were missing too. They’d been on display. Maybe knocked to the floor by the vacuum cleaner. Law could search under the cabinet later. Anything to let Marco ogle that inviting arse, to put the fear into Law that housework covered a multitude of situational sins.

He was quiet in the garden now though. Usually the spade breaking soil, or secateurs clipping branches, interrupted the day, but nothing. Marco sat up from the lawn chair and walked to that part of the yard.

Law better not be trying anything stupid like escape. Marco sped up. But no, there he was, on his knees, heels under his buttocks, like some penitent, staring at the tomato bush. Hand grimy with dirt, as were the soles of his feet.
Marco understood that, a need to atone. A familiar tweak hit his solar plexus. Law's PTSD always ambushed the Phoenix's pity nerve at the most inopportune times. The aroma of the tomato plant, its leaves, could bring the Heart captain out of it though. At least it was fail-safe in the past.

Marco sat behind and to the side of Law, flop-limbed, and pulled him near. He was surprisingly pliant. Maybe he'd have to trigger him more often.

"Lie down now," and he straightened his legs and beckoned Law to rest his head on his lap. Law tugged at the collar impatiently. Yeah, that wouldn't work. Marco nodded. He'd noticed last night when they'd made love how relieved Law had been to have the yoke removed, and how stiff he was around the neck and shoulders. He'd been so good. That nasty mark left from Croc. He'd have to remember to look at it.

"It calms you, doesn't it, babe?"

Marco leant past Law and snapped off a few leaves. He put them on his own tongue and bit, once or twice, for flavour and to coat them. He ran his fingers over Law's ears. So weird to feel the flesh after all these years without the piercings, but nice to know that he could claim all of Law. Nothing was in the way of tactile pleasure. Except that collar.

"They'll soothe you," he spoke around the leaves. "Open up."

Law twisted back, looking scared for whatever reason. It couldn't have been nice for Doffy to slam his head into the table while he'd taken him the last time, or even Crocodile pressing that hook into his neck while he rammed his peachy arse after the court case.

Law deserved it, there was no doubt about it, but Marco understood that he'd been through a lot. The news about Ace. They really shouldn't push him too far. He'd been good. They had to give him the occasional reward.

Marco drew close and reclined Law's head, hand clasped behind the back of his skull so he could avoid the collar. He stuck out his tongue, and Law did the same, meeting him. Nice fresh breath. He'd had teeth-brushing privileges this morning.

Marco transferred the leaf to Law's mouth and was so proud that his slave's tongue curled and took it gladly, properly. Law had almost put a hand up to his face before dropping it. No point in being too forward.

Marco withdrew and smiled at those nervous gold-grey eyes as Law chewed. He pulled him up so he was more adjacent than flush—again, this was the best way with the collar. He tipped his hand once more under his jaw, and turned his face to him. He tenderly placed his mouth against the closed lips with a series of butterfly kisses. Law didn't draw away. Continued chewing. Just staring at him. Gauging. A bruise across his temple from the door last night.

Marco sat back with a tranquil sigh. He brushed his hands through Law's hair, and wished his slave could rest his head on his shoulder. How he missed that kind of affection. He took Law's hand. They often sat in the back yard, side by side, and a casual touch, a thumb run across the base of the back of the hand, was all Law needed to know Marco was there. Well, he was still here.

"Tchh."

Law squeezed back. That was better. Hadn't he sought this last night?

He wouldn't fuck him right now. Marco wasn't in the mood. But he wanted to do something nice. He turned him to face the plant again and stood up and sat behind him, knees either side of his
hips. He wanted to massage the tension away, but Law stiffened, then relaxed as Marco whispered in his ear that he was to do so. He kneaded what he could of Law's neck and shoulders to grant him relief

He was rewarded with a few shivers and even an exhalation of appreciation. It felt good to have Law under his fingers again. He was still basically on his knees. Must have pins and needles.

"Sit back." He got right into that muscle at the side of Law's neck that always hardened as he read his research articles, or after a difficult surgery. "Unfold. Kick your legs out." Law did. Marco had to place a few kisses. He couldn't resist. Lips lingering on Doffy's cigarette burns.

Law's hand rested on the grass, pulling at a few blades. Marco was pleased to hear how regulated his breathing was. Was he hiding the other hand? It sat on his lap under his shirt.

He pushed down a little too hard, and Law tilted his head away slightly, and Marco looked around for the secateurs. The trowel, there, stuck into the soil. The gardening gloves lying on the grass. The secateurs, closed up, but the tips of the blades were red.

He wouldn't try that. He'd bleed out before he even got the cuffs off. Marco let go of Law's neck and stood over him, and grabbed the hidden arm. These hands and arms they'd healed over the years.

"You're a fucking doctor. What're you doing with a horizontal slice like some angsty teenager?" Such an attention whore.

Law's arm, the underside—he'd kept it pressed to his body—was covered with blood. Marco yanked him up, and he tripped. Seastone weak. Beating weak. Blood-loss weak, though it looked a lot more than it was. Those kinds of wounds always did.

"You think I'm going to release you to let you heal and somehow you'll create a Room and regain your strength and be out of here?"

Law's eyes. The hate in them now. The compliance all a fucking act. He wiped. He deliberately wiped that arm on Marco's front. Marco gripped it.

"I'm a zoan, remember? You're in seastone, shithead. You can't win."

It was so stupid. All Marco needed to do was keep one cuff on and he could isolate the area and generally fix it. If Law thought it got him out of his chores he was mistaken. Pocket money and privileges had to be earned.

He studied the wound. What a hack job. "And you got dirt in it. You been playing in the sandpit like a five year old?"

Marco was more than exasperated. Try being nice to someone and see the fucking shit they got up to? He was tired of being taken advantage of. He picked up Law's supplies, and shoved him inside—Law's head pushed way down from the neck as they stormed to the house. He had a right mind to fuck him in the genkan before they stepped a foot in the house.

Law lifted his neck and shoulders from Marco's hold. Who the fuck and where did he think he was? The Whitebeard dropped the tools, transformed, flew above him, and slammed that neck right down with one talon, used the other leg to force Law forward. Bowed.

Move forward bowed, Law. Prostrate yourself with the weight of the collar. Should make him fucking crawl. What made him think Marco would let him stand upright? After betrayal? He
couldn't win. He just couldn't.

Once inside, Marco threw Law on the bed, and loosened one fetter, while fastening the other to the railing. Hadn't bothered washing his feet down, so he'd get Law to clean the sheets later. After he'd treated the shit's attempt at what, trying to black himself out? Had he lost so much reality that he thought that nick could kill him?

Law bled on the sheets too. Lay on his back, knees raised, head elevated of course. Marco'd get the most tawdry shirt he possessed once he'd treated him. To think he'd given him some choice this morning. If Law wanted to play the clown, he'd make sure he looked the part. Stick a 'fuck me' sign on his back, and parade him on a leash through the roughest ports in town.

He washed, disinfected, applied his flame of restoration—he could when he wanted to, and he wasn't going to give Law this. What would he have to do? Provide him with a plastic spork to do the gardening? Then as the skin healed over itself—yeah, real amateur. If Law had gone to town on himself with his knowledge, there's no way the flame would be enough—he bandaged it.

But if Law thought he could escape his responsibilities, he was wrong. Benn and Shanks were coming tomorrow, and Marco wanted the house shipshape. He could get onto it soon. After he'd paid for making a fool out of him. After all, here he was lying in his master's bed all cut and hurt and chained. The best things about belts, Marco thought as he unbuckled his, was how versatile they were. Tools of practicality and discipline, and Law wore welts so well.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, that's it for the dark aspect of chapter 13 (a, b, c, d). Give me a couple of weeks to get the light-counterbalance up and running. It's in the works. Thanks for reading.
"I brought you something."

"Brought or bought?" In the kitchen of one of the safehouses, Law—resting on his elbows—leant back against the counter, waiting for Jean Bart. The two Hearts would set up outside while Marco and Aladine went for beer. Marco was waiting for the merman.

"Brought. Though I had to talk to Nami."

"Hah. So bought, too."

Marco lifted his eyebrows in agreement. A huge steel pot sat on the stove, contents at a low boil, a sweet aroma filling the room. Sanji wasn't present.

"Spill."

Marco did, urging Law to stand up and hold out his hand. He touched the silver band on his wrist for a moment, and put aside the bite of worry at Law wearing it again. He poured his gift into his partner's palm.

Law's eyes lit up. Heavenly. Dried tomato leaves. He brought his cupped hand to his nose, inhaled.

"There's mikan peel in there?" He dropped his hand and sifted through the mixture with his pinky. Separated the dried rind. Breathed in once more.

Marco nodded. Was he a good partner or what?

"Grafted from the trees on the Sunny?" Law looked up and over his hand at Marco.

Marco nodded again.

"Must've cost an arm and leg." Graft in more ways than one when Nami was involved. Trickle-down economics at her exploitative best.
"Especially when she heard it was for you."

Law laughed. A few cloves were mixed in, and grains of rice to give it weight and to stop the scent from overpowering everything. Cinnamon, basil and—"What do you know about thyme?"

"Sanji helped me." What the fuck was Thyme?

Marco held out a tiny black square, stitched on three sides, the Heart's Jolly Roger stamped in gold in the middle.

Law stood much straighter.

"Don't look so surprised."

Law checked the stitching, turning the cloth in his free hand. "You did this?"

Marco put his palm over the mixture, over Law's hand, and placed his other palm against the side of his partner's face, pressing their foreheads together lightly. "Robin did. Bepo gave me the material."

"Did he charge much?"

"They might both be navigators, but Bepo's not a capitalist at heart."

"Except when it comes to honey," Law said, enjoying the texture of the symbol on the pouch, and the Phoenix's breath so close to his own. "And sea-mammals."

He relaxed under Marco's touch. Marco kissed his brow, stepped away. Law contained the urge to wipe the smooch. Really. He loved it. Just habit. It wasn't like Bepo slobbering all over him when he got too enthusiastic.

"It's good."

Marco picked the small square out of Law's fingers and held the opening wide, indicated that the mixture should be poured into it. Law did.

"Use your power to seal it." Marco held the sachet, pinching either edge. The last thing he needed was for the contents to spill over the floor.

"Don't need my power," Law said. Except to get the needle and thread he'd seen Hack use at times to mend a few tears in clothes received at the safehouse, and a few pins. They landed neatly on the counter. Law tacked the material, threaded the needle quickly, tying a knot, and sewed the pouch with a blind stitch, returning the implements once done, breaking off the final thread with a twist of his hands.

"Awesome." Marco jumped up onto the counter, kicking his legs, wondering where their cohorts were and if he should stir Sanji's creation. Then again, it was always best not to mess with the cook's food unless he asked. He examined Law's work. "Better than Robin."

Law brought the pouch to his face. Easier to handle than the loose dried spices, leaves and grains.

"But she's faster," the Whitebeard added.

"No fair," Law said. "She uses more than one set of hands."

Marco's Adam's apple bobbed, his laugh caught in his throat. "Yeah. I don't think she even got out
of her chair to fetch the sewing basket."

Law stood in front of Marco, parted his legs, and stepped between them. Forearms and hands on the island, parallel with Marco's thighs and glutes. He held the blend lightly.

"Fits in your palm."

"It does. Thank you, Phoenix." Law looked up at him and Marco loosely draped his hands at the back of Law's neck, pecked his temple. Law inclined his face and Marco grazed his lips across Law's, stroked his nape.

"I know you don't like people being nice to you." He slid off the counter, Law stepped back, and leant into him when his feet touched the ground. Their few minutes of being together alone in the busy house, these busy times.

"True. I don't. Killed the last man who tried." Law brushed Marco's lips this time.

Marco lifted the hand that Law had wrapped around the scents that soothed him most, and bit at the soft flesh below his thumb.

"Don't like them being shits either." Law ran his other thumb across the bone under Marco's eye. "But at least I know where I stand. They're not hiding anything." Their murderous intent was clear.

Marco drew Law closer, slipping a hand between the buttons of his shirt, enjoyed the beat of his blood and muscle pulsing against skin. Goddamnit. Doflamingo interrupting what they had, and Marco still not really sure if Law was with him or not. He was there. Yes. And wasn't going anywhere, but the silver band was a comfort-reassurance measure, and Law did whatever it took to ground himself, and that was okay.

oOOo

In the early days of the broken-down Whitebeards and the Hearts intermittently sailing with Shanks, Lucky Roo had given Law a choice selection of meat. The drumstick. Had fought the others for it and deposited it on Law's lap. On a plate.

Law had been reading. Away from the rowdy bunch digging into the feast that passed for the nightly meal on the ship. Roo thought Law too skinny, and then he commented on how much his earrings suited him. But really, he'd just wanted to thank him for being a doc and all and helping out after battle.

The doc knew the crew by that stage and was usually easygoing, but a chill blew in, and Roo stalked away. Sat back at the table with a clatter, grousing about stuck up North Blue bitches, man. The red-haired pirates laughed and patted Roo on the back, but Law, plate of untouched chicken beside him, just turned the page of his book.

Marco, peering across from where he perched on the railing, noticed Law held Kikoku tight, always returning his grip after each page turn; his face dark, and the look that sailed past him into the ocean when he glanced up was a shitload of annoyance. He'd received that look before. Law not really knowing what he felt, or what Roo had done wrong, or what he'd done wrong.

He flew down and crouched nearby.

"People starving out there." He nodded toward the drumstick. Law stuck out a finger, peeled off a bit of chicken, and chewed on it as if it was sawdust. Continued to outstare the ocean.
"What was that all about?"

Law lifted a shoulder. He wasn't sure. "Fuck people being nice."

"No wonder you've got no friends."

"Yeah." He'd always been a surly prick.

Marco stood up and sat on the bench beside him.

"Pass it over."

Law guessed the ocean would eventually win. He glared at the plate beside him, lifted it and gave it to Marco. The Whitebeard rested it on his lap, picked up the drumstick whole, bit down into the flesh.

Yassop's eagle eyes zeroed in. "That's for lover-boy, y'cunt."

Law shot them the bird, not looking their way. Marco had his mouth and hands full. Jeers and catcalls racketed to the flooring like hailstones.

"You hate it, don't you?" Mouth full didn't mean he couldn't talk. Izou wasn't looming over his shoulder making sure he minded his manners.

Law nodded. You wouldn't know it from his calm expression, rosebud smile, gaze not taking in the endless ocean it resettled on. Thumb splayed on the book's page to keep his place.

"They don't mean any harm."

Law nodded again. It would blow over. This feeling.

"After Flevance, who was the first adult who was kind to you, interested in you?"

Law dragged Kikoku across the surface, a little closer. "Not Cora. He beat up on me every chance he got."

Marco tore off another strip of meat. "It's good," he said, "You sure you don't want some?"

Law smiled properly now, briefly. There was the difference between being with Luffy and Marco.

"I'm fine." Law had switched his attention from the sea to his sword.

Marco waited.

"Doflamingo, of course, and some of the adults were kind to me, or at least not hateful, because they followed his lead."

Marco placed the empty plate, stripped bones on top, to the side. The thud of crockery against wood was swallowed by a seagull's wheedling cry.

"Even in training, even if they ridiculed me, they helped me improve."

"Before slavery?"

"Before these, yeah." Law circled the old scars around his wrists. Looked down at his hands then back at the seas. "He gave me books. So many. To help me become a doctor. Let me keep my hat."
"How'd it feel?"

Law thought back. So much had happened since. But how did it feel? Wonderful. A hint of wonderful? A place to belong. A place for him in the world before he shuffled off. Sometimes there was even a touch of hope that he wouldn't die. Doflamingo had said there might be a cure.

Law trusted him. He'd looked up to him. Doflamingo had stood up for him. After Flevance he doubted any adult, or at least ones wearing uniforms. But Doflamingo had corrected Jora when she screeched about the amber lead. He didn't even flinch when Law talked about the bodies.

"I mean, you got tortured for a digression, and Cora should've ratted me out for slicing him up, but I felt safe."

That was saying something, Marco knew, after Flevance.

"Then you were captured after you ran away. After Corazon abducted you."

Law nodded. Closed his book. "Turned into a slave, and I heard him, even before that. Before he shot Cora-san, he said he'd train me up to die for him because I'd eaten the ope ope no mi. Everything was fucked after I got caught, but the lead-up was a different story."

Marco's legged tapped against Law's own, waving to the right then back like seaweed in the current.

"Any kindness—"

"Leads to hell. Yeah." Even the kindness that was well-intentioned. He chose his friends, which company he kept, nowadays but sometimes everything you believed proved to be false. Again. He let out a loud breath.

"You've kept all the tea-towels Bepo's given you?"

Law looked at Marco now. For the first time since he'd passed over the plate of chicken. The Phoenix didn't know if the lightness in his expression—sun gleaned off snow—was at the thought of Bepo or those garish bits of cloth.

"I've known him forever."

His voice was freer.

"And they're on your own terms."

Law laughed now, his head against the wall behind him. He relaxed, showed his teeth. The red-hairs in their corner continued to drink and yell and shout and insult, but they too sat more easily in their seats.

Most were stronger than Law, but ever since he'd accidentally lopped off Shanks' other arm (later reattached) they were aware that even a yonkou could get caught up in the Heart captain's power. Who knew what got his knickers in a knot, but it was better knowing they wouldn't lose a limb that day.

"Tea-towels are the way to my trashy heart. Bepo understands"

Marco stood. "Good to know." Law really did like those lurid bits of kitsch. "I'll just inform Shanks' men that you're a homicidal hobby-text grandma, and not some sex god, and all will be
right?"

Law peered right at him from under the cap, a grin, laughter lines tight. "I'm a sexy homicidal hobby-text grandma for the right person."

Only Law could manage to make the gerontological sound appealing. Marco wondered what they could get up to with walking frames. "That you are, yoi," and Marco pulled Law's cap down a smidge, then crossed the ship floor to return the plate.

Roo gestured for him to sit at their table, waving his beefy arm above the surface, Benn and Shanks in conversation at the top end. Marco looked back across the ship. Law and Kikoku were gone.

"That was my best drumstick, Phoenix."

"Thank you. Delicious." Marco, returning his attention to Roo, patted his belly.

"Just wanted to show my appreciation. He helped me out the other day."

That's right. Had saved Roo's life mid-battle (he'd choked on a turkey bone).

"Why'd he get all snot-nosed with me? Not good enough for him? Does he think he's Boa Hancock or something?"

"Not good at taking gifts. He'll come 'round."

"His loss?" Roo looked at the empty plate.

"For sure," Marco said. "But maybe leave comments about his looks aside."

Roo doubled down on his scrutiny of Marco. The Whitebeard and Law were the new thing on the ship.

"Jealous?"

Marco tapped out a toothpick from the container on the table, brought it to his mouth, cupped his hand over it. "Nah." Law was good. The newfound hobby collecting the commemorative dishcloths of the pirate world, and listening to him, little bit by bit—all was good.

Marco was still recovering from Ace and Whitebeard. They all were. Law was perhaps permanently shell-shocked from the assaults and abuse he'd undergone from Doflamingo after Dressrosa, and then the marines. There was no place for jealousy.

"He's vain?"

Marco shook his head. Chewed on the toothpick. It wasn't that Law was ignorant of his looks. Just that they'd brought him attention he didn't want. Plus, Flevance had people buzzing about his appearance for all the wrong reasons. Compliments were like eating an unwrapped sweet dropped into the dirt, because it was there, it was all you had, and maybe you had no choice. Law was meant to enjoy it, and he tried his hardest, but as grit cracked against his teeth, and sugar mingled with saliva, the elements got muddled.

"Has trouble differentiating," Shanks chimed in from across the table, and Roo accepted the comment from his boss, pushing some more meat Marco's way. Roo had been with the crew the few times they'd done business in Dressrosa, but hadn't been in the castle. Hadn't seen the haunted
teenaged boy that Shanks had. Bruised, resentful, unnaturally quiet.

Marco thanked Roo for the meat, stood and walked with it toward the infirmary. Maybe Law had regained his appetite.

"You don't get too scared of big ugly fellas."

Law and Jean Bart sat in the yard. Things were running smoothly. Jean Bart oversaw this safehouse, or the getting in of the staff, and worked in conjunction with the Strawhats and the Revolutionaries. Anyone who was down with the cause. He'd sail with the Hearts if they set out to sea. Same went for the Strawhats and key Revolutionaries and their respective crews. The Sun Pirates too.

Law sealed a rollie paper, swiping it over his tongue one way and then the other. He secured the contents, pushing down with a twig from the garden, held a flame and let the joint smoulder. He lifted the toke to his lips. "Nah, I don't." Inhaled.

He admired the massive Moreton Bay Fig tree. He loved their visible roots folded like the pleats of a fan. It was too cold for them in the North Blue and they were too big for the greenhouses in the botanical gardens, but he'd read about them and always imagined slipping in between them like a rabbit tumbling into the underworld.

"You didn't freak out when you approached me on Sabaody," Jean Bart said, elbows on his knees, fists under his chin.

Law's arm dangled behind his chair frame. They'd dragged a few seats out from the kitchen. Jean Bart took up all of the bench seat.

"It didn't seem to me that the monsters were in chains."

"Huh." Jean Bart refused the joint—he'd crush it just by holding it—and so Law settled back into his chair, lifted it to his mouth again. "Couldn't get a girl to look twice at me in my homeland."

Law exhaled, and looked over the fierce face and high inked forehead, at the scar running diagonally from the base of one hooked tattoo to just above Jean Bart's eye. He had to crane his neck. He was about double Bepo's size, and Law didn't come up to Bepo's shoulder.

"A great strapping lad like you?"

Jean Bart hunkered down and spied Sanji exiting the back of the house.

"Unbelievable, right?"

"I wasn't always a Greek Adonis either," Law smiled, drew in his feet as Blackleg passed.

Sanji placed a large cup of amazake in Jean Bart's hands. The cook wondered if he was a giant. A bit on the small side. He didn't drink much booze, but enjoyed the sweet, very low alcohol, drink, made from the lees of sake, the dregs after the fermentation process—sake-kasu.

Ronin—the samurai without a master, destined to wander until they found one—used to make it in the summer in the old days, though it was a winter drink now, but screw that, Sanji was bringing
old-fashioned back. He could just imagine Zoro slaving over a huge pot of the mixture, selling it for a beri or two, spending his earnings on something stronger.

Their benefactor from the north had brought some paste down with him, at Sanji's request, when he'd dropped off the bottles of sake. The weather was a bit warm for it, but it was a comfort drink, thick like a watery porridge. Perfect for easing anxiety in these troubled times, though it looked like Law had his own methods. They used to drink it to keep cool. One of those counterintuitive things. It was so valuable to health that the government set the price and kept it low.

Sanji lifted the toke from Law's hand and took a drag. Gave it back to the surgeon. Law didn't blink. Zoro would've been at his throat.

"That's Cavendish, isn't it? Adonis? Blond and all. The ladies prefer blonds."

"Just as well," Law said, "Though so do I." He eyed Sanji with a wicked glint.

"You're exclusive, shithead."

Jean Bart murmured thanks before downing the drink.

Law sighed. "I know. Franky got jealous with me seeing other men."

Sanji lit up one of his own cigarettes, hands hiding his quick smile, and pulled up a folding chair near Law. Sat.

"He's not blond."

Law didn't know how he'd ended up with a blond. He was more a seek-your-own-type kind of a guy, but then, Marco and he had similar builds, even if he could look down at him when he put his mind to it. He'd just smother him in tea-towels and that levelled the playing field.

Smoker wasn't dark. Nor was Penguin. Law was a traitor to his own self. Maybe he'd made up for it with Luffy, short thing that he was.

"S'pose blond's a coverall. Any colour that's not brown or black."

"You've got blond streaks, then." Sanji eyed the hints of blue in Law's hair.

"Huh, guess I do," Law grinned.

"And you just lumped me with Marimo."

"Yeah," Law relit the joint. "Sorry 'bout that." But also with Marco and Law himself, blue streaks taken into account.

The garden was quiet and chill. The safehouse was always busy. Folks arriving, leaving, being treated. Volunteers dealing with cleaning, catering, laundry. Whenever Law visited he relaxed in the yard for a while, and those who wanted to talk to him knew where to find him.

The canopy of branches and leaves and the walls around the property both calmed him and left him feeling a little hemmed in, without clear vision. But he'd scoped the exits, the weaknesses in the walls, the objects he could use in combat or escape.

The kitchen door banged against the outside wall. Law finished the joint, turned. Marco and Aladine stepped onto the lawn—Marco's head bent in conversation, finger and thumb straightening his glasses. That light blue shirt suited him. Aladine carried two six packs of island brew.
Marco returned Law's grin and hand lifted in greeting. The Heart turned back to Sanji and Jean Bart, lay his head back, and watched the evening stars dot the sky through the gaps of the tree's branches.

Law had needed to make more split decisions in his life than he could count. Whether to mourn his parents or save his own life. To take Lammy with him or put her somewhere safe. To join the Donquixote Family or remain alone.

He'd probably thought about that one too long.

Whether to take down Doflamingo.

Yeah, he'd brooded on that one. Maybe planning was the thing that fucked him up.

But in conflict a fighter had to act. In safe times it was hard to let go of that response, to know who to trust or not. He trained himself. The calm before the New World, taking it easy as the submarine floated on the surface, bobbing with the current or lack of it.

Aladine shook out a huge rug and tossed down a few red cylindrical and square cushions trimmed with gold brocade. He lowered himself to the ground. The crickets were firing away in the tree. Marco pulled the chair nearest to Law closer and clamped his thigh, Law sending him a glance of recognition, before Marco reached across for the beers, the bottle opener, and popped the lid off four. Passed them around.

Law thanked him. He was still strung out from the attack, Misery. He knew Marco wasn't fully attuned to all that was good with the world either. You pushed through, but he felt more at ease with the Phoenix there. Both paved their own path, but didn't mind the tread of the other on the stones, welcomed it.

The air was still brittle, like the lace of an egg frying in a pan—but fear was its own captivity.

Ikkaku, Nami, and Bepo wandered out. All three wearing jinbei, the loosely woven cotton shorts and light short-sleeved jacket, tied so neatly from the inside and then out, to beat the season's heat. The two navigators traded seafaring stories and tips. Nami's jinbei was patterned with stag beetles, and Ikkaku's and Bepo's with the Heart emblem, of course. Though Bepo's had a few fish swimming about the hem, and Ikkaku's swirled with stylised sea urchins. She must have borrowed Uni's gear.

Luckily they'd brought their own beer, though it looked as if Nami might grab the remaining few bottles Aladine had purchased and charge them for it. Law grinned around the mouth of his drink as they kicked off their flipflops and shoes and settled into the cushions.

Sanji leant Law's way, and Law was surprised he trusted him with it, but he shambled out the portable gas cooker—gently, gently does it, at his request. Sanji returned to the kitchen and exited with the amazake, bubbling in the huge silver saucepan. He placed the mixture on the burner, on the blanket, and set the heat to a low flame. Removed his oven mitts and doled out cups, large and small, of the drink.

Sanji, Marco and Jean-Bart argued about which region of the seas had the fiercest amazake baba, or amazake hag. The rumours were wild in Flevance that she was a demon who'd brought sickness to the town. People made offerings of the sweet drink to her statue at shrines and temples, or pinned cedar leaves to their house entrances so she wouldn't come shuffling by at night, knocking on their doors for the drink, and then spreading the plague whether her thirst was sated or not.
Superstitions. Law practiced his fruit. Miniscule. Lighting up small domes of his Room at the tips of his fingers, and twisting them between his digits like fireflies flitting through the trees. Bepo looked on, engrossed. It was his favourite party trick. Everyone else was deep in low murmured conversations of exploits of mythology and idiocy. Law angled back with a smile, catching Bepo's eye for a second…and Aladine's.

The merman was rapt. Law sat up, a little surprised. Because his sleight of hand had been noticed, and at the glee bathing his face.

"Can you do bubbles?" Aladine's voice rumbled across the yard like the slap of the sea against a boat's hull.

Law almost powered down but there was something in the man's features. His silver hoops were dull against his face in the diminishing light, but Aladine's face glowed.

"On Fishman Island we dreamed of the fresh air and the pretty bubbles of Sabaody. Everyone's childhood dream was to ride the Ferris wheel."

And they could. Now they could. Except if Doflamingo and his cronies got their way.

"Did you go to fairs, Law, when you were young?" Nami asked. On Sabaody? Somewhere else? She and Ikkaku clinked drinks in summer cheer, but looked on, waiting for an answer.

"Festivals, yeah." He shut down his fruit. Could he make perfect, separate, spheres to float in the yard? He'd need to be careful that none flew too high. Were they still under his control if he sent the Room away from him?

The number of times he'd refused to go to festivals with Lammy. He'd been such a serious child. He peeked at Aladine again from under the brim of his hat, and Bepo, Nami and Ikkaku all seemed eager to see him try. Nami's red hair. Damn it.

Marco—still in conversation with Sanji about the witches of the Grand Line, the back of his head to Law—rested his hand on Law's knee again. A clasp, a squeeze, then lifted it. Whatever you choose is okay. It would hardly drain him.

Law whispered the action under his breath, and the blue appeared between his fingers like webbing. Even that was enough to make Aladine cackle. Law meshed his hands together—Kikoku pushing across his shoulder—put his lips to the intertwined fist and blew, pretending that his exhalation could launch bubbles.

"Captain!"

Bepo. He squirmed like Chopper doing his weirdly happy rejection dance. Law lowered his eyes. Nami's red hair, and his crew, dammit.

He released the edges of his palms the furthest away from him, curtains drifting open and closed in the breeze. Blue domes, circles, bubbles, suds, surrounded them like phosphorescence in the ocean. He looked up at Jean Bart. Had he wanted to ride the Ferris wheel too?

Even Nami was quiet, apart from an exclamation or two. The domes floated as high as Jean Bart, and there was Lammy and her insistence on watching all of the fireworks all the way through, though she always fell asleep on the blanket. Their father carrying her home. Law trudging behind, too tired to refuse his mother's hand.

Aladine's laugh was tuneful. Law hadn't heard it often. The bubbles drifted around him and rose as
high as…

As high as. No. He could control his power for great distances, that wasn't the point, and manipulated all manner of things in one sphere, but dispersed and carbonated like this? He wasn't sure. He pulled the rooms in quickly. It hadn't affected his stamina but he shouldn't be too frivolous.

"Tora-o!"

"Captain!"

A questioning look from Aladine, but Jean Bart, Sanji and Marco leant forward, Sanji extinguishing the fire of the burner. Law stood, unsheathed Kikoku and opened a wider single Room.

A slow, steady, clap echoed from the higher branches of the fig tree.

"Very touching, Law. Nice to see the adult has not yet completely abandoned the child."

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a bit quicker to write than I expected. Moreton Bay Fig Tree roots

For your reference, various myths about amazake baba, though some references say she first appeared post WW2.

Nami probably wouldn't wear jinbei with stag beetles on them, but I saw a young boy wearing jinbei with that design on them the other day and they looked so cute. This is a stag beetle design (the kid wasn't wearing this), and info about jinbei in general. The Whale Shark - jinbei-zame (the Strawhat's tenth crew member) is so named, according to that wikipedia article, because its skin patterns resemble those of traditional jinbei.

Oh, the Red Force sections about Shanks losing his other arm can be found in chapter 8 of Gimcracks, and Shanks recalling visiting Doflamingo when Law was his younger slave is in chapter 11 of Repossession. Of course this is an AU, so my timeline is outa whack. Sorry.

Excited for the next chapter. It will be a light Marco chapter too. As always, I'd love to hear your thoughts, and thank you so much for reading and for all forms of feedback. I am as hungry and as appreciative as any writer for it.
Light Marco 13b - battle

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Light Marco 13b

He sprang from his branch into the sky, out of the reach of Law's Room as Law transferred himself to the tree, sword ready.

"Oh, go on. Why not try widening your sphere? I want to see how much you've improved, little one." Doflamingo hovered below the clouds as if supported by the air. "How about extending over an island or two. I won't hurt you when you tire yourself out. Scout's honour."

Leaves swished and the night burned. Marco slammed his foot into a crosshatch of strings that julienned Phoenix fire to strips.

Just as well.

Doffy formed a solo cat's cradle between his fingers, looked over at Marco—flames reforming. Kept Law in his range of vision. The squawking children below. He recalled Marineford. Aokiji had barrelled straight across the courtyard, fissuring a wall, buildings crumbling, after the first division commander's foot had solidly connected with the small of his back.

"Hmm, remember the last time we danced, Phoenix? Did that dear animal survive the way Law slit her throat?" Doffy pulled the twine between his fingers wide and looped a length around three of them on one hand and then the other.

"Gruesome," he shuddered. "His work has forced more than one butcher to hang up his meat hooks. Skilled. Knows precisely how to maximise pain. They can't compete." His pinkies and thumbs held the pattern taut between his hands. "And he said he loved her. Fortunately he got part-punishment, na Marco?"

He dropped the threads and slashed the air, severing the branch Law stood on, and bulleting a fan of strings Marco's way. The Phoenix flew back, claws streaking the twilight, then righted. His fruit absorbed all strands and regenerated. Law leapt to another bough, Kikoku slicing the falling limb, chips scattered harmlessly to the ground.

"How was the aerial view? Quite tasteful, I bet. Erotica at its finest?" Doflamingo peered around the lattice covering the sky and ground. Marco was at more than arm's length. Good. "You remained with the adulterer? Even after that? Admirable or stupid. Take your pick."

Damn Law dragging them into trouble again, Sanji thought, but then, they'd volunteered to help the movement. Camie, Boa Hancock. Misery. She'd been a lady too. Quite the secret-fart dropping, saliva-drooling, lady. But a lady, nonetheless. He planted himself in front of Nami and Ikkaku. They were strong, but Doflamingo was a monster. He'd fight that creep for the ladies.

Law expanded his Room to cover Jean Bart. Doflamingo floated just above it. Bepo limbered up.
The heavenly demon liked to toy with his prey.

"You replaced one pet with another, Law? So quick." Threads shrouded Doflamingo like a wicker recliner. Others cascaded to the picnic blanket faster than the untrained eye. But Law was trained.

"Shambles."

Bepo rolled into the compacted soil at the base of the tree, bruising a shoulder on the roots. Chair legs lost an inch, wobbled on the blanket, the seat sinking into the cloth, still upright but not stable.

Doffy's lips widened. "He's cute in that happi coat. How do you plan to divest this one of life? Evisceration?"

Blackleg, and Law vaulted to Marco's side, circling the webs of strings. Jean Bart shook the tree, sticky fruit splatted the ground, and Law hoped he didn't uproot the fig. Shade and safety and battle launch. It was useful. Camouflage for enemies too, but them's the breaks.

Doflamingo hardly turned his head to take in his surroundings. Enemies. Law might be airborne or arboreal but his subordinates and hangers-on remained earthbound.

Aladine was quick and strong in water, but lost some flexibility on land. Doflamingo's connection with the World Nobles and the human auction house was well-known, but that didn't protect nor prevent the merman from charging Jean Bart, his trident angled toward the Heart pirate's Achille's heel. He struggled against the ties dragging him across the blanket, the cloth rucking below.

"Move. Get away!"

He jammed the tines into the ground but the strings raked him and the rug through the soil.

Law zipped back to the fig and a flutter of leaves replaced the strings. Aladine's weapon loosened in his grip, his shoulders drooped. He squashed a cushion, stuffing spilling, as he regained his footing. Let out a cry of frustration and relief.

"Here, Doflamingo. I'm here. Leave them alone," Law spat.

That voice. A thrill soared up Doflamingo's spine every time. The things he could do. And Law was hiding. He had a penchant for cat and mouse. "Sacrificing yourself again? Can't get enough rough and tumble? They're ex-slaves too, aren't they? Where's that pretty revolutionary?"


"I'm striving to be on the right side of righteous here. But as you wish." Doflamingo lacerated the air with a rapid-fire of Donquixote might aimed squarely at the turncoat. "I've learnt a few things from your bouncy man over the years. I might rename this one Gatling."

Kikoku's steel blocked a volley of wire-rope, metal whipping through the garden. Bepo covered his ears and Law ported himself away from the line of attack. Strings hashed the trunk. Doflamingo woze ere, na Law? At least the freak didn't have his rah-rah girl by his side, Trebol's mucous-laden-commentary undermining everything like a crusty handkerchief.

Doflamingo peered higher into the fig's foliage. The whelp was annoyingly fast. Had to watch out for sailing debris too. Law had a habit of targeting him with it. He scratched a love heart into the

"Black Sirius." A Doflamingo-sized Misery, teeth snapping, rushed Marco. The Phoenix was lucky he chose not to replicate the second division commander. Or Whitebeard. Her head hung off her neck, tongue lolling. Black dogs were scary enough without being monsters of mutation. The unhinged aspect of her near-decapitation, collar bell tinkling, allowed a wider range of motion.

Law shot a look that way. Marco hesitated before tooth and nail, or talon—sole of the foot—and fangs clashed. Concentrate. She gashed the blue shirt, a button fell.

"What if your whole Room was awakened with strings, Law? A wriggling mass of them?"

"It's under my control, moron." Law had learnt his lesson in Dressrosa, and kept his distance. Bepo, Nami, and Ikkaku were still below. They were stronger fighting together, but the Family's strategy was to use and abuse what was near and dear.

The Moreton Bay was a strangler fig, smothering its host as it made its way to the earth, standing alone once its roots had burrowed into the dirt. Its bumpy surface scratched Law's spine as he buttressed himself against its sturdy axis.

Doflamingo placed his hand across his heart "You wound me. But what if you had to stop attack after attack after attack? You'd collapse, the pathetic piece of shit you are, like on Green Bit, trying to repel them all." He let the breeze flow under his arms. Sure got sweaty up here. Marco was doing pretty well against that beast. Another rose from the ground, howling, aggrieved. As you would be if your master had disfigured you. Blackleg was up to something too. Doflamingo returned his attention to the number one pest on his list.

"Though I have to admit, plucky. You were plucky at Dressrosa. Shot through with bullets and gumption and bile. The navy should nominate you as the poster boy for grit, but don't they already have your star on the boulevard of marine wet dreams? Your bounty poster's stored in their wank-bank, so I've heard."

Venom was needed for anti-venom. Law maintained the Room around them all.

Sanji's kick shook Doflamingo a little, dispersing microbes, dust and spores. The demon held it off. He really should do a better job of not letting his defences slip. No-one was weak. Of course not. Except…

"I can heal myself with the strings, and can encourage them to self-propagate down there. The strands will take care of your crew. Suffocation. Defacement. Amputation. That bear. Some people shouldn't be allowed to have pets." His fingers twisted the air. The cook growled.

"They're highly flammable this type. Those in your sphere feel pain, I know it, Law. Depending upon the assault. The smell of burning corpses something you miss?"

Law knew his allies and crew would take care of themselves, though he wished Ikkaku and Bepo were in their boiler suits. Jean Bart scooped her up, Nami too. Nami twirled her Clima-Tact. Strings advancing across the grass sizzled from a lightening strike, the stink of molten plastic and scorched steel polluted the atmosphere.
Sanji belted down to terra firma and cupped his hands. Bepo ran up and landed lightly on them, launched and flew through the air, feet cycling. Ten solid speedy kicks squashed Doflamingo's jaw to the side. Neither used haki.

Don't apologize, Bepo, Law thought, replacing filaments with dust and undergrowth and twigs and utensils where he could.

Bepo touched down gracefully on a branch of the fig and Doffy glowered. "A bear dared to attack me. To touch the King?"

Bepo restrained himself from bowing. Law's smile shone out like those untameable slaves, defiant no matter how many times you smashed their teeth in.

Sanji lit the burner again. The threads were flammable but weren't attracted to fire. If you didn't mind your calves getting a little singed, there was a ring of safety. Jean Bart stamped out flames where he could, the ground shaking with his steps.

"Come with me and I leave your bear alone."

Doflamingo wove a net to drop on the mutt. Ikkaku perched a modified, miniature hand-held ballista on her shoulder, and fired from Jean Bart's shoulder. Her lessons with Ussop had paid off. Oversized porcupine quill after quill zipped through the night.

"Sha," Law whispered.

Wild-stringed Miseries lay defeated in the garden, a bundle of tamed scraps, and Marco caught the porcupine arrows in his talons and shot them one after another—legs pumping—towards Doflamingo. The heavenly demon diverted them Law's way, of course. Law wallop ed them into the ground, barbed end first, shimmering with spiked potential.

"Maybe my sights are only set on you, Law, but it seems I'm not the only one." Doflamingo didn't blame the Heart imposter's absurd collection of dopes and mopes for their dedication. The appeal was obvious but the devotion was a weakness to exploit.

He began a Jacob's ladder between his fingers, for diversion. Kept you sharp. The surgeon would understand that. Quite a skill to complete these string games without a partner. Law surely picked up some of his talent from him.

"You're pissing me off, Phoenix." He turned from Law, Jacob's Ladder dissolving, to bat that bird about the sky some. He lopped off one mighty fig branch after the other and heaved them screeching across the quiet draughts of the suburban night, as if riding the currents of a river. He whittled the blunt edges to points that could rupture diamonds.

Law, not fighting, sliced the timber and shifted it out to avoid smashing in the skulls of his crew and allies—his lover—it must be tiring. Though lover-boy was pretty good at dodging, or taking the impact and recovering. Irritating that he couldn't hurt the Phoenix. He'd have to damage the merchandise instead. Law wore blood well, so it wasn't a hardship.

Marco took on the admirals when Doflamingo had always walked away, if you excused that tiny altercation with Fujitora, and playing with the marines in front of Tsuru-san. But it didn't mean he was without power, or inferior in any way. He chose his battles. Aokiji did own his arse at Punk Hazard, but it wasn't like Marco avoided seastone and all attacks. He hadn't permanently stopped any of the admirals. Garp had pulverised him at Marineford.
If Shanks or Benn were here it might be different. But that was always the case with Law. Putting faith in fair-weather friends. Thinking they had interest in his upstart self. If he'd stayed with the Family he'd have protection until it came time for him to give up his life. That was the kind of loyalty worth dying for.

Doflamingo cut clean through Jean Bart's shins, but he was in Law's dome. The surgeon reassembled him. Noisy. Giants were so noisy. Was he a giant? He trimmed Marco's fiery feathers and Aladine's whiskers. Sanji had got stronger. Commendable. Blackleg blocked the strings as they cracked through the air and kept them away from those weak little girls and their bothersome strikes.

The bear. Doflamingo grunted in pain as his tibia bruised under karate kicks, and an electrical spark burnt his leg hair. Law's counter shock? Ah, he was a Mink. Good thing the moon wasn't out. Doffy kicked him far away, white ropes billowing after him. Let's see Law use his powers this way.

Law knew he was getting distracted, but had to create a safe landing for Bepo well clear of the strings Doflamingo cleaved the stars with. He left the Room wide until Bepo returned.

The demon turned his attention his pissant's way again.

"You're not the best at aerial combat, na Law? You're no slouch, but it takes concentration to keep yourself afloat, don't you think?" The kid's breath wasn't steady even when he took it easy in the tree. Could he draw him out?

The Family had salvaged the surveillance snails from Punk Hazard and the allegro Law had danced with Smoker and the warship across snow and sky was something else. He'd like to see him try again. "You remember the last time we met mid-air, and the time before that? It's never worked out well for you."

Hurtling. Breathing in fibres. The concrete floor, the hardwood floor, meeting him both times, Doflamingo chasing him to his demise. Law flexed his fingers, gripped Kikoku, inhaled and blocked out the images, the senses. He kept cover in the foliage.

"How's the arm? Does it ache at night at times? Phantom pains? War wounds? You're a glutton for punishment, Law, you'd have to agree. Practice makes perfect, though. Won't you do a few pirouettes for me? Don't be shy."

Responding robbed oxygen. Closed-lipped and far enough from Doflamingo's sphere to isolate the ito-ito no mi as it disrupted atmosphere and surface, Law gauged the perfect opportunity for moving in, though intimacy was not something he sought.

The chairs were needed by the safehouse, but collateral damage couldn't be helped. He segmented them neatly. Squads of steel and Formica at jet speed tracked from left, right and centre, aiming to impale his former owner.

Doflamingo thwacked them away. Child's play. Curious.

Did Law have new moves he wasn't aware of? Curling his lettered hands for attack, three fingers, then two, then one. What was he up to? Doflamingo had researched the devil fruit thoroughly. So much investment. That power was his, as was Law.
The bear, Marco, Sanji, the giant, the gnats—a chattering lumbering mess of brute force and persistence—battered him all at once. Predictable strikes, but effective. Blackleg and the Phoenix needed to be watched. He severed the top of the tree, and the velocity of the switch guillotining wood and leaf pushed the crown across the yard to cover the giant's head, his eyes. He stumbled. Nami and Ikkaku cried out. Thieves and ex-slaves. The cook fired down to the yard again. Vinsmokes. The leper dealt with that growing pile of twisting filament cross-hatching the yard. He was slick with sweat.

The parasite tree obscuring him, Law manoeuvred Kikoku and remotely pierced a string through one of Ikkaku's quills. The strands were controlled at will, so it was an experiment. He wasn't sure of the effect. Bepo dove into the greenery calling out for his captain.

"Damnit, Bepo."

"Fuffufufu, Law. That nodachi makes a pretty clean sweep, right? Unlike the dog maybe something closer to a hatchet will do."

The crime lord set up his protective skein and followed the bear into the tree—he had broken celestial skin twice. Marco hovered outside, kicks ready to rattle Doflamingo's ribcage.

Law wanted to hide? Suited Doflamingo fine. Made it easier for him to spin his version of events when his slave again met the scorn of the public. He'd humiliate him here or in the cell he had prepared. Made no difference.

Law worked the needle into the pink coat as Doflamingo, on the branch above him, neared the trunk—the feathers swung so wide. Aladine poked at Doflamingo's foot with his trident, able to slip the prongs through a gap in the webbing. Jean Bart, his topiary toupee dealt with, tried to crush the celestial's noble head. Law rejoined their body parts when needed.

Look at Law flashing his sword this way and that. *He must be tired.* Doflamingo cut Nami's hair, and Law reattached it. Upstart. But Law had easily dealt with a whole unit of the navy, so his energy could merely be flaking away like ants stealing crumbs from a spilled pastry. The greater drain was the concern. The fool thinking friends were important. That love was something. Just like Homing and Cora. Weak.


Law looped the suture through the jacket and then into the branches of the tree, aligned the pants against the smooth bark of the trunk. That took some doing, but it was in his Room. Anything was malleable. *Hold on,* Bepo. Kikoku glinted. It seemed he was protecting him, but the Mink was on his own.

Doflamingo twisted away from a Blackleg kick angling for his face, pushing through the leaves. Shit. He'd lost concentration and dropped defence, or had Law let him through? Marco stepped back as Sanji flew by. Doflamingo lifted his arm for offence but stopped short with a jerk. Strange.

For a second Doflamingo couldn't properly move his hand, and his body was stuck against the tree. These figs dropped aerial roots. Could Law do that? Command them to hold him? Those unusual
hand movements?

Doflamingo fidgeted a little more and his clothes had fluidity, yes, but they were stitched. Hmm. Sewn into their surroundings. Law's seam work was influenced by Doflamingo's fruit, no doubt. As flattering as it was, it worked against him now, and he had no need for such false praise, such useless acts. He was a busy man.

He slipped his arms and legs out of his clothes—though no-one was permanently separating him from that coat. Then blazed back into the sky, out of the Room. He stood, or floated, snarling, Law showing his face now. Batting the bear's concern away from him. Still dangerous.

Doflamingo glanced down at his jacket and trousers stiff against the plant, a faux crucifix against the branches and bole. Staring at the almost-effigy and at the gas fire and threads sputtering below gave him the heebie-jeebies. Aladine's trident morphed into a pitchfork. That woman's weapon, a crossbow. The cat-burglar twirled a pipe in her hands. His spine twanged.

"Fucker." Doflamingo's hands shook as he gathered the rope and powers he would use to hang this ingrate thief, this idolater, next to his garments. Let him take his place. The traitor knew he hated being looked down upon.

"Nice, Doflamingo. Criminal brand?" Law called out. Had a few of Pappag's designs himself. "Feels good and breezy to fight almost naked?" How many fucking times had Doflamingo forced him to do so?

"Idiot. You think my body's as feeble as yours?"

Marco whistled. "Cute banana hammock, Doff. New look?"

Jean Bart reached up and, it was unfortunate, he was only chasing a mosquito, but he hooked the edge of the underwear and snapped the material. Doflamingo didn't mind flaunting it, not in the least, but in the midst of battle it wasn't wise to leave oneself wide open.

His laugh was all sneer no smile, though his grin grew wider. He'd fight them au naturel. What was good for the Greeks was good enough for the Gods. He'd crush the fools, and fortheloveofHades.

The men winced as Doflamingo doubled in pain. They recognised that kind of agony. And again. A cry? A cry from the fallen demon? He floundered, still afloat, grasping and gasping for breath. Robin's work. Where was she hiding?

KillyouI'll killyou infused Doflamingo's groans. The allied crews and friends almost yelled at her to stop but self-preservation won. A craggy wail strafed the garden and neighbourhood.

Aladine dropped his trident, and Sanji had to catch his cigarette after it fell from his mouth. Those flames were duller below, but still flickering.

Panting, cursing, Doflamingo swatted at the hands squeezing his balls, tried to tie them in thread—that woman, he should have adopted her into the Family years ago—but it was better he left before seastone came into play. God Ussop must be around somewhere, and he could touch the stuff.

He secreted silk to the clouds above, Robin intensifying the force of her grip at the same time. Doflamingo swung lopsided. Bawling. Not quite begging. Tears in his eyes.

"So undignified," Law murmured.
Robin squeezed once more, just in case Doffy thought of overstaying his welcome. Focusing for a beat between spasms of pain, he used his powers to pry his clothes from the tree where Law had secured them. He bundled them under his arms. Law had used his fruit's thread. The impudence. If he was as uncouth as his worthless son-of-a-bitch underling he'd flip the whole lot of them off.

"Nowhere near...arghh...finished," he wheezed and took to the night.

Their laughter was unwise, especially Law's. He'd pay and he'd pay on his back.

Chapter End Notes

**Thank you for reading.** Battle scenes aren't easy to write. How'd it go?

Also, I know that a happi coat and a jinbei coat are two different (but similar) things. Doffy's just pissing on everyone. I also think that very few people call Doflamingo Doffy, and definitely not those much younger or what he considers inferior to him, but for the flow of the story, Doffy is sprinkled liberally. Maybe I'll edit a few 'young masters' in there.

I have to weigh up whether the next chapter is light or dark. Obviously Doff isn't through with Law whichever way I approach it. Robin is a legend.

As said, this is a *Repossession* hybrid, so Trebol lives.

Law Novel 4 is out. Not translated yet, but apparently Bepo can do Sulong. That makes me happier than it should :-)
Chapter Summary

The five times it was a good idea to have a hissy fit, and the one time it wasn't.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Light Marco 13c

Those airborne descended. Bepo, Ikkaku and Jean Bart readjusted their jinbei and yard clothes. Ikkaku, still using the ex-captain as a palanquin, instructed him to lower her to Bepo's level. She ran a hand just behind the Mink's ear where a rope had struck. He dipped his head in apology. They'd disinfect as soon as possible.

Sanji assured himself that Nami was in one piece and as beautiful as ever. He secured the oven mitts from the trashed rug and picked up the amazake. Aladine led the procession across the scorched earth to the house. The clouds Doflamingo had used to escape cleared from the sky, and the newly risen halfmoon splintered the garden with light.

Law and Marco hit the compacted soil around the tree roots at almost the same time, their shirts—one black, one blue—drifted right, then left, before settling in the centre. Tired but not tired out, they cast a quick once-over to ensure the other was okay.

An amber glow spilled from the kitchen window, illuminating one side of their faces. Marco grabbed Law's wrist where the silver band sat—Law's other hand holding Kikoku—and he squeezed both the band and the wrist.

"Go easy."

"Just checking you're solid." He drew the sticky, grimy bastard near. "And it's not like he actually touched you."

Face pained, Law indicated his torn sleeve, the streak of blood.

"Ah, diddums."

Law smiled. Marco's grip made him wonder if he had any say in the matter, but adrenaline and relief was a thing.

"All pain's relative, Marco." Yeah, he got off lightly. Marco's shirt was held together by a button. Doffy's strings weren't designed to be gentle. After he'd seen to Bepo he'd swab the Phoenix down and stitch him up, rub salve into his bruises. "About the dog, sorry."

"The marionette?"

They walked toward the safehouse. A fortified stride—confident, purposeful. Law nodded.
"Not like you assembled her, and she'd still be with us if not for Joker."

Law carried his nodachi against his shoulder. "Couldn't have been easy to see."

"Not now, Law."

Law caught Marco's grim smeared face in his side vision. He was right. He looked ahead. "Yeah, okay. Gotta clear…"

Marco stalled. The dog was and wasn't the issue. Robin had halted Doflamingo. He didn't doubt they would've won without her—and he wasn't discounting her help—but the fight hadn't been a pushover.

He held Law's arm (and the band) like a school girl swinging the hand of her new best friend. Law looked down at his skin under Marco's fingers, then back up at him—did that thing where he chewed the inside of his cheek, a thousand thoughts bouncing around that brain, droplets of sweat dotting his collarbone. How to word it?

Anger, fear, discomfort crept along Law's neck. Marco's eyebrows pressed down. They were so high on his face when he was relaxed. And he took on combat with the same amused disinterest as if stepping into a bubble bath. When did those arcs ever lower? Something was up.

The earth below Law's flimsy non-fighting flip-flops was solid, Marco was in front of him. He'd blocked the spread of malice in his own psyche, but that didn't mean everyone was immune to a Doflamingo bollocking. Another talent he'd fine-tuned over the years.

Standing still, his chest rising as he regained breath, he ran through the insults Joker had thrown out. Legion—the things done to Law, thoughts he invoked, what Law had done, what Marco witnessed. The burn of the brand. He blinked. Swallowing was suddenly a deliberate and difficult task.

"You did well. If he'd entered the Room sooner, didn't have that clone trick, didn't target subordinates, we'd have defeated him earlier."

There was more. Marco hadn't paused just to praise him. They had to leave but Law searched Marco's face. "Bepo," he said quietly. Brave Bepo, the only one who landed more than a kick. Twice.

"Went where I couldn't," Marco said. Maybe he had a Mink sense about when the strings were down. He fished his glasses from his top pocket, turned them in his hand. Surprising—the lenses weren't cracked. He returned them to safety.

Law let the Phoenix continue to hold his wrist, but wedged the nodachi between them, against Marco's shoulder, just in case. Tensed. Marco puffed his cheeks and exhaled, ran a hand back through his spikes, the back of his neck wet. Looked to the side then back to Law. His eyelids drooped.

"His words, Law."

Ice. Damn it. Who wouldn't be affected by them? Just because he'd developed a shell didn't mean everyone could. But Marco didn't let go of his arm. Not ownership. Not that. Don't let it be that. Law forced himself not to drop his head. Forced his breath steady.

"I didn't come back. After Misery died. We could barely lay a hand on him this time. And I left
you with him, without your power. In seastone." That time. That time he sat, covered in the dog's blood, on the beach outside their pub, and drank a beer.

A small rush of relief and a runnel of frustration spiked Law's skin, cooling it the way the breeze blew across his perspiration-soaked clothes.

"Not now, Marco." Law repositioned the nodachi back on his shoulder. "Don't remind me, not now." He spoke clearly. *Articulate white monster. Let your voice be heard.*

Marco took his jaw and—again—Law let him, ready to shift away. Difficult to keep his eyes on the Whitebeard, his body near.

"You deserve better."

What the fuck was he meant to do with this? They had to get moving. He transferred his nodachi to the other shoulder and hooked his hand in Marco's belt loops and dragged his arse across the yard. Head down. Wouldn't think, couldn't think. His crew was inside.

"Gotta clear everyone out. Morgans will be hotfooting it here," he blurted over his shoulder. The Family would pull the tarp off their tricycles and clown cars and fast-pedal to the safehouse, surround it like a circus ring.

What did he know about anything healthy? First impressions between himself and his guardian had been a mutual death-wish for the other. They reversed their positions when death was real and love the rarest of rediscovered commodities. Too little, too late.

There hadn't been enough time. Survival flared and died in a breath of hope. Affection was spiked and hard like a rambutan's casing. It all needed peeling away before you got anywhere near the sweet centre.

Marco hiccuped and observed Law's determined not-gonna-think-about-it-right-now march—his face dark, herding all his yesterdays into tomorrow. And fuck Marco felt like shit, but also relieved that Law had harnessed him like some loyal but scatter-brained pet. One with the habit of running away once the gate was open. Hell, it cleared the fence. But came back. When it could remember the way. If it didn't get run over by a car.

"Yeah, I do," Law bit out to the plant beds, the tops of his feet growing darker from the ash kicked up as they walked. Not caring to be precise with his step. "I do deserve better." Fuck clean feet. "But you came back. Don't make me process this now. I can't fucking do that and get everyone away from here."

He was that weakest of emotions, angry. Not the time to be angry. He grasped Marco's trousers tighter as if the Whitebeard was a toddler in the midst of a supermarket meltdown. Shoppers wondering if they should call family services on Law.

He'd just spent the last twenty minutes avoiding all those barbs and here was Marco hooking them under his flesh like he was a fish unable to differentiate food from fear.

"I'm sor…"

"Don't say it."

"You need to hear it." Marco kinda wished Law would let him walk by himself. His feet were kicking up dirt too, and it was undignified for the first division commander to be towed around like this.
He'd been shopping with Law when a crooked-wheel trolley had caught his ire. He'd had a shitty day at his practice. Rather than trade it in for one that worked he jerked it around the aisles, bumping into displays, scaring customers and staff, scraping the heels of old ladies. As Law jackknifed him all over the garden, he developed a newfound sympathy for that cart.

Law would've decked him if they didn't need to get everyone out of the safehouse. But yeah.

"I'm sorry." Marco needed to say it.

He.

Now was not the time.

Needed to

Marco stopped him again, Law's head turned away from him. Too much. Marco directed the black mop his way, and Law smacked his hand off but looked at him. Glared.

Hear it.

"Hasn't been raining." Marco ran a flat palm down one half of Law's face, covering the dust streaks.

"No." Law pushed Marco's palm away. "Dry as a fucking bone." And corrugated death and compasses and viruses occupied Marco's vision as Law rubbed both of his own hands up and down his face. Sap from the tree and ashes from the burnt strings sprinkling a layer of grime over the patterns.

"It's sweaty and hot and I'm pissed off and we've got to get these people away." Law finished his furious scrubbing and wiped his palms on his upper arms, the moisture mingling with the blood from Doffy's wound.

Marco nodded. Law reestablished his clawed hold on Marco's trouser loops. They strode forward. Spasmodically—a Franky cyborg short-circuiting.

"I'm not going to forgive you."

He nodded once more.

"I don't want to be without you and you came back. But yeah…"

A third tip of the head.

"It's too big," Law mumbled, looking to the fence then quickly at Marco tripping a little ahead of him. The Phoenix looked back and kind of earnest as if he was going to turn and push his hair back or grab that goddamn bangle again, so Law shambled them inside, no matter their appearance, before Marco decided to poke that stick deeper into a festering injury.

oOOo

"Whoa," Franky yelled. "Like, get a blueprint or something, Law, before you just land yourself in someone's lap."

"No, shit," Sanji said, heralding as many of the house's female occupants (those who'd let him) to meeting points in preparation for departure, cups of amazake balanced on a tray in one hand.
Marco and Law had alighted in the middle of a teeming safehouse intent on evacuation. They blocked traffic and knocked a few people into Franky. His screwdriver slipped on the cart he was assembling, scratching the wood. Man, these pirates had no respect for artisans.

Law pulled his head back, a flex of his neck and throat.

Oh _ho_. Incommunicative mode, eh? Franky thought. Was that a challenge? He was rarely in the mood to fight Law, and seeing Doflamingo was like facing Spandam rocketing across the ocean on Puffing Tom, so he let it lie.

Robin, helping out with her many extra hands, looked at Law _not_ so lightly brush past Marco's shoulder with his own, and the nodachi’s hilt tapped Marco's cheek. If Law had control over anything, it was that sword (though Kikoku had a fine line in controlling him). All the while he held onto the waistband of his partner's cut-offs as if he were a child in harness. Marco curved Law's head toward him though the Heart shrugged and twisted away—all recalcitrant wildflower on a desert plain.

Marco's hand cupped the back of Law's head, and Robin wondered if she should intervene. The crews needed them both, especially Law, and now wasn't the time for squabbles. Franky was on the same wavelength. They exchanged a glance, but before they did anything Law's hand curled—a flash of blue—and both were gone. He'd thought well-enough ahead to swap out with a book Robin had been reading in a guest room. At least they knew where they were.

Nami picked the book up as she walked by, read the spine, shook her head. "Man, if they think boning right now is appropriate, they need a few lessons in priorities." No wonder Law hadn't become pirate king, though it was a bit of a miracle that Luffy had, to be honest. Not due to lack of ability or determination, but dearth of sense.

Sanji fluttered, "Times of combat enhance sexual attraction, Nami-schwan." He passed her a cup of amazake with a flourish and a bow.

She lashed out. Screw that stupid surgeon and fiery bird.

_ooOoo_

The moon shadowed furniture and the corridor light seeped below the door. Law knew the space a little better than Marco, so he wasn't the one who almost knocked over the table and the jug of water on top as he tried to gain his balance. Law's teleporting was always a bit rough. Especially if he was pissed off.

Marco straightened, then moved next to Law. Had no choice. He was still hooked to the guy.

"You're gonna hyperventilate."

The Heart needed to breathe in for longer than a second or two.

Law's pace didn't slow. He faced Marco and held either of his hands down against the Whitebeard's side, daring him to lift them. He pushed his head and then face into Marco's chest, and man he didn't want to be so fucking weak, so mad. Didn't want to snap off that one button. Or perhaps he did.

Marco budged an arm a millimetre and Law forced it down, and Marco retried as Law's back shook. He headbutted Marco's chest once—once more—and again, Marco losing his footing. He almost expected Law to kick him in the shins. Law's headbutts usually careened into target like a twenty-tonne truck with a full load and snapped brakes flying down a steep gradient, traffic idling
at the lights on the plain. But he was cruising in low gear, his resentment in check, though his body shook. The sinews and muscles of his arms and torso tense and rigid, and ready to fight, but all he did was shove against him.

"Let me hold you, Law. It was fucked up. I'm a shit. I'm so fucking sor—"

Law pressed those arms down, and didn't let go. Marco expelled an exasperated burst of air, tried to shift and they sprung up as Law released pressure. Marco wrapped them around his marked lover, Law's open-mouthed breath sucking in the cuts and blood and dirt left from pretend-Misery as he invaded Marco's space while not letting the fucker have any part of him. He didn't know what he was doing, but what the fuck was Marco doing there when Law was so rabid? But he was a dead man if he went away.

Law pushed forward into Marco and Marco knew it was okay now to hold and feel and have him close. It didn't matter how much Doflamingo scratched his own name into the fig, the fig would outlive, out-be him. It was okay now to apologise, even if Law didn't want to hear it. Marco couldn't turn off his thoughts.

He lit up his blue. He knew it calmed him. "Shit, Law, I..."

"It's not about you, Marco."

Shakes. He got the shakes. Only the stupid were never scared. He'd stared Doflamingo down time and again, and the man had broken him over and over, but he had faced him down out there and here was Marco dragging him back to that morning, those chains, that blur of hate and horror, when he'd refused to let Doflamingo do the same.

Couldn't Marco give him this one sweet moment of victory? What had Doffy said? The show of erotica? The aerial view? Those hours when Marco was gone. When he chose not to help.

Marco had to do something pretty fucking fast if Law wasn't going to shake himself catatonic. Law formed a wobbly Room and, before Marco could make sure he was included in its sphere, two sloshing cups of amazake clunked on the bedside table. Sugar. Warmth. Sanji was clever.

"Catch," Law stuttered, "Cos I fucking can't." And he levitated one cup toward them with a turn of his fingers. Marco raised an arm from around Law, intercepted incoming, and looked down at him.

"Really? I've got to feed you?"

Law stared up, put his trembling hands around Marco's holding the cup. It was a level five deep and sustained tremor. Law directed the mug toward his mouth, and the china hit his teeth, and half of the thick rice drink went down his chin, some hot on his chest. But most went into his mouth, down his throat, into his stomach, warmed his heart a little too strongly. He winced.

He slanted the cup more than once, then dropped his hands from Marco's own, the shuddering far less. Head lowered, he struck his fist against Marco's chest three times before spreading his fingers over his grazed skin.

He hadn't stopped crying. Occasional shake. Law used Shambles to replace one mug with the other. Marco caught it.
He replaced his fingers around Marco's. Steadier. "You want this one too?" the Phoenix asked.

"Your turn."

"I can feed myself, Law."

Law laughed, and dropped his hands and pushed his rice-pasted self against Marco's chest, loosely wrapped his arms around his back. Side cheek and forehead now warming Marco's upper torso.

"You're making this difficult." Marco had to hoist his arms above Law's body, and cant the mug and his chin back, elbows wide.

"Drink up. You'll need your strength."

As awkward as it was, he did a better job of finding his mouth than Law had. The doc was right though. The drink gave him a boost and calmed him, though maybe that was Law nestled against him. Hopefully he wasn't falling asleep. They needed him.

He drained the mug and let it fall to the bed behind them. He angled Law's face. He knew he was ready for action, but the lift of gold informed him he needed just a second, just a moment, more.

Marco brought his lips to Law's and licked where he hadn't consumed the drink properly, and Law turned to him, and the kiss was sweet with rice wine and Law's promise, his potential. His solid fucking being.

Marco pulled away—they had to get going—but first he removed the cloth under the guest bedroom jug of water. Tipping the jug, he wet the cloth and scrubbed Law's face like he was a two-year-old.

"Shit, Marco." Law drove him away and grabbed the cloth and wiped his own face. It definitely needed it. He dabbed at the rice fallen on his front as well. When finished he turned to the Phoenix.

"Okay?"

"All okay, nana."

Law's exhalation was a pneumatic wheeze of a laugh, almost a cry, and he took Marco's wrist, and the two cups. Sanji'd kill them if he left the room without them. They exited by the door, and Law kept Marco near, and any whispers or shit or disparaging looks were dealt—not with Law's fruit or brawn—but with an expression—head held high—that had faced down men who beat children into snow, and who took the lives of boys for the crimes of their fathers. Despite their strength. Sometimes he won.

Marco turned his hand so their fingers met, and Law twisted his into Marco's own. The Phoenix's grip was sound, and though Franky was crestfallen, the rest of the crews accepted rapid-fire orders and suggestions as they stood there, until Robin's hands suggested they separate, cos even though she had more than an extra pair of limbs, a few more were indeed physically needed, and could they get their arse into gear instead of poncing about?

Still wounded (not by Robin's words—sharp as they were), still wary—but not accusatory—the two glanced each other's way. "See you on the sub," Law said, and Marco again squeezed the wrist, Law snared the waistband, and Doflamingo could never have this.

The embrace was maybe their last. You never knew. Law's arm still bleeding. Marco's chest needed cleaning. They parted and Law went to thank Robin.
"Get us to the Sunny, and you should have enough strength to port your crew to the sub. Aladine can swim from there. Karasu and Morley'll help out the Revolutionaries."

"Sounds good." Law smiled. "You're a woman without mercy, Nico-ya."

Franky, packing the now-finished cart with house belongings, flinched.

"Thank you," Law kissed her temple, "Mad woman."

"Oi." That's what Franky would say, and one of Robin's folded hands and the inked one free of a nodachi flipped him off.

"Gotta feel sorry for the guy," Franky said as Law passed him, patting his forearm.

The day Law felt sorry for Doflamingo was the day he lost, he thought. Then again, imagine being in Trebol's company, day in day out. Maybe he had a twinge of empathy for him somewhere.

Sanji relayed precisely where all the towels and talcum powder on the Sunny were stored. He bundled a stack from the safehouse under his arms and others were thrown into Franky's cart. Law exchanged a third of the room's occupants and accoutrements—the linen and toiletries from the Sunny falling to the safehouse floor.

Nami and Aladine scooped them up and joined the next group of people Law cleared from the house. Then there was Marco and the Hearts and he sent them to the Polar Tang. No point in having everyone in the same place. Jean Bart carried Robin's lavender essence with care. She'd told Law she'd personally kill him if it wasn't returned.

Food, identifying objects, bedding, clothes, phones, computers, software—all was zapped. The fig tree had protected them so well, and half lay strewn outside. The fluorescent light bore down in the abandoned kitchen. Neglect quickly dusted the area.

"Room." Law readied to leave.

Glass shattered. He jumped back. A bullet? A nail? embedded in the back of his hand. The dome faltered under the spread of blood and he tried anew. A barrage of fucking tin-tack seastone-coated mosquitoes fragmented the remaining glass. Kikoku deviated a few into the plaster, but too many pierced his skin and it only took one. *Fuck, fuck, fuck.* At least everyone was gone but goddamn.

The back door slammed off its hinges, marines swarming across it into the room. Law, clutching his arm, looked up. Some pimply faced kid had fruit or skills and roped Kikoku out of his clumsy hold. The scabbard went after her. The kid yelped when Law zeroed in on him and moved his palm like a jellyfish floating on water.

Too slow. They pushed him face first to the floor. Knees in his back and seastone mesh over his face and a hand firmly clasped behind his head. He couldn't look up.

Boots clomped across the floor and cigar smoke filled the room. Not Croc it wasn't Croc, not that sandy fucking bastard. Doflamingo's lawyer. The court case he'd avoided, never shown up to. A childhood nightmare. He wouldn't be with the marines. Law calmed himself but the poison so recently dispersed re-entered his bloodstream.
A pike lifted the net, and a boot kicked him under the chin. The hand in his hair yanked his head upwards. Law grunted.

"Finally found you, pirate scum of the sea."

Chapter End Notes

I might be a bit early for posting this one, I hope it reads okay.

I think I'll have to increase that chapter count a bit there. Not by much, but a digit or two or so.

How'd it go? Who's Law run into this time? Got any questions? Fire away. Liked it? Hit that kudos button up (guest kudos are always welcome). **Thanks for reading** and for all those who have given feedback.
His temple walloped metal as the van dipped into a pothole or rode a bump. A flare of pain. He'd been stupid to waste so much time getting his emotions under check with Marco. Wrapped in seastone, he bounced around the pen with every corner turned and every screech of the brakes. He tried to wedge himself into a corner.

Hah, and he thought he'd had the shakes before. At least meltdown number one prepared him for meltdown two, but if he and Marco hadn't been so melodramatic—if Law hadn't needed his fucking moment—they'd all be on their ships somewhere gearing up for combat, rather than being on his ownsome surrounded by a unit of marines. Again. Ready to dip him in the vats of hell. Smoker had crossed over, huh?

Doflamingo had barely touched him. But Law had fought, he'd used his powers, and seastone was no fruit user's friend. He sluggishly wiggled his fingers behind him, searching for a weakness. A way out. He slumped against the ammonia-reeked sides of the cell, but giving up wasn't a solution.

The van hurtled along the pockmarked road in a blazing hurry to get him somewhere. His lips prickled into a thin thorn-twist of a smile. The vehicle lurched to a stop. Law pitched forward—smacking his face on his own damned chains now—and back. Head against the wall.

The side panels and floor stank of shoelaces threaded into grills and blood left to dry. He hadn't had a chance to change into his boots. A toenail hung loose, in danger of ripping off—had caught in the flurry to manhandle him out of the safehouse and into the wagon.

He shuffled over the cold floor—one buttock and long legged shove back, then the next—into his corner. The driver needed training in how brakes worked. Law couldn't be the only one with whiplash, though maybe the only one with concussion. The van was windowless.


Metal slid across steel, the back panel opened—a rectangular gap of darkness. No street lights, the moon a different angle in the sky. Some nocturnal bird warbled to another, croaks aerated a nearby pond or rice paddy. Something swampy. The marine closest to the cell spat, a wet glob falling to the ground. His breath was steadier than Law's own, audible over the pitter-patter of chains against the paddy wagon's interior.

"Trembling like a leaf in there, boss."
Law couldn't catch the reply.

"Imagine, the mighty Surgeon of Death cowering like a wee timid beastie, eh?"

Some dirt track. Law prayed for the death his epithet promised if ill intent stepped a foot in the cage, but searched for exits, flaws, escape routes, even as he shook. Think. Seastone impeded everything. The quiet grunt turned the keys to the mesh gate. Entered.

"Let me know when you're done." The mouthy marine closed the main door, slapped a flattened palm on the steel twice. His steps crunched past the flank of the car, the driver's door opened and closed, and the engine kicked over. The van eased down the track at a much slower pace than previously.

"Hell, no." Law's words hardly disturbed the gloom. Was this how it went? They'd beat or take him one at a time? Both? Where were the rest?

Cigars. He turned his head to the slide of beef and brawn across the cell's surface, keys scraping the wall. Cuffs? Weapons. The marine's body steady despite the motion, unlike his own. An inhalation, spot of fire, exhalation, the space filled with noxious fumes.

"You okay, runt?"

Smoker.

He switched on a dim sidelight.

The captain, now admiral, hadn't changed much over the years. A row of cigars across his shirt like a cartridge belt. Must've taken up smoking again. Flashing his chest about because it was too much bother to button a shirt, his jacket swinging about like a cape. Law scanned for new marks. Smoker stooped—shoulders hunched, head scraping the ceiling, jutte rising over his shoulder.

"You disappeared," he added.

All two metres and then some drew close. Law shrank into himself. Rattling. Today was too fucking much. Smoker was still navy regardless of their past. Law was in seastone. And he was right next to him.

"Leave me alone." Law searched for a grip-rail to hang words on, but they faltered and tripped. The roaring forties filled his ears, his own blood complicit in fucking him up royally. Aladine's enchanted face and his Rooms rising like blue bubbles blown from a bent pipe-cleaner flashed through his mind. He chased them out.

"Quiet." As if Law could do anything. Smoker crouched down, sat, sidled beside him. The jacket a crime in softness. All the worst abuses were hushed, normalised. He reached behind, sat Law upright, and dipped gloved hands under the binds.

Were they kairoseki-proof? Or maybe it came with the position. Some ability to overcome. Guess the peacekeepers had to be able to handle their own chemical warfare.

Law tensed at the touch. Shut down. Compartmentalised everything that made him interactive and human. Ready to endure whatever came. He hadn't survived this far by collapsing, but detaching was a bonus.

"Breathe, you moron. Or kinda, slow it down a bit."
Law tipped his head back against the wall and Smoker's was near enough for him to lay them both out, or knock himself out trying. The nub of the marine's wrist rammed Law's brow sideways, skull thunking against steel. He let out a firehose hiss.

"Relax."

The chains fell away, clinked to the floor.

Law sat with his hands behind his back, arms pinned to his side. Couldn't reign in the spasms enough to lift them to the front, though he took Smoker's breathing advice. He was the holder of the ope ope no mi. A member of the worst generation. A supernova. A puddle of inaction.

"You're not going to get anywhere just sitting there."

Law drew his knees closer, tried not to black out. Concentrated on the dim light above.

"Doflamingo messed you up?" Smoker knew better than to spook the kid at the moment, but it wasn't like Law to stay in harm's way when he could vamoose. He didn't look cut up. "We got a tip-off."


You wouldn't know it from the shudder—worn differentials rocketing along a railway track. "What's the story?"

Law hardly looked at him. Spoke into his chest, head bowed. "Being state cargo doesn't inspire me."

Smoker's gaze settled on the scratches permanently scored into his cheek. Inflicted by a group of navy jailers, a sickening assault. "Hmph." His shoulder still rested against Law's side.

"You've easily defeated over fifty recruits," Smoker grimaced, "More than once." The ope ope no mi had disassembled marines at both Sabaody and Punk Hazard with Law hardly raising a sweat.

"Wasn't in seastone." Law sucked in a drop of saliva threatening to trickle down his skin. Real drag not being able to wipe his face, especially when he should be able to swipe a palm, slam his fist into Smoker.

"You're not in seastone now."

Law knew. He knew. He pushed his chin into his knees willing his hands forward. Morphing his muscles into fight instead of flight. They twitched, but from residual fear not action. Freezing at a time like this was life and death. Heroes were heroes for a reason. The fallen forgotten.

"Smoker?" Law couldn't look at him. "My top pants' pocket. If you're not here to harm, something there that's useful." His trousers really stank of the garden, spilled beer and sweet rice. "Can you get it?"

Extraordinary that Law was allowing him that close when not drunk or distressed. Must have been the second.

"Won't affect you." He turned his head Smoker's way now, body still hunched, as if Doflamingo's strings were restraining his arms to the rear.

"Why'm I always pulling you out of scrapes?" Smoker moved in and placed his arm, navy jacket
swinging wide, around Law's back and shoulders in order to access the pocket, to balance.

"Fell in with the wrong crowd." He was shivering as if stuck on an ice floe without Bepo. "Thanks, old man." Even if Marco had more than a few years on him. He stared squarely at him before returning his attention to the threads of his clothes.

"Brat." Law's hair reeked of soot and cinders. "Been playing with matches again?"

"Cora used to do that. Not me," Law laughed shakily, trying to keep those black dots away. To restrict memories dancing on the horizon to that hazy plain. "The other brother's strings were flammable this time."

"Land on you?"

"No." One strike didn't count.

Smoker's relief didn't show. He was expert at interpreting the criss-cross of scars mapping Law's body. "Going into your pocket now."

"It's right near the top."

Smoker's fingers weren't small. There was nothing thin or elegant about the man, except his hair. So saying, there wasn't an ounce of fat on him. His other arm needed to hold Law close to bolster them, but it wasn't like he'd never embraced him. He kept his cigars to the side of his mouth furthest away.

"Cloth thing?"

Law nodded, his hair brushing Smoker's jaw.

"Small pouch?" His fingers were too big and clumsy for this piecemeal work, digits probing between folds of material and Law's bones. Law recoiled at the intimacy but Smoker retrieved the object before his tremors increased. The Hearts Jolly Roger sneered at him.

"Yeah. Can you bring it near. Let me smell it?"

"You on drugs?" Smoker took a sniff. "It is drugs?" Some kinda herb packet.

"Nah." Law swayed. "All wholesome soothing hippy shit."

Smoker sighed. They weren't anything anymore. Even when they were it was meeting in dingy alleys on borrowed time. Sometimes they managed to find a bed and peace together, but Smoker's animosity and Law's resentment made for prickly, violent, lovers. Lovers nonetheless. In battle, either one helped the other if it was prudent.

Smoker tipped Law's head to him. It rested on his shoulder. Law's body like jelly. Did he still have seastone in his system? They'd have to get it out.

"Don't let Tashigi know."

"Think you better tell her. Won't keep it from Marco."

With his arm still around Law, the pirate's limbs loose and lifeless, Smoker brought the sachet to his face.

Law inhaled. The stench of the day ingrained into the lines on Smoker's neck, and some musky
scent that Tashigi probably picked out for him, mixed in with the aroma of the potpourri. But the overriding scent was the aroma of tomato leaves; the mikan peel mixed among them, and all the other herbs and spices that Marco didn't know how to name.

He breathed in a few times. His mind cleared and his heart slowed way down. Smoker helped. He always did. Somehow he always managed to evade the marine's captivity.

Law wriggled his fingers and twisted his hands and brought them forward, taking the sachet from Smoker. He slipped it into his pocket again, let out a huge breath. Then pulled a blade from the pouch he carried—they'd thrown him in chains without patting him down. He didn't glance the marine's way.

Smoker's eyes narrowed and he bit on his cigar just that bit harder, but Law dug into his flesh, and cut away the skin around the slug that had stopped him from escaping the safehouse. It hurt. Of course it did.

As soon as the shot fell to the floor of the van he formed a small dome around the wound and healed the area, cleansing it of toxins and bacteria—of seastone. All business. Steady as a rock.

"How's Sukie?" Law asked as if they were sharing a beer rather than cutting through country paths that bore no good will for nogood boyos. It pained Smoker that he knew his daughter's name—at least it was menacing and creepy when he was on duty—but considering Law had been more than support throughout Tashigi's pregnancy, they really couldn't keep it a secret. Tashigi knew more about swords than swollen ankles, and Law had been professional without being impersonal, unlike the military medical unit.

"Yah." The pirate really wanted to chitchat about his daughter now? Both jolted left and right and resettled as the tyres thumped over some hapless animal. Smoker was glad Law had finished extracting the slug. "Good grades. Healthy. Shaping up to be a top notch marine."

"I nurtured a monster into existence?" Law drew his Room into a dome the size of his hand, the size of his head, covering the back of the cell they were in, driving along with the car through the light-strangled landscape.

"A future hero."

Like Vergo, Law thought. Or Cora.

"Glad she's doing well."

Smoker nodded. He pulled out a portable den den, fiddled with the screen. "Sword's in front, next to the driver."

He showed the map displaying their position. "Can you get yourself to where you gotta go?" Law's energy was sludged like a puddle dried out in the sun, but fuck yeah. Being stuck in a black Maria was all the encouragement needed to focus his powers. He pulled in the Room, absorbed the information, then concentrated on widening the sphere.

"I owe you Smoker."

The kid had been a citizen for a while now—in action, even if not in legislation—and if they couldn't protect citizens, what good was the World Government? Corruption was supposedly on the decrease. Rights respected.

Smoker shook his head. Tashigi'd kill him if Law was returned to Doflamingo, and the navy
couldn't promise it'd break with regulations and not deliver him. Rules were rules. Even the
anachronistic ones. His head was already on the block for not holding onto the nodachi, but she
couldn't have it both ways.

Kikoku landed neatly in Law's healed hand, a loose bolt rolling about the front cabin. A serviette
stamped with the Heart's Jolly Roger fluttered to the cell floor, and he was gone. The truck
screeched to a halt, Smoker slipping across the cage. The driver ran to open the back, pounded on
the door, shaking hands reached for the keys hooked to his belt loop. The mouse that roared, eh?
How did a devil in seastone defeat an admiral?

Chapter End Notes

If I remember correctly, at the close of the post-canon *Repossession* world Smoker
was an admiral. However, he'd be the kind to work close to the ground and maintain a
close working relationship with his men, I think. At the end of that fic, Smoker and
Tashigi have hooked up. In *Birds of a Feather* there's discussion about Law's role as
her advisor when she's pregnant.

*Cowering like a wee timid beastie* is Robbie Burns, without the dialect. *The Mouse
that Roared* is a 1955 book, and 1959 movie that I haven't read or seen. *Big Black
Mariah* is a Tom Waits tune. *Nogood Boyo* is a Dylan Thomas character.

Thanks for reading.
Dark Marco 14a-(NSFW)

Chapter Summary

Law pays Marco a visit.

Chapter Notes

**Warnings** Not explicit in terms of non-con, but past rape is mentioned, and past underage sexual assault is implied. Neither are gone into in detail, but it's not gentle either, and part of the story hinges around Law and Marco's individual perceptions and semantics.

Follows on from chapter 33, Dark Marco 13d.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Dark Marco 14a

He came back. He knew he'd come back. Law always came back. He'd just had to wait it out and have faith that Law's base instincts would always draw him in. And he and Law were good for each other. So, so, good.

He looked healthy. Hadn't seen him decked out like that for a long time. Black shirt open, fucking open to the third button, that beaming Cora face and the flames rising behind the heart licking at his clavicles. His Law. Fighting stance. Sparring stance. Wicked grin. That challenge. He'd teleported himself into their house?

Forearms. Thick muscled. Black all over like spiders scrabbling. Man, he was a scary mo-fo. And he got his earrings back. How? Let Croc screw him again? Nah. Probably lifted them. Law had no love for that reptile, then again…nah, nah, *nah*, leave that path behind. He'd come back.

The bed dipped as he sat.

"Law."

He moved his head Marco's way.

"Knew you'd return."

Nodded.

Marco shuffled a bit in the bed to make space as Law drew closer, holding Kikoku. Not cool. They had a rule—no Kikoku near the bed. And, he reached to pull Law to him, but he…some kind of mistake. Couldn't raise his arm.
Law getting kinky? He'd tied him. Did that kind of thing now and then, but what could the doc do against a zoan's power? Should be more often—this testing of boundaries. Marco's favourite type of sex. It wasn't seastone. He felt fine. It was only one hand. He dropped his arm back to the mattress, a thousand watt smile wreathing his face. All his Christmases had come at once.

Law was free. No chains. Better he came back unchained. They could start again. It'd been some kind of hell, but as long as Law understood how much he'd hurt him, and to not do it again, they'd fight Doflamingo together, he was sure of it. He must've learnt his lesson.

Marco felt he'd placed a smidgen of pressure too much on the jackboot he'd ground into Law's neck, but it worked, huh? Look at him there so sinfully close, running a hand along Marco's leg, his side. He was ready.

"I came out of those nightmares, you said." Law kept his eye on the arm teasing Marco, then flicked his gaze to his face, the arm still rippling thigh and trunk. Marco missed that voice. Doflamingo had his own snarl, but Law's low-lying threat was rapids and fresh water and the promise of drowning.

He also missed contact as Law sat up and crossed his arms in front of him, and pulled his shirt over his head. Fuck, yes. He'd come around. Fuck. Why hadn't he tried more overt discipline before?

Look at the glint in his expression. The turn of his neck as he folded the button-down and left it at the end of the bed. The ownership of his own body. His arm. Where was his tatt? The M? What was that burn? They said there'd been an accident. As long as he'd come back, they'd figure that one out later. How to rebrand him. FGV for fugitivus?

Law's fingers tippytoed along Marco's boxers, it was how he slept, and Law felt his sleepy cock through the material. His touch gliding over the cloth.

"You said I'd wake but not really be awake. Acting out the dream, the past, when I blew you after nightmares." Law's stare had been on the bulge in his pants, but they skipped to his face before returning to the more pressing concern. "But it was part of my personality, so something I wanted."

"Unnh." Marco groaned as Law's hands slipped to the crotch of the fabric, handled his balls, tips of his fingers curled, hinting at what was to come.

"You were so good at it, Law. So willing. Had to be a natural."

"You fucked my face."

Marco drove his head back into the pillows. "No, you sucked me off. You were right into it."

He wished Law was a little less chatty. He played with his testicles as if they were baoding balls, but his full attention wasn't on Marco's pleasure.

"Crying?"

"Not always."

Marco pushed and rubbed against Law's hand, and was rewarded as he scritched his boys like the dog's ears.

"It was a nightmare."

"Older Law didn't cry."
Law looked up again, smiled brightly. Easily. That was his man. Relaxed evenings on the porch, smoking a joint, looking at the stars, Law's head in his lap, or vice versa. Leaning down to brush the Heart's lips. Law's hands reaching up to pull his head down to his own.

He stared at the ceiling, then directly at Marco. "You think he'd got used to having a master? Nightmare Law?"

"He'd accepted what was best for him."

"Yeah, probably," Law said, lowering himself to the bed before Marco lost his patience. "Cock-hungry slut, right? Even the crying one." That smile was all manner of come-hither—a promise of screwing Law into next Tuesday. It was Wednesday. Ah man. The plans. The punishment.

Marco reached for the black mane. A bronco that bent its neck to only one, maybe two—the rush at taming a beast was something else.

"Free will's overrated," Law added. He leant close to the nub of Marco's cock, mouth open. Licked the cloth. Nibbled. Then lifted his head. "You enjoyed getting sucked off by the crying one?"

Marco kept his free hand in Law's hair trying to force him down.

"He was the most earnest, most eager to please." Sometimes that incarnation didn't have the sophistication of the other post-nightmare Law. "Bit clumsy, though. Hands shook sometimes."

Law continued to knead. To keep his man happy.

"He was a child. You enjoyed sleeping with him?"

Marco pushed Law up a bit with his thighs. Pulled him up by his hair to view his face. It remained calm. The bewitching smile he used to seduce Doflamingo playing on his lips. You could do anything to him, and he'd take it with thanks. "Fuck, no, Law. It was you. Your adult body. You tonguing my cock. You were the one using trauma as a way to get into my pants. To get filled by me."

Why'd he have to make everything so complicated?

"You let all of them go down on you?"

"If Kikoku wasn't nearby."

"Oh?"

Law's hand kept a steady rotation of his nuts, occasionally brushing his cock. Marco took a deep breath. He'd break this restraint if he had to.

"You'd sometimes get spooked if you seemed older in the dreams and reach for her."

"I see."

He lowered as Marco eased his hold, took the nub again, still encased in cloth. Making sure to pool saliva, he sucked—a hungry little piggy at a teat—his lips and suction and upper teeth scraping the material and skin ever so slightly, and his tongue licking underneath, and pulling everything toward him and into his mouth, like burying his face in a mountain of mousse. Had a thing for desserts.

Marco dug his fingers into the bedcovers and lifted his free hand to grip Law's hair again, and to just breathe with relief at the roughness of it. The tough fucker.
Law put his arms either side of Marco's legs, forearms flat on the bed, and just buried himself in his groin. His hands worked up and under Marco's back—his slim, tapered coccyx and muscles—and brought more of the Phoenix toward him as he made sure his own body brushed his thighs and hinted at all the things Marco could do to him.

"But it was you, Law. Like now. All adult brawn and grit."

Law sat up. Wiped the saliva from his mouth, sat on his heels. "Like that? Was it like that? Can't seem to recall how I used to go down on Doffy or the executives." His childhood was just so damn long ago. "Wanna do it right."

"Ah, don't stop, you shit. Even better. That was even better."

"Like, if I'm awake it's a bit more fun for you?"

Marco tried to pull Law closer, to press his head down. The bind he'd used was strong, but he could burn it off in a second. He knew he could. "Semantics, Law. You were all but awake. I've never seen anyone so compliant."

"Well, then," Law leant down, once more, "must be true. That I'm made for this."

As if he had to ask.

He eased Marco's boxers down and pulled them along his long legs. The Phoenix kicked them to the floor.

"You'll sleep in here tonight, Law." Marco patted the space beside him.

Law looked down at the mattress. Across at his blankets still folded on the floor.

"You've earned the privilege. You know. Your place by my side."

"Yes, I've missed you, Marco." Whoever knew what was behind Law's smile. "No-one makes me feel quite the way do."

Marco released the vestiges of guilt he'd held onto. Izou, even Izou said he'd been too harsh. But Law respected backbone and sometimes you just had to crack a few of his own vertebrae to get him to see sense.

His tongue, his whole mouth was on his cock now, and yeah, he was making those noises he wouldn't before. Guessed it was cos' he was out of the chains. He'd have to remember that. Mindbreak trumped kairoseki. Though one was dependent on the other.

Ah man, the way he ran his teeth across the silky skin of his prick like a spider abseiling across her web. "Whoo."

Law paused, tongue under his shaft, half-lidded eyes looking up at him. "Don't stop, just, damn, Law!"

Law nodded. What was that face? It was always a challenge when Law set out to defy him. He'd take it on. Take Law on. Whatever it was he was dishing out.

Slow, languorous, that mouth could fit...well, it had...more than one, and Marco had trouble taking Doflamingo, so Law had a certain artistry. That sin of a cavity was wholly wrapped around Marco's junk, and he knew his pre-cum was dripping down Law's throat, and the slave would take
He leant up as much as he could and gripped Law's hair again. The earrings? What was that design? And he jerked into his mouth. His pelvis pushing lips into his teeth.


He stuck out his tongue, and he never did that. Marco's spunk—a touch of pre-cum—on the surface. Leaning back, he flexed his chest. Everyone desired Law, and here he was getting his own personal lap dance. His Law. Law let his tongue dip into the corners of his own mouth, curled it, pulled it in, velvet smile, and descended again.

"Take it easy. The executives only ever face-fucked me if they were in a hurry, and a willing slave is more enticing than one acting only from fear. Don't you think, Marco?" He was talking about his first captivity here. Seemed the one Marco was most invested in. Face-fucking was the order of the day with the second imprisonment. He was all too familiar with the scrunch of pubes against his teeth and mouth with that one.

Law ran his hand along the purpled cock, swollen and ready to have a little warmth ensconce it. "Don't you deserve all of my skill?"

"Get on with it," Marco snarled.

"Master." Law dipped down. "Can't wait to be filled by you."

He was right. There was something. Some nagging kind of fucked-upness that Law put on Marco when he serviced him after or during those nightmares. Sure, Marco was helping Law out, and Law never mentioned it the next day, so he probably didn't mind, but to have Law's dance-filled eyes flashing at him, and the inked hands alive, pressing down on his abs, not just going through the motions Doflamingo had taught him, not flinching in fear. It was something.

He couldn't wait to tell Doflamingo that he'd been right. Leave them alone, and they'll come home, wagging their tails behind them. Yeah, lambs to the slaughter. Law's arm seemed to tighten a fraction adjacent to his body as Marco let out a laugh. Forget Pirate King, he was the king of the world. Life couldn't get better.

He didn't even have to tell Law to make noises. Those filthy guttural grunts as he slavered all over his prick. Delayed gratification. Yes, baby. Law was getting off on doing it right for his owner. So goddamned hot. He'd pry his derrière open and ride him hard.

It had been some time for Marco too. There was Doffy, yeah, but Law was Marco's bitch and having him finally realise had him this near to spilling everything into the rollicking tongue and teeth that sucked him every particle of blood, skin and air closer to ejaculation.

He slammed his hand onto Law's head and bucked up into that juicy maw. He couldn't help it, so there, so quick, but Law had deprived him. The Heart stilled himself, and took it. His head knocking up, throat constricting, lips still sucking him off, his tongue curled around him. He was the one with two free hands. Could've stopped it. Cunt loved it. He wasn't even chained. Loved it. He blew his load into Law's mouth. He'd rest a while and go for round two with the doctor underneath. Could not wait.

Once Marco let his head go, Law pulled off him, with a groan, a prurient slurp as the cock slid from his mouth. The tatts were a life of their own as Law knelt, that grin, hmm, some good stuff.
Wiped his mouth with the back of his hand again as if he'd just devoured a plate of homecooked pasta.

Why'd he still have jeans on? Marco didn't think about it too long, and took his gaze away from—yeah, that was a bulge—away from Law's crotch as the Heart turned the tables yet again and slunk across the bed, his chest bare and right against his own, like the old days. He placed his lips over Marco's, feeding God's own juice into his mouth.

Hell, yeah. The kind of shit he never got to experience, cos half the time you couldn't even fuck Law's mouth let alone come in it. If the contrary bastard conceded, he'd just cup it into his hand, or wipe it on a towel like some dodderly old granny taking care of her dentures. Marco used jizz as lube when he'd really wanted to screw Law up, but that wasn't tonight.

Tonight, here he was, breath tight, and light and excited, skating across Marco's mouth as he took his lips, and worked his tongue, and it was never a battle between them. Marco twirled his tongue up to meet Law's own, and Law ran his under the rim of Marco's lips and pushed into his inner cheeks, and yeah, that bite wasn't enough to draw blood, but it was enough for Marco to hope his dick would be ready to go again soon, cos damn, Law chewing on his mouth sent blood rushing to his spent cock. Warm. Moist. Home. And There was actual blood too. Must have driven Law's teeth into his skin when he'd fucked his face. Tangy. Like Tabasco in a cocktail.

Law had one hand behind Marco's head, tugging softly on his hair, and the other was circling his chest, remembering just how much he missed the Whitebeard tattoo and the sculpted muscles below it.

"Gonna pound you into the mattress so hard." Marco nuzzled his neck. The bed was firm under him. Just right.

"Yeah?" Law breathed into him.

"Yeah. Would you like that? Not just today. Any time. Sitting down to dinner again with Benn and Shanks, your hole dripping with my cum." He'd seen how Law checked Benn out at times.

"Sounds good." Marco didn't think he'd ever heard Law agree to being wrecked. Even when he was in chains he only sang for Doflamingo. Marco preferred consensual, who wouldn't? The natural order of things just clicked into place. Discipline led to domestication. Law, the embodiment of reformation through rehabilitation.

"That'll let everyone know who you belong to. Remind you." He really did make life difficult for Marco at times. He clutched Law more tightly.

"I need that. Thank you." He chased Marco's lips into silence. Pulled away, murmured against his bristles,"Not so good at thinking for myself. Can't wait for you to take me in this room—".

He raised his head, and there was a flick at the back of Marco's hair, and he wasn't quite sure what it was, but Law made sure his face was solely on his master's, like drinking in a thousand ales, as he ground his body right down against his, rubbing into him. He slipped that hand along Marco's shoulder and arm, and under the tie so that he gripped Marco's wrist. Hmm, it was pliant. His other hand caressed his chest. "—And for you to reduce me to a quivering mess."

"Hah, yeah."

Wait. Law was getting up and moving away and huh? It was draughty. Marco lazily ran his palm over his chest. Kept a satisfied, curious eye on the tart. Was he getting the toys? The restraint
tightened.

No. Holding. In his hand. That beating red thing. In a box. Transparent gelatinous kind of grasp. They'd kept Kizaru's for a while. He looked down at his chest, his face tight, and fired up his zoon.

Nothing. Hole in his heart, and nothing. Correction. Hole in his chest. It'd be a hole in his heart if Law drove Kikoku into it.

He tried to ignite his flames, struggled to slip out of the restraint restricting him by the wrist to the side of the bed near the wall. Law flicked his hands, and the binds moved to the other arm and to his legs. Not spreadeagled, but held down. And naked. They slithered over the bedclothes.

"Like, this is just a kinky shit game you're doing with your powers, right, Law?" Freaky seeing a square where his heart had been. It sped up in Law's hands. He glanced at his Judas. Betrayed by a kiss. The weasel was never getting out of seastone again. No wonder Doflamingo chipped him.

Law looked at the photos on the bedside table and there was a pile of, what, tomatoes? Had he brought them in? Law gently placed the heart on the surface, took a drink of water and swished it around his mouth and spat it onto the floor. No respect. Someone would step in that.

He walked to the bed, lifted his shirt from the end with one hand, pulled it on. Marco regretted not whitewashing his slave's chest.

Law ambled back to the chest of drawers and picked up one of the pictures. Doffy had taken them. Selfies. Both naked. In the bed. "Consensual?" he asked, holding it up, facing it to Marco.

"There's only ever been one."

Law laughed. "You mean, there's only every been one whore, right?" He gathered both the photos of Doffy and a framed one of Ace, and positioned them where Marco would be able to see them if he twisted his head. Just on the edge of the beside-table. Oyaji as well. A bowl of water with a floating pink lily backing them up. The flower smacked of Donquixote.

"How's Doffy in bed? Pretty gifted, right?" When he wasn't trying to kill you.

"Considerate," said Marco, trying to light up his flames again, but the restraints just tightened. He looked down at them. Vines?

"I learnt from the best." Law didn't have much time. He'd been rude and teleported himself into the room, so he was able to slip his shoes on easily. He hadn't got intimate in the bed wearing them though. He did have some manners. His owners had drilled him to respect his elders. Muscle memory.

"Law, really. Of course there was Ace, but after him. Only you."

Marco eyed his heart on the other side of the photos. It was beating healthily, had calmed down a little, but was not an arms breadth away. Definitely walking distance.

Law didn't stop smiling. His eyes with no humour whatsoever. "You paid such an attentive ear to my pity stories. Had me fooled, but we had some good times, didn't we? Treated me as badly as anyone has. Worse. That was the goal, right? You achieved it."

Marco wriggled. The vines crept up his legs.

"What the hell are these things? What about my clothes?"
"Zucchini plant. I know how much you like them."

As much as Law liked bread.

"Sick fuck."

Law paused for a second. He picked up one of the tomatoes from the cluster on the side table. The plant had fruited.

"Learnt from the best." He popped it in his mouth. Sweet.

"I'm not wiped out. It's not seastone. What North fucking Blue witchery are you casting?"

Law held an earring between thumb and forefinger for a beat. "The vine contains traces of you, Marco. Hair. Objects. Fingernail clippings. When you came all over me, your emissions sank into the garden. My blood and semen, anger and vomit, yeah, tears. They're included."

Law pulled the leaves from the top of another tomato.

"Misery? Her bones. Not from her body. The ones she used to eat. Found a bit of that cloth you and Doffy thought should be my cum-rag-chew-toy. That's mixed up too. Don't quite know how it works, but the strands are woven together—braided—with intimacy, with knowledge, intention. It's stronger than devil fruit, like a mother's love."

Marco tried flexing. Firing up. Transforming. Nothing. "Some demonic baba you are."

Law looked around the room. Nothing of his was in it. "Motherfucker, right? Motherfucking whore? Whoreson." So dispassionate.

Law called Kikoku to him and pulled on his hat. "You've got your ghosts, Marco." He gestured to the photos. "It's all you wanted. Enjoy. If you get free, tomatoes do have healing elements." What doesn't kill you can only make you stronger.

"Just stab your sword through the heart. Coward. Can't even fight. Gotta keep me pinned down."

Law thought about the courthouse, Marco's dawn return after Doflamingo's attack when he spilled his seed onto Doflamingo's own, any day of his captivity with the Phoenix. Wearing cuffs. Chained to the bed.

"You're not wearing a collar, first division commander. Seems a fair match against a hyena like me. I'm only strong enough to feed on the kills of others. You know me well, you should realise that."

As much as alarm consumed him, Marco still admired the gold that splintered every word and glance Law sent his way.

"You're eternal. You'll survive whether I stab you or not. But that vine'll keep growing, and by the time it releases I'll have lived my life out. Hopefully. And you'll waste to whatever your original form is."

Law walked to the centre of the room.

"When it holds pieces of you, it has a hold over you. Needs to touch the skin, and yeah, it's definitely doing that. Pretty chummy."

He concentrated, visualised his destination.
"The heart's there in case you free yourself. They desiccate eventually. But you can pop it right back in if you can reach it."

"I'll come after you, Law."

Law glanced at the man on the bed. "I bet you will. Just another hole to fuck, right? The vine has the same kinda sensibility about probing into spaces uninvited."

"Stupid. You don't think Doflamingo or the crew will come visit?" It was getting harder to move, but he tried. Softer than Doffy's strings, but stronger. Marco could burn the ito-ito threads into ash.

"Hear Doffy's your only friend nowadays." And so it was. His crew not quite understanding why he'd gone after the slaves. Turned his back on Luffy's government. Treated Law the way he had. Sure, some had screwed Doflamingo for revenge, Law by proxy, but man, Marco had been brutal. He'd stopped inviting them around. Had put some of the Family behind the counter at the bar. That was a step too far. Buffalo didn't even know how to mix a drink.

"He'll own your arse again any day."

"Maybe so. Let him try." Then he was gone. Out of the room. A chip wrapper floating on the air and to the floor.

Marco cursed. He was naked. Law hadn't dressed him. The guy wasn't a pervert, no matter what they called him for their own means, but he figured the vine—he could feel it wrapping around his thighs—just grew on what was familiar and what had provided it with sustenance.

"Oyaji's grave!" he yelled, head jerking back onto the pillow. Cardiovascular functions seared with pain. Law wasn't there but the heart sounded and beat harder, and the cube moved outwards as if recovering from being squeezed.

He knew how it worked. He used to do it to Kizauru's heart when they had it for a time. When Law and he had something together approximating respect. But Law's power didn't include invisibility so what kind of spectre had touched it?

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On the ferry, Law rested his head on Robin's lap, his face to the wall, his back to the night sky, his legs stretched across the bench, boots on. Kikoku to Robin's side. They'd made the last boat out of town for the night. Just. And they'd both departed the house in the nick of time. He hadn't known she was there, or if he did, he didn't let on. The rendezvous was the dock. He wouldn't want her to see half of that.

Damn he was good though.

Franky exited the bar to the deck, a few soft drinks clutched against his body as he negotiated the door. Robin leant down and ran a finger across the engraving on the gold earring. The mother seal and pup. It was warm. What luck did Law have on his side? What was the power? That wasn't seastone holding Marco back. "Sit up, hon. Franky's here."

Law groaned. Took a breath, then rolled onto his back, and then his elbows, then slid his feet to the floor and was vertical, almost. His front was still wet. His shirt buttoned up. He'd doused himself in a bottle of water when he'd boarded the ferry. Scrubbed his face, washed his hands, then ran his pointer along his gums, stuck it down his throat, making himself dry retch. Coughing water over
the deck. Pissed off the crew.

She'd seen. She'd witnessed. So she didn't question, but she did move him to the bench seats when he was done.

He pulled a clump of leaves from his jeans pocket to his nose and inhaled, both repulsion and relief crossing his face, before he rested his head against the wall, dropping the vegetation to the ground.

"Brother, you're wiped out."

Law nodded.

Robin indicated the bench. Franky sat as best he could. These inter-island ferries catered for all types. Robin took the drinks from him, and Franky shrunk his arms into something a little more human. It's something he'd had to do as his relationship with Robin progressed. They were still oversized though, and kinda metallic. Metal.

"Whoa," Law said. He was close. Too close.

"C'mon, what's more comfortable than a snooze in a Buick or sea-train or a tin can?"

Law nodded again. Kinda. His Head was heavy. True, there weren't too many places more comfortable than the Polar Tang.

Franky lifted his arm and patted the compartment where he kept his cola. Like a little chamber. Someone who understood hearts should understand that.

Law clunked against it. Yes. Clunked. If it didn't hurt, Franky sometimes thought Law felt he didn't deserve it. Yet, all of Franky was heart, no matter the material. He rested his arm on Law's shoulder and almost pulverised him as he pulled him in. Nice and smotheringly comfortable, just like grandmother or a monster truck.

Robin pulled on a Franky finger, and he elevated his arm again. She snuggled to the side of Law who'd dropped to sleep just like that. (Franky smelt like a submarine and it was like returning home). She wished she'd squeezed that heart a thousand times more, but the second Pop Green had been primed to spread and she had no defences against it.

Chapter End Notes

Law wins in this one, but not really. Sorry Law. But he still wins. Yay! Oh, and I had the image from chapter 950 for Law staring down Marco, Marco wilfully misinterpreting.

Oh, it's not tentacle, or vine porn, but those creepers do go where they will. I've modified Franky slightly. Sorry for the number of posts this week! I'll be dialling back soon.

Thanks for reading.
"You-hoo, Phoenix." Doflamingo scraped the gate across the path. Really, he hadn't fixed it yet? The garden looked a bit different. Was Marco right and that tart had returned? He leered. Couldn't wait. Guessed Law had been set to work on the flower beds, then put to better use. "I've brought Marble cake."

Marco had expressed some like for the childhood favourite. He hoped he appreciated Jora's special artistic touch to the colours. It was fun hanging out with him. He was an intelligent man. It was amusing to see his thoughts fall into a fishing-wire tangle over what was right or wrong. Fortunately, he'd turned to the right man for guidance. He was good in bed too.

Doflamingo straightened the waxed paper over the cake when he entered the yard. Damn, he guessed Marco had got to fuck Law before him, but then the Phoenix had a different kind of attachment to the twat and his twat—so to say. Doflamingo was far from biologically ignorant.

As he walked down the path, musing on Law's anatomy, an uneasy charge in the air clung to his feathers. A coronal hum fuzzed the house, but mostly it was calm. Quiet in the residence. Quiet in the surrounds. A rustle in the garden. Something growing? Moving? It pulled in warm air from the earth, cold air above, and from the space surrounding Doflamingo. The grounds were sunk into silence.

Red, green—yellowing to ripeness—the tomatoes were out. Doflamingo secured one with a string, whipping it toward him. He wiped the thin layer of dust and dirt coating it on his pants, and popped it onto his tongue. Sweet. And zucchinis? Where had those plants come from? Some kind of hybrid?

First of all, Marco lost standing for such a pit of a yard, and second, everyone would avoid him if he foisted zucchinis on them. Sure, they were a dependable food source, but they never stopped fruiting. There were only so many bottles of pasta sauce you could make or stomach.

He moved a bit closer to the house. The building was dark, darkened. Battered. Abandoned. Covered in?

Crumbs of dirt speckled the patina of his shoes and hitchhiked a lift on the thin soles as they tapped across the path. Vines. Vines all over the house. Smothering the windows, the doors, slipping under the runners, under the eaves. They even burrowed below the foundations of the house. The zucchini plants intermingled with the creepers' twists and turns.
But a plant? Plants? Had to be Law's doing. Bah. What could you do with a plant? Just burn or cut it, and you were past it. The doctor's logic was never as sharp as he liked to think.

Doflamingo shot his weakest strings out to clear a way into the entrance. They cleaved the air but collapsed when they came into contact with the green. Dissipated into air.

"Hmm?"

*Step on a crack, break your mother's back. Step on a line, break your father's spine.* Doflamingo avoided the first, and firmly executed the second, until he ran out of path. Drawing his mind away from notches and clefts and parents, he stared at the house.

No. No-one could mistake that energy, and he'd harnessed it himself enough times to keep his enemies in place and Law subservient. Disquiet calcified the rungs of his vertebrae. Seastone. The place was covered in it. Or the climbers carried it somehow. And carried the zucchinis. He couldn't get near.

Oh well. It meant Law couldn't either, and he was either trapped inside or well away from there. He'd put his bet on the second. Marco had been a pleasant diversion, but his business was with the surgeon. He placed the Marble cake on the doorstep, just in case the Whitebeard was out and about, or had a way of exiting.

"Marco, are you in?" Impossible to knock on the sliding door. "Pesky seastone's *crawling* all over your place. Can't touch the stuff. But we'll think of something." He shifted away. "Toodle pip, na."

A vacuum left by the absence of the first division commander was something to contemplate. A dangerous and advantageous thing.

Using his power, he severed a few zucchinis from their stems. The first of the season were tender, and never as tedious as the thousandth.

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The vine found the chamber to his heart, and though it didn't hurt as much as having it compressed, it wasn't fun to have the runners creep back and forth across and into the cavity. Most of Law's victims functioned as their skin covered the hole made from extraction, but the greenery hadn't given his flesh the chance to reform.

It slithered into the edges of his mouth, and he tried to bite down to feed himself, but also just to breath and spit the vine away. He could keep that up only for so long. Sleep was a thing. When he woke, he was close to mummified.

He chewed his way out, though he couldn't do anything about the tendrils constricting his trunk, arm and legs. They kept clear of his eyes, ears and nose. Law's magic, maybe. He was still able to turn his head and view his loved ones, the tomatoes exploding and spilling their seed in their ripeness, and the crushed bunch of leaves wafting their aroma through the room, though they'd dry out eventually. All on the bedside table.

Law had both repose and repulsion when faced with the leaves. Marco's conditioning certainly hadn't been successful if he'd been able to physically pick the fruit and foliage and bring them into the house. Though perhaps he used Shambles.

As the stems twisted, lulled and cajoled him, Law smiling so easily as he took care of the herb and vegetable plots floated across his mind. Back before Doflamingo had disrupted everything.
Law dug the climbers and plants into the earth after a bumper season. He'd plant them out in the far end of the yard next year. A paper bag with the last of the crop, and an apple to encourage ripening, sat on the kitchen counter.

The weakening sun lit the edges of his hair. His farmer's tan peeked out from under a raised sleeve.

Marco stepped near, Misery by his heels. She ran to Law. It was time for her walk.

"Join us?"

He looked up, wiped an arm across his brow to brush away sweat without marking it with dirt. Drove the shovel in to the soil, leaning it against the side of the house. His expression was positively dopey.

"What're you so happy about?"

Law picked up a cutting that lay on top of the turned earth, ran his fingers down the stem, pulled off the leaves and scrunched them. He held them under Marco's nose. The Phoenix took them in his hand.

"Just really dig this smell."

He watched Marco inhale, dusted his palms, then stretched back, both hands on his sacrum as he waited for the verdict. "Well?"

"Nice, I guess?"

Law laughed. He walked to Marco's side, squatted to ruffle Misery's fur. She licked his neck. "Philistine." He didn't mean the dog. He stood and held out his palm for the leaves, also inhaled. "Perfume of the gods."

"I'll take your word for it." Marco ran his fingers across Law's hair, his partner moving away, and they'd strode up the path, down the road, to the park. There hadn't been a nightmare in an age.

Lying in the bed, bound in and to the present, he tried to hold onto this—the scent of that day, the smell lacing the times he'd gathered foliage for Law. He'd never been disappointed with the look Law sent him that he'd got it so absolutely right, and that Law was glad of the fact. Because, whoever did get him? Marco sighed. He was and wasn't that complicated.

The knoll at the back of the house, the chaff bag, the seasoning he'd insisted Law sprinkle on his food, the aroma he'd licked from his face because he'd mashed leaves into a poultice he liberally and savagely applied—he didn't want to recall any of that. The orgasms had been something else, but the odour fused with those memories reminded him that he had no way of breaking free.

Law had always tended the garden. It made sense it acted on his behalf now when imbued with whatever Law said it contained; mainly Marco himself, from what he could gather. But considering how many times he'd beaten and assaulted Law right by the vines, using the plants to humiliate, sicken and condition, it had to contain parts of the Heart too, and Law had stated as such. Saline and plasma, eh? Tears and blood.

The vine sent out feelers exploring the corners of his lips, the spaces beyond it, before proceeding. He had to wait until it intruded far enough before biting down. It was quite tasty, though he didn't appreciate the hints of courgette; the zucchini plants having entwined with the climbers, and man, how did they pop up overnight?
It rustled over his scalp, through his hair, a den of snakes warmed by spring. He'd got used to that. It would settle eventually. He'd gagged himself awake a few times when the runners had sneaked past his tongue and teeth to the back of his throat. Serration had been hurried and, as a practitioner, he drilled himself not to panic, but it wasn't easy.

He'd soiled himself of course, and that fed the plants too. Nothing went to waste. Reduce, reuse, recycle. He was the one reducing, not the creepers. And nothing he went through was anything he hadn't inflicted on Law. In a manner of speaking. No collar around his neck, thank god, and the sluggishness of seastone wasn't there, but he was immobile. Not a single power operative. The vine sheathed everything.

It was attracted to nutrients. Him. He was what made the plant. All those loving tugs of hair Law had given while they'd been fucking, pulling it from the roots. How meticulous he'd been in sweeping up the bathroom and dumping the refuse in the garden. How the faker had trembled when Marco had sent him to work there. That slit wrist. Explained why it was such a hack job. Law hadn't been trying to eradicate himself.

There, he caught the glints within the stems. The end, the broken curve of his red glasses frame, and—ah, didn't Law have any mercy? Slaves were not to be trusted, that was for sure. Shards of crockery, raku glaze flaking, from the tea set passed down from Phoenix to phoenix, generation to generation—on the human side of things—patterned the vegetation. There were mortal aspects to his lineage.

At least they were with him—all that was familiar confined him and would go with him if it came to that. If he understood Law correctly, basically Marco's essence pinned him down, with some Law spite and North Blue sorcery thrown in, nullifying his devil fruit when it touched his skin. Surely he could control it somehow. He glanced around as much as he could. Yes, the climbers were creeping over his possessions, obscuring them. It left Law's folded blankets alone, the dog bowl. The photos.

If returning to ash was an option, he would. When the tendrils wrapped themselves around the tomatoes and consumed them, nutrients entered his body too, or maybe he imagined it. He'd been some time without food. The plant produced its own water from the humidity amassing in the house, and drops fell to his tongue occasionally. Either way, another flavour had never tasted so good.

When it found the heart it wrapped itself completely around it like a delighted child. It had no sensibility and squeezed hard. Then rested before resuming its embrace. Was this how the vine, vines, extracted nourishment?

Something clinked on the concrete surface outside. A dish? Who was there? Surely they'd heard his yell of pain, his call for help, but shoes clicked back up the path and Marco shuddered into the mattress.

Ace and Doflamingo and Oyaji looked on at the clumps of crawling leaves that gradually took over and flattened the bed, which did maintain its size. Behind them, the ever-shrinking square startled the room now and then with a sonic bump as its light faded, and the house sank into darkness—creepers suffocating every entry way and exit.

Chapter End Notes
I've got to take a break from this for a while before summer finishes with me not having done much but working on this fic. September's just started, gotta fit in a few more non-ff things. I'll fix any clangers over the next few days.

Thank you to the lovely RobotintheRoom for commenting, and folks who've communicated by other means.

Background knowledge of the tea ceremony ceramic shards isn't at all necessary for this fic, but they get a far sweeter moment to shine in Defects.

Let me know if there's something you can't follow, want clarification on, or to just share your thoughts. I know zucchini plants aren't vines, btw. Cheers!
Law stood against the railing of the deck, looking out to the darkened sky as the ferry pulled into Robin's island, water slapping the hull. He'd sleep at hers the night, and go back to the safehouse tomorrow—his crew should be returning. The boat pulled up to dock, and Law listened for fat-bodied splashes of water.

Seals enjoyed this corner of the island with its slight dip in weather. Clever animals. When they were tired they grabbed a ride on stern wedges or the bulbous bow of whatever vessel had room for them, sometimes climbing right into the boat if it was small enough. Not his familiar, however—the Largha. They were wary of humans.

It was strange to think that the two most gentle members of his crew were apex predators. Bepo and Shachi—a polar bear in appearance, and an orca in namesake. Both ate seals, fortunately usually not his kind. Largha seals were agile, blended in well, and chose to haul-out in areas that were difficult for either larger animal to access.

The orca could be pretty indiscriminate. It was also more likely to kill a polar bear than the other way around—even if the young of both were vulnerable to the other, but the orca was a more efficient killing machine. Both happily fed on carcasses of one another rather than creating them.

Shachi's namesake was capable of preying on blue whales and great white sharks. In pods, mind you, but that was something else. Polar bears were cunning, but the orcas took it to a whole other level. Blocking the blowholes of humpbacks, and dragging them underwater so they'd drown. Ripping out the livers, stomachs and testes of sharks. Slapping sting-rays about for fun, until they sunk to the bottom of the ocean and stayed there. That's if they didn't eat them.

Seals ate penguins, but again not the largha. Even so, seals knew how to crush skeletons and flesh to food. Penguins, seals and narwhals ate sea slugs; birds and seals ate sea urchins. The orca and the polar bear were enemies of the narwhal and some sea birds. Bepo wouldn't dare, but maybe it was why Shachi told terrible, inappropriate jokes in Ikkaku's presence about her being horny.

Law picked at his teeth and tipped the nodachi back against his shoulder as he queued to exit the ferry. It'd been a tiring day, and his troubles were far from over, but one obstacle to safety had been removed. One bad memory dealt with, one bag of shit dumped on a doorstep and set on fire. He didn't think it could ever be completely over, but there was some peace. He dug into his pockets and crumbled a few of the leaves left.

The engraving on his earring was still a little warm against his skin when he'd tapped it. He wasn't
sure which combination of elements brought about the power of the twine—a lot was gut instinct. But it worked. Marco's scent was familiar, the contours of his body known—there was an indentation near Phoenix's hip that he loved tracing when they rested together, a nick from a knife fight, but there had been no pleasure in going down on him as a repentant slave.

The tyrant Marco became—always had been if stories about nightmares were to be believed—man, what he'd have given for a glimpse of that crap earlier, to avoid or eliminate it and him. But that curtain had been lifted before, hadn't it? A glimpse into his own head then, to fix the screws rattling around that made him stay when it had been wiser to go.

The leaves flaked a little more, and Law imagined the plants they'd hidden and helped nurture tightening around Marco's body with a little more pressure. He didn't want to spend all his time thinking about him. If he came after him, Kikoku would go straight through that feathered heart.

He'd get Usopp to incapacitate him with seastone, and with his devil's fruit cancelled, the sword must have some effect. Why didn't he try it in the house? Really didn't like taking life. Wanted Marco to reflect? Suffer?

Franky stood behind Law. He knew it was almost impossible for the guy not to crowd him, but man, he had to stop crowding him.

"Ready, Bro?" He clamped a hand on Law's shoulder and almost dislocated it.

"Mmm."

Law, Robin, Franky and Kikoku took the stairs to the lower decks to disembark.

A few leaves scattered over the path. Light usually seeped between shutters in dots and dashes of illumination, but now—blinds wrenched from awnings—it spilled into the yard. Branches of the mighty Moreton Bay Fig lay strewn over the grass. A bullet hole cracked a window.

"The fuck," Franky said in what he probably thought was his inside voice. Robin and Law lifted their heads. A whirr of cameras and trundle of wheels dollying video, booms and mikes raced along the sidewalk—chasing away the silence.

Birds. Morgans sensationalistic rabble-rousing ratbags chirped a few decibels louder than Franky. The landlocked members burst in through the side gate, the one Shanks and Benn had bundled Law through about a month prior, wrapped in a blanket. Whether they were there to ensnare the Revolutionaries, the slaves, Law himself, who knew? Anyone was a bonus where ratings were concerned.

Morgans at the helm, all bobbing head and extended neck, looked around the yard excitedly. His horde, crew, and equipment rushed in after him, tearing, defacing, and driving a cloth napkin—hemmed with the design of the Hearts crew—into the soil. The house and garden were empty. Battle. Battle had occurred. The bright lights laid bare warfare in the quiet suburban streets.

A story was a story. Morgans urged the cameras to roll after the make-up crew had powdered his nose, and the lights and all were set up. "Gangland War Escalates," he snapped at an emu to his side. He clicked his feathers as if they were fingers. "Ex-slaves' Gangland Execution; Salacious Slaves Sully the Suburbs—pick one and run with it." He rubbed his wing across his beak, tipped up his top hat. "Or think of a better one."
"Ready to roll, boss."

He intro'd the breathy trailer. An anonymous tip-off had led them to a criminal hideout masquerading as a tranquil suburban house in a gentrified neighbourhood. Rumoured among the squatters was the despicable animal torturer, Trafalgar Law, Surgeon of Death. A few minutes too late, The World Economic Journal had discovered signs of attack and struggle in the peaceful backyard.

Which citizens had Trafalgar Law harmed? Because he invariably had. Which of the citizenry's sons? Daughters? What tales of horror did the dwelling hold? Skinned cats? Beakless birds? Carcasses vacantly staring in terror, eyes popped from sockets? The surgeon was insane and no barbarity was beyond the realms of imagination. Law-abiding folk had much to fear.

A harboger of Revolutionaries and ex-slaves, cutthroats and criminals, the man was dangerous and was not to be approached under any circumstances.

"Cut! Ask the neighbours what they saw, heard, suspected. Did they fear for their lives? Ask if any were aware that the infamous traitor resided in their leafy neck of the woods. What should be done with him once he's caught?

"Tell them about a trail of blood, singed lawns, vandalised trees. I bet they're attached to this beauty. " And he patted the side of the Moreton Bay fig, stared puzzled at the scratches scored into the bark, and then shooed his staff away to interrogate the bunch of gawkers milling outside the residence.

Chapter End Notes

Just a short chapter. I guess a break for me is two weeks, lol. Now's the tricky part of bringing these two storylines together. The light storyline has had a Doflamingo fight. The dark one has not. There's one more chapter in this section of dark storyline (also short). I think the chapter count is right now, but again, might lose or gain one. Thank you for reading. Any feedback, questions, etc. are welcome.

BTW, you probably all know, but Orca whales are actually dolphins. Man, they are brutal, and just kinda bash other sea-animals about for fun. My research has been interesting lately.

Just a recap: **Shachi**—Orca (Killer whale-really, folks should ship him with Killer, right? Not Penguin. Hah), **Ikkaku**—narwhal, **Uni**—sea urchin, **Clione**—a particular type of sea slug.
The things that most attracted Doflamingo to Fire Fist Ace were the medallions attached to his hat. The faces of tragedy and comedy. There was a lot to relish in the world, to be amused by, and it was difficult to distinguish between pleasure and pain—the faces pulled, the noises made—at times.

Law, too, that symbol on his back and flag, so close to his own, but without the strikethrough, without the double set of teeth. And also sporting a corona of sorts. A pinwheel. A log pose with no destination. That was some kind of dualistic commentary.

How was a symbol like that meant to bite, to chew apart fiend and foe? All it could do was smile. It was a jab, as he'd always thought, some misguided homage to Roci, but Doflamingo had held the Heart seat open for Law. It was the reason he hadn't hunted him down in those years.

The most loyal of servants were the ex-slaves, especially those who returned full of remorse and fear. More fun to punish the ones that were dragged back kicking and screaming, though.

As if he hadn't known when Law was in the human auction house on Sabaody. Must have brought back memories for the kid. As if Doflamingo hadn't observed that garish yellow submersible surface and rescue Strawhat and Jinbei from under the noses of the World Government. That took some balls. He only wished he'd thought to send a few strings shooting across the battleground to hook and harness the vessel before it motored away. Was too distracted with Croc. Sandy had put on quite the show.

But if Kizaru's light was able to pierce the layers of sea-water, his strings could do the same. He'd missed his chance. Had his hands full with Moria and all.

Luffy survived. Happiness. Ace did not. Sadness. Doflamingo flourished and took over Dressrosa—a farce of sorts. His life twisted and turned like a wizened cane gouging crooked paths into reluctant flesh and soil. He was pleased he'd endured and got as far as he had. Roci had not. That was a tragedy, but the fool brought his demise upon himself. A comedy of errors.

And Law perpetuated the allegory. The smile on his bounty posters in no way matched that which spread over Doflamingo's face or his deceased brother's. But it was there. And that scowl. Comedy and tragedy in one person. Now there was a thought.

Jora knocked on the door and crossed the room at Doflamingo's beckoning to the bay window. He liked to look out at the yard. It wasn't Dressrosa but the manicured lawns were pleasant. Much better than prison, though he hadn't spent much time there. She carried a ceramic cup. One of Lao
G's creations. He visited with a pottery master every weekend if they weren't busy sacking and looting.

Doflamingo took it with thanks, the sweet aroma of amazake filled the room and warmed his hands. "It's new year all ready?" He sipped.

"Sugar answered the door to an old lady. She said amazake was made in the heat once to help people cope with the depletion of energy. She was selling it, and I thought she needed a few beri, and we had some to spare."

"It's a quiet and hot day, so why not?" Doflamingo said. Why not indeed?. The air was a dirge of humidity and the drink surprisingly refreshing. It had been popular in families who had family, he noted, in the North Blue. Traipsing off to the new year shrines in their kimono, they returned home after midnight to bowls of soba. Slurping down the noodles encouraged longevity. Something they determined his family would not experience. Vergo had sometimes made amazake for him. The old woman was out of season and region.

Dim memories of rice and sake lees and water in their Mariejois kitchens simmered at the back of his mind. It was once a noble drink. Its popularity spread amongst the commoners over the eras. You couldn't get much closer to the slag heap than slaves and servants, and you couldn't make good coffee without good grounds. The Donquixote family's subordinates were a cut above the rest, but they were still peons and property. The top slaves were marked with those double-piercings. Just like Law.

Why had he been in the kitchen? At his grandmother's place, following that valet-vassal around? A cup of amazake was offered—maybe it had been a new year's treat for the indentured—and he'd smashed it to the kitchen floor, thick globs of rice and shards of pottery covering the tiles. The slaves should be punished for even cooking it up, but his grandmother had a liking for it, so she allowed it.

He'd been grateful for Vergo's attention. Doflamingo still felt his loss. During his mission on Punk Hazard, Vergo had said he'd bring back Law's ear. It would've joined all the ears of fallen enemies, opposition—civilians and warriors alike—in the ear mound, the mimizuka, he'd kept for such a purpose at the back of the Riku palace.

Back when he'd been king—reclaimed the family throne.

Carrying the heads of the fallen to prove their expiration was such a troublesome business, and he should know. An ear here, a nose there sufficed, and Vergo was one of his best foot soldiers. He never returned empty-handed.

If that mutilation had come to pass, Law would've once more joined the ranks of tragedy and comedy. The new year bells chiming 108 times to atone for sins would be a muffled haze. Plus, Vergo would've ensured no-one piffered the gold. The idea of holding the ear in his hand with its little trinkets certainly tickled Doflamingo's funny bone. It surprised him that Law so obviously kept those slave markings when he'd been so keen to scour his body of the brands.

He should have sliced his ear off in the interim years to indicate not a corpse of the fallen, but a deformity of the rebellious. A warning to others. He'd put that plan into place when he recaptured him.

Being branded—again, three times now—marked him as a clown, a knavish buffoon. He took solace in that.
It was almost time to feed the family. Doflamingo liked to eat well, and mealtimes were always a feast. Pasta and the accompanying sauces, stuffed and roasted vegetables, paella, garlic and fresh-from-the-oven bread.

He placed his cup on the windowsill, a maid scurrying to collect it, as the gong sounded and the Family gathered. Jora had gone ahead of him. She'd conducted art classes during her time in prison, but also learnt new dishes. The others enjoyed cooking too, though Buffalo and Baby 5 burnt more than baked. Everyone took turns when they felt like flexing their creative impulses, otherwise the servants catered for all. Cooking the rainbow-hued marble cake the day before, and the zucchinis today; using what was at hand (though the pantry was well-equipped with food dyes) fired her creativity.

Chapter End Notes

Now, I always thought that Vergo's statement about bringing home Law's ear from Punk Hazard was a kind of throwaway line, but it was warfare practice when Japan invaded Korea way back when (not the more recent times). Here's information on the mimizuka, which was established in Kyoto in 1597. That link has links to links, if you're interested, also the comments have information. I mean, I'm all for the slapstick and whimsy of the Family, and they're some of my favourite characters, but they really are brutal. So are a lot of the other organisations and people in One Piece, of course.

I guess we can look at this chapter as Doff before having his battle with Marco and Law in chap 35 (light 13b), or near the time that he came back from visiting Marco (dark 14b, chap 39). Thank you for reading.
Light 14C

Chapter Notes

Follows on from light 13d (chapter 37), and light 14a & b (chapter 41).

Warnings: A few sentences of smack talk and thoughts from Doflamingo and a special guest. Literally two or three. No real warnings.

It's a long one. Strap yourselves in :-).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Light 14c

It was Marco's turn to shake if he'd had the time. Relief almost toppled him when Law stepped onto the deck of the Polar Tang, hours past the time he'd teleported them. Something had happened. Should've been right on their tail, but here it was, dawn hammering the waves into mottled gold.

He didn't have that red welt on the back of his hand before they'd departed. The kind left when he operated on himself, and his toenails had been intact. Had some bruising to his face too. That was new.

But he was here now, and drew his nodachi immediately—the schick of steel against the metal throat of the scabbard waking the sky—and called up a Room. The strings tugging Penguin, katana waving madly, toward Shachi, and driving Jean Bart's fist down toward Ikkaku's curls, dropped away. The Hearts stumbled into one another with the loss of tension.

Fuffufufu.

Damn, that pink thing was annoying, and why hadn't Law put some boots on before he decided to land himself in the middle of a stringfest, or at least a plaster on his toe? At times he had all the sense of a moth to a flame, or a mallard worrying fuzzy-tailed ducklings across a highway.

Hundreds of chattering starlings flew above. Flashes of video and camera lights popped and buzzed. Tweets tapped the morning with a telegrapher's efficiency. Parting the thick sea air, Marco's shirt lifting, Law swung Kikoku and sliced the birds. One half of their bodies flew one direction, and one half the other.

Chirps escalated to squawks as, with a single wing per partitioned bird, they circled clockwise and anti-clockwise, creating a vortex. Law's hair rose and settled, then rose again. He smiled a boxer's grin and spat. No blood.

Marco eyed the electronics that fell to the sub's deck. Could come in handy depending on who was behind the shutter.

Doflamingo, fully dressed, elbow slung over a raised knee, perched on top of a chamber of the submarine, the conning tower. The lopsided birds were all kinds of quirky, but he didn't have time
for Law's theatrics. The Hearts' Jolly Roger flapped below him and—looking straight at the doctor—Doflamingo dropped his leg, leant and slashed a diagonal line through the symbol's smiling face. He'd do the same to the one on Law's back, though Kizaru had beaten him to reconstructing that years ago.

"Shame to see you in clothes, Law."

A crosshatch of strings scored the sky. Doflamingo would rectify Law's current issue with overdressing, pay kind with kind. Joker proudly wore his pink coat now, though he'd swapped out one garish set of calf-length trousers for another. Gladius had patched up the holes left by Law's blade in his feathered garment. It had not been fun flying through the night air in his birthday suit.

Law countered and dodged. Ignored the flag. It was replaceable.

"I'm surprised those nice marine boys didn't divest you of them. Deck you out in prison stripes" Or less.

In fact, he appeared remarkably un-scuffed, despite mulberry patches of fatigue dappling his cheekbones, and the bruises; the tear in his sleeve from their altercation at the safehouse. Hadn't fixed that arm yet.

Marco shot a worried look, but there wasn't time. He touched a rail as the sub listed. He thought the Polar Tang was too sturdy to be affected by the surface currents, but it was a weird hybrid. Even though its huge black sail was furled, it moved as if caught in a swell. Law had explained it—the vessel was designed for stability underwater. It rolled about above water.

As on every ship, loose items were battened down or under nets, and in the case of the Polar Tang, usually not on deck at all. But a mop and bucket skittered, suds spilling over the flooring. The almost clear sky reddened a few wispy clouds, and a spray of salt blew across the deck, sank into skin.

"Or did you invite, them to partake, Law? Is that why you look so debonair? Refreshed and sated? Your arse tingling with warmth? It was all manner of consensual? A pursuit of pleasure?"

The tart.

Talons extended, Marco screeched across the bridge, got nowhere near. Doflamingo quickly but casually wrapped string around his feet as if trussing him for the oven, and propelled him away. But he was in the Room and wouldn't stay damaged for long. Law cleared the threads and he righted mid-air.

"Watch his fingers and face," Law yelled, his words dipping and peaking like a sine wave. That warning went for his crew too. He wiped his own face clear of salt and mist, a blaze of reckless anger subsiding. Tobi, Black Kites, called and spread their wings above the starlings, swooping in for easy pickings.

Doflamingo smiled at the attention, the information, and that Law was a little flustered. Let them try and avoid him. Let them try. He peered down to admire his work on the Jolly Roger, then turned his head to a splash at the side of the sub.

What a riot.

"Your crew's useless, isn't it Law?" He returned his gaze to his prey. "You were always more concerned about urchins in the snow than your own survival. Your own power. Look, they're jumping ship. You declared your fealty to the wrong man, the wrong team." Doflamingo idly
flicked his fingers—no strings—toward the boilersuited group. Law's subordinates. He adjusted his seat on the tower with the rollicking of the submarine.

Marco swore. What the fuck? Even Bepo went over. Jean Bart stayed on deck. He was strength, but such a target. Penguin remained beside him. Law's expression didn't change. If he wasn't worried, Marco wouldn't stress either. Then again, Law's pokerface was often the only defence he had against continued abuse, and he'd had years to refine it. Might indicate flat-out panic.

Doflamingo doubled over in laughter. "And you think the Family are rats." He removed his glasses, wiped under his eye, strafed the water with ito bullets. Law exchanged them with droplets. Both powers worked with sea water, just not when the liquid was directly applied to the wielders. The droplets rebounded over the deck to the conning tower, a rainbow haze above them.

Law leapt into the air hoping to counter-shock a depleted demon under the cover of the shower. To be so lucky. Splashes rained about the ship as Doffy's strings dispersed the swell, splattering Law and Marco. Law faltered and returned to the lower deck, unsteady.

Doflamingo lunged forward, fingers poised, then…gripped his stomach. Mid-flight. Had Law broken through? He'd grown more cunning with age. Or was it the runs? Diarrhoea would be inconvenient at a time like this. He touched his brow. Hot, but fighting was hard work. No wonder. Some of the seawater must have made contact. The brat.

"Fullbright."

A lightning strike split the air. Law rolled from the five strings, metal flooring jarring bones, then rolled right back like a party horn. Damnit. One string pinned a corner of his shirt to the deck, only the cloth, piercing the tear Doflamingo had inflicted at the safehouse. The other four threads spiked the surface of the sub near his head—the clang spicing a tsunami of breath and pulse in his ears.

Another favourite shirt ruined. Law ripped the sleeve away and scrambled to his feet, Kikoku low in his hand. Penguin and Jean Bart rushed below to check for damage, to fix immediately in case of escape. Maybe fetch a replacement shirt for captain. The one swinging about him had fewer buttons than was decent.

The blue dome retracted, Law's Room. Doflamingo pulleyed down before Law thought of somewhere clever to hide, pink feathers fluttering with the changing air around them as the starlings reformed. One kick and that pretty face and jaw flew into a railing and another gutted him across the vessel, sword pinging, and a nice jarring thunk of humerus against steel. A delicate trickle of blood framed his face.

Doflamingo wanted the sword that ended Vergo's life. Ended his own career as the manufacturer of SMILE, or had tried to. But it had developed a nasty energy over the years. He assessed it across the bridge. Not the time to grab it, even if he'd had no trouble in Dressrosa.

Law skittered from the strikes, Kikoku in his grasp, but Doflamingo torpedoed forward, head down, directly after him. The hell? Headbutting wasn't his style. He glanced up at an angry Phoenix, claws spread. Marco's foot jammed against Doflamingo's skull had thrust him into Law's lap. Almost.

"Don't push him towards me, you moron."

Marco tipped his head in apology and elevated higher for vantage.

Law scrabbled away again, not quite standing, not sure he had the energy for any ope-ope no mi
strategies, and the positioning wasn't right even if it seemed he was about to sing a lullaby to his tormenter. His ragged nail caught on the deck but the adrenaline rattling his bones absorbed the flare of pain.

All three metres and some of Doflamingo straightened, and he reached for the gold-trimmed pistol he kept tucked into the back of his pants, and strode over the deck. The gun had such heft. So comfortable in his hand, cool against his thigh. He was partial to using it on Law.

Kikoku's blunt edge hit the wall behind Law, and the air heaved. Seagulls shrieked a round of condemnation as Marco dove and scratched up Doflamingo's arm and wrapped his claws around the barrel. He pulled it from the demon's clasp, accelerated over the ship's edge and released it into the ocean.

Doflamingo's strings—emissaries collecting and delivering everything and anything—zig-zagged after the weapon. The flintlock had witnessed his father's last breath and his traitorous brother's final grimace. Law had an astonishing number of lives, but he wasn't going to use any more of them.

"Room."

The shit diced both the strings and gun. Pieces fell to the water, disrupting the surface like fish jumping for insects. The chamber would be fucked even if it was reassembled. The choppy sea thwarted divebombing seagulls hoping for bread scraps.

Doflamingo straightened and regarded the effigy of blue fire. Should be an effigy. Like Guy Fawkes getting his just deserts. "Marco the Phoenix." He cricked his head one way and the other. The bluebird of happiness had crossed one boundary too many. "My men are decimating what's left of your crew. That amputee. That kabuki player. That moustache twirler."

Marco scoffed. "And?" Doff's bunch of weirdos weren't to be discounted, but against Vista, Izou and Jozu?

"And of course there's him."

Doflamingo waved lazily at the sky. Law and Marco peered up. With the distraction, the heavenly demon wrapped a string around Law's wrist and sword, but the surgeon replaced it with...water. Again? He slumped a little. Getting befuddled? Good, good. A tired Law was so compliant.

So near the ocean was not ideal for Croc, so the burning light blazing through the sky could be none other than the outcast Kizaru.

"That old man's still got power?" Marco asked, standing back scratching his head. Law didn't like being on his knees with two nemeses bearing down on him. Luckily, Akainu was dead. His stunted nails throbbed as they did whenever this bastard was nearby, his back burning as if it had just been gouged. No shaking now, lad. Not the time for it. Get up.

"In our lives, Law," and Law sprang up and away to a far point of the ship as Doflamingo warmed to his homily.

"There are souls—" He stepped across the deck. He wasn't happy.

"—persecuted for no good reason—" Closer to the puny little shit. How dare he keep up with the defiance?

"—other than life's circumstances and their odious personalities."
The click of his shoes across hard surfaces fostered such delicious fear in the faces of his enemies.

"They make it easier on themselves when they accept their lot."

His pistol was disabled, a crying shame, so bullet strings skipped the deck as he advanced on Law, the surgeon countering them with his nodachi. What? No swapping out. No clever attacks—was he winding down?

Doflamingo grinned, then—face flushed, hand spread across his abdomen—groaned. Maybe his internal organs spasmed recalling Law's gamma knife. Mind over matter. That little lesson in radiation therapy was reason enough to seek and wreak revenge. His moment to spit and proceed.

Marco and Borsalino lit up the sky, and Doflamingo knew he'd have to share Law once it was all over, but the ex-admiral was worth having onside. It was useful to keep Morgans close too. He would never have learnt of Law's little hidey-hole without him.

The birds had reassembled and were filming a hushed, excited commentary on all the barbarous acts they witnessed, and that the Surgeon of Death had committed, including supporting and sheltering terrorist and renegade cells. It broadcast directly to the World Economic News cable channel, and Big News Morgans sat in his office, feet on the table, viewing the feed with a happy cackle.

One step nearer. Another. Law shivering? He'd got weak. Perhaps he was cold. Could be the vibrations of the sub. The ocean was rough. He must be exhausted.

He'd made and blown his pretty bubbles, and fought him at the safehouse, blocking and transforming ito-ito onslaughts to ensure his friends were safe. He'd presumably transferred all of the house's occupants to who-knows-where. Well, the Polar Tang for one. Kairoseki must have been part of his capture, and marine headquarters was in the opposite direction to the bay sheltering the sub. Law had been gone for a good chunk of the night. That was some distance to cover transporting himself back.

"Weary?" He aimed for the toe. Law stepped back a millimetre too late and the shout filled the battleground. Marco paused and Kizaru lasered him through. The Phoenix folded in on himself, but spread his wings and discharged a few flames and laughed.

"Ouch."

"Liar. Or did you mean your boy?"

Law shut down the yell, but aggrieved seagulls amplified the din.

"Familiar sound." Kizaru waited for Marco to re-form. "Cried the same way when I flambéed his nails." He gazed wistfully to the deck. "I love the smell of smouldering keratin in the morning."

Why Fujitora hadn't tried him for war crimes, Marco didn't know. His foot squarely caught Kizaru's cheek and the admiral turned his attention back to the blazing figure in front of him.

\[\text{OOOo}\]

"Hmm, I'm keen on riddling you with holes, Law, but you seem to dodge my bullets—every time—or you survive them. I'm not used to my victims living to tell the tale."
"Yeah, sorry for the inconvenience."

Law fired his Room as Doflamingo approached, but synapses were netted as if in seastone. He tightened his grip on Kikoku, and his heart constricted. Blue webbed between his fingers as it had in the backyard of the safehouse, but spread no further. Jumping into the ocean wasn't the best option. He stared at the jeering monster heading straight for him.

"First your ear though. For my collection, for Vergo. For Monet." Doflamingo lifted his fingers and moved them with a conductor's flourish.

Look at that. As if Law holding onto his ear would somehow stop the ito-ito no mi from not only cutting off his hearing, literally, but the hand as well. It was kinda sweet. Was this the result of the storm he declared the Ds would unleash? Was he trying to listen to the ocean like the sea trapped in a shell? Pathetic.

His Italian leather connected nicely, solidly, with Law's stomach. He doubled up, spat, cursed him out, but didn't let go of his ear, his nodachi extended in the other arm. His arms wobbling.

"You're breathing rather heavily, sweet." Like a blancmange. Law must be near-expiration.

Did the good doc think he desired those trinkets? He did, but purely to rub Law's nose in it. He'd tagged him for a reason years before. Not only were the earrings property but the ear itself, and the person it was attached to. A Donquixote commodity. What would Law trade for now on the current New World Index? He'd still fetch a pretty sum. What he'd lost in youth he'd gained in experience.

Strings from one hand flew for the ear, and a machinegun hail blasted from the other. Each and every attack stopped before it made contact with Law, but they nicked and splintered the deck around him, and the sub's railing wore a few bullet holes, steel curling like a flower. Part of the balustrade fell into the water. Seagulls raided the waves, ever hopeful.

His Ito-ito powers were failing? Law's dome wasn't up. He'd seen it peter out. Law's sluggishness was apparent, his breath uneven, and his mental state probably as fucked as it ever was, given that he continued to clutch his lughole like a clown. It gave him some kind of barrier now? The ope-ope no mi should be ope-ope-non-operative.

Borsalino landed lightly beside him.

Doflamingo turned to him, face dark. "Shoot him, would you? My power's coming up short." He caught one of Morgans' avians in silk filaments and brought it to hand. He loosened the threads from its beak and let it go. Strange.

"Curious," Kizaru said and Law tried to block that absentminded condescension from his mind. His fingernails were healed, though they'd never fully grown back, his life his own. The water was gaining appeal if escape wasn't possible. But they'd fish him out. The fuckers. He needed to move. Doflamingo kicks and punches and bites packed a wallop, haki or no haki. Where was Marco? He looked around without trying to be obvious.

"I slammed loverboy into the sea. He got distracted when Doffy blitzed you. Left himself wide open." Kizaru noted that Law didn't move his hand away from his head. Positioned the sword defensively across his body. Who was he? Scratchman Apoo? "He wasn't conscious."

Law's face clouded in irritation. Kizaru should've got more of a rise than that. He rubbed his pointer along a sideburn, under his nose, and pursed his lips. "None of these problematic issues
would occur, Law, including the death of your beloved bum bandit, if you simply followed the rules as they're laid out."

He shot a light at the almost immobile pirate. Law raised a finger under that ridiculous sword he barely held onto. Ooh, always good to see that the nails had merely grown back to stubs. Trafalgar coloured them as a perversion, he guessed. Scar kink.

But flipping him off? He never knew when he was outclassed. How dare he escape from him at Sabaody? Marineford? After Dressrosa? And had Sakazuki ever been avenged?

"If you let yourself get captured. Nice and peaceful, like…." Weird. The light from his beams seemed to deflect and shoot back up into the sky, exploding into a burning star, splattering starlings over the deck. Messy. He shook his fingers through his hair, freed it of bird guts. Law had the sense to move back from the strikes, but they were fast and he was not.

"If you had not defied the world government by pirating away a disgraced warlord and the son of the Revolutionaries…" The next one did some damage to the sub but avoided the surgeon. Hmm, possibly they would have time for that game of chess if they took him into captivity rather than shredding him in a blaze of fire.

Law heard the crew rumble below deck. Averting electrical shortages and fixing wiring, plates, holes. There weren't too many places for him to shift himself to with his power down.

"And as for escaping marine custody when you were ours to do with as we liked, that you shirked the executioner's platform…" He stood right over Law now. It'd have to freak him out. The sub tilted to one side and then the other. How did he manage to spend so much time on such a shaky vessel? Maybe it helped explain his calm.

He raised a hand. This one could not miss. "...That was beyond the pale. Let's merely say we've missed you and your skills and can't wait to play catch up." He chuckled Law under the chin and the pirate's breath was so angry it burnt his fingers. Hmm? Not as settled as he seemed. Across all his years as a marine, the fractious were never able to coherently express their feelings. No ability to reflect.

Rays of light poured over and fell whichever side of Law—as if the Heart clutched an open umbrella. The beams burnt straight through the upper layers of the sub-floor. Hmm? Frustrating. But there was more than one way to skin a curious little cat.

"Of course I'm more of an outlier now…" and Kizaru raised a very long, stylish, leg and kicked Law under the chin, in the stomach and across the deck as Doflamingo had before him. Handy that his power was so unreliable. "...Rather than a respected admiral." Law and Kikoku smashed into the cabin wall. "Thanks to you. But a good government's simply as strong as those who uphold it."

Damn logias and their ability to move faster than the eye could see. Law was practiced with Doffy's powers, but Kizaru was levels above.

"Fujitora and Luffy are putting out those pesky partisan spotfires that lit up all over the place ever since you—" Law's stomach again for good measure. Which organs to target? To split? Grunts. Good. Scream. Excellent. Blood. Regrettable, unavoidable. "—ever since you refused to toe the line and follow civil ordinance."

Law was dedicated to his sword and clinging to his head. Why not fight back? Migraine? One of those kids with a metal plate? Tinfoil messages from outer space? Was Enel going to drop from the moon and rescue him?
"He gets like this. Completely wiped out when his energy's gone. Devil fruit goes with it. Really doesn't know he's not grown up enough to wear long pants. He's always had ideas above his station."

Law's breath hadn't decreased any.

Doflamingo strutted over and quite liked the idea of a duet. He stared down at the stray pup, shy of air, strength, life. Still so fluffy and endearing. That cute black fur. If only it behaved. "Shall we?" He raised a leg back, and Law knew a string wouldn't work, but a well-aimed blow could break bone.

He flicked the clasp of the earring up and slipped the hoop into his hand, his palm encasing it, the gold brushing his flesh. Now he was a little less open to their charges. The last thing he wanted to do was to give away the location, the nature of his defence.

"I'll slice both of them off, Law," Doflamingo snarled, dropping his foot, and lifting him by his shirtfront, his underling's legs dangling and Kikoku more likely to be used against the Heart if she didn't suck the energy out of anyone she considered an enemy. It was nice to have Law at eye level, but he'd never learnt manners. Glared at him as if he were in the wrong.

"I clipped you after all so you wouldn't stray." He shook him fiercely enough for Kizaru to step back. The ex-admiral didn't want the sword to slice him when he'd evaded Marco's concentrated attacks. To be caught out by carelessness was humiliating.

The last tenuous strand threading the button on Law's shirt popped and the sight of that tattoo did nothing for Doflamingo's mood. "You had your run, your routine, were well taken care of. I didn't take a chunk of your ear to mark you like other ranchers do. Did the humane thing and gave you an identification symbol. Asked for very little in return. Why wander from the herd, from safety? Why endanger all that? For what?"

Yeah, for what, Law thought, hand curled but flapping about. Kikoku firmly held, but not directed. Doflamingo couldn't pump him full of lead, so he shook him about as if pulling the trigger again and again. Swaying about like a dust mote, again, Law didn't even raise an eyebrow at Doflamingo's grandiosity. Why would a particle so insignificant desire self-determination? Joker liked his angry face, well let him have it.

"There's more than one way to shut down a blowhole," Law muttered, but didn't know that he'd witness it in his lifetime.

"Oh?"

Doflamingo shunted him to the deck and Law's fist remained balled, even if it meant landing poorly. A shooting pain wrenched his collarbone. Lost a flip-flop too. Really should learn to wear more sensible shoes. Marco always chided him. Kikoku stuck with him more than his grasp had a hold of her.

Legs.

Kizaru's pin-striped shins, Doffy's hairy calves.

The bosom buddies sauntered over, hands in pockets, chatting casually, destination his goolies. His toe. His face. His skull. Whichever part of him was in their path, which was every part of him. A good physical workout was important for men their age wanting to keep trim. Doflamingo kept a chest expander in his study and used it regularly.
Law brought the arm with Kikoku across his front, but yeah, he'd definitely dislodged his clavicle. Catherine wheels pricked his vision. He sucked air, saliva, over his teeth as he tried to shuffle back. Bright fire-fly slugs flashed across his sight, no… across the sub… across the sub and across his vision, avoiding Law, and tunnelling into Doflamingo and Kizaru's flesh like hollow-point cartridges from a cluster bomb.

Spiked shuriken followed, spinning after the slugs like a trail of frisbees. Now was not the ideal time to hallucinate. Law blinked twice. He'd been in worse pain without tripping out. The ship rocked, shuriken saucered one after the other over the deck.

Blinked again. Sea urchins? He rubbed his good hand, holding the earring, on his chest. The sea creatures' spikes perforated Kizaru and Doflamingo's skin, again bypassing Law. Flower urchin. Its spines were venomous. A huge body of water pursued them.

Ah fuck. It'd wipe Law out too, but he wasn't up to much anyway. He hunkered down in preparation. Surveyed the railings to hold onto if the heaving wave tipped them over the side. Clasping the earring and Kikoku, his powers wiped out, he hoped his feet and legs were up to the task. He shut his eyes, flicked them open. Smiled slowly. So different from Doflamingo's leer of leisure. A hint of victory. Even when facing defeat. Drove the heavenly demon mad that Law never understood there was no-one lower than a person without a state.

A whale. A tail. A whale of a tail. A giant whale's tail slapped another wave over the deck drenching all three—salt and plankton and sea plants decorating their skin and clothes. Law clung onto the earring now because he couldn't lose it after all these years, and coughed and spluttered as much as the other two, and then, what… fucking… what?... invigorating?

He hadn't swum freely since Flevance. The dump at Spider Miles was toxic. He'd got his devil fruit at thirteen. He felt the engraving, the water purifying the metal. The sea-urchins and sea angels soared past, disinterested in his flesh and hair. Shunned Kikoku like the plague.

Bless his shapeshifting crew.

The soggy duo coughed, spluttered, rose to their knees, then full height, and stormed him. Even Kizaru glowered. Clicks. Whistles. Squeaks. The whale called its friends and two more damn orcas swam to the side of the Polar Tang and drowned them all. Like standing under a waterfall. Only salty and full of seaweed. Law laughed as the water soaked him through. He should be suffocating.

A dream, or a memory? Diving with his mother and grandmother. He'd call to her underwater, and rub noses when they reached shore. She taught him how to fish. It had been years since saltwater energised rather than enervated him. When the disease had taken a stronger hold, even though soaking in saline baths had been recommended, there were fewer trips to the ocean. It wasn't always a calm body of water. The coast and outcrops were home to king waves. If they went in, they mightn't make it back, even if they simply collected shells and paddled.

A narwhal and her pod splashed up a ruckus on the other side of the sub. They didn't want to capsize it. They needed to be careful. They didn't want to cross paths with the Orcas either.

Bepo jumped from the main killer whale's back. Shachi's back. And which crew didn't have seastone cuffs or chains to subdue their captains when they wouldn't listen and were stupidly self-sacrificial? Though that wasn't why the Hearts kept them. Of course not. Triggered Law too much, but they kept some, because you never knew if a devil fruit user was enemy or friend.

Jean Bart and Penguin exited to the upper deck, and joined Bepo in wrapping them around Kizaru and Doflamingo, stinging urchins and sea slugs still blitzen the couple. They nipped between toes,
down sides, slipped under clothes, and kept the logia and paramecia occupied brushing and pulling them off, squirming with discomfort, all the while struggling to regain energy.

Kizaru shrieked. Often. Every time a slug left mucous trails along his body. Doflamingo was more composed. If Law thought muck and poison unsettled him, he didn't realise how much Law's story corresponded with his own. Though the leper had never been a god. How did Law remain bruised, aching, but now upright? The water had doused him too.

Another surge. The whales were playing now. Law took the gold to his lips. Salt, ack. His power was useless while he held the piercing, but the brine was like medicine. He'd loved swimming before he got his fruit and before Amber lead had weakened him.

He glanced out to sea. Where was Marco? A mass of black turned below the surface. Keeping well clear of the orcas, seal after seal slipped back and forth, flipped out and into the water, contributing to the stream that had spilled over the deck.

Bepo joined Law, dapper and spry, despite how salt-encrusted his coverall was. Maritime elements were bracing.

"Marco's on a rock. He's okay, but we knew we were gonna make a mess with the sea water. He protested, so we dunked him and he came round. Or will when he's conscious. Had to fish him from the ocean once already after Kizaru knocked him down."

Law gave a quick smile. Marco, always too trusting around the Hearts. He pulled his gaze away from the sea mammals, and touched his collarbone. Bepo placed Kikoku flat on the deck, then grabbed Law's arm and shoulder and yanked it back into place, Law bellowing. Seemed all he did lately, but hell that was better. Hurt like fuck though. Now, perhaps they could fix his aching toe.

Marco. On some outcrop. In the middle of the ocean.

"What if it hadn't worked? How rash was that? What if I'd been wiped out as much as these two?" What if a Great White thought he'd make a great bento, or the tides swept him off the rocks?

"Then we'd put you in seastone too, cap. You need the rest."

Law glared at him, and Bepo bowed his head in apology, noticing how tightly Law's hand was clenched and that he was missing an earring.

"Your family's out there looking after him." He tapped the fist holding the gold so Law knew what he meant. "The largha don't like humans but they don't mind birds." And Law wasn't sure whether that grin showing Bepo's incisors filled him with confidence for Marco's well-being or not. "Three of 'em, boss. Keeping him company on the islet. Little one's almost ready to leave the nest."

Bepo tapped Law's hand again and touched his ear. Doffy and Kizaru were too enmeshed with creepy-crawlies to notice. Law slipped the piercing back into his lobe.

"What're we gonna do with them, Cap?" Bepo jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "Want Shachi to tip the boat?"

Yeah, what? Law thought. He'd had enough escapes to know that sending the two to the ocean floor didn't necessarily mean sending them to their next lives. And who was the criminal here? Over the last few months, by edict, not deed, he wasn't sure if it was him or Doflamingo. Joker hadn't had a summons served on him, or been chased by Morgans and those quislings.

"Meteor."
Bepo's ear's twitched, the Orcas clicked out warning. The air, the actual air, grew heavy and dark.

"What?" Since when had the Mink grown so nonchalant?

Bepo pointed to the sky. It was huge, a few lengths of the ship, and hurtling toward them.

Where there was a meteor a marine ship was sure to follow. Hadn't Law retired from all this shit years ago? Opted for a quiet island life, running his practice and clinics?

Shachi jumped on board. Ikkaku. Clione. Uni. Doflamingo's eyes narrowed. North blue sorcerers and djinn one and all. Was that why his family had been targeted when Homing removed them from Mariejois? Another reason? A true reason? The single power the northern dwellers had was a power they wouldn't willingly share?

He looked upward and a bubble of humour foretelling shattered bones and rounds on the breaking wheel floated through the sub. Meteor. Was the boy recovered enough to deal with it? He and Borsalino could do fuck all.

Yes. The Room expanded, Law swiped the air, and iron, nickel and rock fell around the sub and back toward the navy vessel. Yeah, there was a marine ship closing in on them. What was Fujitora playing at?

Law's powers recovered enough to shamble the two fruit users after the asteroid pieces, dropping them into the wake around the hull. Fujitora sensed the pink coat, the striped trousers (plus his ensign whispered the gaudy fashion duo's red carpet debut into his ear—they really made a splash), and who could mistake Doflamingo's cackle? The admiral paused long enough for their lungs to fill with more brine than a standard human could take before sending the dive-rescue crew.

When he asked for the coordinates of the Polar Tang, not that he needed them, the officers informed him bubbles and ripples interrupted the surface. Seagulls bobbed about among them, and the huge swarm of starlings was gone.

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Bepo assured Law the family with Marco would let Phoenix know the score. It'd make sense for him to go to the Thousand Sunny or his own crew, or any one of the safehouses not uncovered by Morgans' roaming team. They'd inform Aladine and his fighters, and they'd let the Strawhats know they might have a visitor, the good kind, soon. Maybe the Hearts could pick him up too, be able to resurface.

In the meantime he pushed Law onto an infirmary bed. Shachi gently pulled him further along it, shoving a few hundred pillows under his upper back and neck, so he sat comfortably upright. They prodded the area of dislocation, and it was tender, but motion was possible. Dislocated joints were no joke but Bepo had done a quick and thorough job. Law's stomach, chin, and face rippled with discolouration, hopefully just surface contusions, but they checked his eyes, and set up a roster to keep watch during the night.

Law reached for Bepo's ear. It hadn't been stitched yet.

"No time, boss."

A Room flickered and Law gestured to retrieve his kit but Penguin pushed his hand down.
"I need to keep my skills up. Let me do it."

Ikkaku was the one to pull Law's ripped and buttonless shirt off for no other reason than she had a spare one in her hand, but the crew all kinda envied her. They had to wash Law down and disinfect his wounds first anyway. Sure, the water did a pretty good job, but it was also full of seaweed and sea urchins and sea slugs. Marine poop.

"You communicate with shellfish?" he asked Uni and Clione. He wasn't surprised, but he didn't realise how deep the network went.

"Strength in numbers, man," Clione said.

"Couldn't have done it without ya, ya bottom feeders." Shachi slammed his hands down on Uni and Clione's shoulders.

"Them spikes are poisonous, y'know. Don't go getting all apex on us." Uni had almost dropped the surgical tweezers. Sterilising them again was a pain.

"Waste not want not," Clione said. "And not all. We're varied."

Shachi grinned, but dipped his head. True. Their captain belonged to the seal family, straddling a line between the extremes of life and food cycles. Orcas ripped out the tongues of baleen whales. They were full of protein and the easiest part to access once the pod had drowned the whale by brigading and dragging it underwater. He didn't know if his animal's feeding habits were any more savoury.

"Hey, Ikkaku," he called out.

"Shut it." She was bandaging the gash Doflamingo had cut into Law's arm. "It's a tooth, not a horn, and mostly limited to the males."

Shachi beamed and Penguin hit the back of his cap so it fell further over his eyes, but it couldn't disrupt his mood. Wasn't often he got to shine.

Jean Bart had powered the sub away from the navy vessel, which didn't give chase. Law would have to connect with Benn and Luffy to find out what was going on. The Polar Tang cruised through the ocean depths. It was rough above but smooth sailing down here. The streetlight lampshades on either side of the submarine lit their way, and also attracted a few disappointed lantern fish and others their direction. The deep sea dwellers swam away, disgruntled. False advertising or what?

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On an a small bunch of rocks, Marco watched the marines depart. Bepo sure had some kind of juju. After the original saturation, a group of bottlenose dolphins swam past every half hour or so to wet him again. It took forever for his fruit to recharge. Once they stopped soaking him, he figured things were good. He hoped. The Hearts' plan had sounded tight, or better than nothing, and Shachi in orca form was awe-inspiring.

The seals slipped away and Aladine surfaced, scaring the shit out of him. Marco committed his companions to memory to etch their likeness into the stick he'd started whittling on the Polar Tang.

"Doctor Phoenix."
"Doctor Brotula, didn't they teach you how to knock?"

Both nodded, and wheezed a laugh over their teeth. Marco squatted, his fingers running over the barnacled surface.

"The Strawhats are expecting your company."

"Law?"

"He's okay."

"Where is he?"

"On the sub. It's submerged. The Hearts'll let you know more when they can. Soon."

Marco stared at crushed crustacean shells on the tiny bit of land. The seals ate them whole, but were messy eaters. The adults dove after fish, and the pup was almost up to the same task. Okay. If Aladine said Law was okay, he was.

"Doflamingo? Kizaru?"

"On the navy ship."

"Free?" It was ex-admiral Kizaru after all, and Doflamingo baited Marco, letting him know he'd sent the marines after Law, calling in anonymously from his mansion. He was pissed off about losing all his clothes. But still. The marines only went after Law due to the system tying him to the Donquixote clan. And Misery's gruesome death.

It was trial by media and an incited public, and shouldn't stand up in a court of law. The World Government and Doflamingo's sense of justice had always been nebulous.

"In seastone chains. Swamped by the wash from a pod of breaching orcas. Plunged into the ocean by an irate surgeon."

"Law did that?"

Aladine laughed again. He'd witnessed it. He'd used his trident to push the duo down a little further. "Do you blame him?"

Marco's shook his head. "God, no." It was amazing they'd been fished out. But the powerful always found friends.

The merman moved to slide back under water but Marco caught his attention. Aladine submerged but surfaced, moisture dripping from his beard.

"Know anything about my crew?"

The merman's turn to shake his head. "Sorry."

They'd be all right, but that was his first port of call. Then the Strawhats. Then find Law. He took to the skies.

oOOo
In the infirmary, Bepo, ear fixed, slept in the bed adjacent to Law's. Law turned to him, inhaling sharply. One side was the gash, the other side the shoulder, but it was all right.

"The seals with Marco. What were they like?"

Bepo pulled himself from a drowsy slumber. "Hmm?"

"Bepo. You said my family was with Marco."

The Mink glanced across at Law. A dim glow from the equipment and the floor runners lit the room. Law's energy reminded him of the boy in the shack on Swallow Island, all those years before.

"Family. Familiar. A family. They stay together from about ten days before birth until weaning, Captain. But they're monogamous for that time. After mating they find a new family for the next birth. A child a year. A child a time."

"Spotted?"

"Yeah, like you Cap. Remember when you and Penguin found me, and Shachi joined us? Except you were white spots on dark skin and the seals are dark on light. You had a few marks left. And the babies are white, like polar bears, until they gain their blubber." They were cute, and good eating. They put on so much weight under their white-furred-lanugo that it was difficult for them to swim until they moulted and slimmed down.

"Blotches. Blotches on my skin."

Bepo rolled to his side and had to gauge Law's wellbeing from his body language and tone of voice. Too difficult to see his face. Though he discerned a vague outline.

"You saw what Uni can do. Poison is as much a foe as friend. Maybe your disease manifested a connection? A remembrance. Spot is unto spot?"

Someone on the crew had removed the band, the cuff he sometimes wore for grounding, but also as a restriction. Sometimes the past was hard to shake. Sometimes you didn't want to shake it. He ran fingers over old scars, and tenderly poked at new. His navigator was the crew's philosopher. "Shachi patterned the tattoo around the blotches on my back. Before Kizaru destroyed it. That's all that's left."

"Yeah. But they're there. Some things remain."

"Scars are fine. Most of the things that cause them aren't."

"For sure." The reason he'd been lost in the snow when Law and Penguin first came across him was he'd been running from a group of thugs. "We can all do without the cause, and the fallout. But you know, they're stained glass windows, aren't they? in churches and houses. When the sun streams through, the impurity lights the air and colours the floors."

"Yeah," Law said.

"Fragments make the prettiest patterns."

Law loved his wise navigator. Except when he ate fish from poisoned rivers. Poison was not always a friend, no matter what he said.
"Law?"

"Mmm?"

"Next year there'll be a different seal father for another largha father's baby, but there will be three, and if the pup from the year before survives, give it four to six years, and there'll be another unit of three."

Law felt for the pot pouri Marco had given him, and recalled it as a sopping bundle of clothed herbs pulled from a sodden trouser pocket. His crew had put it on the side table to dry. The mother abandoned her baby when it was strong enough to survive, though juveniles were known to swallow sticks and seaweed, and ate a lot more molluscs than the adults. Maybe no-one was ever ready to grow up.

"Flevance hurts. They saw your spots and hunted instead of helping, instead of accepting. But it lives on a little bit in those seals. A fragment? You too. Your mother, father and sister."

Perhaps the family of three carried part of him for some of the time.

"For the cycle to continue, it has to be broken, and if it isn't broken it won't continue."

"So, I'm doing fine even if I'm in dire need of an oil change and I've got a faulty gasket? And it's dandy for the government to gun my family and people down?"

Bepo laughed. "Of course to doing fine. You have a fruit that disassembles, right?"

"And assembles, reassembles." Law pulled the blanket over him a little more, moving slowly.

"Same idea. Gotta break things down for health and protection." Bepo rearranged his pillows, bore down on them. "But to the second? Decimation? Nah, not cool. Cruelty, whether deliberate or senseless? Maybe it achieves something, but what's the cost? It's that those strands that died off or were cauterised weren't the sole strands in existence. You've made yourself possible, Captain, and us."

Bepo tucked his paws under his cheek. He wished Law would get some rest.

"Huh. Guess so. But you've gotta take responsibility for being your own fuck-ups once you get past a certain age and circumstance."

Bepo nodded against the pillows. "Of course." Except when Penguin made him so mad that he ate his fish supplies. That wasn't his fault in the slightest. Polar bears needed a lot of food to survive. "You're perfect, Cap, Just the jumbled up mess of a way you are." Like us. Bepo thought. It had been his first time to ride a whale. That was even more fun than navigating the Polar Tang.

Law could live with that. Like Misery and her impaired vision. Seemed Marco could too. He put an arm over his eyes and bid his navigator good night, the steady thrum of the Polar Tang's engines a vat of honey below, warming them both.

Chapter End Notes

*I think that nodachi, katana, etc. are kept traditionally in bamboo scabbards, and I don't think the scabbard 'throat' is made of steel, but you never know. However, the
*shink* sound of the sword being drawn is so seminal in *One Piece* that I had to include it.

In this AU, the way that Law met Shachi, Bepo and Penguin is not canon. The wiki also says that the Polar Tang has a wooden upper deck (?), so it can splinter. Also, I don't know where the crew come from apart from Bepo, Shachi and Penguin, of course, but for this fic, the ones with sea elements are from the North Blue. Also, creative licence with having Arctic animals in temperate climes, though Orcas do travel.

I'm probably off on some of my seal facts. They're hard to come by. Orcas, however, really are the demons of the ocean. Plus, I know they're dolphins. Thanks!

Fight scenes are fun to write but really take a *lot of work*. Would love to know your thoughts.
"You wouldn't think a one-eyed creature could swim so well."

"Anything swims better than us."

Marco wrapped an arm around Law's waist and drew him near. Law, arms crossed, turned his head Marco's way for a beat. Steadied his footing. Looked back as Misery paddled out into the sea, picked up a stick thrown for her and swam back in. The salt water had to taste bad.

She loved the ocean. So did they of course, and they could stay afloat atop of it, in a vessel or under it in a submarine, but they couldn't physically submerge themselves and let go and trust the water and currents to carry them from one point to the next. They'd drown.

She ran up to them, shaking droplets all over their hairy legs—board shorts were the order of the day, even if they only went in as far as their knees. Franky tried to convince them of the benefits of Speedos, but the two pirates were strangely modest. Plus, Robin might be lurking nearby and she had no mercy. Board shorts hid the fishing tackle a whole lot better.

They'd tether a floatie ring to the shore, or wear them themselves, tough guys be damned. The floaties looked particularly cute around Law's badassmotherfucker bicep tatts, and Marco never failed to snort as his lover inflated them and slid them along his muscled arms.

They were like city kids—fluent in the ways of back-alley streets, but pale and jelly-legged on sand or sea. Even if they'd spent their lives on it. On it. Under it. Not in it.

Law's gruff wheeze of a laugh joined Marco's. It didn't stop them.

Once, Law chased down some bozos who'd taken off with their wallets, his wet boardies stuck to his thighs, yellow floaties (with Hearts' symbols) pumping up and down as he ran after them. Then he remembered his power and those kids never knew what hit them. Smoker had taken their statements and visited Law and Marco at home.

"Said a bunch of putzes..."
"Us?" Marco asked.

Smoker chomped on his cigar. That meant yes.

"Only two of us," the Phoenix added.

"Anyway, a galoot of galahs."

"Two, just two of us," Law corrected, "And the dog."

"I think they're using that word incorrectly," Marco murmured, turned his teacup. "Galoot. I think a galoot is a galah."

"Galoshes of galahs?" Law suggested.

"They're wellies. Wellington boots."

Marco looked at the window, all innocence, to avoid the devilment in Law's quick grin. He knew the Heart was imagining galoshes-wearing-galahs galooting in a downpour, like umbrella-twirling tap dancers.

Smoker glowered at them. "Some floatie-wearing hard-arse greenhorns dismembered them and dropped them on the foreshore."

"They lived to tell the tale?" Law asked, a tumbler mug of green tea in his hands disguising the curve of his lips. "They sound positively ghastly."

"Especially the floatie part." Marco bent under the table and scratched Misery's fur. She thumped her tail.

"The kids admitted they'd been trying to lift wallets."

"Do tell." Law and Marco had taken precautions and buried them in the sand while they paddled. Their possessions should have been safe. Who'd they think they were messing with?

"And so they're not pressing charges."

"Huh."

"But just be careful, Law, about separating people from their bodies."

"Is it illegal?" He thought stealing wallets also wasn't high on the list of judiciary approval.

Smoker knew if Law used his power, subjects wouldn't be hurt.

"No, but it scares the fuck out of everyone."

There should be a law against it. Sent ripples of fear through the community. "If you two still wanna play pirates, do it on the wide open unchartered seas."


"Scares them even if we've got floaties on?" Law and Marco sent each other a glance, and had to look down at the table to stop a fit of unmanly giggles.

"We look pretty suburban." It pained Marco to say it, but it was true.
Smoker cracked a smile, quickly hidden by bitter coffee. One of the "victims" had taken a snap. Smoker almost expected the irate man bearing down upon them, yellow floaties prominent, to be wearing an Edwardian one-piece swimsuit, and to have a little jiggly beer belly.

"Well done," he growled, and ran his foot over Misery's hide, "Just how do you manage to threaten and protect while wearing floaties, of all the goddamned things?"

Marco looked at their tea-towel collection, at Law's tea-towel collection. Smoker really had to ask? "One of Trafalgar's many skills."

"We've got a rubber ring, Smo-ya. It's cute. Got daisies on it. Nami gave it to us."

Marco stood and walked to the kitchen. "Charged us, Law. We had to pay her for the pleasure." He brought back a mandarin each for all. Sat and peeled his, looked over to Smoker. "Sure, big guy. Next time you want to join us, just ask. You don't have to arrest a bunch of losers to impress us."

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The vines covered most of the photos. Oyaji's face obscured. Ace's hidden. The only visage leering out at him was Doflamingo's. Marco's emaciated body was all bedsores and bones. It hurt when the vines squeezed the heart in search of sustenance, but it had extracted nearly all his life force. The pain was more a dull ache. He closed his eyes and the vines slid over them, then prodded his lips. He was too weak to bite and spit them out of his mouth, or swallow them down.

Law, earnestly leaning forward on a Bepo-shaped pool float, swam to mind. Marco had mixed drinks at a poolside bar that day, and Smoker rolled his cigars on the edge of an ashtray set up on his daisy-patterned float. Both fruit-users' stacked arms were encased in floaties. Smoker's bore the Marines' symbol.

Misery ran up and down the side of the pool, and it was Tashigi's job to fetch either one of them out of the water when they tumbled in. All it took was one point needing emphasis, one grown man leaning too far. There went the cigars, Law's do. Thank goodness for the floaties. And Tashigi. Turning circles, Misery barked, and Marco for the life of him was sure she was laughing. They were an uneven family and couple, yet, when they travelled, throughout their lives, it was Law who managed to find tiny parks buried in cities teeming with traffic and pollution. He dragged Marco to this garden or that, and sat him down on benches, and doled out misshapen onigiri (because Bepo had taught him), and greeted grannies watching children run about on the grass.

And Law was particular about who ran a firm thumb over his painted half-nails and scarred flesh, let so few hold him where he'd been held and restrained, those rivulets tracing a mandala of ownership into his wrists. Law held them and let Marco. Law's ownership of Law. Marco knew that variegated skin well.

The Heart built a world with him. They ventured into waters, double-checking the inflatables were in the car, the dog was happy, that they had ways of dragging the other up from the depths if the floaties failed them.

Doflamingo shredded their precautions, butchered their dog, stripped Law of all he'd constructed to sustain and regain himself. Then Marco had corroded material already thin with wear.

The Phoenix's hands were still tied. He couldn't place his thumb and forefinger around his wrist the way Law used to. Damn long fingers, skinny wrists. He'd catch him circling it when he wasn't
chained, when he was captive, even when he was free. Had he beaten him for that? Marco knew it was habit, but also more than that.

Law's flesh was marked, but it was his flesh. The indentation circled his wrist, permanently, and Law circled the indentation. Lying like this, so little light coming in from the outside, Marco could imagine how there was a fragment of bowed-head comfort in it.

When the outer world was too much, the inner was everything. He found himself turning, like a dandelion, to the tiny slice of sun that cracked the gaps of the house in the early afternoon. He waited for it.

Few could rise above pain. Disassociation waylaid immediate terror, but it slipped under the skin and incubated. Yet, he knew. Law knew. In his fear, nerve-endings and neurons clattered like rain bouncing from a corrugated roof, but the Heart captain knew what he was and wasn't.

He couldn't always remember, but holding his wrist returned Law to Law. He'd been Marco's for a short sweet while. Properly. He'd shown the Phoenix how to trace those paths. Then Marco had tightened his grip and bruised the skin and gouged them deeper and not let go.

Law escaped. Of course. What he gave was not Marco's to take or deliver to others. It was theirs to enjoy together. When Marco chained him or pinned him on the bed he lost him. At his most restricted Law was least present.

Marco opened his eyes. Only a slither of light entered the house nowadays. It glinted across the photo of Doffy, gleeful in the selfie, Marco's own self obscured. Ace and Oyaji gone. His heart a scrap of tarpaulin not even fit to cover dust.

Chapter End Notes

Hope it worked. Too clichéd? Would love to know your thoughts. Thanks for reading. Fair wind, wee chapter. Pink and Grey Galahs in the rain.
Chapter Summary

Vine, women and song.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Coroner's Report

This template is used to submit reports to the coroner. Remain objective in your account of the events and time. Avoid adjectives / adverbs and abbreviations / acronyms (unless previously explained). Not all coroners are doctors so maintain exact language but minimise jargon. The statement is often read at the inquest where the family is present, so please be aware of this. All reports must be checked and co-signed. On completion, please add to the patient's record. Provide a duplicate for the GP (in lieu of a discharge summary). Send an electronic copy to all the relevant clinical leads involved in the patient's care. E.G. for all trauma deaths please email a copy to XXXX XXXXX, Lead Nurse for Major Trauma @hiriluk.drum

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From:

Hiriluk Hospital

Sea Train Road

Mainland

5406-82

Direct Unit No.: X2X 5XX5 X3X8

October 22, XXXX

To:

P. K. Coroner for

Turn Over a New Leaf Correctional Facility

15-25 Bon Clay Rd

Penitentiary Peninsula

8613-13
Dear Sir / Madam

Re: Donquixote Doflamingo Age: 46yrs

Of – Flamingo Mansion, New World Mainland, 5406-82

Date of incident – October 21, XXXX

Military Police - REFERENCE No: 820802. Fujitora Issho (Fleet Admiral)

Mainland Ambulance Service CAD number – 535A

Date of admission to Hiriluk Hospital – October 21, XXXX

Time and date of death – 22:37, October 21, XXXX

GP – NAME: Doctor Fishbonen

SURGERY ADDRESS: Turn Over a New Leaf Correctional Facility Surgery, 15-25 Bon Clay Rd, Penitentiary Peninsula. 8613-13

TEL NO. Den-Snail-Noble

Recorded next of kin - Trebol  RELATIONSHIP TO PATIENT: Blood and Mucous Brother

CONTACT TEL NO: DOF-SNO-GLA

I, Dr KOBATO, am a consultant in Intensive Care at Hiriluk Hospital, 5406-82. I have held this position since the dawning of the New Pirate King Age. Between October 20 and October 22, I was the consultant on call for the General Intensive Care Unit (GICU) at Hiriluk Hospital.

In response to an email request I received from Money Lender Zenny, Assistant Legal Services Manager at Hiriluk's, dated October 22, XXXX, please find below a formal statement documenting my involvement in Donquixote Doflamingo's medical care. The following account of Mr. Donquixote's final illness is taken from his medical notes supporting my own recollection:

Mr Donquixote was a 46 year old gentleman, who was known to suffer from:

· ACUTE ACID REFLUX 1: THAT CONTRIBUTED TO CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH
· ILEOSIGMOIDAL KNOTTING THAT CONTRIBUTED TO CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH
· THYROID NODULES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH
From the Chopper Ambulance Service and HEMS documentation

At 14:00 on October 21, Mr. Donquixote was transferred by land ambulance to Hiriluk Hospital arriving at 16:00, in a state of distress. His skin was covered with white blotches and fluid filled bumps resembling the long eradicated small pox, and the rarely seen Amber Lead disease. Further to these rashes and infections, he complained of feeling restriction in both his stomach and throat, causing pain and difficulty in breathing and moving.

From the Hiriluk's Emergency Department notes:

On arrival Mr Donquixote was vomiting and examination indicated abdominal tenderness and distention, causing further pain. Notes from Dr Fishbonen outlined obstipation, with Mr. Donquixote's bowel movements limited in the extreme. Intestinal obstruction was the likely cause.

Furthermore, Dr Fishbonen suspected thyroid nodules were interfering with Mr Donquixote's breathing with possible strands large enough to potentially reach his lungs. Due to the symptoms described above, Mr. Donquixote had difficulty keeping down anything except sweet rice amazake, and even then, it often repeated on him, causing further distress and anger.

There was some delay in admission due to needing to quarantine part of the hospital, and gathering specialists in the areas of infectious diseases, gastroenterological surgery, and from the oesophageal society.

Consultation: A full trauma CT was performed at 18:00 (full report attached as appendix A) showing that Mr. Donquixote had an acute obstructed bowel. It was also discovered that his intestines were severely compromised and he had type IA ileosigmoidal knotting, where the aggressive ileum was coiled around the passive sigmoid in a clockwise manner. Unusually, more than one loop of the intestine twisted itself around stomach tissues and membranes (mesentery) supporting it, resulting in a bowel obstruction and restricting blood flow to the bowels and intestines.

From the theatre, anaesthetic and operation notes:

Mr Donquixote was transferred in to the Drum Operation Surgery Room at 20:00.

He was given general anaesthesia at 20:10 and was asleep in less than a minute.

It was decided to conduct an emergency laparotomy. The CT indicated that there was gangrene in both ileum and sigmoid colon, possibly further affected by Amber Lead, as unusual discoloration was found. Attempts were made to resect the ischemic bowels including the ileum and sigmoid
colon using Doctor Hiriluk's adaption of Hartmann's procedure.

The procedure was hampered by multiple threads and foreign objects evident in Mr Donquixote's stomach, some of which seemed to grow even as they were removed. Burns similar to those witnessed in the bodies of patients suffering from radioactive exposure were also found.

At 22:00 it was observed that Mr. Donquixote's heartrate had increased, despite the anaesthesia, and soon after he suffered heart failure, and chronic kidney failure and stopped breathing. Despite attempts staff were unable to resuscitate the patient. Time of death was noted as 22:37.

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**From Thriller Bark Autopsy Notes:**

**Mr Donquixote's body** was transferred to the Thriller Bark Autopsy Unit arriving at October 22, 00:03. Despite the obvious intestinal damage wreaked by the presence of ileosigmoidal knotting, a number of abnormal physical characteristics were apparent, which led to **Doctor Kobata** and her team asking for an autopsy.

I, **Victoria Cindry**, took responsibility for Mr. Donquixote's body at **00:03, October 22, XXXX**. My assessment of Mr Donquixote led me to the following conclusions.

Little is known about Amber Lead—research conducted on the disease either having disappeared with fires that ravaged Flevance, or remains highly classified. However, considering the discolouration of Mr. Donquixote's internal organs, separate to the gangrene that had already affected his bowels, samples have been taken and sent to government labs to determine if there is a link.

His skin demonstrated white blotches associated with carriers of the disease. On further inspection it was apparent that Mr. Donquixote had also been exposed to severe radiation at some stage of his life. All of Mr. Donquixote's tissues were damaged, including his skin and the marrow of his bones. The damage was widespread and systemic, and appears to have been present for some time.

Plant matter was also found in his stomach and intestines, contributing to coils and blockages. A report from the Hiriluk's botanist indicates that zucchini seeds were not only apparent, but were sprouting and shoots appeared to have gained sustenance from Mr. Donquixote's internal organs and other bodily matter. Shoots from the seedlings and from the radiated threads also affected the patient's thyroid, from where they appeared to grow into the lungs and around the larynx.

DNA samples, even from Mr. Donquixote's stomach, indicated the presence of foreign DNA, though no foul play is suspected. However, it is recommended to review the patient's dietary habits over the last six months.

Ostensibly, Mr. Donquixote died from heart and kidney failure, exacerbated by intestinal complications. Further to this, he appeared to be suffering from two rare contagious diseases and authorities should look into whether he was deliberately exposed to them and assess their own health, and the health of those around them, as a precaution. Another unusual aspect within his organs, was zucchini shoots, membranes and tissues, and coils of intestine demonstrated intricate braiding patterns. The appropriate departments may wish to observe and examine other prisoners to assess whether a new strain of infectious disease has entered the New Pirate King Age.
**Mr Donquixote** died peacefully at **22:37** on **21 October, XXXX** in the presence of the operating staff.

From our knowledge of this case I believe **Mr Donquixote's** death was due to the following:

Chronic heart and kidney failure brought on by widespread infection and intestinal complications.

I would like to convey my deepest condolences to the family of **Mr Donquixote**. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need anything further

Yours sincerely

Victoria Cindry.

Head of Autopsy Unit,

Hiriluk Hospital.

Chapter End Notes

Oof. Here goes. Does the chapter need a major character death warning? I wasn't sure if Doff was going to make it or not, and well...

So, basically his intestines got all coiled and blocked everything up, including blood flow, if the jargon above is too much, AND I'm sure I've got a zillion things wrong! This hospital seems to be a lot more efficient than most, so my timeline admission to operation could be totally out of whack. The opening statement about writing a report for a coroner is a paraphrase from a template I found online. I'd link, but I also don't want a bonafide hospital to be scratching its head wondering why there's a connection to this fic, so I won't.

Thanks for reading.
Dark but not so dark 15c - near past (Doflamingo)

Chapter Summary

How'd Doff end up in jail in the dark thread?

Chapter Notes

Chapters 44 & 45 uploaded on the same day. So go back and read 44 if you haven't yet, or this won't make sense.  
In linear terms, vaguely follows on from 14c/14d

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Dark 15c - near past

"You gotta be kidding."

Coby shook a little, despite being in charge of large units of men and possessing haki that left even Luffy envious at times. If anyone knew how to sneer it was Doflamingo.

"Flying over restricted areas is not allowed." He pushed his glasses further up his headband.

"What's between a man and his whore should not be government business."

Coby shook his head.

What?

Well, he was right. Whatever was between Doflamingo and his whore was his business, but intercepting trespassers on government property was Coby's. He'd walked the sky and shot up to apprehend the intruder. They were currently floating above the ocean, a pretty pair—pink hair, pink feathers.

"Fleet Admiral Fujitora's orders."

"Issho? It's been some time since we've rolled dice together." Doflamingo feigned to shoot up into the air but lurched forward instead. The nervous brat was ten steps ahead of him, and they plummeted toward the ocean. Strong. Strong little marine boy.

Ah well, he'd catch up with what the marines were doing, and it was the same as a parking ticket, really. He'd pay the fine, be out of there, then on his way to hunt down Law.
Chapter Summary

"Justice will prevail, you say? But of course it will! Whoever wins this war becomes justice." Donquixote Doflamingo, Marineford.

Dark 15d – Starling Report

The Starling Report

An archeological and forensic team unearthed a vine-obscured house in the Leafy District yesterday. Deeds on record show it once belonged to the infamous Surgeon of Death: Trafalgar D. Water Law, and his partner, the Whitebeard First Division Commander: Marco the Phoenix.

Trafalgar, captain of the notorious Heart Pirates, disappeared more than twenty years ago when reactionary forces tried to reinstate archaic laws allowing one human to own another. As with other carriers of the initial "D", he'd led a chequered life up until his disappearance, including training as a pleasure slave for the crime lord and ex-Celestial Dragon, Donquixote Doflamingo.

Despite slavery being denounced in the New Era of the Pirate King, the practice hadn't officially been outlawed. Trafalgar had lived independently for a number of years and, as a key member of the Worst Generation, played a major role in the changing politics of the time.

Unable to face the prospect of returning to life as a slave, Trafalgar savagely murdered a household dog in a fit of apparent insanity. Rumours at the time stated his actions were in response to a sustained and vicious assault on his person by Donquixote after the latter trespassed upon the pirates' property.

Donquixote's devil fruit drove others to do his will thought string manipulation. Advocates for Trafalgar said he'd been forced to kill the dog. Advocates for Donquixote said his actions weren't an encroachment, nor inhumane, as slaves were property and insentient.

In a surprise move, under the contested legislation, Trafalgar was required to return to Donquixote, with the expectation he'd fulfil the role trained for. Slaves officially had fewer rights than livestock, even in the more enlightened times, and Trafalgar's freedom was deemed to contravene existing commercial ordinance.

Mutilation of the dog soured relations between Phoenix and Trafalgar and enmity ensued. Following the trial, Doflamingo leased Trafalgar to the Whitebeard commander for an unspecified period of time. Seastone restraints were considered necessary when taking charge of a slave with devil fruit abilities, and their use was allowed.

Whether the infamous Heart captain escaped or was freed from the residence he and Phoenix once shared hasn't been established, but very few records exist of him from the time. Anecdotally, personal records were incinerated, stripping Trafalgar of any claim to full citizenship. Raking through the cinders of a stove in the backyard, investigators discovered document scraps to support this theory.
To the investigating team's surprise, giant zucchini stems covered the house. Local residents reported that no-one approached the dwelling because squashes were in ready supply and they feared having surplus foisted on them. The garden annually yielded a bumper crop. Seeds from the last harvest brought in the new.

Forensic specialists discovered the arm of a pair of spectacles, and shards of pottery in the soil of origin. Particles sent for assaying contained elements of hair, and blood traces. The DNA of either pirate is on record, and a match was being sought at the time of writing. DNA samples of Donquixote Doflamingo are also under investigation. Nail clippings, blood, vestiges of semen, and possible vomit, were apparent. Seastone elements permeated the soil.

The fire brigade cleared a path to the house using hatchets. They reported that aerial rootlets and tendrils invaded every surface of the residence, curling around doorknobs, handles, and entrances, and obstructing access. Firefighters with devil fruits had difficulty severing vines. Scientists ascribed this to seastone factors.

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It was her father's work. She knew it. The way the plants took over the place, and breathed. Zucchinis shouldn't live so long, nor should they climb like that and cover everything. The hair on her arms stood to attention. Skin tingled whenever she was near a plant that had germinated from a pop green. What a legacy.

The teams needed to be careful as they pushed into the house. The floorboards held up so far, but it had been years. Rotting from damp was likely. The firefighters cut vines from the windows. She snipped a cutting here, a leaf there, pulled up a root, or more exactly, rootlets—the roots were deeply entrenched—and she placed specimens in separate baggies. Pitter-patter. Her heart. Pitter-fucking-patter.

Ribbons of light woke the dust as the vines were cleared, but trees grown from the leaves and fruit of those already planted pushed up against the house.

Roots had disrupted the path to the back sliding door, and the only thing that held the gate upright were vines. Covered with debris, the stairs at the front sagged, and a storm, perhaps, had punched a branch into one of the steps. Greenery slithered from below and above to claim the space.

Maidenhair ferns pushed up from the piping and filled the kitchen sink. Some sunlight must get in. And other ferns, weeds and mushrooms grew on the floor—tendrils hung from the ceiling.

She remembered Law and his cauterised arm. Tried to imagine him in these damp and deserted rooms. His beautiful tattoo work, apart from the fingers. She'd inherited her father's eye and drank in the designs. He had them touched up as he aged, and though his skin wrinkled, the tattoos fell in tandem with the cracks and lines that relayed his story.

At times when her father and the raggedy bunch he hung out with—pirate legends, now long-retired or deceased; leaders, academics, adventurers, explorers and healers—got together, his eyes nervously passed from Trafalgar Law's face to the arm that carried a burn mark like a crater, marring the black ink, then back to his face.

She understood that her father was a scaredy-cat. It wasn't news. If she didn't know better, she'd say he was deciding whether his fear of Law's gaze, which had frightened her as a kid, or guilt for whatever had happened to his arm, was battling it out. Usopp was gentle and fun, though. What did
he have to do with the lesion?

She was drawn to the scarring because Usopp so studiously avoided it, and as a ten year-old had wondered at the strange blue daub just outside the obvious burn. It had a brightness that was so out of style with the rest of Law's monochrome tattoos and manner, that her eye couldn't help but be drawn to it, as small as it was. A peacock feather sheen, but sky rather than ocean depth blue.

She'd touched it, and almost asked a question, but her father ushered her away, and a hummingbird flutter of pain crossed Law's face. At the time, she'd thought that the scar was still tender. That she'd hurt him.

As an adult, she realised that whatever had burnt the skin and destroyed the images below had done so long ago.

The colour didn't match the dome, Law's Room, that he sometimes conjured to entertain the kids, spinning them around in the sphere and separating their bodies until one of the non-pirate spouses barrelled in to yell at him to quit. Hyped like caffeinated monkeys, they loved it and begged him to do it again.

The blue on his arm had a luminosity like the cupola on the set of drawers in the darkened room the team had just entered. The vines congregated there. And, yes, they moved. She knew her father's work.

Her crew felt safe with her among them. The rabid plant life Usopp had released across the years, all for a good cause, was tame and compliant when she was present.

In the room, a bed had collapsed to the floor, the mattress was thin and flattened. She touched the edge, and the vines that smothered it dropped away, unwrapping themselves from white bones picked clear of muscle and flesh, arms at an angle as if tied. The skeletal structure of some avian creature. A square vacuum interrupted the flow of bones near the heart. Law's extraction methods were legendary. Had that happened? Usually the skin grew over the hollow, bones not affected. Didn't seem to be the case here.

She wandered to the drawers. All that was visible on top was the button of blue, pierced with tendrils, and a few actual feathers nearby (also blue) that dissipated when she attempted to pick them up. She held the blob in in her hand, and eased the vine from it.

As she did so it also merged into the light around her until she was no longer sure if she'd really seen it. Small bubbles rose and vanished with a soundless pop. She glanced down at her palm, at the vague outline of an M, but even that faded the longer she stared. What shape did aorta and ventricles take once removed from the body with a devil's fruit?

The firefighters cleared the windows but it was still dim. Taking a torch from her backpack, she shone the light on the tabletop, then on her palm. Nothing there. Cutting vegetation away from faded photographs in cracked frames, she recognised the great heroes—Ace and Whitebeard—from the government halls, and from Luffy's own house. She almost dropped the one of the two naked blonds.

She didn't know much about Law. He wasn't one of her father's closer friends, but he seemed greatly indebted to Usopp for some reason. She loved listening to the stories of war and loss and fighting, and she understood that the Heart captain had whisked a near-death Luffy away from the legendary Paramount war and saved his life, thereby helping bring in the New Pirate Era and peace—eventually.
She understood why her Auntie Nami and Uncle Sanji spoke together with Luffy of Ace—Luffy's kind polite funny brother—in tones of fondness and regret. He'd died at Marineford, and Luffy sacrificed a lot to save him, and almost had.

However, she learnt from her history books that, at that time, it was only Law and his crew who were there. The Strawhat crew had been blown to distant climes by the warlord, Kuma. Of course there were many other pirates there, like Uncle Vista and Izou, but Luffy's immediate crew wasn't present.

Law was never impolite at the parties, but didn't contribute to the conversation when it turned to the war, except to say how Luffy had punched up his submarine, how Aokiji had almost frozen them in the water, and that he'd caught the legendary straw hat. Ace was worthy of respect, he'd state, and then usually disappear outside even if Robin's hands were pinning him down. He'd speak with a hint of a smile, but remain distant from the conversation.

When Uncle Izou and Uncle Vista visited, as they sometimes did—Luffy's parties were legendary, and Usopp and his family were always invited—they'd talk of Ace's exploits with Luffy, and the laughter and drinking encouraged more. Law kept his distance, hanging out with Bepo and his crew, talking shop with Chopper, in the garden.

If Law wasn't there, they'd mention the First Division Commander, Marco the Phoenix. The man whose house she was currently exploring. Law and Marco's house. She hadn't realised until she was well into adulthood that they'd been a team.

Separately, Law and Marco were both part of the New World history courses, and she knew on this island they'd been well-respected for their medical prowess and the bar they ran. Marco worked more casually as a general healer, and Law had his own practice and clinics.

Once, Izou got sloppy drunk and insisted that Law had ruined Marco. If they hadn't met, Marco's mind wouldn't have been corrupted. She wasn't sure what that was about. She was just a kid. Luffy almost punched him, but Zoro beat him to it, the tip of his sword at Izou's neck. Then Vista's blade was across Zoro's. That had been scary. Izou didn't back down but admitted no-one deserved what that poor bastard had gone through.

She thought he'd been talking about Marco at the time, but when she got older, she researched and asked those she could, and realised the statement was directed at Law.

The forensic team dusted what they could of the area the vines had occupied and slipped the bones into sterile carry bags after taking pictures. They were stark white as if picked clean by ants. Were some flaring and ashing as she looked a them? She shook her head. The house was murky and her mind was playing tricks.

She tipped the photo-frames upright, except Doflamingo and Marco. The villains of the time were as well known as the heroes. She recognised Ace and Whitebeard. She took possession of those, hoping to ask or research, to get further information. But it was puzzling that there weren't any pictures of Law. And also, if they were the remains of Marco's body, how and why had her father and the Heart captain trapped him and, more so, why had they left him there?
Chapter Summary

Revolution.

Chapter Notes

If I'm being strict, this follows on from Light 14C, chapter 42. But chapter 44, Dark 15b feeds into it too (Coroner's report).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Light Marco 15a

A bouquet of light glinted off glass, funneled and coned across the water like sprays of baby breath, and lit the corner of a dull red mesh barrier, the rest shadowed under a bridge. The inhabitants of the Ferris wheel car shielded their eyes from the glare, then dropped their hands from their faces as the ride rose higher.

Squashed between Robin and Franky on one side of the carriage, the demon child held Law in place. He didn't mind being their favoured companion, but it got a bit much at times. A flash of blue and a ticket stub floated to the hard plastic seat as he shambled himself to the opposite bench, next to Marco. Leant into him. Crushing him. The carriage swayed a little. Franky frowned. Should be sturdier than that

"Aren't you meant to be the master of that damn fruit?" Marco asked.

"There, there," Law laughed, planting a quick peck on his cheek, "I am." Marco placed a palm over the embrace and looked out the window, a small smile creeping across his face like a tongue-tied sixteen-year-old. Damn, must be back in the good books.

Law brushed his head against his clamped arm and shoulder, a pup with no notion of personal space. Marco smiled more broadly, lifted his arm, and Law tucked in, warm breast to heart.

Then shambled Marco out.

And had the best window seat.

The view of the ocean. Marco next to him. The blond leant his head back against the metal and groaned.

"Hafta be so flashy about everything?"

Law was intent on peering out the window, but he quickly glanced at Marco. "Like this?" he asked, and flashed his best smile, finger pointing at his pearly whites.
Arms crossed, but head turned, Marco allowed himself a quick grin. "My eyes are smiling."

"Are they, now?" Law thought they were rolling with well-deserved exasperation.

"Positively dancing, bro," Franky said in his best inside-a-Ferris-wheel-car voice. Law and Marco winced. Robin remained calm. Probably something to do with knowing she could break any of their necks at any time.

"Star-aligned lovers, indeed," she said. They could be cute. Not as cute as Ryunosuke, the poorly drawn dragon left to fade out on the back of the Elephant island, Zou, but in their own scrappy way.

"You get the seaside view because—?" Marco spread his arms across the back of the seat. The sky was fluffy goodness and recesses of blue. A news coo flew past on its way to spreading some form of government soft sell, despite tightened media regulations.

"Aw, c'mon man."

Marco stared across at Franky.

"It's still a novelty to him. All that time spent in the submarine. Never gets to see the ocean from this angle. He's like a cute little cockroach crawling into the sun. And let's face it, he can't fly like you. And the Polar Tang—solid as she is—just don't have anything like the Coup de burst."

"Humour him," Robin said, "It's best."

Marco's gaze flicked to Robin then back to Franky.

"Law, not the cyborg. Or both, best to humour both."

Law shot her a look, over his shoulder. Ohara. Her serenity could teach the Madonna a thing or two. Flevance her gaze shot back.

"Everyone's got a poor cousin, I guess," Marco sighed. Law knelt on the bench and leant halfway out the window like a primary school sprog who had yet to figure out the laws of gravity.

"With manners to match." Franky was solemn. He was so tall Robin didn't even have to adjust as he put his palms on the back of his head, elbows out. "Yeah, I know bro, it's a tough row to hoe."

There were worse things than Franky's rhymes. Humour him. Robin was wise. Marco lifted his chin in acknowledgement of the all a-o-kay-ness. The shipwright was spot on. He turned to the shaggy tattooed mop to his right.

Law was still half out the large valance window like a three-year old on a sugar high. Three-year-olds probably rode these cars all the time. Why were the windows openable?

Marco tugged at the back of his trousers. Hooked a thumb under one of his belt loops, the leather of Law's belt soft against his skin.

"That's why we had him between us."

"If it's not hyperactivity it's Thanatos."

Law shot a look back at Robin again, shook his head.

She calmly stared him down. Gallows humour helped them both avoid the gibbet, for sure, but she
knew there were times when the noose had held more attraction for him than reality. She sent a hand to join Marco's in making sure he didn't pitch out too far. Who'd he think he was? Luffy?

She scratched a mole just above his lumbar, and he twitched.

"Thanatos?" Franky asked.

Law flopped back into the car, Marco quickly pulling his hand away from behind him before it hit the seat, Robin's appendage disappearing. "Death wish," Law answered. "Nah," he shook his head and cupped his hands. "For others perhaps." Yeah, he had a death wish for a few people. Had never quite outgrown that phase.

He drew up a room like peering into a crystal ball and Franky looked a bit panicked. Law about to demonstrate the ink on his fingers wasn't just for show? Always wondered what had stopped the Heart captain from getting a little prison scratch teardrop. He'd certainly killed a few men.

"Steady, bro. Wasn't me who said you were about to top yourself."

Law looked over the blue. It refracted onto his face with an eerie glow, and the shadowed hatching from his cap and concentration made him more maniac than medicine man.

"She can break your neck, you know?" Franky knew he could always rely on Robin if he was in a fix.

Law nodded. He blew across his hands, and manipulated his fingers. Franky stiffened, but Law had never purposefully hurt him, so why start now? But the air charged differently when he used his devil's fruit, so instinctive wariness just meant he was ready for action, not that he had to act. Law was fast, though.

The blue bubbles Law sent into the carriage appeared to float across the air from his breath alone. An illusion. They drifted around Marco and the others like hothouse butterflies. Marco'd do anything to see that smile more often.

Law directed his finger a few times, a train engineer checking a crossing, and the blue left the window, floated across the sky, and entered the cars above and below them.

"Captain!"

Marco moved closer as Bepo's delighted voice wended its way up to them. Law didn't look down. Marco followed his gaze to the car above them. Aladine, bewitched, had a larger window open, and tried to catch and pop the small bubbles, the miniature Rooms, as they crossed his vision. Law flicked his pinky each time to make sure they dissipated, as if he had. Jean Bart at the foot of the Ferris Wheel lifted his head at the rumble of laughter.

Aladine's smile—sea spray on skin after being landbound—was almost as good as Law's. Marco sat back into the carriage, and Law sent a swarm of blue into the car above. Sabo's top hat, Koala's cap, both blonds joined Aladine, and peered below. Through the clear curved roof, Franky kept an eye on the grips holding the gondola above.

The three withdrew into the car. Sabo had set sail, to navigate his small boat across the bay into the larger seas when he was barely ten, and a tenryubito had fired at him, fired at the boat, sunk it, and left him to die in the ensuing fire.

He wasn't sure he understood the simple pleasure Koala and Aladine had in just following the circles across the air in front of them like cats tracking string, but it was connected to captivity, and
from the time when the only roles Fishmen and mermen were deemed fit to fill (by humans) was that of slaves. If not for Fisher Tiger and his crew, Aladine included, Koala wouldn't have rebuilt herself. Even the smallest pleasures were off limits when she belonged to others.

One bubble expanded, grew larger, filled the carriage and, oh fuck. Sabo really didn't like having his head cut off. Koala sat back in the seat—laughing—as Sabo griped in her lap. He was so much easier to handle this way. She stuck a thumb out the window to thank Law, then pulled on Sabo's ears. Sputtering anger suited him. His indignant headless torso flailed next to her.

Ping pong ball-sized rooms drifted to where Jean Bart stood with the members of the crew who had no interest in riding the Ferris Wheel. Or were just too tall. Tony Tony Chopper sat on his shoulder, and they both ate fairy floss*

The quiet, fierce helmsman lifted a curious hand, almost unconsciously, and absorbed the blue. This was one of Captain's favourite tricks, but he usually created them to pull Bepo out of a funk. The bubbles in Sabaoandy confirmed how much Jean Bart hadn't belonged, how few rights he had. Anyone could enjoy these.

Chopper, in so much wide-mouthed wonder, forgot all about his treat.

When Luffy—zooming up to the Hearts, and Chopper, the rest of the crew in tow—tried to eat the bubbles Law knew it was time to draw them back in. Their uneven weights could tip the carriages slightly, but Luffy's strength could bring the whole structure down. Anyway, the allotted number of revolutions was almost up. Fittingly, the ride was named the emancipation wheel.

"Don't think you're off the hook, Trafalgar!" echoed down from the car above as Sabo pulled his head tightly onto his body. It was bad enough that Aladine and Koala shuddered with giggles, but Franky, Robin and Marco cracking up contributed to the festival air as well. Law, smarmy bastard, probably just sat there with that cat-that-got-the-cream face.

Koala held his hand though, and straightened his top hat, and placed a kiss on his jaw. "They were pretty. Not to be destroyed."

He looked down at her. And over at Aladine. "But I didn't touch them."

"She's come a long way, Sabo," the merman said. He actually had tried to burst them.

"No-one likes being the butt of a joke." Koala, pushed Sabo's hair back, and he nodded, straightening out his gloves. "He'd never choose anyone who couldn't take it."

A stray bubble moved across the car, then disappeared without a trace.

"It's because you're strong."

Sabo cracked his knuckles. Nodded. "Yeah. Guess so. I've been through worse."

And hadn't he, and hadn't they all.
Cotton Candy is called Fairy Floss in Australia (and Candy Floss in the UK). And I just found out from this article that it was originally called Fairy Floss. Interesting. Of course, "Fairy Floss Chopper" doesn't work at all, but oh well.

Thanks for reading.
Dark (but not so) 16a

Chapter Summary

Here we are.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is especially for the lovely RobotintheRoom for their unstinting support. I took this down a few times, so I think this is about a one year anniversary, even though it officially went up at the beginning of Dec. Thanks to Ossicle for reading those early chapters when they were in a very rough state, and this was just going to be a four-chaptered work.

No warnings. But possible very very slight spoilers for chapter 962 (just one line). Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

16a Dark (but no so)

Law landed on the sturdy, weather-beaten wood of the boathouse. Wavelets tagged the hull then rushed away. The ship never gave chase. Shanks and Benn kicked back in lounge chairs on the upper deck. Shanks leant over the railing. Had felt Law's approach from over a city's breadth away.

"C'mon up, lover boy. We're about to fire up the grill."

It was obon. The time of year to welcome in and then farewell the spirits of ancestors. Law had too many ghosts and too little of him. Benn knew that when the doc and Marco had been good they carried out the annual ceremonies together, hosted a big street party, were there for each other and the other orphans; there for the spirits ambling in and then sent on their way with love and provisions. They always bought extra for Ace.

"Lost?"

Law had teleported himself up to the deck.

He shook his head.

"Look like a lost little lamb." Benn patted the side of his chair. Law walked over, nodachi in hand and sat. Benn pulled him near, and Law let himself be pulled, Kikoku on the floor under the seat.

"Just wanna watch the stars," he said, and Benn nodded. Okay, if that's what he wanted. They were pretty from the deck. Law, his piercings snug around his lobes, scanned the red-streaked sky. Benn wondered yet again who'd separated the gold for him. Had to ask one of these days.


"You know where the recliners are kept," Shanks said. Law turned his way. "Get yourself one."

Law flicked his hand.

"Walk. You're gonna have a coronary with how lazy you are."

Easy smile. Good to see. He didn't drop in without calling first. Except today. Except every obon, or the last few, anyway. His eyes weren't quite relaxed.

Benn and Shanks, always sociable, sometimes had their down times. Had seen and heard Law in a few of his captivities and knew when to push the sulky, crabby kid into a bit of cheer, but also when to leave him on the deck to sit and gaze at the sky. And also knew when to drop a blanket to his lap, and offer a shoulder and a corner of a body to burrow into if he needed to mourn in company.

Benn was especially good at that. Marco had been. Penguin was there for a younger Law, and Luffy had been too when they'd sought the same kind of relief from one another. Law gave as well. In different ways.

He slouched down the stairs to the small outdoor cabin on the lower deck and opened the door to a mess of deckchairs strewn in haste and hedonism. He managed to shake a recliner free, dust and mites tickling his nostrils and skin.

Slinging the folded frame over his shoulder, he brushed a few cobwebs off his hat, and closed the door behind him, stepping back onto the ship floor. The aluminium legs hit the wall of the upper deck, flaking paint, as he climbed the stairs.

"Physical labour's good for you, Law," Shanks said over his shoulder, sipping a piña colada decorated with a pink umbrella.

"Yah." Law used Shambles to separate Benn and Shanks' deckchairs and plunked his squarely in the middle of them. He wasn't an inch out of breath.

Benn drew on his cigarette, and twirled his whiskey and ice, mildly surprised.

"Do it again!" Shanks whooped like Luffy, saluted Law with a tip of the umbrella.

Law swept the dust from the recliner with his palm, kicked his shoes off and sat down. Wiped his hand on his pants, then shambled a beer and some lemon slices from the cooler at Shanks' side.

"Don't be shy," Benn said, "Help yourself." Law flipped him off, popped the lemon into the beer, tilted it, thumb over the mouth.

"You feeling a little lonely there?" Shanks asked as the Heart captain managed not to spray himself with his beverage, and slumped into the seat, cap low.

"Unh."

Benn and Shanks shared a glance. They picked up their recliners and aligned them closer so the edges met Law's. He didn't move away.

"Too warm for a blanket?" Benn asked. Law nodded, supped his beer. Benn lifted Law's cap, and Law let him. He gestured for the doc to come a little closer, and Law edged over. Benn took the beer from his hand and placed it next to the seat, besides his drained glass.
"Was drinking that."

Benn held his arm wide, indicated his shoulder, and drew the disgruntled Heart to him. Law acquiesced, beer or no beer.

Shanks moved in on the other side. "Came here for a cuddle sandwich?"

Law let Shanks' body heat encircle him. The exhalation, both frustration with himself and relief, was a positive. Shanks' hand sat loosely on Law's drawn up knees. Knuckle-whorls rough with weather and rigging caught Law's palm as he placed it overtop.

"Luffy always ends up asphyxiating me," he said quietly, a crease of a laugh.

"We're the next best thing?" Benn tightened his hold on Law and felt his heart beat against his side.

"Best thing. Both the best thing." Law pushed his head further against Benn.

"Ghosts?" Shanks asked.

Both older men had, every now and then, entertained the idea of a threesome—as a mild curiosity. Hadn't discussed it with Law. He was all blurred shadow at times and the last thing needed was for Benn's hand to land on the wrong place, and for Law to respond—fight, flight, or fuck—the moment pressure indicated he should. Conditioned.

Warmth and safety. Sex could offer both but often didn't. Not in his life. It'd be the end of a beautiful friendship. He needed as many of those as he could gather and keep.

"So many ghosts," Law said.

Shanks pulled his hand free, inserted his thumb and pointer between his lips, his whistle cutting ice. Law shook his head, ears ringing. He and Benn both tried the same to varying degrees of air-leaking-from-a-bag-of-potato-chips-success.

That tired grin, and Benn's own smile. He'd let Law down, in the past, he really had. But all rivers had sudden dips. Once Law got the earrings back, he'd phantomed the trial, and Benn's part in it, into the shaded folds of a lacquered screen. Benn was glad they hadn't lost him, and that the kid still sought his company. They both tried again to expel something better than a canary chirp.

Shooting? Check. Beheading? No probs. Cool whistling? Not even on the reserve of the reserve team. Law's lips twisted like Luffy trying to pass off a lie, and on second try the sound was good—it always got Bepo's attention—but he looked like he didn't know how to tie his own shoelaces. Probably why he always wore boots or flip-flops. And didn't whistle. Benn growled out a laugh, and shoved Law's shoulder into Shanks who shoved him back. Law smiled down at his hands, then up at Benn.

"C'mon, big guy." Law's eyes were a little calmer around the edges, and Benn stopped a snort short as he pursed his lips like a rabbit's bum and let out a sharp whip-like call.

"Only guy I know who inhales when he whistles." Shanks was all up close and conspiratorial. But that was the sound that heralded the hurried clack of nails across the deck, and the black shorthair one-year-old pup that followed the two Redhair Pirates home one night leapt over Shanks and onto Law's seat.

She smushed and squirmed right up over his thighs and lap, and placed an inconsiderate foot on his stomach, and licked his face all over like the mad girl she was.
Ah, Law bent down and the back of her neck was his support, though his grip wasn't a harmful thing. He didn't crowd her. She didn't have the same consideration. She sniffed at his earrings—something in them—then returned to his face and was that a laugh or?

Shanks kept his shoulder and stump up against Law, and Benn still literally had his back, and the two shot yet another look across his tangled hair. Yeah, just as well the dog wanted to lick his face further. That was her mission. Was what Law needed.

"They all think she's an empath, but she just craves salt," Shanks said.

"Yeah, bring on the sobbing pirates. Sure makes her popular."

Law flicked a finger out to them—twice in one night—but didn't look up.

"Hah," Shanks said.

"Cheeky, here we are looking after his psyche and all." Benn ran his fingers up the back of Law's neck into his hair, much in the way he kept clumping the dog's fur. Benn gestured his head and Shanks lifted his, stood and wandered inside. It was time to stock up the cooler anyway. And they should fire up the grill. They'd said they were going to.

The pup scrambled off Law, following Shanks.

"He's got better tasting salt," Benn said.

A beh-heh-heh or a boo-hoo-hoo caught at the back of Law's throat as he expelled an ironic life-is-grand-and-so-is-this-ship-we're-sailing-on puff of air. Benn couldn't tell which.

"C'mon."

Law looked down at his ink again, but shuffled back and to Benn's side. Cigarettes. The stench seeped into his coat. His hair. His fingers. Law put one arm around Benn's back and the other across his front, not making eye contact—as if that would weaken and negate him. Benn would turn on him, stop him, worse, if Law had to formulate—like with words and all—what the hell he was doing. It wasn't the first time. He laced his fingers together.

"S'alright." Benn conversed with Law's hair again, and dragged on his cigarette with the other hand. He stubbed it out and slipped one arm over the Heart's forearm and onto the elbow he had resting over Benn's chest, and then put his other arm around Law's back and held his shoulder. The Heart captain's head found Benn's clavicle and nested.

The dog trotted back out, bone hanging from her mouth, a gift from Shanks. She jumped onto the adjoined seats, and lay at the end of Law's, gnawing her loot.

Benn rocked Law, minimally—didn't want to collapse the chairs—and a gravelled hum like tyres dusting up a dirt road vibrated his larynx. Law did that when this happened. Found kith and kin with overtone throat singers. Benn wasn't sure he was aware of it.

He smoothed down and patted Law's hair. His breath and words close to the Heart, and if he gave a smooch or not across the incoherent strands of black it was an antidote to distress, not an invitation to response. It was a fucking miracle Law was still with them, but he didn't want him to leave. Permanently.

"Long, long ago," Law said.
The dog at the end growled a little at the words as if they were a spell for whisking bones from the teeth of deserving pups. It was the first time she'd heard him speak since she'd unearthed him this visit.

"On the Red Force—," Benn picked up, "—a mighty ship—."

"—harbouring the Scattered of the Seas."

Benn loosened his grip and lit up, but returned his hands, careful not to burn Law, cigarette near his face. He was a cranky shit about it usually, but when he got like this the smell rooted him to the present by porting in the past.

"Among the crew was the infamous Surgeon of Death, Doctor Trafalgar D. Water Law."

"Visiting crew."

"Visiting," Benn corrected. He inhaled, let Law's hold alone cling onto him like flotsam for a second, but returned his arm and made sure the kid was ensconced. "And Doctor Fushichou Marco, AKA Marco the Phoenix."

Law stiffened, then Benn felt strands against his chin as he nodded. He came here for the story. One year after the next.

"Shh." Benn planted a mother duck peck.

The Redhair first mate had main storytelling duties, but had to take the cue from Law. "One day," Law fingered a button hole on Ben's jacket. The kid couldn't go on? They had to avoid a gap widening between the seats, but Benn brought him in a tiny bit.

"One day the evil pretender and his faithful..."

"candy-striped-wearing..."

"Yes, those pants were all flares and flounces...candy-striped wearing toady, arrived unannounced on the Red Force."

"Rude." Law rubbed his cheek on the cloth below it.

"Very rude."

"Family in tow."

"Those freaks were there too?" Benn asked.

He felt Law nod. "You didn't sense them?"

"Too busy concentrating on Doflamingo."

"Ah." Benn's chest, it was the most comfortable thing. Like the recess behind a waterfall, staring out as the water rushed down—dry, warm, safe, hidden. Law knew he was visible, but if he closed his eyes no-one could see him. Lights danced behind his lids like rays on the fall's edge.

"The Surgeon of Death was a brave young man and much loved by his own crew and the crews of others."

"Never quite got the Whitebeards' trust."
"They let you treat them?"

"Mmm."

Benn leant onto the sloped back of the recliner, Law with him. Law's legs jack-knifed over his own, the dog shuffling to maintain her own space. He wasn't light, Law, a fully grown man, but he was supple when he wanted to be.

"Much loved by his own crew and the crews of others, the surgeon, Law, captain of the Heart Pirates, was—"

"on the run. Escaped from marine prison and—"

"long, long, long ago, a slave who'd escaped from his cruel master, Doflamingo."

"Benn?"

Benn wished he had Law's handy powers to get himself a drink. He looked up at Shanks' tread. On cue. Benn tipped his head toward the cooler. Shanks popped a beer and put it in his first mate's hand, then lay on the recliner next to Law and sat back to take in the dimming light and the story.

"Yeah?"

"If you'd been a slave, had a benevolent master, would y'try to be free?"

Benn took a drink. His touch was constant, tethered Law with them. The bottle, in Benn's fingers, but weighted against Law, was the here and now. "Hell, yeah."

Benevolent master.

"You did well to keep trying."

Ownership was still a fucking abuse.

"To escape?"

"Yeah."

The way Law squeezed his arms a little tighter meant those efforts came at a price. They'd both seen it. Him and Shanks.

Benn sipped, dragged on his cigarette, rearranged his arms.

"It'd been a quiet morning. The surgeon—being his usual anti-social self—read a book in a corner of the officers' quarters."

Law laughed. Shanks. "I helped Benn with the crossword first." Benn sent Shanks a warning glance. Ignored.

"Marco, Benn and the mighty Shanks pored over maps and shit that was actually useful for staying afloat. Suitable for the life of pirates and seadogs."

"Which was why young Trafalgar was the first to sense the intruders," Benn said.

"Skip the next bit," Law, slug-buried against Benn, mumbled.
"Where Doffy trash talks you and you shamble yourself out to the deck with Marco?"

"Yeah."

"But it was so cool how all four of us just stopped those strings mid-air," Shanks whined. He loved telling that part.

"It was pretty cool, but can do without hearing Doffy take stock of his assets again."

"Yeah, that was rough, but we were awesome."

Benn loosened his arm from Law's shoulder and indicated for Shanks to shift in. He clicked his tongue. It was too difficult to hold his drink. But he managed, and added to the body temperature.

"So once the evil fallen king and his hapless sidekick slunk off the ship, tails between their legs, the first mate..."

"That's you, Benn," Shanks interrupted.

"Thanks, Shanks." Benn's fingers tapped on his partner's shoulder. "The first mate went onto the deck in search of their two guests. The surgeon's imprisonment and enslavement had not been gentle and he wanted to avoid recapture at all costs, so the first mate expected to find him armed, primed, ready, raring to fight."

Law was primed, Benn felt the shift. A warm breath of air across his face sometimes reminded him where he was, and he tipped his chin down and exhaled across the black mess pushed into his front, as if blowing the seeds of a dandelion. The body in his arms relaxed a fraction.

"Instead, he found him back to back with Marco the Phoenix. Asleep..."

Shanks had his knees drawn up so he wasn't all over Law. "Asleep! We were busy saving his arse and Law was sleeping?"

Benn and Law laughed. Or Law coughed. It was probably a laugh.

"Only this one was asleep. Asleep and with his hand in Marco's own."

"He just sat? Just let me lean against him?" Law asked into Benn's jacket, the wailing rubbing his cheek.

"Yeah, we were too scared to wake you because you had Kikoku on your lap."

"Didn't touch me, hold me, in any other way?"

"Marco? Like you're all pushed up into my space now?"

"Something like that."

Ah nothing like that. It had shocked them both to see Law chained by Marco, wearing a collar, beaten and worse. They'd known the couple for years. The pointed words, the disregard, was so foreign. At least they'd been able to free him.

A knock to the noggin could cause swelling to press against all the wrong points, drastically changing behaviour. Is that what happened to the Phoenix?

Law was silent for a long time. Shanks sat back, drink in hand, picked out some constellations.
"It was real, Law. He wanted to help. Liked you," Benn said.

A flash of light streaked the sky.

Silent.

"You were more than a substitute, kid. Don't know what happened to Marco after Doflamingo fucked you and Misery up. No-one recognised him, but he cared. Used to care." Shanks had practically grown up with Marco. Captaining his own crew, he'd keep tabs on the Whitebeard. Followed his progress.

The dog uncurled, snuffled up and curled herself behind Law's bent knees. Paws and snout over Shanks' feet.

"Helped me so much that day," Law muffled out.

It took so little for the doc to be grateful, Shanks thought—a blessing and a curse. He ran a foot along Law's calf, past the dog, Law starting marginally from the action.

"You can mourn the good with the bad."

"Isn't that what we do mourn?"

"Our perception, I guess."

Shanks knew what he had with Benn across the years. He saw it in Luffy and Zoro, and the later relationship of Robin and Franky. Even in the friendships and family bonds of the pirates who'd allied to change the world and make it better. And they had made it better. Yeah, man, he would've called it love. What Marco and Law had sure looked like love to him. But Marco's maltreatment?...anything but.

"Want a drink, Law?"

"Got one."

"A cold one?"

Law breathed against Benn, pushed into him, and then up. The pup growling at him again. He placed a reassuring palm over her back and she thumped her tail. His face was striped.

"He's huggable, isn't he?"

Law nodded, stretched, tipped the chairs a little.

"Hold on there, Romeo." Benn readjusted.

"Thanks for lending him to me."

"Hey," Benn said behind him. "No equating living creatures with commodities."

Law looked back at him, his smile a contusion of gratitude. He didn't move from the rough hand yet again thumping his head and hair in fondness. He owed these two.

Sometimes they told the story of when Law turned the very ocean luminous for Marco, (cheating, Shanks, said. Those creatures lit up the waves even without the benefit of Law's powers). How Marco's path just happened to take him past the showers when Law was finishing up and the two
dawdled over the deck before going to their quarters. How he'd stood firm and right by Law's side when all four had negotiated with the Kid pirates. How they combined the monstrous with the mundane. Law's tea-towels. His suburban hobbies.

Law glanced at the rounded curve of a Ulysses butterfly's wing colouring his skin. Benn and Shanks approved of the burn that obscured Marco's imprint but not the reason for its appearance. His face tightened, and he took in the white swathed over the dark of the night.

"Fuck that."

It usually ended with some variation of the two words. Just as well. He had been loved, or at least liked, but that made the about-face harder. Loss of love was inevitable. Law knew he was a lot. Had been through a lot. Could hardly handle it himself, let alone anyone else. That kind of loss happened. It was painful, but he could process it.

The tines of a forked-tongue betrayal though. Man. He'd been used for years, and called it love, and Marco took his ignorance as permission to inflict more. That love still curled up like a beetle's carapace. He couldn't see the underbelly. Still didn't feel it when he looked back, though the support he'd had meant less than it used to.

He lost sight then. If that was all his life was. If that was all he was to others. Things he'd valued leading him along the same path again and again. And it mattered to him that Marco had cared for him when he'd done all he could to break him? Had broken him. Benn and Shanks helped him escape that spiral. Helped put it in perspective.

Shanks rummaged in the cooler and passed Law a drink. "Gotta get the meat on. Help me out?"

"Got some fish?" Law took the drink and rolled the glass against his cheek before resting the lip in his mouth.

"Benn caught some when we felt your approach."

Law swallowed his mouthful. "Gutted?"

"Gotta earn your keep somehow, kid."

That was fair.

"It's a Sea king."

Law paled.

The Redhairs thought they were funny, even when no-one else did. The seagulls joined in. All three men stood, and the dog twisted and jumped to the ground. "He's not joking," Benn whispered into Law's ear, slamming his cap on his head.

oOOo

His arse was on display once or twice a year—when Chopper or his own crew ran a check-up, and if he joined the Strawhats or others at the onsen. Massages were fine with someone he trusted. Cuddling even was sweet and a draught of validation—with someone he trusted.

Sex just didn't happen.
Robin occasionally pointed out eye candy and he'd join in on the speculation, but it went no further. He didn't dare.

Bleat curled up beside him and kept him warm when he visited Sengoku. He'd had dreams where he'd hurt her, but never in actuality. Law didn't think she'd ever die. She came from Drum island. Kureha had delivered her to Sengoku years ago, and she'd been Cora's childhood pal, and had even known Olvia Robin as she'd traipsed after the sixteen year old boy when he paid a visit to her cell. Law hoped he'd never have to protect her.

They'd never take Kizaru out. Even biowarfare could be forgiven if the potential for another weapon existed. He was some kind of tactical genius.

Apparently.

Doflamingo's death was painful.

Apparently.

He'd read the reports: Some elements sounded like amber lead, as the coroner said. Still couldn't get it right on it not being a contagion. The zucchini and twisting of intestines, almost a braiding, was freaky. Had Doflamingo eaten something from the garden? Could the Flevance power work like that? There probably was enough of his damn fluids in the soil for them to have some effect.

Larceny, pick-pocketing, travelling tent boxing troupes. The Family drifted into petty crime and wages gained from theft or heft. Croc represented Doflamingo only. The man paid well. Scandal of the century that he wasn't able to free him from charges of trespassing World Government airspace. He couldn't counter the zero-tolerance application for ex-convicts. Surveillance had caught him jaywalking as well—one red light crossed too many.

Fujitora had gone after Croc. Legally. Benn on his side. Too smart to be caught out, they disqualified him for not renewing his license in a timely manner. Law knew Croc had never seen him as anything more than Doflamingo's plaything, and if Joker wanted to share, who was Croc to refuse? But he didn't have the level of obsession Doffy did. Law was all tight jaw and gut and seconds blacked out and forgotten when he thought about him, but he'd bide his time. It'd swing in his favour eventually.

Buffalo washed down the bar with a greyed cloth, musty from not being wrung out when left to dry. It hardly cleaned a thing. Water pooled. The shack reeked of urine and alcohol poisoning. The Family, the last dregs of them, dropped in sometimes. Baby, long split up from Sai, sitting at the bar, older and wizened and happy to pay him too much for a weak gin and tonic. Jora had departed suddenly from the same strange kind of disease that took out the Young Master.

Law's betrayal had been avenged, and Buffalo's own sweet life gutted, inverted and turned against him. He was without a leader, a father. The locals had deserted the bar when Marco failed to turn up, and clientele had dwindled prior to that. Law brought a peace to the venue that wasn't evident until he vanished.

Buffalo waited for the door to push open and it hardly ever did.

Michel, the fisherman that used to supply the bar with seafood, was the first to visit. Law conducted the initial consultations accompanied by either Chopper or Bepo, until he regained the
trust of the area, the public's trust. He knew it was a bit unusual, but relief swept the patients' faces when they saw that maybe they didn't have to talk to him. Didn't have to have him touch them. He busied himself with his tools. Head down.

But Law charged minimally, or worked on a barter system if people were down on their luck, and a lot were in that part of town. Bepo and Chopper weren't always available.

Michel's daughter, May, charged in behind Michel one day. A teen in her last years of school, Law thought she'd come to gawk, but she pulled a gangling kid behind her, his elbow grazed and cut up. The kid was scared and it wasn't because of the grated skin.

Law scrubbed up and Bepo cleaned the injury.

"How's the knee?"

"You always ask."

"Interested."

"I'm competing tomorrow. Won the semi-finals last week." A far cry from Law using his Room to piece her smashed patella back together when she was eight. A skateboarding accident.

Law smiled, and May's friend relaxed a little as he listened in. Law was all business, and stitched where needed, but mostly the damage required a bit of gauze, ointment and instructions to keep it clean.

His clientele increased. Some boycotted. The vet never understood why he was free. Law tried to talk to him once, but he reached for a weapon and to call the authorities, so Law walked away. Dr Moonbeam had been pivotal in getting him ushered back into Doffy's 'care'. Maybe he thought he was there for revenge.

Freedom of Speech was necessary, but so was freedom from libel. Morgans had his hands tied with what he could print with new accountability laws, though the occasional jab slipped through the articles, but without the fabulous flamingo stories about Law lost their punch, despite his own dark notoriety. The madness was archived. The Quislings melted back into society, manning desk jobs and quietly spewing their venomous bullshit over lunchtime conversations and water cooler chats.

The tailor who'd clothed the ex-slave fugitives was given a government contract.

Law backed the safehouses. They sheltered people fleeing other violence and persecution and circumstance and bad life choices, and he enjoyed visiting Jean Bart. The Moreton Bay Fig tree was sheared, and lopsided, but still loomed large. He knew he attracted attention and it was crucial the houses operated quietly, so he limited his time at them.

His practice was in a converted house, the bedrooms retained at the back. He slept there. Lived there. Grew tomatoes from the seeds Robin had saved. Kept some by the entrance of the clinic. At times he needed to brace himself to not flashback with the smell, but it also ushered in Lammy, and the vines working to protect him, even while Marco had thought he was harming him by having him do yard work near them. It really did fuck him up sixty percent of the time, but they'd helped fuck Marco up one hundred percent all time, so there was that.

Every now and then he loosened the braiding from his piercings and laid them on the kitchen table. He'd light up a Room without touching them and everything was fine, but the minute he came in direct contact with them his powers extinguished. Even so, he held the tiny braids between his thumb and forefinger before returning them to the gold. Another energy ran through them.
He needed different strength lens with every passing year, but his eyesight was still good enough to make out the engraving of the mother seal and her pup on the piercing, and even if he went blind, he knew how the etching felt under his fingers, against his skin, enveloping his body in its being.

Serpents cut swathes through the land, and water filled the tracks left behind them—irrigation and drinking supplies for farms, flora, folks, and fauna. Underground springs, overground streams, estuaries and cascading falls, braided the sky and soil with life.

Fat and bloated at times—pythons could swallow a deer whole—waterways split their banks, raised their heads in hissed attack. Other times, tails cracked creek beds dry, spread weeds and algae and strangled flow.

Law placed the woven hair, free from the gold, on the family shrine.

Seals rode currents from one catch to the next, and back home. His grandmother's tradition was passed to his mother and became his own. Lammy's if she'd survived. His parents' research was underground like the shafts and tunnels the miners dug for trinkets, for profits, for beauty—a legacy not yet uncovered.

He stroked the plaits. Sister was black and red on white, a strand in the snow. Another strand, a classmate—his brother, mother, father, dead, the end of the line. The wisps connecting them were frayed and loose and lost.

Law cupped them here—Sister, his classmate, the tattooed miners—in a room adjacent to his kitchen at the back of his place of work. He was handy with stitchwork. Had the skill to weave the locks that knew Cora and Misery and a tint of what he'd thought Marco was. Remnants of them.

A raised lid.

A crack of light.

An utterance. A belief that he wasn't such a monster—worthy of love despite what he was. Perhaps he was simply a scared boy in a trunk.

Love and hate coppered the entrails of history and possibility—drive—twisting them into what he was now, and what others would be after him.

Remnants.

He repacked the braids before they slithered away, spawning dreams and terrors that spawned their own. Bamboo rhizomes guarded forests one dense cycle to the next. There was a reason they encircled cemetery markers.

He slipped the piercings back into his ears. These particles spun stories and swung swords their rightful owners couldn't. He kept them close.

It wasn't all he had.

In memory, in the confines of that chest, Law ran a thumb, a flattened palm, over the creased pictures he'd gained of Cora. The snow reinforced the hinges and bolts of his sturdy little hidey-hole. Never stopped snowing. He'd lost a clear definition of Corazon to the years.

When Cora was shot he hadn't known his family was with him, but once he discovered the earrings
sewn into his hat, he cuddled with Lammy—in memory. His mother and father really crowded the space, but they covered their children’s ears to the gun blasts, blocked the entreaty to let Law be free.

He rewrote the unwritten. Never lifted his face to Gladius' sneer. Diamante's fingers never grabbed his neck, wrenching him from the trunk.

Everything was a breath of calm, not silenced by Cora's power, but by the flux of the ocean, the heavy ice above. Paddling down—then gliding even deeper for herring and cod—harm, abuse, love, worry, regret, appreciation and deprecation, fear, faded with the way of water.

Salt and sleet and hunter and prey were self, except in terms of absolute need and instinct—and even then. All that mattered was moving when required, resting when needed.

Still, the mother seal and pup rubbed noses on resurfacing. Partners did the same for the short time they were together. Guarding life to be born, seeding life for the next season and the one after that.

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Law poured milk into a tiny cup on the shrine. Misery used to bury her face in Marco's cereal when they all ate breakfast on the deck, and the Phoenix never learned not to place it beside the deckchair when he turned a page of the paper. Misery farted and scratched with allergies, snapped her ears like sheets in the wind, but loved milk.

Law didn't drink it. Marco cared so much for the dog that he could no longer bear Law. In the afterlife, perhaps Misery still joined the three, so maybe the Phoenix touched upon the shrine before departing for favoured pastures.

Law knew Marco would let the dog lick out the tiny offering while grumbling there was none left for his tea. So he kept some milk in the fridge. Beyond expiry date. Until it grew rancid and coagulated.

He had to deal with the stench and was the one to tip it down the sink when the smell got too much. But never let it be said amongst those ghosts gathered in wasp-tongued clusters that Law was a slave who didn't know how to meet his master's needs.

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Did the heart go with him to the other side? Or was it reborn in another phoenix in a set of cogs turning another round of eternity?

Law was happy to run his course to the end once the time came. Like a raindrop on a rice stalk in a paddy fully planted, paths crossed and parted and departed with a spark of difference. Who could discern?

He washed his hands off the Phoenix, curdled milk, sparred regularly, visited Shanks and Benn or Robin (more for the dogs than company). He'd sever his own shadow if he could, but it'd merely grow, engage, go rogue, and hunt him down with an assassin's rifle and intent.

So yeah, good and bad and bad and really fucking bad. His hands never shook when he rethreaded the earrings, braided his own tiny plaits, wreathed the wraiths of the past. How they'd shape his
future he no longer dared contemplate.

But, an orca, a bear, poisonous sea urchins and lurid slugs swam nearby. A sharpshooter, a swordsman, a demon, a cyborg, a cook. A narwhal. Fucking unicorns of the sea. A yonkou, his first mate, the pirate king, the fleet admiral. And Smoker and whatever title he now wore. Law could do worse.

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Izou dropped in one evening. Law checked for his backup, his cohort, but he was alone. He didn't let him into the house where the mismatched silverware, the few pieces of crockery, would be judged. Rootless. Sun was a lazy summer refusing to set.

Law gestured to the stairs, aware of the silk of Izou's kimono, but he sat down when invited with no distaste or grumble. Law snapped off a tomato leaf and rolled it in his palm.

Izou lit a cheroot, his flintlock visible at the side of his robe. Law stared out to the yard, not assuming or revealing anything the sharp Whitebeard could swing back at him.

Izou's eye dropped to the splodge of blue. All that was left of his work. It was the tattoo he was least proud of—the design had been appalling—so the ugly scarring overtop was an improvement. It obliterated Law's original ink too, which was only an improvement in his books.

Law tapped his foot. Stared at the man for a second before returning to his view of the yard. Office hours were over. Izou hadn't visited Law in his own space on his own terms since before the attack.

She'd been gone for some time, Marco too. But in this unfamiliar yard the Whitebeard scouted for the dog that always ruined his clothes with a saliva-slavered stick, begging him to throw it, when Law and Marco had hosted their barbecues, fired up the wood-fired stove.

Law sighed. "She's gone."

Izou inclined his head, inhaled, felt the flintlock. Habit. Law eyed it.

"Vista and I went to your old place once. After you'd left."

Law pulled more leaves, crushed them, lifted them to his face.


Izou agreed. He was right. He wouldn't remain in such an arrangement, despite his adherence to cultural hierarchy, if he had a choice. He was selective. If he could leave, he would. If he couldn't he'd make it work for him. That, maybe, Law never understood.

"Yard was a mess."

Law scraped his foot across the path and thought of sweeping. Yeah. Even if Marco hadn't been restrained, it was a mess. Law's job. His duty.

"You did a lot to keep that place looking good."

"Was invested once." He'd plant his herb garden out here soon. Get Chopper's advice. Set Penguin
and Shachi to work.

"Vines everywhere."

"Yeah."

Izou inhaled. This yard was so dull. Where were the small touches? "What happened to him? To Marco?"

Law looked across, and Izou wasn't totally without empathy at the anger chafing his expression—he'd never seen the gold burn before. But if anyone knew, it was Law.

"Vines. Everywhere. We called out, but no response. Went in, but there was nothing. That Doflamingo stooge—the one with the teeth, ability to fly—took over the bar."

He didn't mention the plate on the doorstep, streaked with the dirt of a few rains. An empty snail shell on its side and a single twig swam in the recess.

Law let out another done-with-it exhalation. Rubbed his leaf-stained fingers over the forearm away from Izou. Made sure he knew, could feel, where Kikoku was.

Izou swore he heard the gold hit Law's palm as he brushed the back of his neck, flicking his ear. Drama.

"You branded me, Izou. You had tea with him. Discussed how best to keep a slave, the duties of a whore."

Law chained up in the master bedroom. That collar dragging down his neck. The ridiculous clothes. Izou telling him to suck it up. He was, should be, used to it.

"The door was open. Always fucking open." When Marco wanted his broken arse on display. Wanted his conversation overheard.

Izou nodded. It was true, but Trafalgar hadn't killed him yet, so he doubted he would now.

"We thought it was a phase. Descent to madness. A temporary thing."

Law laughed, his hands linked. Izou could have got him out. From the beginning. Refused to tap that nomi, that bamboo stick with its silk thread and whittled needle into his skin, but better Izou than the Family. Law tipped his head away from Izou. Not a gesture of submission.

The Whitebeard pressed his lips together. Whatever.

"You never forgot who I was, did you?" Law asked. Nails black. Still black and painted. His fees were nominal. Let the patients worry.

Izou shook his head. "Couldn't." If anyone was trained to suffer, it was Law.

Jack shit. That's what he was getting. Or not getting. Law bent from the waist. The stoop was low. Rose in a fluid motion, paused to take in the still blue sky, reminded him of the ocean, and entered the house. The door clicked behind him.

Izou drew on his smoke. Law hadn't offered him a drink. Should have. It was his role. Under duress. The grace came in being able to undertake all tasks under duress. The top of the game knew that.
Marco forgot who he was, but his crew never did. First Division Commander. He was allowed aberrations. Law was one. But better to let him go—the Heart upstart—than torture him.

Izou's role was loyalty at all costs. But to Whitebeard, to Marco, to his men, to his brothers. To Oden long ago. Not to Doflamingo or the Family. Or Law. Law made his skin crawl, but that bunch of creeps broke him out in hives.

The man they lost wasn't the man they'd known. Izou cast around for the dog one more time. Still expected to see Marco's blond spikes when Law's black mess made an appearance, year after year. He rose, straightened and tightened his kimono, and clacked down the clear path, the manicured lawn. No trees. Law's practice as bland and innocuous as any other doctor's office just starting out.

Bepo's self-esteem was on the lower side of not quite there. In North Blue he was an anomaly. The bear. That bear. A white bear. A talking bear. A freak. A circus attraction. But he'd hidden Penguin and Law from Doflamingo's searches and all three boys had huddled into him in the shack when the fire died down.

Yet. There was Shachi and Penguin jeering and blocking the way to river. Bepo wanted to catch fish. To share. He could've just ploughed through them, but he hung back. Law walked up.

"What's wrong?"

"They said I couldn't pass. Wasn't allowed."

It was the voice of the kid who sat by himself at lunch and waited by the teacher's car to help her with her books in the morning. Some shops had signs on the windows, No Minks Allowed. Some didn't know about Minks, but chased him out the minute they heard the bell chime and thought rabid wildlife was invading their premises. Law was surprised at Penguin. Shachi was the town he'd grown up in. Maybe they rubbed off on one another.

"We'll go together," Law said, and Bepo fell in a little behind him.

Penguin and Shachi were not Law's enemies but he stared them down. "Did you forget who he was?" he asked.

Who you were?

An escapee like Law, even if not a slave. A spell-caster tolerated because he knew how to cut hair. Shachi didn't have parents. That kind always grew up shaky. Everyone knew.

Did you forget who we are? How we're in this together?

Did you forget, Law?

Law was a heart denied, a future refused, determination not permitted.

Did you forget, Law? Nah, Law?

Penguin and Shachi also fell in behind. "Sorry, boss." "Yeah, kinda fucked up." "Didn't mean it." "Bit of fun." "Can't take a joke."

They gathered wood, and the fruit Shachi knew to be good, while Law helped Bepo with the catch.
"Don't like the eyes."

Law shrugged, that was fine. He and Bepo fought over them. Though Bepo shyly pushed them his way that dinner. Some sacrifice for a polar bear.

When Law turned to Penguin in the night his friend, new love, was hot and sticky and didn't want the touch. Law froze. Because he helped Bepo? Because he'd asked for too much, expected too much? His sixteen year old mind was pretty sharp but had its moments.


Every morning Doflamingo served a bread roll if Law wasn't on rations, and demanded he eat it. Most nights he rolled to the side and pulled Law to him and commanded him to stay. As if there was anywhere he could freely go.

Did you forget who I was?

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Law washed the small cup that had the milk. Drained by which creature he wasn't sure. He looked over his kitchen. Threadbare. He still burnt oils. They still calmed him. But he needed a few things a little less transient.

Intelligence was not peculiar to the owners, the powerful. Hope. Quite the opposite. What did the powerful need with hope?

Did you forget where you were from?

Protozoa, tetrapods, amphibians, pterosaurs, birds, primates.

Nucleotides, phosphates, sugars, nitrogen.

Doffy's pink coat, Cora's black. The braids in the gold in his ears.

Law had nothing of Marco's. Not a thing to remember him by. Sure, the few towels he and Robin had Shambled from the house, but they were Law's. The blue on his arm. Guess there was that.

"Did you forget who I was, Marco?" Law asked the empty house, the hand of the clock clanking over to the next minute.

Izou answered, no.

Law answered, yes.

He stood by the sink, washing the few items, looking out at the plain yard. He'd have to plant it out.

Chapter End Notes

Orright. If you read. Thanks for reading. Very special thanks to those who have given support. If you're a reader who saves kudos for last, and the ending sat well with you,
don't forget to drop it, please. 150K words is a lot to read. Hopefully I got some things right, and thank you again. They make any writer's day.

Quick references, Bleat, Sengoku, etc.—explored in *Gimcracks*.

Law's captured by the Family after Cora is shot rather than escaping (*Repossession*). The Shanks and Marco scenes touch upon scenes in *Repossession*, except Vergo was alive in that fic (the messes I get myself into). So I've replaced him with Diamante in this fic.

References to Law and Marco and luminous oceans is in *Gimcracks*

I think that's all.

And Izou and chapter 962 eh? ♥

Sorry I didn't explore the political machinations. Deep bows of apology, and to Law too.

Thanks for choosing this fic if you stuck with it.

my [tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com/).

Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://www.tumblr.com) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!