Bird Perch

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Summary

Marco used to love a lot of people, Whitebeard, his father, Ace, his brother, Whitebeard Pirates, his family, and all of them were gone.

Like the aftermath of an unimaginable nightmare. Except it wasn't, it wasn't a nightmare, nightmares ended, this won't, this reality just won't end. At least that's what he thought, till a sunshine boy in a straw hat came, and then a phoenix perched on the Sunny.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Chapter 1

Marco used to love a lot of people, his pops, Ace, other brothers, the whole Whitebeard family, and they all, within a span of a day disappeared from his life.

Marineford was a terrible event, where mostly everything that could have gone wrong, went wrong.

His captain, his father, was dead, murdered by his former son. Ace, his larger than life brother, who had so much more to live for, was dead, the less said about his death, the better. Entire crews of allies wiped out, countless men from their divisions lost to the battle, the Moby Dick destroyed and not a single other major fleet ship remaining. As if things could ever be the same, as if there was any hope for restoring their crew to its former condition. It wasn't possible, not because of lack of faith, but lack of people. If the people of the family are changed, it won't be the same family as before.

They were truly at the end of their line, the Whitbeard pirates could no longer continue, and to be very frank, Marco didn't regret the cause, to protect family, if they lost, so be it. Yet he couldn't truly give it his all, couldn't die for what he believed in, couldn't conclude his journey as he would have liked to, fighting to the death alongside his captain, in the last battle their crew faced, no, not when their father had asked them to leave. Wished for them to continue, to live on with their dreams. He understood his captain, just like he always had, no more death, no more,

and the first mate follows the captain. So they left, he gathered the remaining forces and retreated, for them to live another day, to live another dream, Marco understood that Edward Newgate had seen enough lives destroyed, felt that there was hope still remaining for them, to start afresh, to start anew. For the first time in forever, he didn't agree. He would rather die, conclude his long journey with the Whiteboard pirates, for it was unfair to him, he who had been there from the start, been there for every step of the way, it was cruel to be denied an end with his crew.

Then again, their escape was something bigger, more important, than the crew. This had stung, badly, the captain accepted the end of the Whiteboard pirates, knew very well there was no possibility of the survival of their crew as before. Which was why, he considered their battle to be over. He didn't need the remaining people to die for the cause of a dead crew. Marco disagreed, but captain's orders are captain's orders.

The only reason Marco followed the last order was because he knew his captain was right, as he had no freedom to disagree, not when Whitebeard's last order was to be carried out. They had come to the end of their journey, there was no need to fight for a dead cause. Not when escape was possible, for the remaining pirates to still live on with their dreams.

Yet it wasn't fair, not to him. Others could regroup, forge onto new paths, continue to be free, as sons of the seas, but not him.

His dream died with Edward Newgate's death at Marineford. A first mate's life is forfeit to the captain after all.
Thus, with the end of the entire affair, Marco lost whatever he considered precious in his life. From his captain, to his old crew.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Marco is a bird that loses flight.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Marco owed Shanks, for his steps at Marineford. Steps which he didn't need to take, but took nonetheless. From fighting Kaido to stop him from interfering, to stopping the pointless bloodshed and saving the remaining Whitebeards. For saving the lifeless bodies of Ace and pops. Marco tried to thank him, only to have him brush him off.

"He was a rival, but a man worthy of respect", he spoke, and walked away.

Marco watched as the Red-Hair pirates left. He was, Marco agreed with Shanks.

Edward Newgate was a man great enough to deserve almost everything.

He became a symbol, once all of Shanks' crew left, all of the remaining Whitebeard's rallied around him. Marco the phoenix, the last remaining hope for the Whitebeard pirates. He could sense their expectations, looking at him for inspiration. Marco looked at everyone, at all the people he was about to disappoint.

He had a mantle to carry, to preserve the last ounce of hope their father had given them by allowing them to escape. He was the one they were all looking at, for strength. He could almost hear their pleas. What do we do, what next? Lead us, you're the first mate.

Too bad, because Marco the phoenix, the first mate of the legendary Edward Newgate was gone.

All that was left behind was an empty shell.

"I can't take his place. Im sorry, but I can't lead the remaining crew." A voice emerged, washing over the place, leaving behind deathly silence.

Oh, it was him wasn't it. The one who spoke was him.

"Marco?", Izou ventured, "What are you talking about?" He finished, his face twisted in half question, half despair.

Marco refused to meet his eyes. Refused to look at anyone.

He couldn't do this, he didn't want this, he never had a choice in this. He refused to do this. The least he could do for everyone was to be honest.

"Its okay Marco." Vista spoke. Jozu sighed and patted his back. Marco grimaced, tears slipping past his lashes. It wasn't alright. It still felt like betrayal. It felt like failure. He failed his family. First he couldn't protect them, then he couldn't help them.
Namur came forward and spoke, "It is alright Marco, we cannot ask this of you either. It is too much to ask, from anyone."

Marco sobbed as all the commanders acquiesced one by one. Bidding him final words of farewell, as they left. Some gathering other cremates, others making their way alone. His sobs grew harder as the remaining crew split apart. Many came forth to give final words of understanding, while others left in silence. It hurt the most to see the ones with the tears. The ones he had hurt the most. He turned around and left, walking away with a blurry vision.

Later he reached a forest, in who knows what island, his movements from the past days a hectic blur of events, to get away, to get away, to get away.

Away from his crew, away from his loss, away from his dead captain, away from the dead Ace, away from the pain.

He shifted into his phoenix form, and he crashed into the trees. Sliding down through the foliage, bombarded with branches, twigs and leaves. He lay on the ground, heaving, as he stared at his arms, full of scratches and cuts, oozing blood. He couldn't remember the last time he bled due to injuries, while in his transformed form. Then he screamed, as his chest collapsed in itself and panic surrounded his brain. Too much pressure, too little air, too dark to see. No wings to fly away.

When he later regained consciousness, he truly couldn't see anything, only hearing the buzz of the insects of the forest in the night. So now, god knows what's wrong with his devilfruit power and he has panic attacks. Marco shut his eyes and let darkness consume him again.

After he regained some semblance of control in lieu of his delirious episode, he made his way across the forest, trying to find a tree with branches large enough to hide him. Once he did, he spent the next few days curled up with tree bark, screaming his throat hoarse, scratching his surroundings with his talons cum hands as his fingertips dripped blood.

His body finally stopped responding properly after a few days, lack of food, lack of water, with injuries that just didn't heal. With wings that just wouldn't fly.

He made his way to a town with his wrecked body, unable to make a single more attempt to fly. He was nothing now, not even his own strength stayed with him. He felt so utterly hopeless with the trees surrounding him on all sides, the tress that he used to soar above of. Mocking him. Like a flightless bird. Dead bird. Trapped bird. He wanted to raze it to the ground, burn every last tree. He couldn't. He laughed as he realised it didn't matter what he wanted, because he couldn't do it anymore. Couldn't do it. Can't live. His insane screeches turned into hysterical sobs, as he trudged his way along a town's road, Leaving the wretched forest behind. Where the trees mocked him. A failure of a bird, a flightless weakling.

A plain wooden ceiling stared back at him as he lay on a bed. The windows of the room in which he was were wide open. Rays of sunshine filtering in, making dust motes glow. It was a fuzzy scene. He felt clear-headed and sat up. Unable to understand where he was. Pressure started to build up in his chest as moments and memories jumped up in his brain. No, he didn't want to remember, he didn't want to reminisce. No, he didn't want this pain. He started breathing heavy, choking on air, clutching his chest, where it burned.

"Hey mister!" A voice called after him as he stormed past, leaving the house he was sheltered in.

He couldn't stay, he needed to search, search for less pain, search for relief. He collapsed to his knees on a cliff overlooking the sea. The salty spray permeating the air. The familiar scent washing over his being.
He stared at the sea, the rolling waves. Nothing had changed, the sea looked the same. It moved the same way, the familiar sounds. Why. His captain was dead, his life was over, so why. Why was it still the same.

We are all sons of the sea, a whisper drifted across the tides. A white moustache pulled taut over a wry smile. His fathers words.

The sea was cruel, doling out the same tranquil picture as before, yet here he was, a lost soul. The scene was too much, he couldn't bear to look at it, it couldn't be the same when the world had shifted, and yet, he didn't feel so much as if going insane anymore.

If the sea was the one unshakeable thing he could find in his remaining shattered world, then Marco would rather never step foot on land again. So, he set sail. Heeding the ocean's call. A son of the sea is a son of the sea, cannot survive elsewhere. Apart from the wild free waves. At least he is a pirate. A broken shell of one, but a pirate nonetheless. There was nothing else he could bear to be, bear to do.

The sea had always held answers for her sons, So he would follow his one last hope, and let the waves guide him. A single insignificant sailor, searching for heaven knows what.

Chapter End Notes

Things get sadder and sadder, lol, luffy where r u, help him
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The sun gains colour, and his feathers ruffle on a breeze.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marco traveled across the sea, without a plan, without a purpose. Picking random directions and random currents. He never dared to fly long distances as before. When he used to fly across the span of entire seas at one go. He didn't trust himself anymore, he didn't trust his wings anymore.

Apart from that, he truly didn't think he would make his way back to these familiar seas again, if he ever got far away. He didn't think he would have the courage to return. That would kill him, because he would waste away, separated from his true home, and as of yet, he wasn't suicidal.

So he sailed in the new world, and in paradise or in the calm belts.

Which is why, he met familiar faces everywhere.

Scattered remains of former allies.

Most of them showed Marco a kindness he wasn't sure he deserved. Giving him soft reassurances and healthy helpings of respect. They weren't unwelcome, these kind demonstrations and yet, they kept adding on to an overspilling storage of guilt. I failed you, he thinks, unprompted, at the face of an old friend. His guilt twisting his fleeting moment of joyous relief into a desperate void full of nothing but grief.

His burden kept watch over him, reprimanding him for every moment, any moment, where his lips twisted with some semblance of joy. You don't deserve this, it whispered, icy breath around his heart.

Like a monster breathing down his neck, keeping a watch over his actions, his feelings, his mind.

The weight was a reminder, to live life, forever carrying the remains of his failures.

As for his failures,

Marco slaughtered any marine who dared to make a move on him. He didn't actively try to hunt them down, he wasn't that far consumed by hatred, but never held back in any chance encounter. He could only apologise to his late father, who condoned death where mercy was an option, but mercy was an attribute he lost when Akainu manipulated Squard to stab Whitebeard.

Yet, no matter what he did, where he went, his condition worsened. He knew it himself. He was losing hope day by day. The day when he would question his continued life didn't seem that far away. Blackbeard's claim to the previously Whitebeard claimed territory created a burning brand of pain around his heart. It was his fault.

If he hadn't run away, like a coward, maybe he could have upheld the promises they previously
made to these islands. All the people that used to depend upon him, as a Whitebeard pirate, all the hopes that used to rest upon his shoulders, all of them, let down by his mistakes.

He once treasured the weight upon his shoulders, considered it an honour to carry the heavy responsibilities, now, all of the same weight dropped down, much heavier than before, to bend him in agony.

Topping it off, the lack of news about Monkey D. Luffy was like a cold dead weight in his mind. He couldn't even protect the kid, the one person Ace wanted him to protect. He'd seen with his own eyes, the state Luffy was in, when Ace died on the battlefield. His broken scream was terrible to hear.

It was completely wrong, so utterly horrific. The boy with the unbending will, broken.

Maybe all of these things were in his head, but it was a struggle to move like before, with his chest inflamed in burning anguish, shoulders tormented by crashing loads.

He struggled along, for as many more days as he could. Only his fathers last command to sustain him.

He was caught in battle with some marine battleships, near Sabaody, when the storm hit. A fearsome tempest characteristic of the bad side of the weather in the Grandline. His small boat obviously collapsed. Too preoccupied in trying to stay alive by flapping his failing wings, he didn't notice where the winds carried him. The terrible storm rendered him near blind, as he desperately tried to escape its clutches. After countless hours, the sea turned calm suddenly. Totally pristine, without a single ripple.

The calm belt. He could only mutter curses as he kept of flying, on his brittle wings, to find land. It would be pretty ironic to die like this, drowning due to failure of flight. Yet, he was nothing if not stubborn. Stubborn enough to live while being almost dead. He could atleast keep pushing his physical capabilities. Pops wouldn't want him to die. Damn his dead captain.

He collapsed on the first island he found, which seemed uninhabited, which was just as well, because Marco made a spectacular burning, crash landing, his powers going haywire after the long physical exertion. Exacerbated by his out of sync control of transformation these days. Then darkness clouded his vision and he was gone.

His eyelids were glowing red, Marco opened his eyes to blinding sunshine and closed his watering eyes with a curse.

"Hey! You're awake! You're a really cool bird you know! It was AWESOME when you landed here, all COVERED in BLUE FLAMES!" A familiar voice laughed nearby.

Marco's heart nearly stopped beating. He snapped open his watering eyes to stare at the source of the noise. Bright red vest, sand streaked shorts and a grin large enough to seem painful. Luffy was alive. The realisation that one of his most regretful failures wasn't a reality, burst a barrier he never knew existed. His fears were unfounded.

Luffy was alive.

Alive and shining, bright as the sun, more brilliant than before. Still smiling, still laughing.
Luffy was alive.

He hadn't failed Ace, hadn't completely failed Whitebeard.

Alive, somehow stronger than before.

Alive, somehow against all odds.


Not dead, breathing. Laughing, talking.

Marco stared at him, his endless chatter going over his head and he broke down again. Tears flowing down his unmoving face, as a chunk of his phantom anguish disappeared. It didn't feel like he was dragged down by chains anymore. As long as this boy was alive, he hadn't failed everything.

He was hope itself.

Seeing his condition, the boy immediately stopped laughing, visibly startled and confused.

"Pineapple-hair? What's wrong? Why are you crying? Stop crying! Want me to beat someone up for you?" He continued, trying to deal with Marco's episode, a slight frown on his face.

Marco made a half choked noise and wiped his tears, already amused at Luffy's perplexed, haphazard behaviour.

Oh god, amused, he felt amused. What is fuck's sake was with this kid. Of course, should've figured it would be a ridiculous moron like him who would end up helping him. For the first time in years, joy didn't seem like a crime. Not with this boy. It was as if his aura itself shielded him from his mistakes.

Then he laughed. His sobs mixed with choked chuckles. He could feel Luffy's annoyance rising, clearly not understanding Marco's weird behaviour tantrum. His sort of sulky face, made Marco laugh harder. Till Luffy finally got influenced by the contagious laughter and started laughing himself.

What a dork. Oh no, what did he just think.

After his insane episode was over, he instantly blurted out an apology, "Luffy, I'm sorry." Luffy stopped laughing instantly, his eyes staring at him quizzically.

"I didn't know you were alive, which is why I didn't come to you sooner, so I have to say, I'm sorry. I know it doesn't make things better but I have to say it" He continued. No matter how normal Luffy was being with him, he wanted this discussion to be out and in the clear.

"Of course it doesn't make things better." Luffy replied simply. Marco's heart sank so fast, it felt like it pushed out all the air in his lungs. He nearly almost wanted to puke with the sensation of returning guilt.

"I don't know what things you're talking about, so I can't really tell." Luffy finished normally. Scratching his nose, gazing at a butterfly.

Marco's forehead twitched. His feelings thrown into muddled chaos as a weird sense reminiscent of irritation started to bubble. While Luffy giggled at a bird and slingshotted across a tree to grab it.
"I've never seen this kind of bird before, even though I've been on this island for a while. Do you think it'd taste good?" He questioned, chuckling as he swung the unconscious bird in front of his face. Holding it up by its feet.

Marco was at an utter loss for words. Did he not recognise him or something?

"I meant Marineford,"

"Yeah I figured it was something related to that, cuz thats the only place we met. I meant what in Marineford cool-bird guy?"

Marco stared at Luffy uncomprehending.

"I failed to properly help you, I couldn't even reach out to you and Ace in fighting Aka-he was cut off by Luffy,

"Are you feeling guilty? Cuz thats dumb. Stop being ridiculous. You saved my ass a lot of times. The result wasn't your fault. Why would I want an apology, neither for that matter, would've Ace. Now, lets go eat!" Luffy spoke, eyes serious as they met his. Marco gaped at him. Then Luffy smiled, and then laughed, before starting to talk more about food.

Marco felt something stir in his heart, a streak of deep admiration, as Luffy's smile forgave his sins. The sun glows brighter and the breeze is suddenly fresh.

Marco feels like flying, feels almost free.

Chapter End Notes

There you go, here comes our Luffy.
Thanks for the support you guys, all of your comments made me write this earlier than schedule lolz
let me know what you think again eh, if its no problem
peace :)
Marco followed Luffy, as he proceeded to chase one monstrous animal after the other, to find the biggest one possible. To eat. He smiled along at his antics, glad that the boy was just as lively as before.

Marco questioned Luffy as they sat around a campfire, while Luffy demolished a cooked bird creature. Well, he mused, the kid sure could eat.

"Where are we Luffy? What is this place?"
"Itsh Ushkaina", Luffy replied, mouth food of meat and Marco sighed.
"How about you eat first and then speak, yeah?" Marco ventured.

Luffy nodded, closed his mouth and chewed for a few seconds before gulping all the food in his mouth in one go. Marco opened his mouth to tell him he didn't need to hurry, because the kid would choke if he ate that much, but it was too late as the food went down. Stretching his body proportions. Marco shut his mouth, right, rubber. Then he blinked as Luffy's inflated stomach went back to normal in a couple of seconds. That was some freaky metabolism.

"Its Ruskaina." Luffy repeated, once his mouth wasn't full. Ruskaina huh. It certainly made sense, the island was located in the Calm Belt beside paradise. It made sense that he crashed here. Marco was infinitely glad that he did too, for he managed to bump into Luffy, but what didn't make sense, was what Luffy was doing on Ruskaina.

"Hey Luffy, why are you on Ruskaina? Its a dangerous uninhabited island after all, even seasoned pirates avoid it due to the ever changing extreme weather patterns and dangerous creatures.” Marco spoke.

"Yeah this place is sure full of crazy strong animals! Even I couldn't deal with a few of them, and I grew in a forest full of monstrous animals. The weather is weird too, but thats the reason I'm here.” Luffy laughed, talking about 'crazy strong animals' in the same way one talked about slightly irritating bugs.

Marco remembered how Ace told him that he grew up in a forest, fending for himself alongside his brother, as Luffy said the same thing.

That aside, it didn't exactly explain why Luffy was here.

"Why?” Marco asked again.
"Im here to train you see! Rayleigh offered to teach me how to use haki, after I escaped from
Marineford. This was the island we came to.” Luffy replied brightly.

So that explained why Rayleigh was spotted alongside Luffy at Marineford, a few days after the war. He must have offered to train him then. It also explained why there was no news about Luffy in the recent times.

Speaking of whom, Marco sensed him coming with his observation haki and turned around to look at Rayleigh as he appeared from the forest.

"Well well, look what he have here. If it isn't Marco" Rayleigh commented, grinning down at Marco. Same old bastard as always. Marco smiled wanly at him.

No matter how the Whitebeard pirates and Roger pirates were sort of enemies, there wasn't actually any bad blood between them. The stories about their historic clashes and great battles were quite inaccurate. Sure, they clashed, but it was more of friendly rivalry than actual skirmishes. Most people would probably burst into hysterics if found that Roger used to drink sake with Whitebeard, over many leisurely meetings. That Rayleigh and Marco used to spend time together, discussing about their ridiculous captains. In fact, there was a sort of friendship among both crews.

Yet, Marco couldn't claim to have any staunch connection with them now. It had been more than twenty years since they had last met as two crews. The Whitebeards only ran into a few of the former members, like Rayleigh from time to time, after the Roger pirates had been disbanded. Seeing him again brought back a slur of feelings. Especially because it reminded him of the time that had passed, considering Rayleigh was an old geezer now. The realisation hit him hard, considering he was only a couple of years younger than Rayleigh. Due to his devilfruit powers, and his different way of ageing, Marco wasn't exactly always aware of how he was technically a member of the old generation of pirates, due to his youthful appearance.

"Whoa! Old man, you know bird guy?" Luffy questioned in an excited chitter.

"Sure do." Rayleigh replied, winking at Marco before striding over close to them.

"I'll tell you how later, for now, you have to find that Arachnid, uh, big spider thing that we saw yesterday. Use your conqueror's haki properly alright? Have fun!" Rayleigh told Luffy cheerfully as he punched him and sent him flying into the trees nearby.

Marco could hear Luffy let out an indignant screech as he emerged from the remains of a fallen tree. He made a face at Rayleigh and disappeared into the forest after yelling out a cheerful goodbye to 'pineapple-head', which Marco assumed, was him.

Maybe it was all in his head, but the air seemed pale now. Like Luffy took away the warmth with his departure.

"So, brat. I heard what happened with the crew." Rayleigh spoke, as he sat down, right beside him. The small smile on Marco's face slipped off and he refused to turn his head towards him.

Marco had actually been quite young when he'd met Rayleigh for the first time, alongside Gol.D Roger, at the start of his pirate journey. He'd been infuriated by the calm and laid-back first mate of the Roger pirates. To his chagrin, Rayleigh had brushed him off with a laugh, calling him a cute kid. As time went by, and Marco got some sense, he actually started admiring Rayleigh openly. Sending both Whitebeard and Roger into fits, as he told them both that he only considered Rayleigh a true adult. Following which, Rayleigh sort of took him under his wing, which led to them spending time together whenever their crews met.
"Marco.." Rayleigh sighed. Marco looked at the ground between his feet, hair falling into his eyes. "Pay attention brat, I'm not trying to admonish you." Rayleigh continued, not unkindly.

"Theres no need for unnecessary sympathy Rayleigh. You, of all people know I've failed my crew. Failed my captain." Marco replied slowly.

"Well I've never sugarcoated anything for you, so yes, you have, you failed them. Failed your captain. You and me both know, what being a first mate means." Rayleigh sighed, patting Marco's head, as he doubled over with the strength of new sobs and wept.

Hearing it from Rayleigh gave the pain new colour. Like the final bridge breaking. Like the ground beneath his feet finally shook free, from the force of long overdue tremors. He desperately tried to avoid the suffocating feeling, tried to stop himself from crumbling into unfixable shards, thinking of a sunshine boy with a large smile.

"Then again Marco, so did I, no?" Rayleigh continued, speaking softly.

Marco let the words sink in and choked out a reply, "Your crew disbanded on its own accord, from the captains orders, you didn't-

"I didn't get a choice?" Rayleigh cut him off. "And neither did you." He finished sternly.

"Not to be presumptuous, but technically, first mates don't get better than us, and yet both of us failed, failed our main purpose to our captain, and it was all due to our idiotic selfish captains. In making themselves the great captains, that they are known as, they made us wretched first mates fail our duty, by keeping us alive. They ensured that they never failed us, and in doing so doomed us for failure instead." Rayleigh spoke, as he locked eyes with Marco.

"Whitebeard saved you, because he was a great man, a captain that wouldn't let his crew die, as long as that sacrifice from the crew is avoidable. It is unfair to you, yes. Yet, it is now up to you to carry that unfairness that he saddled you with, live as a failure of a first mate, or you can accept his selfishness in saving you, live as his success, to become a beacon for his triumph, to show the world that Whitebeard protected his crew, even in his death. The choice is up to you." Rayleigh finished. Letting his words hang in the air.

Marco's face twisted as he continued sobbing. The weight that had lessened with Luffy's presence, finally disappeared, finding its salvation. He could feel the chains across his wings, the phantom ties, disappear. He knew, he could fly again, like new wings, reborn into a man with a future.

This is the last time pops, he promised his father. Last time he would cry due to the weight of the burden he didn't have to carry.

He would live, live properly, as his pops would've actually wanted and he could somewhat feel his fathers smile, almost hear the words, 'thats my son', drift across the wind.

After his sobs subsided, he tried to thank Rayleigh properly, only to have him explode in laughter, calling him a crybaby. Marco rolled his eyes, never mind, Rayleigh was still a smug asshole. Marco was taking to him, telling him how he arrived on the island and asking some other things, holding an actual intellectual conversation with someone after so long, only to have it interrupted by a loud yell, as something huge landed from the sky. His eye twitched as he looked at the laughing Luffy, situated atop a horrendous spiderous monstrosity.

"Hey Rayleigh! You sure I can't eat the big ones I tame?" Luffy asked, looking at his ride contemplatively.
Marco could swear he felt the spider shudder. He almost felt bad for the spider, looking at how it cowered from Luffy. Which was justified, which was something all monsters probably should, lest Luffy try to eat them. Marco decided to step in before Luffy actually gave in to temptation.

"Luffy, I don't think it'd taste that good. Considering, you know, its a bug" Marco spoke dryly.

Luffy looked at him, about to yell something at him but snapped his mouth shut suddenly. Smile disappearing. He jumped down from the huge spider and stood before Marco, examining him seriously. Marco was confused.

"Whats wrong kid?" Marco asked.

Luffy smiled, then his face exploded into a dazzling grin.

"Birdie's all fixed now, good job Rayleigh! He's not sad anymore. I knew you could fix him!" Luffy yelled out.

Wait.

What.

First bird-guy, then pineapple-head, now birdie? Marco was getting a really bad feeling that Luffy was deliberately trying to make up the most ridiculous nicknames he could for him. Rayleigh looked at them and laughed.

"Name suits you! Being a cute birdie and all." Rayleigh snickered.

He was a fucking phoenix, not a cute chick. Asshole.

"My name's Marco Luffy, Ive told you that before." Marco sighed but smiled.

"Also, thanks to you and Rayleigh I'm all better now. So I won't be sad anymore." Marco finished.

"Thats good, because I don't want you to be sad anymore. I like making my crew happy!" Luffy laughed.

That was almost sweet enough to give him toothache, and- wait.

Wait.

Did he just say crew?

"Luffy, I'm not in your crew!"
"Course you are."
"Since when?!"
"Today of course!"
"When did that happen? When did I say that?"
"You didn't? Ah, yeah I don't think you did actually, but thats okay, since I've decided you are."
"Thats not how it works!"
"Why?"
"You can't just ask why!"
"But what's the problem? You aren't in any crew currently anymore, right?"
"Yeah, but still!"
"You're going to like the others!"
"I said no Luffy!"
"Yeah, but I've already decided it birdie!"

Luffy finished the argument, laughed loudly and ran off to cook dinner. Rayleigh winked at him from the campfire.

After a few days of rest, Marco tried flying, and was unsurprised to feel the strength in his wings again.
He told Luffy and Rayleigh about his plans to depart soon. To go on a real voyage and decide what to do.
Luffy just laughed again and told him to join him as soon as possible in the new world. After his crew reached the new world.

Marco was at a loss, because Luffy just didn't care no matter how many times he declined to be in his crew. Marco knew if he wanted to make a run across the seas, he would have to leave soon, or he never would. Trapped by the gravitational pull of one Monkey.D Luffy.

"Take care brat, do as you always have. Follow your heart eh." Rayleigh spoke to him while he made final preparations to leave, early one morning. Marco nodded.
"Thank You Rayleigh. You guys saved me. I don't think, I would've lasted much longer without your help." Marco spoke genuinely, bowing his head.

"Nah, I would've found you anyway. I was about to search for you soon enough" Rayleigh replied.
"Really?" Marco questioned, surprised. He thought Rayleigh would want to wait for some sort of sign that Marco was actually in trouble before setting off.
"Yeah, I mean I was about to wait for some signal that you really needed my help, before interfering, because I knew that you might reach a conclusion for yourself, but, well, Luffy pestered me into going anyway as soon as I could, to find you." Rayleigh answered.

"Why did Luffy do that?" Marco asked, startled.

Rayleigh looked at the still sleeping boy and smiled.

"To be honest, I'm pretty sure it was instinct. He just knew I suppose, and he was quite worried." Rayleigh spoke softly.

Marco looked at Luffy, and he couldn't stop his heart from falling, just like that, into his gravitation.
So, in the end, Luffy would have saved him, even if they hadn't met by chance, at Ruskaina.

Well, he would decide soon enough, but first, he needed to properly finish all the things he left unfinished, in his pain.

So Marco left, wings restored, heart strong, from Ruskaina. With a boy yelling at his back. Telling Marco that he would be waiting.

Somewhere deep in his heart, Marco knew, and he knew Luffy knew too.
Marco would return, to join the straw hats.

Chapter End Notes

Well I really like Rayleigh too, not to mention he probably has a good idea about what
Marco's going through so yeah. Of course, they just had to have this conversation lol.

Also,
I am so done with this autocorrect.
Why is there so much whiteboard written everywhere? WhAi.

Thanks for all your support as well ^-^
leme know how the chap eh? (Please excuse all the "Whiteboards") lols

I'm sorry about the state of the grammar and everything, as well as all other mistakes. I haven't been able to diligently edit chapters, but I will edit them all soon enough and will most probably post edited chapters from next time.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Luffy is suddenly, weirdly obsessed, with birds. The straw hats are confused. Or, not really, its Luffy after all.

Chapter Notes

For kireeeshima, you're a real sweetheart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The straw hats were used to their captain and his slightly, or maybe more than slightly eccentric qualities. After all the journeys and adventures, finding something weird was, quite, rare, and yet, Luffy was acting weird. Well, more bonkers than before.

Usopp could obviously see that he was very much different than before, which was understandable, since Luffy had gone through a lot, in Sabaody, Impel Down, Marineford and the two years of hiatus that they had undertaken, but still,

why was increased craziness a side effect of power.

Seriously, Usopp contemplated, thinking back to all their travels, 'the more crazy, the more strong' rule seemed to apply everywhere.

Back to Luffy,

heaven knew why, he grew an obsession with birds.

Any time someone spotted a bird, Luffy was eerily, present within two seconds flat. He always seemed to be excited for some reason. The intrigue didn't make sense! He'd seen plenty of exotic creatures and monsters, what was so special about birds now?

Usopp had once asked him, "Luffy whats going on, anything interesting?"

Luffy had squinted at the bird, then scrunched his nose.

"Nah not yet, this isn't it, but I know its soon." He proceeded to laugh and jumped towards Sanji, who was carrying food.

Excuse me.

Hold on just a minute, Usopp mentally yelled.

Just what in the heck is going to be soon?!
Knowing Luffy, it was probably something crazy, seemingly impossible and ridiculous.

Yet no matter how many times he tried to ask anything again, Luffy always gave his usual brand of ridiculous answers.

Maybe it wasn't a big deal, Luffy was after all, easily amused and amazed. Maybe he was just talking about a new adventure. Still, why birds? Not to mention, everyone was paying attention to this habit of his, ever since he made a serious announcement, saying,

"Dont hurt the birds okay! Not until I see!"

Why was it a big deal? Last Usopp checked Luffy almost always wanted to eat anything living, which wasn't human and birds were delicious!

Well, everything was, with Sanji, but still.

Usopp's something-is-very wrong sense was tingling. No he was not paranoid.

Was it too much to ask if he just wanted to explore the seas, calmly? Maybe with much lesser life or death situations?

After all the trouble they went to, to just get to the New World, from Fishman Island. This was not boding well.

He talked to Robin, who just agreed to everything and replied,

"You're right, the captain is acting strange. Yet, thats what he always does. I wouldn't spend time worrying about things like those, it doesn't matter anyway. If the captain is going to land us in some trouble, us worrying won't really do much to dissuade him." She smiled at him, politely.

Not reassuring. No.

Talking to Nami and Sanji didn't help either, she agreed to everything he said and mused, "Well Im sure he's up to something, and we're probably getting into something we don't know a thing about, but somehow, birds seem like the least dangerous thing he could've become attatched to. After all, it could've been a liking towards Sea Kings."

Sound logic, still.

Sanji just smoked a cigarette and proceeded to give his own opinion, " He's just bored, he wants action. Its just a stupid obsession to pass time probably. What possibility is there of something truly dangerous happening, in relation to birds? His wishes won't just bring a killer, mythical bird you know. Even if it comes, and tries to attack, Luffy has a big stomach. Now get lost, Ive got to talk to Nami dear."

That didn't work either.

He scrambled to find Franky, Brook and Chopper.

Franky just looked at him and supered, "Im in super condition with super lasers, super dangerous birds will be super shish kebabed!"

Brook just pulled some dedicated friendship, "Whatever happens! Ill be sure to support Luffy! He will have my strength, In all times of need! Yohohohohoho! I dedicate to him my existence, with all the strength in my heart, even though I don't have a heart! Yohohohohohoho!"
Usopp chuckled, then sobbed. Poor soul, he would learn soon enough, he supposed.

Chopper just exploded in terror, "Oh no Usopp! What is you're right? What if something big happens! What if an actual killer bird arrives due to Luff's wishes and whatifwealldie! Idontwannadie! UsOPP!"

Robin and Nami punted him into the ground for freaking Chopper out. After which, they all managed to calm him down.

Usopp didn't even try to talk to Zoro about it. No fucking point. He was almost as bad as Luffy.

If wishes truly did bring them their killer birds of their dreams, Usopp wanted to make sure that Zoro didn't tell him such wishes. Just in case.

One captain with non-stop dangerous ideas was good enough.

Their situation in Punk Hazard made him almost completely forget about Luffy's behaviour.

What with their newfound ally of Trafalgar Law, and dangerous-and-crazy-villain-no-2635 on their ship as they sailed towards Dressrosa, to do more crazy things.

Wait, it was true wasn't it? They found a killer flamingo. Non-friendly at all version.

... The crew made their way towards Dressrosa, to engage in a crazy deal with a murderous warlord. On the other hand, the weather was nice. At least they all would enjoy some good days of sailing in the New World before entering a life and death situation again.

One specific day, when the weather was perfect, windy and sunny. Usopp's fears turned to reality.

"INCOMING!", he bellowed at the ship from the watch.

He sobbed as he looked at the flaming(unholy blue colour flames), monstrous creature, similar to a bird, flying towards them.

The deck erupted into chaos, startled from a sleepy, dazed reverie.

Sanji, Zoro, Robin and Trafalgar were instantly alert.

While their captain was, more than alert and flying-through-the-air-already, after shooting up the mast with his rubbery powers.

"DAMNIT LUFFY! YOU'RE GOING TO FALL INTO THE SEA!" Zoro yelled, exasperated, as he prepared to jump off the ship into the ocean. Luffy did tend to forget he couldn't swim.

Luffy was moving towards the burning monster at full speed while everyone else screamed at him as well.

"OH NO! THE MYSTERY KILLER BIRD IS HERE!" Chopper screamed, sobbing.

"Im going to roast the bird after I kill Luffy" Sanji roared. Annoyed at Luffy's recklessness, preparing to jump into the air with skywalk.

"Protect the ship if we get attacked! The wood is fireproof but the sails aren't! They'll burn if that thing collides with them!" Nami yelled out, while Franky and Brook prepared to move into defensive positions.
Robin and Trafalgar stared silently and intently, ready to take action as well, while Caesar sobbed behind them.

There was no use. Luffy was going to burn to a crisp, Usopp screamed nonsense at him, hoping that he would, somehow, miraculously stop.

Luffy collided with the ave, which swept him up in a dazzling increase in flames. Oh no, Usopp freaked.

The majestic creature became terribly bright, flames spreading across the sky, terrible, fearsome and beautiful. They all squinted and waited with bated breath.

Luffy laughed, they could hear him through the blanket of flames.

All of them stared in confused, as the flames receded and revealed the scene.

Luffy was embraced in the birds shining, humongous talons, its virtual flaming feathers billowing around him.

The bird was staring at him through creepily intelligent eyes, amidst intricate markings that circled its glowing head.

The bird was friendly?! It was quite a scene to behold, and Usopp just stood dumbstruck, trying to calm his blood pressure.

The crew stared awestruck as Luffy laughed continuously. The flames didn't seem to be harming him!

A choked sound broke their shocked silence. Usopp consciously made an effort to look away from the outworldly creature to stare at Trafalgar, who had made the sound.

If he wasn't out of his wits, he was sure he would've found the choking cat-like noise that Trafalgar made, hilarious.

He was completely pale, all the blood gone from his face, as he stared at the bird is something akin to half-dread, half-admiration with a heavy dose of mixed in confusion.

At least he seemed to recognise the bird.

Usopp looked back at Luffy and the bird, who had gently come to land at the deck of the sunny.

The breathtaking creature stared at them, wise eyes scanning their faces.
Luffy on the other hand, was clinging to the bird, enveloped in the ghostly flames still.

Everyone stood frozen.

Chapter End Notes

Lol Luffy doesn't make sense does he, heh.
POOR USOPP.

at least he gets to say, I told you.
Lol, someone save Marco from Sanji’s wrath. He's gonna eat him eh

As usual Zoro is cool af, not giving a fuck, till Luffy causes him to explode. oooohhhh I CANT Wait to write the interaction between. Marco n zoroo. First Pov, which aint Marco pov, ill release another chapter a few hours after this! (If I can, I should be, cuz the week is almost over, and I should be free by tomorrow evening maximum)

err, I have exams coming up next to next week, and I had to finish a shit ton of assignments, which is because, I procrastinated the whole time before.

Anyway, who cares, but yeah, thats why I'm late
Im sorry I'm so late....
There gonna be a proper reaction based chap and all with emotions and thoughts coming up!  
Hope you guys enjoy!

Thanks to all of you who commented and left kudos! ^-^ 
Jesus fucking crhrist, I swear I'm not a sap, but ya guys are sweet little plums

Meh, I know this note s a pain in the ass to read, cuz I don't use any vocab lol
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Everyone learns about the cool blue chicken birdie.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marco saw the paper and laughed, reading the headline announcing the triumphant return of one Strawhat Luffy, leading the Strawhat pirates.

What a return it was, destruction of a Pacifista in a single hit, accomplices destroy another, escape easily from heavy Marine forces.

Wouldn't be long now, before he'd find him again.
Well then, time to make final preparations.

"So, he's back huh?" Izou comments, trying to peek at the newspaper in Marco's hand.

"So it seems, about time too!" Marco laughed.

"Well, they'll be arriving here in a couple of weeks, you should get to work, exchange your farewells with everyone. We'll miss you." Izou remarks, trying and failing to keep the sort-of melancholic tone out of his voice.

Marco would miss them too, after all, he was leaving his old crew behind permanently now.

He smiled softly and put an arm around the dressed idiot, pulling him closer in a squished half hug. It was a sign that Izou was quite depressed, as he didn't even try to get out of the hold, for once, not paying attention to his clothes.

"Whats this unnecessary sadness for? Don't be ridiculous, this isn't goodbye. You guys aren't losing me you know, we're all bonded together after all, as brothers, no?" Marco spoke slowly. Izou's flat face crumbled, a small smile breaking out.

"Who in the world is sad about you leaving, you moronic shithead. Let go of me now, you're ruining my clothes." He spoke back, politely angry, grinning in a refined manner as usual.

"Well I suppose I can take care of us, so you can leave everyone to me." Haruta inputted cheerfully, coming up from behind them, jumping into the hug, ruining Izou's hair. Izou hissed at him.

Haruta taking care of stuff usually ended in disaster. So, no.

"That makes me more worried Haruta." Marco replied dryly.

Haruta just laughed and kept clinging. Ignoring Izou's hisses.

Slowly the remaining group dog-piled them, some jumping into the hug, others leaning into the
circle with dignity (Vista and Jozu).

Just a week later, as Marco ate his last breakfast as an old Whitebeard pirate, Haruta erupted in laughter, waving around the day's newspaper.

"Damn awesome! Look at this guys! Straw Hat stirred up a mess on Fishman Island! Apparently, he took down about fifty thousand fishermen at once! It's reported that a group of hostile fishermen were trying to kill King Neptune and his family, to destroy the island! He helped them out! They say he claimed fisherman island too!" Haruta yelled excitedly.

What.

Last he checked, Fishman Island was Big Mom's territory.

Marco sighed in resignation, no point in disputing it. It was Ace's bother after all. Same brand of chaos.

The group exploded, cries of disbelief ringing out.

"Wait! It's Big Mom's territory!"

"He's going to die! No! I wanted to meet him again later!"

"That kid's got no self preservation. I'm not really surprised."

"Well, I doubt we should worry, he survived Marineford didn't he? I bet he'll be all the more stronger for it. Not to mention, Marco will be there for him soon enough, Luffy will be fine, Ace's will won't be extinguished that easily."

"We all saw him, he's not going to be cowed, at anything, not even by an emperor and as long as he's got that ironclad will, he'll go far."

"Well it's Luffy ya know, norms don't apply, the world sort of rearranges itself for him"

Marco smiled at the reactions. They all had a soft spot for that moron after all, after Marineford and all.

Yet, he couldn't help but be a little worried, it'd be a good idea to find him soon, before the chaos inevitably did. Also, he sort of wanted to be there as Luffy pissed off all of the New World big shots.

Well, If Marco was a slight troll, who could fault him really? Everyone was allowed to be crazy here, no?

...

Marco sipped tea as he opened the day's paper. He was on route towards the entrance of the New World, island hopping, hoping to run into the Strawhats at some point.

He knew all he had to do was follow the chaos. Foolproof way to find them, really. Marco was well acquainted with the crew's shenanigans after all, due to Ace's proud big brother moments.

Well Ace, here I am pulled into Luffy's gravitation, your warnings about his orbital pull and reckless charisma weren't wrong, he thought.

His eye twitched as he regarded the paper. Strawhats and Trafalgar Law form a pirate alliance. Law, the rookie who became Warlord. Uuh.
If he remembered correctly, he was the one who had saved Luffy's life back at Marineford. Well, some gratitude was in order, at meeting. Apart from that, the paper recounted their violation of marine law in visiting Punk Hazard.

Marco tapped his fingers on the table, folding the paper, he wanted more information on Punk Hazard.

A few hours later he was grimacing. The information he pulled from the underworld wasn't very pleasing. They were already intertwined with Joker and his Smiles business. That meant, Kaido on the backdoor. He needed to hurry. Dressrosa it must be.

He waited for daybreak, to make a final flight towards Dressrosa. He was at the port when the morning paper arrived.

Oh boy, seemed like they already did something. Doflamingo had resigned. Still, no, Marco knew something was wrong, something didn't seem right. Well he would have to deal with it later, he thought, as he flapped his powerful wings to catapult himself into air.

...

Marco was flying high above the ocean, searching for dots in the water which signified ships. Everytime he spotted one, he dipped a little closer to see the crew members, hoping to find the Strawhats, to find Luffy. His stomach was jumping in excitement now, adrenaline rushing through his body as he knew his new captain was near. It was the start of a new phase. Hold on Luffy, wait for me a while more, I'll be there in no time, he vowed.

He bypassed Dressrosa, and flew towards Punk Hazard. After constant search for more than a few hours, he reached the current stretch flowing from Punk Hazard, where a small dot appeared on the horizon.

His stomach jumped, heart thudding. Damn, was he excited or what.

He dipped from the high altitude, flying a little closer to see the ship. It was a bright, majestic vessel, with a huge imposing figurehead. Intricately designed, with bright recognisable sails. Sails which boasted a Jolly Roger with a strawhat.

Yes.

Marco let out a loud trill, flames bursting into life around him.

He knew he was still unidentifiable to the naked eye, after all he was using his bird sight, which increased his vision range by a lot. He was only probably visible to the man on watch.

His heart thumped ever more louder, face twisted with joy, his beak ends curling up (a benefit of being metaphysical, his form was fluid, ghost flames, easy to manipulate), wings beating faster as he headed straight for the ship. Where he could see a bright, tiny red spot, sitting on the ship's figurehead, with a familiar straw hat loping around his neck.

He saw how the man on watch ran and yelled something at the crew. He seemed panicked.

Oooh, for some reason, Marco didn't think Luffy had told anyone about him. Well, well, what a nice little detail, he would get an epic entrance anyhow.

He saw Luffy turn around and stare at him, and the next second, he was in the air, shooting towards him, face split into a grin so wide it nearly seemed manic. He missed Marco, Marco was
so touched.

What an adorable, reckless, idiot.

Marco extended his flames, increasing their intensity to an unholy brightness, as greeting. He waited for the boy's momentum to carry him forth before grabbing him and enveloping him in his flames. He spun them around as Luffy laughed, both of them surrounded by his fire as he nuzzled the boys head affectionately with his beak.

He could hear shocked cries and panicked voices yelling from the ship.

Oh boy, this was going to be great.

Marco gently flew over to the ships deck, carrying a still laughing Luffy and settled on the grass. Amidst the stunned crewmembers of the ship. He remained in his bird form for now still.

All of them were frozen still as he raised his head to look, whilst allowing Luffy to cling to his chest feathers still.

"Guys this is Marco, he's our blue fire bird! Isn't he cool?!!" Luffy yelled out excitedly, still clinging to his chest feathers in glee. Marco looked at him and nuzzled him fondly.

Most of the looks he was getting were downright hilarious.

The man who was on watch seemed to choke on mid-air, wiping tears, clutching his heart painfully, like he was trying to control his blood pressure.
The orange haired woman had a resigned self-mocking depressed face, as if she knew she should've expected something like this.
The black haired woman was staring at the scene wryly, almost amused and the cyborg was looking at him with wide eyes and a straight face, trying to make something out.

The blonde-haired black suited man looked pissed off and amazed at the same time, he was glaring at the scene but the expression was lost, due to the fluffy creature clinging to his head sobbing.

A freaking skeleton was staring at him, jaw wide open. Tear tracks down his shiny, bony face. Whoa, now that was pretty creepy.

He could see a pair of samurai son and father, looking at him with hilariously stunned expressions while Law looked like he was scarred, done with life, with an expression that said I-dont-know-what-keeps-happening-now.

"Straw-hat, he's..." Trafalgar Law choked out from the upper deck, losing his sentence midway. Marco gazed up to meet his exhausted eyes. Poor soul. He probably only just realised what Luffy was.

Well, everyone close to him went through this at a point, he remembered his own period from Ruskaina.

"I should never have gotten my hopes up, I thought we'd be okay for once." The orange-haired woman wailed slowly, sinking to her knees, in depressed exasperation.

"I TOLD YOU ALL!" The man from the watch yelled, pulling at his hair.

"Well, looks like Luffy gets what he wants, we got our bird I suppose." The black-haired woman remarked calmly, smiling.
"ROBIN! HOW CAN YOU LISTEN TO THIS CRAZY MORON!" The orange-haired woman, curly haired man and creature yelled. Whoa, looked like it could talk.

"Oh my, this is quite terrifying! I never expected such a fierce, frightening creature, yohohoho!" The skeleton spoke suddenly. Holy shit.

Wait, how was he the scary one here?

"This is superrr-unexpected!" The cyborg commented, calmly, similar to Robin.

"Oye Luffy, if I don't get a good explanation, I'm going to kill you and grill you alongside the bird for giving me a heart attack!" The blonde bellowed.

Well, we didn't want to be eaten yet. Apparently, Luffy thought the same (thankfully, because Marco almost had doubts about whether he was emergency food supply).

"Aww! SANJI, we CAN'T EAT CREW! Anyway, Marco's so cool! I knew he was going to catch me anyhow." Luffy snickered. The blonde's eyebrow twitched.

Whoops, that didn't seem good. Well, it was time to turn back now, when everyone was still losing their heads.

"Now now Luffy, maybe you should've given them a fair warning." Marco commented wryly as the flames pulled back, to reveal his human features.

Everyone fucking exploded as Luffy yelled in delight and latched onto Marco's human back, arms wrapping securely around his neck, causing them to tumble to the ground.

"Yeah Luffy, I'm glad to see you too!" Marco replied and laughed along with Luffy.

"What the absolute fuck!"
"Can we ever get a warning before shit like this?"
"How surprising!"
"Superr-cool!"
"Oh its a devilfruit effect! Kind of like me! Yohohohohoho!"
"Luffy what the heck?"

Luffy and Marco chuckled as they stood up, facing the crew.

Suddenly the voices calmed down, everyone going quiet as the green-haired swordsman stepped forth.

Marco had noticed that he was the only one who hadn't reacted at his arrival.

He locked his eyes with him. Everyone stared in apprehension as they stared at each other in a silent exchange.

Time to see if the new captain he found, had a first mate worthy of respect or not.

...

Chapter End Notes
Damn I'm late again. Jeez, this is getting a tad bit annoying for you guys, so, sorry.
Daymnnn, Zoroooo and Marcooooo. So hype.
Comment down below eh? Whaddya think will happen? Face off? Battle? Rivalry?

Also, Marcos a fucking troll. I swear.
Marco stared at the swordsman, emotionless.

A single eye glared back at him, intense.

The wind howled, everyone standing quietly.

The air around them was heavy. Marco could feel it scream, both of them were projecting their haki. Marco increased pressure, not backing down.

He took Luffy as his captain, Luffy deserved the best. Luffy was his now, just as much as anyone else's from this crew. Likewise, he had a right to judge someone, to judge whether they were worthy of his captain.

Also, like hell would he ever bow down to a weak first mate.

He trusted Luffy, and he trusted his judgement, but it wouldn't hurt to test their bond.

The air positively howled, haki exploding from the green haired man in response. Everyone backed off, away from the razor sharp aura.

The swordsman smirked, hand tightening on his swords. The air twisting around him, taking a definite monstrous presence. Marco was surprised. This aura wasn't just any aura. It wasn't the normal presence of a powerful entity. It was- it was that.

Well, how surprising.

Marco was almost sure of it. A conqueror's spirit, or something close to one.

These things didn't happen that often. Usually, two domineering presences couldn't easily work together. Yet, this man was no pushover, and neither was Luffy. How were they moving in sync? How were they not clashing? Their bond was apparent. He had noticed it from the very start.

A man like this one, he didn't seem like one who would bow down to anything, who would listen to anyone else's will, and yet.

Yet, he showed not a single instance of doubt towards his captain. He showed no doubt towards Luff's will.

He stared at Marco instead. Like he confirming something. Smirking. Not worried at all, about the hostility Marco was showing.

Somehow, Marco was sure, that he knew Marco wasn't going to try anything, knew it like the sky was blue and fire was hot.

The message from his concentrated staring eye was clear.
'You can't hurt my captain, or deny him.'

Marco was trying to test his worth, somehow, he understood that wasn't an option in the first case. There wasn't going to be any test for their bond, it was far beyond any limit, and the man knew it, knew it and was amused, amused at Marco for trying. For trying to test something unchangeable, something irrevocable.

"You can't." The man finally spoke, grinning at him, as sharp as Luffy was kind. Strangely feral, strangely fitting.

He was right. Marco couldn't. Couldn't harm Luffy. Couldn't deny his judgement.

The man was fitting. Fit enough to be the first mate.

Well, Marco had worried over nothing. The man was powerful, and clearly understood Luffy, not to mention devoted to him.

It was just something... obvious. Now, that Marco had seen them.

A good outcome for their meeting, Marco supposed.

"Well, can't say you're wrong." Marco supplied, rather amiably.

The stifling pressure from the man disappeared.

"So, want some booze?" The swordsman questioned, amused.

Marco laughed, "Sure, can't say no to that."

Everyone around them relaxed. An arm appeared on Marco's shoulder, followed by a body two seconds later. Marco stumbled forward due to Luffy's momentum, crashing into the swordsman. All three of them tumbling to the ground.

"Ugh. Luffy could you stop doing that!" The man groaned, exasperated.

Marco sat up from where he had landed on the ground alongside the swordsman, Luffy sitting on top of them.

"Calm down Luffy." Marco agreed similarly.

Luffy laughed, "Told you Zoro'd like you!"

So, Zoro huh.

"Yeah, the name's Roronoa Zoro." The swordsman spoke, looking at him wryly.

"Honour to meet you, Marco here." Marco replied lazily.

They grinned as they got back to their feet.

Well, this was going to be great. Something told Marco, he was going to enjoy the company.

"Hey there, sorry about that rude shithead. Come on in!" The blond spoke, waving him over from the door to a room.

"YEAH! ITS TIME TO CELEBRATE! ITS A NEW CREWMEMBER! SANJI MEAT!" Luffy yelled.

The crew erupted into cheers.
As everything calmed down, a voice emerged from behind him.

"Lord Marco!"

Marco turned, to look at the samurai who just spoke.

He had almost forgotten about their presence. He wasn't surprised to see them out of Wano, but surprised to see them in Luffy's ship.

It was more than a little bittersweet to see them. He was all too aware of the condition of the Wano kingdom in relation to Kaido.

"You know him Kinemon?" The orange haired woman asked, surprised.

Marco looked at the pair of samurai's carefully.

Wait, weren't they-

"Well of course! Years ago, the Whitebeards had sailed in vicinity!" Kinemon remarked.

"Hey, you guys, did you tell the- Marco was cut off with a loud screech.

"Whitebeards!? You were a Whitebeard?" Usopp exclaimed.

Kinemon shook his head at him, a silent plea.

Alright then, their identity and problem was their business. It was up to them to disclose the details when they wanted to. If Luffy wanted to help them later on, he would have absolutely no trouble in helping. He would keep his silence till then.

"Well he wasn't a Whitebeard, so much as one of the Whitebeards. He was the first mate of that crew actually. Marco the phoenix, if I'm not wrong." The black haired woman commented easily.

"He's one of the strongest pirates across the seas of the New World. He's strong enough to hold his own against Navy Admirals as well. In fact, he was fighting at Marineford, he also helped protect Luffy." Trafalgar Law commented.

"Well yeah." Marco replied, just as easily. Zoro gave him a considering look again.

"WHAT!?"
"HOW COME YOU DIDN'T TELL US YET?!!"

Marco looked at the shocked expressions, amused.

He laughed as the orange haired woman and long-nosed guys gave him dead stares.

"But you didn't ask."

The woman gave him a look which said she was going to murder him. Ah. He wasn't trying to be obnoxious, really.

"Well, thanks for protecting our captain, from all of us, also, welcome to the crew now. I'm Franky, the shipwright. I made this super ship, its called the Thousand Sunny." The cyborg spoke, holding out a hand, from which emerged another hand.

Well, pretty amazing. He hadn't exactly seen any cyborgs, besides Kuma.

"It's a pleasure. This is a wonderful ship, Adams wood if I'm correct." Marco replied shaking his hand. The cyborg grinned in reply.
"Well, I guess introductions are in order. I'm Nami, the navigator." The orange haired woman spoke, with a genuine smile. "The names Nico Robin." The black haired woman spoke amiable. So, she was the famed survivor of Ohara.

"I'm Usopp by the way, I'm the sniper." The long nose spoke, a bit hesitantly, not hostile though. Marco nodded at him.

"Yohohoho, I can't wait to celebrate! I'll play all all the songs you can think of! Im Brook, the musician!" The skeleton spoke.

"Yeah, thats nice. How about you tell me about yourself first? I haven't seen any live skeletons before." Marco asked, intrigued.

The skeleton laughed, "Yohohohohooo, I'm a devil fruit user actually! I ate the revive-revive fruit and returned from the dead."

Very cheerful for a dead man, pretty cool. Actually, he was the musician wasn't he? The popular personality? The one who supposedly hid behind a skeleton?

"Yes! I'm also known as Soul King Brook. Yohohohoho!" Brook continued, guessing his thought process. Well that was darn awesome.

"His shers shoper, heshar octor." Zoro spoke, voice muffled.

What?

Marco turned around and realised that the strange fluffy creature was stuck to Zoro's face, preventing his words from coming out clear. At his gaze, the doctor let out a yelp and turned around to stick to Zoro's hair, freeing his mouth. Choking his neck.

"I said, this here's Chopper, he's our doctor." Zoro spoke normally, not even trying to pull the creature off.

Marco smiled at the ridiculous scene. Zoro flushed, resigned.

"Yeah, my name's Tony Tony Chopper. Im a doctor." The creature spoke, meekly.

Marco moved forward to great him.

"EEEEP! DoNT Eat ME!" He yelped. Then transformed into a huge humanoid fluffy form.

Marco stopped in surprise. Must be some zoan devil fruit.

"Don't worry Chopper, he won't eat you." Zoro spoke soothingly.

"Chopper's a bit young actually, so he's a bit nervous about new things and new people. Once he gets used to you, he'll stick to you in now time." Robin spoke fondly.

Oh, that was pretty adorable actually.

"Don't worry doctor, I'm a doctor as well, I definitely won't eat you." Marco spoke gently.

"Really?! You're a doctor? Thats amazing! Id love to discuss about medical science if you won't mind!" Chopper spoke, perking up, excited.
Marco laughed, really cute.

"Hey you guys! Come inside already, I've already prepared food! Come before Luffy eats it all!" The blonde yelled, coming out of the room, which he assumed was the kitchen.

The crew startled, then scrambled. Marco gazed confused as everyone rushed towards the kitchen. Even Trafalgar. Zoro and Usopp grabbed him, pulling him along.

"Quick!" The sniper spoke, urgency in his voice.

They entered the kitchen and Marco stared.

Chaos everywhere. Hands appeared at random moments all over the table, pulling dishes. Luffy inhaled them all one by one. More hands appeared, but this time out of thin air, grabbing certain dishes and tossing them towards the others. A plate loaded with food came flying towards him, Marco grabbed it before it could fly off.

"Here you go." Robin spoke amused.

Marco stared at the hands that appeared and disappeared.

"Thats you?" He questioned, interested.

Robin smiled and nodded, "Its the flower flower fruit."

Marco took in the atmosphere and realised why everyone was in a hurry. Food was disappearing at an alarming rate, whenever it went near Luffy.

"You'll get used to the chaos soon. We have to hurry, otherwise Luffy attacks." Zoro spoke nonchalantly, leaning over to pass him a tankard of beer. Marco accepted the drink with a thanks and questioned, disturbed, "Where does all that even go?"

"Don't ask, its just a bottomless pit." Nami commented, chewing on a meatball calmly.

"I agree, its for the best if we don't go there." Trafalgar spoke, calmly taking the salt from Robin. "You seem pretty used to it?" Marco commented wryly.

Trafalgar stopped eating, giving him a haunted look.

Brook erupted into a song, starting off with his violin.

Marco smiled, already liking the chaotic atmosphere.

"Hows the food? Tell me if you need anything okay? Also, do you have any allergies?" The blonde spoke, coming to stand beside him.

The food was fantastic, Marco was thoroughly impressed. The last time he'd had anything close to this level of cooking was when,

when Thatch.

Marco sighed internally, ignoring the pang.

"The food is excellent. I'm very impressed. Also, no I don't have any allergies, anythings fine." Marco replied.
Sanji grinned, "I'm glad you like it. Tell me your preferences later, I pride myself on knowing the palates of everyone on the crew. Nothing less than the best."

"That's pretty amazing. Seems like the crew has a wonderful chef. So, may I have a name?" Marco questioned.

"It's Sanji. Pleasure to meet you. Also, sorry about the grilling you comment, you were, you know, a bird." Sanji mused, waving a spatula.

"Yeah! What up with that? You have a fire related devil fruit power, or bird type, or what?" Usopp questioned.

"It's actually the second option. It's a zoan type power. Mythical zoan type, model phoenix. The flames don't actually burn, they heal instead, power of a phoenix." Marco replied.

He received a lot of impressed looks. Well, he could get used to it. Especially because Chopper. He had stars in his eyes.

"It's one of the rarest type of devil fruit powers, even rarer than a logia type." Trafalgar added.

"Wow! That's so cool! Never knew Zoan types had a category like that! That's so amazing! It almost makes me feel mine is so weak." Chopper spoke, first excited, then sad.

"Hey now, don't be ridiculous. You don't need a rare fruit to be strong. I'm pretty sure you're very strong too, so, tell me about yours instead." Marco spoke.

It was true after all. Strength didn't always depend on rare devil fruits. A prime example being Luffy himself. Who would've thought a gum-gum fruit would be that strong? A devil fruit user was as strong as he made himself be.

"Really! You think so?!" The fluff ball exclaimed.

"I know so." Marco replied confidently, smiling as Chopper grew embarrassed.

"Sho Markho, welcome to the the crew!" Luffy laughed, after swallowing a piece of meat, bone and all.

Marco smiled as the memory of Ace doing the same surfaced.

"Yeah. Feels good to join, captain." Marco replied.

"So, tell us then."

"How did Luffy end up catching you."

"Yeah, we have no idea what's going on."

Marco smiled at the questions.

"Well, long story short, I guess Luffy saved me, then he declared that I was his crew member."

A barrage of sighs greeted him.

"Typical."
Another overdue update. I really was stumped at one thing. Almost messed up the Wano story arc.
I guess I had to make the reference to Kinemon, vague, cuz ya know. I'm also not completely up to date for the chapters from Wano (Cuz I'm one of the losers who started by watching anime, but I promise, I'm reading the manga now too)

Also, the fucking autocorrect has now started writing Luffy as Luff. Whai.

Mayn, I have a feeling Zoro and Marco are going to hit it off. Booze buddies. Lets just hope, Marco can help improve his sense of direction.

Which is frankly not happening.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Marco is back in a solar system. Where the star is still young, warm and alive.

Also, he learns a bit about the planets.
All of them, special in their own way, clicking together in a beautiful, harmonious system.

Not to mention, he's getting real fond of the first mate.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The day was whiled away in partying.

Damn, these brats weren't half bad in their enthusiasm.

"The thing is, I wasn't able to save my captain in Marineford. I would've preferred to die alongside him, but, he gave his final orders. He wanted the remaining crew to escape. I was devastated. Frankly, I didn't want to lead the crew. It wasn't the same crew, because a crew is its captain you know. That's why I ended up feeling more and more like a failure each day. That I couldn't live up to the expectations everyone had from me." Marco spoke softly.

The noise quieted down a bit.

"Stop thinking that way, okay?! You did your best. Sometimes things just don't work out. We'll work together now, to ensure none of those things can ever happen to us, or our crews, our friends or families, in the future." Luffy growled, glaring at Marco.

"Yeah, I know Luffy. You already beat that lesson into my head." Marco replied, chuckling.

Luffy relaxed, already grabbing the next piece of meat.

Marco looked at Zoro, who was giving him a look.

Well, Marco knew he understood the actual implication behind his words. It was up to him to take the lesson, as a first mate.

The atmosphere went back to its jolly colour, as Luffy put chopsticks in his mouth and stretched his face, soon followed by Usopp and adorable little Chopper.

Later, Zoro plopped down beside him, with a refill for some booze.

"I know you've been through a lot, and probably don't want to remember Marineford, but I have to say it. Personally. Thanks for protecting my captain, when I wasn't there to back him up. I'll owe you for this, to be honest." Zoro spoke, staunchly.

He continued staring at him with an intensely haunted look on his face.
"He needed our strength, my support, and I wasn't there to provide." Zoro grit out, hurting.

"Let it go. Luffy doesn't blame you. It was a matter of circumstance. True, you might've failed your duty once, but you're strong now, aren't you? Don't ever let it happen again." Marco soothed.

Zoro inclined his head, somewhat amiable, and went back to drinking.

"So Marco, you should listen to our plans. As you mustve heard, Law and Luffy entered an alliance. The objective behind it is to take down Kaido." Robin started.

Marco was right. Their target was Kaido.

"We have Caesar Clown in possession, and we blackmailed Doflamingo, to hopefully give up his title of Warlord." Name continued.

"We'll know if it worked tomorrow morning." Usopp added.

Well, they had played their cards right.

Yet, Doflamingo was no pushover. He had tremendous raw power, a conqueror's spirit and an immensely powerful devilfruit. He might've been the most powerful or second most powerful warlord in terms of battle prowess. Probably only matched by Mihawk. He was also, probably, the only warlord alongside Mihawk, who could take on Navy Admirals.

But, in terms of influence, and territorial power, he was the most powerful Warlord by far. In fact, he was considered one of the possible future candidates for Emperor status. If any of the present powers collapsed.

He was also the conductor of the underworld. Defeating him would not only make enemies of Kaido, but dozens of other clients as well.

Well, Marco was up for the challenge.

It would be fun to turn the New World upside down, once again. This time though, not for the position of Emperor, but Pirate King.

That night, after the heady chaos had passed, Marco had asked to be on watch. It was a question of trust.

Luffy didn't even bat an eye. "Sure." He mumbled, sliding sideways, going boneless and collapsing into a pile of rubbery mess, snoring.

Most of the others chuckled.

"You sure? You did arrive from a journey this morning." Zoro asked.

Oh boy, it sure was new to have young brats worrying for him, after all, the only ones who dared tell him to rest were Vista and Jozu.

"Yeah, I'll be fine." Marco replied, assuredly.

Nami and Robin stood up, leaving after a bunch of goodnights. Frankie had left already, in lieu for some work.

Brook, Usopp and Chopper joined Luffy, to sleep on the floor.

"Lets take them to quarters moss-head, we have a big fight coming up tomorrow." Sanji spoke
quietly.

Sanji grabbed Usopp and carried him away, followed by Zero who carried Brook and Chopper.

Both Zoro and Sanji snickered, as they looked at the sleeping Luffy and well awake Law.

"There now, how about you bring Luffy." Zoro chortled.

Law flushed, giving them both the finger, embarrassed.

Well, that was interesting.

Law proceeded to turn beetroot red and pulled his hat down, low over his eyes. He didn't disagree though.

The moment Law to picked Luffy up, he wound his hands around Law, several times, like an octopus catching crew. Still sleeping though.

Law was even more mortified as Luffy proceeded sleeping, face buried in Law's neck.

This time, Marco along with Zoro and Sanji, erupted with laughter.

Law didn't even look at them, hissed like any angry kitten, and left the kitchen with Luffy, huffing.

Well, he was a bit skeptical about Law, but well, Luffy was a good judge of character. He would trust him.

The scene was too cute anyway.

All three of them wheezed in laughter for a few more minutes, after which, Marco went to the lookout.

It was filled with weights. It reminded him of Jozu's training area.

He guessed it was Zoro's area.

A number on a weight caught his eye.

Five tonnes.

Yeah, no fucking way it was anyone except Zoro.

He turned into his bird form, leaving the lookout to sit on the very top of the main mast.

Well, that was better.

He gazed at the ship. His ship now.

"Hello Sunny. I'll be joining you from now, that alright?" Marco spoke softly, letting his words float away in the wind.

He was back to a fresh start, a new journey, into a solar system with a living, breathing, shining star.

...

The next morning arrived bright and crisp.

Sanji and Zoro coming up first.
Sanji entered the kitchen, lobbing a good morning at Marco.

Zoro just nodded, sat on the deck, leaned on the railing, and went back to sleep.

Nami arrived, moving to water her trees, which were full of lush swollen tangerines.

Marco soaked in the atmosphere. Watching his new crewmates going on about their routine. He was a bit apprehensive to join in though, everything a bit unfamiliar. He honestly didn't want to inconvenience anyone, neither did he want to make them feel as if an outsider was intruding. He ignored the nervous pangs and went to freshen up, following which he entered the kitchen. Only Robin and Usopp had appeared, the rest still loitering outside, enjoying the morning.

"Hey Marco, want some coffee?" Sanji questioned brusquely, smoke drifting from his fresh cigarette.

Marco nodded, taking the hot beverage.

Robin and Usopp smiled at him. Robin seemingly having already finished her breakfast.

"I'll move to the lookout, I'll inform everyone when the paper arrives." She spoke pleasantly, and left.

Marco nodded.

"Hey, I'd like to tell you something." The sniper spoke, over the noise of the kitchen, where Sanji was working.

"Sure, what's up?" Marco asked. He was intrigued by Usopp. Who reminded him of someone. He just couldn't place who.

"You don't have to worry so much. We're all easygoing, you'll blend into the routine soon enough." Usopp spoke, gently.

Marco startled, was he that obvious?

"Oh no, it's just, I was paying attention. You're a special case you see, most of the time, the crew already knows the new crewmember to be, personally." Usopp replied, sensing his question.

Well, he never expected the sniper to be so perceptive, if he was honest. He was pleasantly surprised.

"Yeah, you're right. I know it might be uncomfortable for everyone to trust and accept me right off the bat, without knowing much about me. So, I ended up a bit apprehensive." Marco replied.

"That's what I'm saying, you don't need to be that twitchy, we trust you already." The sniper continued, taking a sip from his drink as well.

Marco raised an eyebrow. What exactly did he mean?

Usopp saw the quizzical expression and continued, "Look, Zoro already tentatively trusts you, and that's a big deal okay. There's almost no one in the crew, who's earned Zoro's actual acceptance as fast as you have. Since, for us, Zoro judgement is the ultimate standard, I suppose you get what I mean."

What.
That was,
a strangely gratifying fact.

"Really?" Marco asked, genuinely surprised.

"Yeah. Want to know about everyone and what happened when they joined?" Usopp asked.

Marco nodded.

"When Nami joined he was always twitchy around her, and she did as he predicted. She left us, for
a while, not because she wanted to but because she had to, because she had no choice but the fact
of the matter is, he knew she would leave. Of course, once we got her back, and she finally stuck
with us permanently, he started liking her. Also, don't ever tell him that I told you this, because he
would murder me." Usopp spoke.

Uhuh. Well, that made sense. For a true first mate, abandoning their captain was like an
unthinkable mistake.

"Uh I suppose he always did believe in me, but he knew I wasn't the most dependable, I had a lot to
learn, about friendship, and true loyalty, because I did end up making a mistake. I got into a quarrel
with Luffy once, questioned his decision as captain, and left the crew. After that, we all got into a
big mess at Water7 and Enies Lobby. In the end, I realised he was right, and I wanted to come
back. Luffy found out, and he was going to give me a second chance, but Zoro stopped him. He
told Luffy that I had to apologise first. That I had to learn. It was harsh, but I'm sort of glad he did,
because I learned the true meaning of what it meant to be a crew, what a captain is to a crew." Usopp winced out.

Well that was certainly unexpected. He never would have expected a crew as close as this one, to
have had problems like that.

"Well, about Robin, to be honest, none of us trusted her in the start. Since she was previously our
enemy, but obviously, we learned bout her past and the reasons behind why she did what she did.
Of course, we all trust her now, she actually very sweet, well, uh, mostly, if a little creepy." Usopp continued.

A hand appeared from the table and slapped Usopp, after which, it disappeared.

He had heard about how the Strawhats had decimated Enies Lobby, defeated CP-9 and declared
war on the world government, all for Nico Robin. Some hell of a past she must have, Marco wasn't
surprised, the World Government had ruined many lives, just like the ones on Ohara.

"Frankie was another member who infuriated most of us. He, uh, beat me up, and took very
important supplies from us, we needed the resource for our previous ship. Which unfortunately
didn't survive, Merry was really important to us, still, in the end, we understood him as well, he's a
great guy, and a great shipwright, he made us our ship and here we are." Usopp mused.

Who would've thought Frankie had such an explosive entry.

"We were all scared of Brook okay, we met him under weird circumstances, and he was really
vague, so we thought he was some terrible weirdo. He's also a great guy though, he helped us out
so much, and he's actually suffered so much, he was so lonely, but he's still happy now. Very
inspiring actually." Usopp commented.

Well, that was again unexpected, that such a cheerful person had a lonely past.
"So, all in all, the only crewmates who got Zoro's seal of approval right from the start were Chopper and Sanji," Usopp finished.

Chopper he could understand, but, Sanji? Last he remembered, both of them had a hidden taunt competition going on to piss each other off.


Yet, he was amazed at these bits of information, the whole crew was exceedingly surprising. Like captain, like crew, he supposed.

"Well, I'm certainly gratified that you think Zoro puts me in regard." Marco continued.

He was. He never expected that someone like Zoro would accept him that easily. He didn't feel like he was anyone that special.

Yet, it did make him cheerful.

"Ah, don't be ridiculous. Zoro's real glad he got a sane booze partner, Nami isn't the most stable, mood swings you know!" Usopp laughed again.

"What did you just say?" Nami questioned sweetly, entering the room with a smile full of shark teeth.

Usopp went paler than a sheet of paper.

"How about you repeat that?" Nami continued, sickly sweet.

Usopp scrambled in a flash, followed closely by a raging Nami.

They both returned in a couple of moments, Usopp sporting some very chic spiky hair, and some burned clothes.

Marco, didn't really want to know what happened.

Zoro entered, yawning, a Chopper asleep on his head.

Gods, that was adorable.

Brook and Franky followed him.

Brook and Franky were laughing uproariously.

"Hey Marco, come with me quick, you're the only one who hasn't seen!" Frankie exclaimed.

Brook kept on laughing. Most of the others already present smiled as well.

Marco followed Frankie out, to the mens quarters in the lower deck, intrigued.

Frankie opened the door, and motioned for him to look inside.

Marco tilted his head, looking inside.

Oh, that was, precious.
He laughed, looking at the scene.
Luffy was totally and utterly wrapped around Law, limbs everywhere. Drooling on his pillow.
Law was missing his hat, expression relaxed and calm in deep sleep, hands around Luff's waist.
At Marco's laughter, Law blinked, waking up.
He gave no reaction whatsoever for two whole seconds, uncaring, still in the throes of sleep.
Then he exploded, face contorting in mortification, jerking back from the clinging human octopus.
There wasn't exactly much space.
Both of them fell off the hammock,
Law letting out a squeaky noise as Luffy landed on top of him.
Marco lost it. So did Frankie.
Both of collapsed to the floor, clutching their stomachs in helpless laughter.
"Room." A voice murmured, soft and shaken.
Marco managed to catch a glimpse of Law's disheveled attire and helpless expression before he disappeared.
Marco and Frankie were starting to stand when Luffy woke.
He yawned and stretched, blinking at them owlishly.
Well, Marco couldn't blame Law for his embarrassment, Luffy was endearing, he wasn't good for the heart.
"Come on Luffy, food." Marco spoke.
Luffy gave no facial reaction, stretching out a hand instead, to grab Marco and cling to his back.
Marco grabbed him securely, preventing him from sliding off.
"Food Marco!" Luffy whined.
Marco laughed and carried him up, Luffy waking up properly as they made their way to the kitchen.
The moment Luffy entered, all hell broke loose, ending the previously calm atmosphere.
Marco laughed and joined in, somehow, feeling much better, what with everyone being so helpful.
Usopp smiled and gave him a thumbs up.
After the disaster of a breakfast was over, Marco stood behind, to help Sanji with the dishes.
Sanji scowled at him.
"You don't need to work! I can handle this, just go out and join everyone on the deck." Sanji spoke.
"Its alright, I'd like something to do, I'm not used to sitting still." Marco replied.

Sanji's scowl softened.

"Fine, come along, but don't expect to slave about in the kitchen. I don't like others working, when I'm perfectly capable," Sanji sighed.

Marco was amused.
Sanji was a total sap at heart, wasn't he.

"I wanted to thank you as well, for Luffy you know." Sanji muttered, directing him towards the sink.

Marco remembered Zoro's words from the previous day.

"Is everyone going to come to me and tell me that one by one?" Marco asked amused.

"Yeah, probably. We don't like making Luffy think that he made us worry. So everyone might just come to talk to you one by one." Sanji replied amiably.

While it was nice to see how everyone cared for Luffy, they really didn't need to feel like they owed him or anything.

"I don't need or want a thanks, this is really unnecessary." Marco continued.

"Too bad, its going to happen anyway." Sanji smirked.

"All of us in the crew, are good at different things, not all of us are able to fight like Luffy, or even at times, like Zoro. So, its the least we can do." Sanji murmured.

Marco looked at him, considering.
As far as he aware, Sanji was one of the strongest fighters of the crew, why was he worried like this?

"You don't need to worry that much." Marco spoke softly.
"Believe in yourself, take lessons from your experiences, you won't make the same mistakes twice." Marco finished.

Sanji gave him a wry look.

"True enough, with a captain like ours, we don't need to worry about failures, only need to have a will to keep going." Sanji replied, easily.

Marco laughed.

"I've gotten stronger you know, just like everyone else on this crew. We were much weaker, two years ago, so we nearly lost our shitty swordsman, and got separated. Its never going to happen again. We won't let it. I want you to know, maybe we don't look like much, but we are Luffy's crew, and we are stronger than we look, so you don't need to worry that much yourself." Sanji commented.

What.

He never thought they were weak.
Sanji gave him a look.

Well, alright, fine, Sanji was correct, Marco was already worrying wasn't he.

Everyone was much more perceptive than they seemed, weren't they. Marco should've expected such surprises. They were the crazy crewmates under Luffy.

"Well, I was doing it subconsciously, so I apologise." Marco replied sort of bashfully.

"No worries, you'll get it eventually." Sanji supplied easily.

A thought nagged at Marco.

"So, if its not too much, tell me about your separation?" Marco questioned, gently.

He was curious. Luffy had arrived on Marineford without his crew.

Sanji sighed.

"It began on Thriller Bark, where we ran into another Warlord, Moriah, we defeated him, but he was another reminder of how we all needed to get stronger. Then we unfortunately encountered Kuma as well, the swords-freak nearly died there you know, due to him." Sanji exhaled, pulling out a cigarette, after putting away the last of the dishes.

"What?" Marco quizzed.

"We were all spent, due to our fight with Moriah and his forces, Luffy himself defeated him but suffered large injuries, he was unconscious. Then Kuma arrived, he gave us a choice, our lives spared in return for Luffy's. We refused. He neatly knocked us out with a shock wave, and was about to take Luffy. We were saved only due to Zoro. He made a bargain. He agreed to take all of Luff's physical injuries, in return for our lives. It was almost a certificate for death. I tried to intervene but the shitty moss-head knocked me out. Damned bastard managed to survive. Also, most of the crew and Luffy don't know this." Sanji snorted.

Marco was stunned.

"You didn't tell them?" He questioned flabbergasted.

"Zoro didn't want Luffy to know. Luffy would've been horrified, as would've everyone else." Sanji spoke grimly.

Marco stared speechless.

"We continued our journey, towards Sabaody. Where our already tired crew met Kizaru and the legion of pacifistas, under Sentomaru. Zoro and I couldn't protect anyone. Zoro was still injured, I was too weak. We couldn't carry out Luffy's order. He wanted us to escape, and regroup. We were too weak, so we failed. Kuma separated us, slingshotting us across various destinations far across the seas. That was why, Luffy had to go Impel Down and Marineford, all alone." Sanji finished.

Marco had been woefully wrong about the crew. It was a new crew, compared to what he had seen and known, but the things they went through, certainly were nothing to laugh about. Even old, experienced crews hadn't gone through the things they had. From all the things he had heard, he could finally see how they managed to come so far. How their bonds were so staunch.

Marco felt humbled. He who had travelled with the Whitebeards for so long, had almost forgotten
the struggles that were underwent by young rookies, to carve a path into the high seas.

"Well, I'm certainly proud to be Strawhat now." Marco soothed softly.

Sanji smiled.

...

"The plan worked, Doflamingo resigned!" Chopper exclaimed, reading the paper loudly.

"All right, its time to get into action." Trafalgar spoke.

The crew lined up and Marco smirked, Dressrosa was close.
Well, he was certainly hoping to make some new waves. He grinned.

Zoro came over and laughed.

"Someone seems excited." Zoro commented.

Marco looked over at him. All the things he had learned about the first mate coming to mind.

"Well, can't let a brat like you, upstage me, can I? You're already getting too damn incredible for a rookie." Marco replied, wryly.

Zoro looked surprised.

He grinned at him.

"I like you too, old man. I just hope you aren't totally useless, with those old bones and all." Zoro spoke, cheekily.

Why that little.

"We'll see brat." Marco replied with a smirk.

"I bet I'll be more useful." Zoro grinned.

Marco smiled at the hidden meaning.

'Join me, protect them all'

It would be an honour. To become a Strawhat.

"Sure, keep dreaming. Im here now, your glory days are over." Marco snorted.
"Rich, coming from an old man."

Chapter End Notes

Sheeesh, an update for you lovelies!
Days, I dunno why, I really like Zoro and Marco, the booze bros. CuZ I don't knOw. doesn't Marco seem like the really dependable dry humour guy.
Of course, it doesn't hurt that he's actually pwetty shtrong.
Course nothing is ever going to replace the beauty of Zoro and Sanji's married life quarrels, but still.

Daym, I jUst IIKe ToYinG wIth lAw. OkAy.

Everyone so great.

Reaction time: Marco finding out about Usopps dad, having actually ridiculous memories with the red - hair pirates...

hmmm, that'd be cool. MAybE IIL Do It.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Ace's flame lives. No one will touch it. Not one undeserving hand.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marco watches the horizon, the island of Dressrosa drifting into view.

"For as much as Doflamingo's a rotten warlord, he runs his country without the expected tyranny." Marco comments. Remembering the jolly atmosphere of the country.

He had been here before, as he'd been to many of the notable places in the New World. Except of course, Raftel.

His father never had wanted to go there, the Whitebeards never did aim for the seat of the Pirate King.

Now he would. Marco would be lying if he said this new goal doesn't make his blood sing in excitement.

"Would it be prudent to assume you've been here?" Robin asks. Marco nods.

"Still, I don't have much of any useful information. I only stayed here for one or two days, whenever I did land here. My crew used to avoid this place. Only some of our members have been here, that too, discreetly. Any Whitebeard ship in the vicinity, would have raised hostile tensions. Doflamingo has always been a dangerous entity. We didn't care to needlessly engage him. Also, we didn't try to maintain an informant network here, it was too dangerous, due to the ruthless ways in which the Donquixote family worked." Marco replies.

"We already have information on the Donquixote family and its executives. The only important piece of intel about Dressrosa that we need is the location of the SMILE factory. Any clues about that?" Trafalgar asks.

Marco shakes his head. He'd heard of the SMILE's yes, and the Punk Hazard plant, due to his contacts, but never about its production facility in Dressrosa.

"We'll just have to find out. It can't be super-hard." Franky speaks.

Nami squinted at the island.

"Remind me again why we can't just take the Sunny to Green Bitt and rendezvous there? It saves the Caesar-handover group the trouble of travelling all over the country." Nami asks.

"Yeah! That way we won't even have to worry about our escape route!" Usopp adds.

Marco grins as Trafalgar rolls his eyes.

"Green Bitt is inaccessible by ship." Trafalgar replies.
"Can we get more of an explanation!" Usopp shrieks.

"Trafalgar means to say, its surrounded by huge shoals of extremely dangerous fighting fish, who usually destroy ships and eat passengers." Marco adds dryly.

Luffy laughs as Usopp turns white as a sheet.

"Well whatever! Let's hurry! I want to go explore!" Luffy laughs again.

"Oye Luffy! Don't forget your group's objective!" Law interjects sharply.

Marco shares a look with Robin as Luffy ignores Law succinctly.

Law sighs in defeat.

They anchor the Sunny near the rocky outcropping of the main island, far from any port.

"Right now, everyone's clear on the plan? The exchange time is 3 pm." Trafalgar speaks again, gripping his sword.

"Ooh! Something smells great! Lets go already!" Luffy yells in excitement, already on the island.

"Not so fast Luffy. We need disguises!" Usopp yells.

Kinemon immediately steps forward.
"I can help with that!" he finishes.

Marco cringes a bit as Kinemon gives most of the other males a fake moustache.

"Lord Marco! Shall I give you a disguise as well!" Kinemon speaks, walking towards him.

"I really think I'll pass." Marco replies dryly.

"Here." Robin speaks, handing him a dark long coat, and reflective sunglasses.

Marco takes the items gratefully.

By the time he puts them on, Luffy, Zoro, Frankie and Sanji are gone.

Marco startles.

"They left already? They left me behind, I thought I was supposed to be on the Factory-destroying-team, and why is Sanji gone? Wasn't he supposed to be at the ship?" Marco asks.

Robin just gave him an amused smile while Trafalgar gave him a harassed look. Well, no need to worry then.

"BUT SANJI WAS SUPPOSED TO BE WITH US! WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO!" Chopper wailed.

"Choppers right! That IDIOT! Who's going to protect ME?! Nami wails with him.

"Don't worry Chopper,Nami I'm sure it'll be fine. Lets go, Usopp, Law." Robin replied, dragging away Caesar.

"Stay safe Momonosuke!" Kinemon speaks.

Marco looks at the samurai consideringly. He had found out how the pair of samurai and supposed
son had joined the crew along the ride, from Punk Hazard. How they were separated due to Doflamingo's chase, from their allies.

Of course Doflamingo was after them. Kaido wanted the Oden line finished.

"Let's go Kinemon. Before we lose Luffy and the others." Marco speaks.

They make their way away from the Sunny, and Kinemon raises the subject Marco was waiting for.

"Lord Marco, I know all of this is complicated, thank you for going along with our story." Kinemon speaks apologetically.

"I didn't know you were already being actively hunted. I'm sorry my old crew couldn't help, we just couldn't keep going after... Marineford, but now, I promise, Ill do all I can to help you out. Also, you can trust Luffy you know. He's already on his way to fight Kaido. Considering how you guys are his friends now, I'm sure he'll help." Marco replies.

It was true, Luffy would do anything for his friends.

"Yes, we have come to understand that, Lord Luffy is quite a great man, we are going to tell them after this whole mess. I need to find Kanjuro first!" Kinemon continues.

Marco nods.

"Also, Lord Marco, we knew the consequences of Marineford. You needn't worry about helping us out. Im sure you had your own share of problems, but I must admit, it was quite disheartening and surprising to hear that the Whitebeards had disbanded, when we were about to seek you out for help." Kinemon comments, softly.

Marco sighs. His fucked up decisions sure caused a lot of trouble.

"Yet, more surprising was to see, that you, have joined Lord Luffy!" Kinemon adds.

Marco gives a smile at the amazement in Kinemon's voice.

"To be honest, the Whitebeards ended with pops. I don't think I could've continued to carry on the crew, everything hit me hard, so I left. I probably would've continued on a downward spiral from there, if not for Luffy. He reminded me that pops would've wanted me to be happy, to move on, in whatever way I wanted. So, I joined the only person I could find worthy of following, which is, Luffy." Marco replies.

Kinemon nodded in understanding.

"Lord Luffy seems quite capable as a captain, in the ways that count." Kinemon speaks, seriously.

Marco laughs. Sure, Luffy seemed like an airhead, but he had much more substance.

"Anyway, since Luffy and the others seemed to have disappeared, there's no point in wasting time searching for them. You should go, search for your friend, ill try to locate the factory." Marco continues.

Kinemon nods and rushes ahead.

Marco stops at a teeming town square, looking around for a tavern or bar. A huge squashed group catches his eye. People standing around someone.
Marco joins the group, listening to the man in the middle,

"A logia type devilfruit! Not only that, it belonged to the infamous pirate, Fire Fist Ace! The flame fruit!"

Marco freezes, the colour draining from his skin.

Marco remembers the words he heard a couple of hours ago.

"I have something you want Monkey D. Luffy!"

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry, okay, I'm sorry.
I know this is long overdue ( I KNOW I said this last time)
but I really have a good reason, I had exams! Sorry!

They ended today, and I had to plan out how I wanted to add our birdie to the dress rosa arc, there are certainly lots of places, like maybe a good ol beating to fucking Jesus Burguess.

Also, random thought, has like everyone caught up to Wano Arc here? Or are people usually at the arcs of Dressrosa or something...
Well, my bad but SPOILERS for those not caught up yet.

Also, I just realised, as I reread my entire story, the tenses are PATHETIC.
I CanT BeLiEve I wRoTe SuCH ShIttY SubstAnDarD woRk.
ItS LikE I kEeP SwItchINg BetWeeN PaSt AnD pResEnt aNd no thAnK yoU.
Im going to keep in strictly in present now. Ill edit the prev chaps too probably.

Im wondering whether I should make this Lawlu cuz dayum that pairing is pretty sweet.
Or not, maybe ill start a separate fic for that.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Law's plans go to shit. Marco and Luffy are unapologetic hellions. Well, Ace's flame has ardent guardians.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marco instantly grabs the closest nearby toy, shaking it back and forth. The toy's head wobbles pathetically on its spring neck, as Marco hisses out a question.

"Tell me, just why exactly is everyone talking about the flame flame fruit."

The toy screeches unintelligibly. Marco sighs and loosens his grip.

"This is preposterous! I refuse to be treated this way! Unhand me y-

Marco lets fire bleed into his eyes.

"If you don't start talking this instant, all thats going to be left of you is a squished pancake." The toy goes very still, straining its springy neck to remain motionless.

"Its the reward for the contest taking place in the Corrida colosseum right now. Whoever wins take's the fruit." The toy mutters out hurriedly.

"Take me to the colosseum." Marco speaks.

The toy flails its hands, trying to escape. Marco lets his arm transform slightly, flames curling around his body.

They arrive at the colosseum in exactly fifteen minutes.

Marco storms his way towards the colosseum.

The gateways around the building seemed shut, with guards posted at all entrances.

"Let me in." Marco mutters out to a uniform clad guard.

"Im sorry sir. The registration period is over. No more entr-

The guard stops speaking as Marco lets flames surround both his arms. He raises his wings to smash the bars when-

"Hey! Hey! Hey! This is not cool brother! Stop!"

Marco whirls around, watching Frankie rush forward, a small tin soldier at his heel.

"Im sorry Frankie, this is important Frankie, theres something in here that I need to get. Luffy
would understand, you need to go and tell him. Ill bust in till then.” Marco speaks, hurriedly.

"Timeout! I know how important this is but you need to wa-
"No, its not something I can wait for. Ace's devil fruit is on the line! Luffy's brother! After
Marineford I can't fail Ace again! I need to-
"Trust me brother I know! Still, wait up-
"How can I wait up when its so import-
"Because Luffy is already participating!"

Marco stops his tirade.

Frankie takes the chance to grab him and pull him away.
Marco diminishes his flames, ignoring the people who had gathered at the scene, he steps into an
alley, closely behind the blue haired cyborg, who was still followed by the little tin soldier.

"Listen now brother, Luffy is going to win no doubt. Theres no need for you to participate as well. You'll have to fight him at one point otherwise. Still, him participating puts the whole plan at risk. He's going to be found out sooner or later too, which is why, we need to finish the plan sooner. Or, we won't be able to continue it at all."

Frankie speaks.

Marco sighs, he was relieved that Luffy already got to it, but he couldn't stomach the fact that he
couldn't participate himself.

"I can't just stand by and watch." Marco sighs, fists clenching.

"Yeah brother, which is why, let's go destroy the smile factory in the meantime. Luffy'll be waiting
with the fruit when we come back." Frankie speaks, patting his shoulder with a hand from his
hand.

Marco stares the smaller hand, which emerged from the palm of the larger one. Alright, so this was
apparently normal.

Aside from that, Marco still wanted to run straight to the colosseum, where Ace's legacy was
probably being showcased as some sort of collector's item for a bunch of morons.

'You better hurry up and get that fruit, Luffy.' Marco thinks and sighs.

"Well then...lets hurry up. I'm itching to slaughter some morons." Marco drawls, calm again.

After all, his was fury was better contained till he had the opportunity to let lose in a useful
situation. Fun.

"Wow brother, thats the spirit. Lets go get ourselves a factory." Frankie grins, anticipatory.

Marco likes this cyborg.

"I must interrupt now, I am still at a loss at how you people know of the SMILE factory." The little
toy soldier butts in.

Marco finally turns to pay attention to the small toy, which sported one leg.

"Doesn't matter really. All that matters is whether you know anything of it. We need information to
find it, so that we can destroy it. You seem to know about it too, somehow." Marco replies,
crouching.
"Well I guess there's no point in hiding things from you little soldier, when you've already heard our plans. So, what's your decision. Are you going to tell us something?" Frankie shrugs as well.

The tiny soldier stares at them.

"Follow me." He speaks, turning around and skating away, balancing on one leg.
Marco looks at Frankie, who nods and runs after the tiny thing.

They run towards the colosseum, moving ahead to bypass the building.

Marco listens to the roars of excitement. Luffy.

Just as they move along the building, a voice screams.

"MISTER SOLDIER!"

The tiny toy screeches to a halt.

Marco turns to see a young girl clutching at the bars surrounding the colosseum from the upper floors.

"Don't leave me alone! Please!" She sobs.

The toy soldier turns away and leaves.

Marco exchanges a look with Frankie and follows, sending one last look at the sobbing girl.

"Did you now that girl?" Marco asks.

"Yes." The soldier replies curtly, speeding away.

"Does she need help? Why is she in there?" Frankie asks, a worried frown between his brows.

"I told her not to enter. She didn't listen. Now there's nothing that can be done. I'll leave her alone to make her own choices. She could survive, she isn't weak." The soldier sighs, morosely.

Marco just sighs, and nods along. His instincts were telling him not to interfere, so he wouldn't.

Something strikes Marco.

"Frankie, where are Zoro and Sanji?" Marco asks.

"Zoro ran off to catch a thief who stole his sword. Sanji followed him, it was superr chaotic." Frankie replies.

Marco opens his mouth to speak but stops, as the soldier leaves their sides.

Suddenly, the toy slows down, moving towards a dog shaped spring toy, who was entertaining a mother and her child.

Marco waits in silence alongside Frankie, for the tin soldier to return.

Suddenly, Marco catches something from the corner of his eyes.
He turns to see Frankie sitting on his knees, moving slowly on a rotating mechanical belt on his calves.
Okay.
Before Marco can comment, the soldier returns with the other toy. He leans close to Frankie, muttering something in his ear and then whispering again to the other toy.

Marco stares confused as Frankie inches over.

"Hide behind the wall there." He whispers.

Marco gives him a perplexed look but complies.

As he crouches low, the dog approaches Frankie.

"He told me you're a half toy, and seems like he wanted my story, so here it is." The toy dog speaks morosely to Frankie.

"That woman there is my wife, and the child beside her my son." He continues.

What.

Frankie looks just as perplexed as Marco felt.

"It's all because of that Doflamingo. His soldiers caught me and dragged me away for some reason or the other. Next I knew, a bizarre child touched me and I became a toy." The toy dog wails.

This didn't make any sense.

Marco had never heard anything of this sort before.

"We toys don't try to tell anyone anymore. People don't remember us. Even our loved ones forget us. If we try to say something, they brand us as malfunctioning toys and throw us in a trash heap." He continues.

So that's why Marco had to hide, if the toy had seen him, he probably wouldn't have revealed the story.

He continues to listen to the story, slightly horrorstruck, trying to figure out the truth behind the words.

If this was true, it would definitely explain how Doflamingo had such impeccable control over his territory.

If this was true, it would mean Doflamingo had a devastatingly powerful, if unconventional devil fruit user.

The dog leaves.

Marco emerges from the alleyway where he was hidden and stares uneasily at the tin soldier.

"I have several questions." Marco questions gravely.

"I totally super, agree with Marco." Frankie adds.

"Come, I will tell you on the way." The soldier replies, whirling around and whizzing away again.

As they make their way across the town, Marco glances around uneasily. The new revelation painting the entire jolly atmosphere with a tinge of dread. If the story was true, then, everything was a lie. The whole country.

So, now he could see little signs, of somethings being very wrong.
Toys following certain people. No discontent citizens, like a magically perfect society.

Also, he could feel that something else was also off. His instincts were screaming, something was not right.

Music erupts across the street, people bursting into jolly songs. Marco stares at them confused.

A laughing couple prances around. Carefree.

Marco stops in his tracks. Why carefree.

Why were they so carefree.

After, so recently... losing their king?

Marco whirls around, dread filling his heart, surveying the people around. Surely, not everyone could be uncaring? Atleast some people cared, or, shouldn't all people care, about their picture perfect, powerful king?

Now to think about it, how was everything still working perfectly? All shops, all restaurants, events... the colosseum.

He turns to tell Frankie, only to realise, both Frankie and the toy were gone, lost in the crowd. Marco immediately turns around, moving towards a laughing man, walking on the sidewalk.

"Excuse me, could you tell me, how is everyone so calm?" Marco speaks politely, not letting his dread seep into his voice.

"What are you talking about good sir, why wouldn't we be calm?" The man laughs.

"This mornings paper, about Donquixote Doflamingo, the kin-

Marco is cut off by the man's sound of understanding.

"You must have reached Dressrosa recently! If you would've come in the morning, you would've already known! Its a mistake you see! The paper made a mistake! Officials from the world government confirmed this for us! His highness, lord Doflamingo is still our king." The man speaks, excitedly.

Marco nearly goes breathless at the sudden drop his stomach seems to make. Dread fills up his lungs.

Its a trap.

Chapter End Notes

Well, straw hats in a pinch.
"Something went wrong."
Jeez at this point, its obvious NO PLAN WORKS.
Its the fucking STRAW HATS.
Still, poor LAW.
Also, FRANKIE IS COOL. Hes a CHILL bro.
He's like one of the most SANE characters, but SANE in An INSANE WAY. Get wHAT I mEan?

Holla sweets.
Yikes. Im a good for nothing procrastinator, I really have no excuse Gais.
Still, SoRrry...

IM SUCH A TERRIBLE PERSON, IM SORRY I MADE YOU PEOPLE, WHO LIKE THIS WAIT.
I went somewhere, then I kinda got lost when I came back, my semester began, and I just, couldn't, ya know, muster the courage to pick up where I left.

TheN, wHeNeVer I CheCk mY email I sEE aLL thEse WonDerFul PeOPlE lEAvINg COMments.
thank you all so much.
Im being too nice. I feel I'm being too nice. Im sorry I'm getting hives. WTF am I acting this sweet, when I rude AF.
Fuck all of you recurring readers for making me feel this way.

End Notes

I really like Marco, guess I have a thing for devoted first mates.
I think this guy could use some good-ol-Luffyness.

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