The Silly and the Strange

by Blazonix

Summary

Outtakes, AUs, and whatever comes to mind for Finding Your Wings

A man winds up in the body of a little girl and has no knowledge of the world he finds himself in. Pirates? Marines? Revolution? Too much work, she's off to see the world.

This is the author messing with their world tour.

Notes

This is attached to Finding Your Wings, but I didn't want to attach it officially as a series.

Unlike the main story, I promise nothing on the quality. Read at your own risk.
“We’re tiny,” Zoro points out obviously, wriggling small fingers as if to make a point.

They are indeed tiny. She doesn’t think they shrunk the convenient way either considering they look like children. Zoro—both shorter than her and dressed in his old training gi—is identical to his young crybaby self. She avoids looking at the other child frowning at them.

“Trafalgar,” she says with narrow eyes, “he messed up.”

Turns out two reality warping Devil Fruits competing against each other can cause undesirable effects to those who happen to be in the crossfire. She frowns at the pink stick lying on the floor. She has a terrible feeling about it.

“I think my swords turned into sticks,” Zoro says in disbelief, holding up three different colored sticks.

“Damn it,” she spits, hurrying to pick up Tsubasa de Tobu. “Whatever Trafalgar did, he better be able to undo it.”

Two sets of grunts agree with her, and killing auras tear into the room like a sudden inferno. Breathing deeply, she tries to calm down. She puts Tsubasa de Tobu in her pocket and lets it go for now. They’ve got bigger things to worry about such as where they are.

She has no idea if they’re in a hostile situation, but she rather doubts it once she examines the room. Two shabby bunkbeds rest against plain, white walls, and a large dresser stands on a bare floor. There’s nothing else. It’s a bedroom, but not one that’s comfortably lived in.

The only door attached to this small room opens without warning, and a man wearing a grey dress shirt tucked sloppily into brown slacks stares at them. She thinks their own stares perturb him because he turns around immediately.

“You’re the new kids then? God, you’d think they’d give me some warning. Well, come on then. We’ve got to fill out your paperwork,” the man calls over his shoulder before hurrying away.

Shrugging to Zoro, she follows after the man. It’s better than doing nothing. Peering into opened doors on their route through a winding hallway shows rooms with a similar setup to theirs. There are no locks on the doors, so this place isn’t a prison. Perhaps it’s a dormitory of some sort.

She’s guided to an office, and takes a seat in front of a large, wooden desk. The chairs next to her stay empty as the boys choose to stand behind her, giving the impression of two tiny bodyguards. Most likely they’re prepared to make a break for it if necessary.

“Damn Japanese immigrants,” the worker mutters under his breath.

The man keeps his head down, probably due to a certain someone’s unnerving gaze, but continues to act like their very existence causes him grief. She narrows her eyes at the word, “Japanese.” She hasn’t heard that name in a very long time.

“Your parents were part of an illegal group living here. Do you understand? You’re not citizens
“Here,” the man begins shuffling papers menacingly. “How long have you been here?”

“The whole time we’ve been here,” she deadpans.

“Medical reports place you three at eleven. Which means you’re eligible to stay. You’d be better off in Japan,” the man continues a rant under his breath before poising a pen over paper. “Name?”

“Kuina,” she says.

The blank stare she gets in return makes her sigh. Wherever they ended up, the language rolling off her tongue is English. She spells out her name only for the man to shove a paper into her hands. It’s a simple form that requires a first and last name. It’s a form for citizenship, if she’s reading it right.

She doesn’t think playing along will hurt; she’s currently weaponless and a child. No one stops her from putting pen to paper though the checkmark against the “male” box for sex makes her pause. Zoro hadn’t mentioned her looking strange, but does she have different genitalia? She’ll have to check later.

She places “Kuina” in the first name box but freezes at the empty space for the last name. If she has one, she doesn’t know it. She ends up putting down “Koshiro.” It’s the name of her father.

“Roronoa Zoro.” Zoro snaps out when asked the same question.

She ends up writing Zoro’s name in English as well. Holding a hand out silently, she’s given the third form to fill out; she points a pen over her shoulder.

“That’s Mihawk. Family name Dracule. He doesn’t talk much,” she says.

They get shown their schedules. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner is served in the cafeteria at set times, and lockers contain their school items. With a patronizing smile, the man welcomes them to the institution for children in need of care.

They’ll be under surveillance to ensure their quality of life while maintaining their education. If they get known for good behavior, they can get fostered and from there, adopted. This place is an orphanage, she’s guessing.

“Our parents are dead?” She asks.

“Blew up in the gas disaster,” the man tells them heartlessly.

The three of them get kicked out of the office, and she shares a glance with Zoro. The sane thing would be to remain here where there’s shelter, to stay for the bed, free food, and probably hot showers.

“Yeah, I’m not staying here,” Zoro says. “Law better hurry the hell up.”

Mihawk walks off without a word, and the two of them are left scrambling after him. The man-turned-boy beelines it out the huge, glass doors, and soon the three of them are walking down the sidewalk. For all that the man droned on about surveillance, no one says a word as they disappear.

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The first time she sees a car, she freezes. Zoro bumps her shoulder to jolt her out of it. Tall buildings surround her, and she nearly loses it once she realizes how abnormally alike everyone is. Speech fails her as she takes in the crosswalks and familiar architecture.
She probably gives off the appearance of being traumatized by the traffic lights. From beside her, Zoro radiates unimpressed with every fiber of his being, while Mihawk, damn him, saunters through the city like he’s always been there.

Tsubasa de Tobu grows warm in her pocket, and she shoves the panic down. Her situation hasn’t changed; she needs to find a way home, get her older body back, and have her sword be, well, a sword. Everything else is relative.

It takes a while for it to click, but absolutely no one reacts to Zoro’s green hair or Mihawk’s special eyes. Considering they ended up in London of all places—as stated by their stolen newspaper—it’s more than unusual.

She tries not to think about the connotations of being here. Considering everything that went down to bring them to London, it might not actually be his old world. Haki still works after all.

(“Alright, stay here. I’ve got something to check out,” she says, opening the door to the toilet.

Zoro leans against the sink, and Mihawk frowns in the mirror. A quick check down her pants shows there are no new additions, and she’s left confused over her designation as male. It doesn’t really matter, but it does make her wonder if she took some child’s spot.

Upon exiting the stall, she finds the glass from the mirror grounded into a fine powder, and Zoro cutting up the sink with a Haki-infused pocket knife. She covers her eyes with a sigh.)

Perhaps this London is used to the weird and bizarre? But no, everyone looks as plain as she remembers them being. The more she looks for it, the more she sees that people’s eyes tend to slide over Zoro and Mihawk as if they weren’t there.

Not her of course. Everyone wants to ask her where her parents are even if they never say anything about her blue hair.

Mihawk takes the lead, and they wander around, stealing money and mapping the area. Her previous experience isn’t much help; he never visited England after all. As they investigate, they notice something strange.

There are people dressed oddly, who wave sticks and mutter under their breath when they think no one’s watching. Most walk into a pub that no “normal” dressed person enters. There’s a niggling sensation in the back of her head, but she pays it no mind.

“Something interesting?” She asks.

“Something interesting,” Zoro nods.

“Follow,” Mihawk orders before marching to the pub.

As if they weren’t already. Zoro grumbles something explicit under his breath, and she keeps an eye on the people around her as they go in. The moment they near the entrance, it’s like the three of them cease to exist. She doesn’t doubt that her companions notice the same thing.

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Witches and Wizards.

The barman is unusually helpful to their inquiries. He explains the existence of magic that most people outside can’t see. There’s a whole different world filled with magic on the other side of this
pub, and they’ll need either wands or someone with a wand to get in.

Witches and Wizards.

She has a horrible suspicion about where they are. The Devil Fruit that collided with Law’s might not have simply sent them to a different dimension; the three of them might be stuck in a fairytale, a very popular one that had made it into his hands once.

“You’re Japanese? You’ll be going to Mahoutokoro then,” the barman remarks after hearing her supposedly full name.

“The hell is Mahoutokoro?” Zoro scowls.

“Why, it’s a school of course! Your parents homeschooling you? How else are you supposed to be learning magic?” The barman asks, baffled.

“We’re actually citizens of England. Just made it official today,” she says, elbowing Zoro in the side. “We recently lost our parents though, so we’re at a loss on what to do.”

They’re more likely to get helpful information by being polite. Sadly, that means she does most of the talking. At least Mihawk doesn’t try to sabotage her efforts unlike a certain somebody.

“A special case, eh? You’ll be needing to contact Hogwarts directly. I can send them an owl on your behalf,” the barman offers.

“We don’t have money for expensive schooling,” she says as a way to politely decline.

“Hogwarts is open to everyone who needs it. You’ll be needing to buy school supplies yourself, but they got something for orphans, I’m sure.”

The owl gets sent anyway, and she lets it go. They negotiate payment for rooms, and while the barman accepts their money, it’s best if they get they get it exchanged for school purchases. Not that they actually plan to go to school.

The barman lets them into Diagon Alley, London’s magical market, and they get directed to the bank. Mihawk grabs them by the back of the neck and marches them there once it becomes apparent neither Zoro nor she can be trusted not to wander off.

In her defense, there’s a lot of neat stuff to look at. In Zoro’s, he just sucks at directions.

(The window over there has a cat with color changing fur, oh, but the window over there has a broomstick flying itself around, and over there—“Eyes forward,” Mihawk says flatly.)

They exchange their stolen cash at the bank. Zoro almost starts a fight with a goblin, and she gets them kicked out for “accidentally” bumping into someone and causing a chain reaction that ends up with jewels being scattered everywhere.

“Did you manage to get one?” She asks, as they walk around, taking in the sights.

“Three,” Mihawk replies shortly.

“It’s going to be tough figuring out how to exchange them,” Zoro says.

Thieving isn’t their strong suit, but even reverted to children, their abilities remain great. From what she can tell, they’re physically stronger and faster than anyone they’ve encountered so far. Defenseless child is the last thing to call them.
Taking in the shops and the magical people scurrying about, she can’t help but notice something. If the three of them have magic—as the barman said they did—then it is entirely possible they’re overlooking something. She pulls Tsubasa de Tobu out of her pocket to examine it.

“Our swords turned into wands,” she states.

There’s an uncomfortable silence as Mihawk and Zoro examine their swords-turned-wands, and she clutches Tsubasa de Tobu to her chest. Her beautiful sword is a damn wand.

“I guess we’re doing the school thing after all,” she mutters.

“Why?” Zoro asks with the tone of the damned.

“I don’t know how to wield Tsubasa de Tobu in its current state. It’s hurting me. And I’m not going by myself,” she says. “We might also find something to help us get in contact with Trafalgar.”

“We can probably figure something out here,” Zoro nods to the market around them.

It’s true that Diagon Alley could be a good resource, but that doesn’t guarantee anything with their lack of funds. Plus her original point of being able to wield Tsubasa de Tobu still stands. She turns to Mihawk and pulls out her trump card.

“Free, massive library,” she says.

It only takes a second.

“We’re going,” Mihawk declares.

They end up staying in the pub until school time. When the barman shows concern over her staying with Mihawk and Zoro, she just shakes her head and tells him she’s a boy. She ends up buying boyish clothing to better set his mind at ease, and their Hogwarts letters come in without problem.

Of course, they have a few things to do until school starts.

“These were the only things left to us before our parents died. The explosion took them and everything else except for these,” she says, sliding the jewels to the shady muggle businessman.

There’s a glint in the businessman’s eyes, and she knows he’s going to try to cheat her out of their worth. Well, she did expect it, but she rather doubts her opponent knows what he’s dealing with. You don’t become king without breaking a few arms.

By the time she’s done, the businessman and his assistant are on lying on the floor with quivering pupils. She counts out the banknotes. They won’t be rich by any means, but she’ll be able to buy more than the necessities.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t know how to make a kimono. I mainly make robes or cloaks,” Madam Malkin says with a furrowed brow.

“That’s okay. I drew out the design,” she says holding up a small stack of papers. “It’s easy, I swear.”

Madam Malkin relaxes once she goes through the papers; the woman even makes a remark about sewing sleep robes that were more difficult. The fact that she’s modified the design so that it only resembles a kimono never gets mentioned.
She splurges and buys expensive, imported silk; she has no regrets because she ends up with a light green material that has *moving* white birds imprinted on it. How cool is that?

While she’s at Madam Malkin’s, Mihawk and Zoro are supposed to be searching for high quality knives or swords. Neither one of them said anything about wanting anything outside of their school uniforms, but Mihawk’s ragged clothing is far from the intimidating man she remembers.

“What kind of clothes do you recommend for vampires?” She ends up asking.

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Getting Mihawk and Zoro onto a train without either of them trying to throw the other in front of it is an interesting experience. She supposes it’s difficult for them to stick to their temporary truce until their swords return to normal.

They arrive early enough to find an empty compartment, and she settles in next to Zoro who sits by the window. It’s a long wait before the train even leaves the station, and she breaks out the textbooks to pass the time. The compartment door opens several times, but one glare from Mihawk sees it slam shut quickly.

“Wake me up when we’re almost there,” Zoro tells her before leaning against the window.

Mihawk cracks open a magical theory book once the train sets out, and she ends up throwing her book down to look out the window. The textbooks are dry and boring; she’s decided to burn them. It doesn’t matter in the long run anyway.

“Has anyone seen a toad—oh, is that a kimono?” The compartment door slides open, and a girl with bushy hair stares at her in surprise.

“No. Yes,” she says.

“Are you from Asia then? I read about the schools, and—”

The girl and the boy looking over her shoulder pale as a pressure fills the compartment. No doubt Mr. Grouchy is upset at his reading being interrupted. Zoro tenses up next to her but continues to feign sleep. One wrong move will trigger a knife fight that will wind up with someone on the floor bleeding out.

“We’re having quiet time now,” she says with a straight face. “Find me at school and ask your questions then. Good luck on the toad.”

She closes the door gently and goes back to staring out the window. She hopes she doesn’t get placed into the same house as these losers. She needs the break.

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The British school of magic, Hogwarts, is a giant castle that looks breathtaking from the lake in front of it. She lets herself take in the moment to enjoy an impossibility from a book he loved as a child. Then the boat rocks, and she has to deal with the reality.

“You want to keep talking about my hair?” Zoro snarls, dangling a child over the side of the boat.

The fourth member traveling to the school with them is an unremarkable child that had gotten on the boat begrudgingly. The kid must regret it deeply if the pleading screams are anything to go by.
“Are you going to stop him?” She asks rhetorically.

Mihawk’s expression doesn’t change, but he somehow gives off an amused feeling. She moves to step in once the groundskeeper in charge of them begins yelling.

She really doesn’t want to be in the same house as them.

Hogwarts divides its students into four houses, four dormitories: Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Slytherin, and Hufflepuff. The asinine system places emphasis on exaggerated character traits, but if she’s remembering correctly, some of the placement is politically based as well.

An old, grimy hat that sings and talks is responsible for choosing these children’s houses. The sad part is that she’s experienced weirder on the Grand Line; neither Zoro nor Mihawk do more than blink at it.

“Dracule, Mihawk,” the professor with a list calls out.

She treasures the moment a large, pointy hat covers the frowning face of the legendary Hawk-Eyes. Mihawk makes it to Slytherin just as she knew he would, and some of the older students’ begin throwing calculative glares at him. She wishes them luck; some of them will probably be going home in a casket before the year’s out.

“Granger, Hermione.”

Oh, dear. She recognizes that name. The girl with bushy hair runs up to the Sorting Hat, and she mentally sighs. Well, hopefully they won’t be here long enough to get involved. If Law takes longer than a year, she’ll make him wish he was dead.

“Koshiro, Kuina.”

The black robes are large enough to go over her kimono smoothly, but with the way the professor frowns at the bottom of her robes, her kimono might be peeking out of her uniform. Oh, well. She plops down on the stool, and the hat falls over her eyes.

Another unique one, I see. Now where shall I place you?

“This must be difficult for you considering our life experience. If I were to look at the three of us on a whole, I’d say we’ve all maxed out our capacity for bravery. Then again, our ambition is probably high too. Cunning, not so much,” she muses silently.

“We’re all extremely hard workers, but I think Zoro fits that bill best. Mihawk fits the gloomy aesthetic of Slytherin, so I’m not surprised he went there. I really can’t imagine him in red and gold. I, myself, will break everyone’s neck in that house. I also don’t like hard work, so that leaves me with either Gryffindor or—”

“RAVENCLAW!”

Pleased, she makes for the table covered in blue and bronze. There’s no way Zoro’s getting into the house known for its curiosity and intelligence. Let Mihawk and Zoro be someone else’s problems.

She shuts down her housemates’ attempts to small talk her using polite words and short answers. Even if she looks like one, she still doesn’t quite know how to interact with children. The room
soon goes silent as a certain name gets called.

“Potter, Harry.”

She pulls a small book out of her kimono sleeve and tunes out. None of this matters because Law will be getting them out soon. Luffy wouldn’t let him rest otherwise. She continues reading until Zoro’s name is called.

“Hufflepuff!” The hat shouts.

She hides her face in her arms and laughs so hard she cries, causing her housemates to panic.

(Zoro tells her later that the hat made the remark of not wanting them in Gryffindor because they’d be terrible influences on impressionable children. She laughs once more.)

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“Girls, with me! I’ll take you to the first year dorms!” An older student shouts holding up a wand.

She trots after the other tiny girls only to be stopped by a hand on her shoulder.

“Where do you think you’re going? Dorms are *this* way,” and older boy says, pushing her in the opposite direction forcefully.

Too confused to argue, she lets the boy drag her to the male dorms. When she’s pushed into a room with four other boys, she’s surprised to see not only a fifth bed but her belongings as well. Shrugging, she grabs her sleeping robe and changes on the bed with the curtains closed.

She’s sure someone will cause a fuss eventually. Until then, she won’t bother pointing it out. Her papers do say male after all.

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“Looks like I have classes first with Mihawk. I don’t get classes with you until later this week,” she says, looking over the schedule.

The only reply she gets is the sound of crunching. It seems neither Mihawk nor Zoro have any shame as they stuff their faces with everything in reach. It’s grotesque, but considering how hungry morning training has made her, she understands.

“There’s a few self-study periods which we can use to explore the library. If there’s a way to use magic to contact Trafalgar, then it should be in there somewhere,” she says, pulling an entire plate of bacon into her arms.

“We might be able to find a way to revert our swords too,” she comments before downing bacon after bacon.

Honestly, she doesn’t remember training making her this hungry as a kid, but it’s entirely possible they’ve got more going on with their bodies than simply de-aging. Zoro tosses a plate of tarts to her which is downright romantic for him, and she slams a fork into the table as a warning to Mihawk who eyes it.

“What are you doing? Are you a bunch of savages? No, wait, do you guys know you’re in different houses?” One of her housemates demands with a disgusted face.

“There’s plenty of food that way. Now leave,” Zoro points out at the other end of the table.
Before the Ravenclaw student can reply to that, Mihawk glares at them while holding a butter knife. She doesn’t know how he manages to make it look terrifying, but her housemate scurries away.

(They end up eating at the Slytherin table after that, but only because the seats around Mihawk stay empty. No one bothers to tell them to leave either.)

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Classes are interesting because while they don’t pay attention, don’t even hand in assignments, they are still somehow passing. They get detentions—that they skip—and talks in the office, but for whatever reason, the professors let them slide because they end up being magical prodigies.

Practical lessons soon turn into an excuse to sleep or read. Spells are done on the first try, and they don’t even need to say the incantation. She knows it has nothing to do with them, that it’s their swords-turned-wands, but it’s not something she can say.

She does end up doing some of the assignments out of pure curiosity which curries favor with the teachers. Her Head of House, Professor Flitwick, is more than happy to assist her in theoretical discussions about dimensional messages. Zoro somehow endears himself to his Head of House, Professor Sprout, and Mihawk—well, none of the professors want anything to do with Mihawk especially his Head of House.

She’s just glad she doesn’t have to deal with the havoc those two idiots cause. When a manhunt goes out for the person responsible for destroying a hallway and she notices the telltale signs of a duel with blades, she simply goes to find the kitchen for some hot cocoa. It’s not her problem.

(“You can’t have three wands,” Professor McGonagall says, baffled.

“Watch me,” Zoro says, before putting a white wand between his teeth and holding one in each hand.

She rests her head on her arms and watches as Zoro transforms the professor’s desk and everything around it into a pirate ship. The children shriek in awe, and Professor McGonagall turns interesting colors.

Still not my problem, she thinks with a tired sigh.)

Chapter End Notes

I honestly was never going to post this, but now that Zoro showed up in FYW, I figured why not?
Kuina will never get a Devil Fruit, but this is what it'd be if she did.

Life on the Grand Line tends to surprise her day by day. Life with the Straw Hats tends to cause headaches and hostage situations.

“I’m really sorry about this, Miss Kuina,” Kaiden says miserably from the other cage.

“Don’t worry, Zoro and the others will be here soon,” she tries to reassure.

When she initially rescued the little boy from the island’s tyrant, she had been offered food. She hadn’t thought anything of it, had eaten to be polite. The cage she woke to had been an unpleasant surprise.

Stripped of her kimono and sword, the cold metal of the cage seeps through her pants. She looks for a weakness in the bars around her, but there doesn’t seem to be one from where she’s sitting. She’ll have to wait for an opportunity.

“You’re too overpowered! You can breathe fire and destroy buildings, but you can swim too? It isn’t fair!” The island’s tyrant, Paridge, paces in front of the cages while waving a pistol carelessly.

She remembers Paridge hurling curses when she had escaped with the boy by jumping into the river, remembers the angry howls about not being able to follow.

“Are you jealous I can swim?” She asks incredulously.

The grossly over-muscled man twitches, and his long, braided beard curls irritably. Paridge’s Devil Fruit had something to do with facial hair, if she recalls correctly. The man picks up a small, opened chest off the ground, and with eyes full of madness, shoves the contents in her face.

“Good fortune landed in my lap. Literally, I was sitting under a tree and it fell into my lap,” the man grins. “With this fruit, the Ichibyō Ichibyō no Mi, you’ll never swim again.”

Paridge drops the chest and kicks it next to her cage. She frowns down at the fruit lying innocently against red velvet. The Devil Fruit looks like a giant chokeberry, and swirls shine against the black color.

“Pick it up and eat it, or I’ll blow his head off,” Paridge says from in front of Kaiden’s cage.

With a gun held to Kaiden’s head, she has no choice but to reach through the bars. Grabbing hold of the fruit, she puts it to her lips and hesitates. She has a dagger in her boots—her only remaining weapon—but there’s no way she can guarantee a lethal throw from this angle. She takes a bite.

“Kuina, are you alright?” Kaiden asks in alarm as she begins retching.

This is a hundred times worse than a chokeberry. Her mouth goes numb, but she manages to eat the entire thing. Her guts feel like they’re twisting inside out, and she has to swallow rapidly to keep from throwing up.

“You can turn back time—by one second. How does it feel to have the most useless Devil Fruit? Gwahehaha!” Paridge laughs at her.

“You’re an idiot,” she says before choking on her saliva.

“You give her that kind of power?” Kaiden asks in horrified awe.

She wraps her arms around her legs and rests her head on her knees. She’s a little dizzy. Kaiden keeps Paridge talking, and she takes the moment to figure things out.

“Power? There’s nothing you can do in one second, boy!” Paridge grins, beard curling.

“It is a bit limiting, but I wouldn’t say ‘nothing,’ ” She remarks as the cage around her falls apart.

“You, h-how did you?” Paridge gapes.

“I’m very fast. I can do a lot of stabbing in one second. Your cage had a weak spot.”

She holds up the dagger in her hand and waves it mockingly. Before Paridge can think to point the gun back at Kaiden, she dashes forward and disarms him. Paridge attempts to strangle her with his beard, but her flames makes sure there is no hair left to try.

Any slight mistake is corrected instantly with her new power, and she soon has the man lying in defeat. While making sure she blocks Kaiden’s line of sight, she rests the dagger against Paridge’s chest.

“Turns out there’s a lot I can do in one second. Shall we test it some more?” She says darkly.

She thrusts the dagger into his heart. Time rewinds until the dagger is poking into his skin. She thrusts the dagger into his heart. Time rewinds until the dagger is poking into his skin. She thrusts the dagger into his heart. Time rewinds until the dagger is poking into his skin...
Her friend will be the strongest swordsman

Chapter Notes

This takes place during Chapter 1 of Finding Your Wings. Heads up, the beginning may make you wince.

She doesn’t know what possessed her to challenge Zoro with real swords, but when she tries to sneak back into her house, she hesitates at the entrance. There’s something ominous being whispered on the wind, something that makes her not want to go inside.

It’s probably nerves left over from earlier; they’ll get in trouble if their duel with bladed swords gets found out. She grips the katana in her hands tighter, and after a moment of deliberation, opens the door. There’s nothing out of place, no sign of someone having broken in. She steps in and closes the door behind her slowly.

She’s being ridiculous, she thinks. Still, she can’t shake the feeling of needing to leave immediately. Muscles tense and with a wary eye, she moves silently through the house. Once she puts the katana back in the stand outside her father’s bedroom door, she’ll be free to sleep outside if she wants to.

With that thought, she speeds up, taking the stairs faster than she intends to. It is then that something pulls on her hair, causing her foot to slip. Her attempt to stop her fall only ends with her spinning around and seeing the floor speed towards her. She clutches the katana tightly, and she lands awkwardly. The pain takes her breath away before she loses consciousness.

In that whole time, she saw nothing that could have pulled her hair.

“Who are you?”

She sits up with a gasp. Her hand automatically rubs her sore neck, and she winces as the pain travels down to her shoulders. She squints up at what she assumes is a boy. She can’t see him well since he stands in front of a bright light, but there’s a sword on his back. Must be one of her father’s students.

“What are you doing in my,” she trails off as she takes in the grass beneath her, “house?” She finishes weakly.

She looks around with wide eyes; her house is nowhere to be seen. Matter of fact, there are no houses to be seen anywhere. A wide, open plain of dull green grass sways in a light breeze, and she thinks she sees mountains in the distance. Shimotsuki doesn’t have mountains.

She rubs her eyes, but white flowers sparkle beautifully against dull colored grass under bright sunlight. Birds fly overhead, but they’re not ones she’s ever seen before. The boy huffs at her and repeats his question, reminding her of his existence.

“Quick, do I look like a young girl with blue hair?” She demands.

The last time she woke up suddenly in a new place, his body had changed to match it.
“You have blue hair,” the boy eventually says.

She examines her hands and sees nothing amiss. She’s wearing the same clothes, and her katana lies on the ground next to her. She’s probably not in a different world then.

“Could I have been kidnapped?” She muses. Or maybe her father had found her unconscious body and finally gotten rid of her.

She gets to her feet and begins stretching. Her body is in a lot of pain, but she’s had worse from training. She picks up the katana, does a quick check on its blade, and tucks it under her arm. She regrets not having anything to holster it with, but she never expected to be suddenly thrust into the middle of nowhere with it either.

“How do you know how to wield that?” The boy suddenly asks.

“Of course,” she says while scanning the area with a critical eye.

She should be fine if she can find a river. Not only will it provide water, but following it may lead her to a town. Aren’t there usually rivers in mountainous areas? Maybe she should ask—

There’s no warning, no declaration screamed at the top of a pair of childish lungs, but she feels it coming at her back. She drops to the ground, and the blade misses her. Rolling, she gets to her knees and draws her katana, tossing the scabbard away as quickly as possible.

The boy frowns down at her with his sword pointed towards her face.

“I’m going to kick your ass,” she seethes, “and you’ll regret such a dirty move.”

She kicks off and thrusts her blade forward. The boy counters her straightforward move, and she puts speed into her momentum. Her attempts to end the fight quickly get countered by precise, strong movements.

Whoever this kid is, she’s strong. If she was allowed time to think, she’d come to the awful conclusion that she might actually lose.

However, thanks to long standing practice of disarming a certain loudmouth, she soon sends the boy’s sword flying, and she sweeps his legs from under him. She takes heavy breaths as her blade hovers over the boy’s neck.

“Kill me.”

The boy looks up at her with calm acceptance, and she considers how much strength it would take to end his life painlessly. She finds she doesn’t want to. There’s nothing to wipe the blood off the blade except her clothes.

“Why?” If it were her, she’d probably beg for her life, she thinks.

“If I cannot beat you, I cannot be the strongest swordsman,” the boy says simply.

It’s shocking to hear. She swears she’s heard those exact words before but in a different tone. She’s used to hearing them spat at her in challenge, in defiance. Not in emotionless defeat. The difference bothers her. A lot.

“You’re an idiot. How can you be the strongest if you give up so easily?” She asks with narrow eyes.
She doesn’t understand these boys, so obsessed with the grandeur of being the best at killing. She doesn’t understand what madness drives them, but there’s a difference between being an idiot and an idiot.

“There’s a boy who says he’ll be the world’s greatest swordsman. He challenges me every day, and every day I beat him into the dirt,” she tells the boy whose expression never changes. “But he keeps getting back up, and he gets stronger every day I defeat him.”

Of course, she grows stronger each day too, but that’s beside the point. If she ever stopped training, Zoro would probably surpass her at some point. Even if that were to happen, there’s no sense in lying on the ground and giving up when there’s still time to catch up, when there’s a whole world to explore.

“I won’t kill you, but you’re going to regret giving me your life,” she says, throwing her sword down.

If the boy refuses to fight for the right to live, then she’ll just have to see how much use she can get out of him. She’s currently alone, stuck in the wilderness of an unknown land. She needs every advantage she can get.

Her knees hit the ground, and straddling the boy, she grabs the collar of his ragged, red shirt to bring his eyes close to hers. He frowns at her unflinchingly.

“You are now my indentured servant,” she declares. “You’ll die when I say you can,” she hisses.

A flicker of something goes through his eyes, and her anger fades away. With a blink, she comes to a belated realization and lets go of the boy in surprise. She hadn’t noticed before, when his eyes were filled with such lifelessness, or when she awoke in pain and dazed.

“You have beautiful eyes,” she says in wonder. “What’s your name?”

“Mihawk,” the boy says.

“Kuina,” she replies, holding out a hand.

He takes it.
Her new servant leads her to a town where the two of them are immediately pelted with suspicious stares and frightened cowering. She only mentions that she’s hungry, and someone’s forcing a fried meat ball into her hands.

“What did you do?” She asks with a sigh.

“Thereir strongest fighters were weak,” the boy at her side says.

No doubt Mihawk killed their warriors in the most terrifying way possible. Crunching into her snack, she wonders if she shouldn’t have killed him after all. She might end up literally losing her head at this rate. Is it possible to rehabilitate or at least mitigate psychopathic tendencies? She glances at the emotionless face of the kid next to her and thinks, probably not.

Oh well, she’ll ditch him soon. Her plans to leave Shimotsuki may have been sped up, but she has no plans to go back. She’ll need to find another island though; it’s impossible to get a job and settle down considering people here flee from her and her shadow.

Shame, it was a nice town too. With bricked roads, outstanding architecture—it’s mostly white buildings with flat, red roofs, but it’s beautiful somehow—and colorful clothing as far as the eye can see, she would have enjoyed it here.

Piercing eyes continue digging into her back as she attempts to figure out when the next passenger ship leaves, attempts to figure out how to get on with no money. No one makes it easy on her; her servant especially can’t seem to understand the simple command of “don’t follow me.”

“There’s no way I can stay here,” she says flatly. “I need to go to another island. One that hasn’t seen your face.”

“I will procure us a vessel,” Mihawk replies immediately. “Force a map and food out of the leader. He’s the bald one shaking in his own filth.”

She glances to the man that’s been stalking them with tears in his eyes. She probably only needs to tell the town leader that she’ll take away the scary boy, and she’ll be handed everything she needs.

“I don’t know how to sail,” she says, having the feeling Mihawk literally means getting them a boat and nothing else.

“I do.”

She watches Mihawk stride away in full confidence towards the docks and thinks, well shit. She’s going to have to travel with someone who tried to kill her. Her dreams of leaving the kid on this island go up in smoke.

(To be fair, she started it by claiming his life as hers. No, she doesn’t want to hear it, shut up.)

“Hey, you heard what I need, right? I can use some new clothes and something to tie my sword to me too,” she calls over her shoulder.
The bald man practically runs to get all she asks while she tries on clothes. Deciding to play up the innocent girl look, she ends up wearing a dress. Though the shape reminds her uncomfortably of a wedding dress, its bright red color and comfortable fit is rather pleasing. She could do without the lace, but it’s not like she’s paying for it.

With her katana tied to her back and a wagon full of heavy bags, she heads to the docks. She’s grateful for her choice of boots when she has to chase after the wagon. She doesn’t recommend letting go of something on wheels while going downhill.

Mihawk does, indeed, get them a boat and nothing else, and she helps load their cargo onto it. The boat is small, only big enough for six adults, but it looks sea worthy. She hopes trusting him to sail it isn’t a lethal mistake.

“Stop that. I’ve got full range to kick your ass in this. And I have pants too,” she grunts as the boy wordlessly eyes her dress. “Don’t think I didn’t get something for you either.”

Like hell she’ll be seen all dressed up next to her servant who’s in rags. What a terrible boss that’d make her. Not to mention someone will probably look at them and think them to be conmen or something.

(This is ignoring the fact that she has a pouch full of ill-gotten money, and that she technically stole everything in their boat—including the boat.)

Despite her fears, Mihawk truly does know how to sail. The trip is long and quiet, and she ends up wishing for something to do that isn’t failed attempts at meditation. Maybe she’ll start an arts and craft project, see if she still has a talent for his old hobbies.

They make it to the next island safely, but she only gets five steps before Mihawk makes trouble for them. She wants to think it was the way the men leered at her, but since they had long knives attached to their waists, she unfortunately knows the real reason.

“Here’s a challenge for you. How about next time you beat them without killing them,” she hisses while dragging a body into a bush.

“They weren’t worthy of living,” Mihawk tells her snottily while dragging his own body.

“They were drunks. They weren’t worthy of killing and dulling your blade either,” she says flatly.

She has no doubt these men mistook her to be older with the way her dress is shaped, but since her body is that of a little girl, there’s no sorrow over their deaths. She just doesn’t want to get involved in slaughtering a village.

Mihawk changes into the clothes she picked out while she scrubs the blood out of his old ones the best she can with sea water. She gets an idea of why his clothing is so ragged, and why he chose a red shirt.

Thankfully, their misdeeds aren’t found out, and she can find them a place to stay in relative peace. Mihawk follows behind her like a small guard dog, and she is acutely aware that it’s nothing more than an illusion. He’s more of a wild animal that can turn on her at any moment.

She ups her plans to ditch him as soon as possible. She’s going to leave him on this island where he can kill to his heart’s content without her being around to deal with it.

“Why don’t you see if they have a sword shop?” She suggests. “I’ll go find some information
about this place. Meet back here for dinner?”

They’re renting a room at a tavern; it’s a good deal. The place is cheap, near the docks, and the owner couldn’t care less about two children staying there. Plus, the food smells great.

“If they have any, they will be of poor quality. Fine,” Mihawk relents at her unimpressed face.

What a weird child, she thinks as the boy marches off with a huff. She can only imagine the upbringing Mihawk must have had. She smooths down the lace apron on her skirt, widens her eyes, and drifts through the market like a naïve little girl. Her sword remains on her back, wrapped and hidden in silk.

Getting information without someone glaring murder over her shoulder is so much easier. The island she’s on is small but has a busy port village. There’s usually a trade ship going out every week. Why yes, most would be happy to give passage to someone who needs it. Oh, but this week’s ship has already left.

Surely a little girl such as herself doesn’t need to work, but if she wants to learn a trade, there are a few people willing to pay for some light work. Stay away from the caverns on the other side of the island though and don’t fall for jobs requesting someone small to go in them. No matter how much people are willing to pay.

Ultimately, she learns she needs to survive a week on this island with Mihawk before she can slip away on a trade ship. It should be simple enough, but she has a feeling her peace won’t last two days before the people here are either terrified or out for blood.

“I am eating,” she says with a horrified sort of disbelief.

There’s a man lying face down where her soup was a moment ago. Forget two days, her peace didn’t even last through dinner.

“I didn’t kill him,” Mihawk states as if that is the problem. “He asserted that children can’t handle taverns at night.”

The boy’s satisfied expression makes her grind her teeth on her spoon. There’s a horrified silence coming from the rest of the tavern, and her plans to ditch Mihawk get thrown out the door. They’ll probably be packing up and leaving again by tomorrow.

“Bodies off the table,” she demands. “If you draw your sword, you take it outside.”

Mihawk kicks the unconscious man onto the floor, and the man’s friends begin screaming. She stubbornly continues eating even as Mihawk begins a one-sided slaughter that could only technically be called a bar brawl.

What the hell did she do to deserve this?

Chapter End Notes

I'm on break, and I can write what I want.
Three days after she set foot on the island, she leaves. Her tiny boat is sailed by a boy far too satisfied by the trail of blood he leaves behind. She’d strangle him, but it’s technically her fault that she’s in this situation to begin with.

(“Look, killing people while their backs are turned is cowardly,” she hisses while dragging yet another body into the cavern. “How are you supposed to actually get better as a swordsman when you keep pulling sneak attacks?”

“You felt my intent,” Mihawk points out while wiping the blood from his blade.

“Yes, and great fighters will feel it coming. But everyone has their off days. Think about how many potential great fighters you’ve killed because you went for assassination.”

Her words are meant to be scolding, to get him to quit trying to stab everyone who openly wears a weapon in the back. She’s never wanted to know how to “clean a scene,” but she finds herself learning quickly. The only good thing about this mess is that Mihawk has—on accident, she’s sure—been targeting the people who draw no sympathy from her.

“I should declare my intent?” Mihawk asks with a pause.

“It’d make life easier, yes,” she says before counting out the dead men’s beli.

She doesn’t condone murder, but she won’t pass up the chance to fill her pockets. She’s only a little girl, which means her prospect of getting a job is slim.

Being a little girl also seems to attract people who think they can scam her. She has no doubt there was nothing in the caverns waiting for her except death, so at least these guys won’t be hurting another child.

Mihawk falls into silent contemplation, and her hopes begin to rise. Maybe she will be able to stay long enough to ditch him after all.

It turns out she’s an idiot because the very next day, Mihawk begins proclaiming to his victims that he’ll kill them before he starts stabbing. There is no hiding the evidence after that.)

“The concept of challenging others is hard for you, isn’t it?” She sighs, leaning over the side of the boat to watch the waves.

“Words are useless. Real swordsmen should know the moment I reach for my sword,” Mihawk tells her stubbornly.

“There’s a thing called being ‘polite,’ ” she remarks dully, trying not to fall into the trap of letting Mihawk make sense.

No more words are exchanged until they reach the next island. Whatever deity exists in this world must smile on her because Mihawk actually listens to her when she tells him to behave while she rests. He only stops his rampage for a day, but it’s enough for her to get a hot meal, some sleep, and to do some shopping. She’ll take what she can get at this point.

Every attempt to ditch Mihawk gets rendered useless by the fact that when he’s not hovering over her shoulder, he’s causing trouble. She knows he does it on purpose. He hates her nagging and the
fact that if she catches him in the act, she’s fully capable of stopping him; when she isn’t around, he can be a little psycho all he wants.

*Being a boss,* she thinks as she drags Mihawk away from an elderly man with a bad knee who claims to still be an unbeatable swordsman, *is hard.*

If only she’d known how stressful her new servant would be. She could probably still be on the first island, eating as many fried meatballs as she wanted. Hell, if she took them his head, she’d probably be lauded as a hero.

“What are you going do when we run out of sea?” She asks as they get thrown off another island.

“Find another,” Mihawk says simply. “I’ll make it to the Grand Line eventually.”

How she ended up in South Blue, she doesn’t know, but it sounds like once Mihawk’s bled the place dry he’ll aim to cross to another sea instead of heading up the Grand Line. She’s too afraid to ask how he plans to do it.

“There are only weaklings in East Blue,” she says knowingly. “It’s not worth the effort of going there.”

It’s a lie. Her father is stronger than her, but the thought of Mihawk finding Shimotsuki upsets her in a way she doesn’t understand.

“West Blue. Then North,” Mihawk says with a glint in his eyes. “The Grand Line after. *I will* be the strongest.”

She believes him. If Zoro doesn’t pick up the pace, he’ll have to defeat Mihawk for the title. There’s still time for him to get stronger though. There’s also a high chance that Zoro’s competition will die before they even meet.

Mihawk is doing his absolute best not to make it to adulthood. She already knows what will occur when they run into a ship full of pirates or Marines. Once that happens, she’ll step back and leave the boy to his fate. She won’t ruin her life for anyone.

“I won’t die for you,” she tells Mihawk during the quiet of the night. “You better be able to save yourself.”

The stars are a beautiful sight on the ocean, but the same view is quickly growing stale. She wonders if the view will look any different in West Blue.

The next island they land on is large enough to have a city. Mihawk goes off to find a place to train while she shops. Tired of the boredom during sailing, she makes it a priority to look for art supplies. It’s when she’s looking for sewing needles that she overhears something interesting.

“That blasted cruise ship is stopping in tonight. Oh, I hate those tourists,” a woman complains to another. “They let anybody on board that thing.”

*A chance,* she thinks with excitement.

She waits for night eagerly, waits for Mihawk to fall asleep in the bed next to hers. She doesn’t bother keeping quiet; he’s a heavy sleeper unless someone gets too close. The only things she grabs are her sword and a small satchel filled with beli and her art supplies.

When she manages to sneak aboard the cruise ship without being found out, she almost can’t
believe it. It’s too easy, and there are no dead bodies surrounding her. If she can stay out of sight until the ship leaves, then she’ll be free.

She chooses a cleaning supply closet to doze off in while she waits. The dust tells her that it’s rarely used, so she should be safe. When the cruise ship takes off, she nearly bumps her head on a shelf in surprise.

Holy shit, it worked. She walks around the ship like a normal passenger, and no one seems to realize she doesn’t belong. She has no idea where the ship’s headed, but she finds she doesn’t care. She relaxes into a chair on deck with a cone of free ice-cream.

She’s so happy, she could cry. It’s been so long since she could sit back and not worry about suddenly being doused in blood. She’ll treasure this feeling of freedom forever.

Of course, pirates attack only a few hours later.

“Why?” She asks as a man holds a gun to her head.

As a small child, she supposes she makes the ideal hostage. She’s easy to carry, supposedly can’t fight back, and most people don’t want to see her harmed. If she widens her eyes and trembles her lips, it’d probably be devastating.

Unfortunately for them, they picked the wrong child. She waits until the man’s finger moves from the trigger to kick him in the balls. When the grip on her goes slack, she makes a break for it. Before the gun can be aimed at her a second time, the man comes down with a sudden case of death.

He wasn’t a lone pirate; more come soon after. Each pirate looks from the mangled corpse to her standing over it with a blood soaked sword. They aim their weapons at her.

“You ruined it. You ruined it. You made your last mistake,” she says darkly.

She doesn’t remember much of what happens after, but she knows she went on a cleaning spree. What doesn’t fall to the floor gets kicked overboard. Pure, unfiltered rage guides her hands, and she doesn’t stop until she’s stepping on the pirate captain’s face.

When she blinks back to awareness, she’s covered in blood and the cruise ship’s captain is cowering before her. She seems to be at the helm. It might be a good idea to stop using the pirate captain’s head like a hacky sack. Before she can attempt to placate the woman, a familiar face enters the cabin.

“You killed them all,” Mihawk says, radiating disappointment.

She closes her eyes and keens in distress. There is no fairness in this world.

“Who are you?” The captain asks, sounding just as distressed.

“Her indentured servant,” Mihawk deadpans before grabbing her wrist.

She’s pulled out onto the deck and pushed to the railing. Leaning over, she can see their tiny boat tied to the cruise ship. Of course, Mihawk managed to figure it out and catch up to her.

There’s a rope tied to the railing, but she doesn’t have the energy to repel down. She says as much and wraps her arms around Mihawk’s neck. She clings tightly in the hopes the blood on her rubs off onto him. She hopes it doesn’t feel good.
“Justice is a myth,” she sighs as Mihawk swings them over the side of the ship.
“You know, I really thought there were supposed to be more pirates,” she says. “I could have sworn there were more Marines too.”

Mihawk doesn’t bother acknowledging her musings; he’s too busy trying to fly them safely over the Red Line, the mountain range separating South and West Blue.

She keeps a fierce grip on her knees as the boy works their hot air balloon-like boat’s many ropes and levers. She’s doing her best to forget the fact that they are currently far above the sea, leading to a copious amount of rambling.

“I also would have thought you’d have a bounty by now.”

At that, Mihawk flicks a piercing gaze to her.

“You keep killing the witnesses,” he tells her sardonically.

It’s not completely true. Sometimes she pays them off, and sometimes she offers a bribe. The last island they were on, she had helped someone restore their birthright to the throne solely to stay out of jail. She ended up with a new sword, an armored dress, and more importantly, a boat that functions as a hot air balloon. The dead bodies were pretty much forgotten at the end of it all.

“One day, you’ll get in trouble, and I won’t be able to get you out of it,” she says. “I’ll leave flowers on your grave. But only the ones I like because you’d probably want black roses growing out of a skull or something.”

One of the weird things she’s learned about her servant is his unique taste. He never complains about the clothes she buys him, but she’s noticed the more gothic ones stay in better shape. She bought him a vampire-looking cloak on a whim, and it still doesn’t have a stain on it.

“If I die, then I was not worthy of becoming the strongest swordsman,” Mihawk declares before ruthlessly saying, “And keep your flowers. They’d be dead before they even make it to the grave.”

Rude, she only tried to be a florist’s assistant once. So maybe it hadn’t gone well; that doesn’t mean she’d kill every plant that landed in her care.

“I don’t think we can fly like this over the Grand Line to North Blue,” she squeaks out as the boat starts a slow descent. “I’m sure we’re using up all the fuel it runs on.”

“Perhaps the potency of your tears can maintain it,” Mihawk tells her with a wry glance as she grips a handrail tightly.

“I think your ego would work better, what with all the hot air,” she says.

Flying over the Grand Line might have been safer, but she’s rather glad this is a onetime flight. Not that she plans to allow Mihawk to drag her through the Grand Line at all. She’s going to find a way to get it through to his head that she’s not going.

She’s long given up trying to ditch Mihawk the traditional way. No matter how many times she runs for it, he tracks her down immediately. She tried explaining it to him—

(“I don’t want to travel with you. You stress me out,” she seethes, attempting and failing to stuff a
body into a hollowed out tree trunk.

“Until I beat you and claim my life back, I will stay by your side.” Mihawk’s eyes glint dangerously. “A master cannot be without their servant.”

—but she gets the feeling that this is revenge for kicking his ass.

Admittedly, traveling with Mihawk isn’t as bad as it used to be. He’s slowed down on trying to kill everything in sight, and their journey has been getting more absurd and interesting recently. She almost enjoys the places they visit now.

The moment she actually enjoys traveling with Mihawk is the moment she knows she’s lost to her brain’s coping mechanism. Sadly, she knows that time is upon her because lately Mihawk’s been making sense.

(“Does it not tire you to keep pretending?” Mihawk questions as she wraps her sword in a material that matches her dress.

“There’s something I want more than anything else in this world. To go wherever I want without anyone trying to stop me,” she says, finding herself unable to look him in the eye. “I can fade into the background as a woman but not if I’m seen as a swordsman.”

“If you get strong enough, no one can ever stop you,” Mihawk points out.

And she’ll only get stronger if she calls herself a warrior and picks fights, is what he’s trying to say. It’s true enough, but at the same time, she never wanted to be forced into living—and dying—by the sword.

“Are you planning to kill me one day?” She asks.

“I will defeat you.”

The moment she lets her sword skills slip is the moment she’ll die, so it seems like she’s a swordsman whether she likes it or not. She unwraps her sword and ties it to her back.)

She’s thought about killing Mihawk, ending his life before he can end hers, but something stays her hand each time. She doesn’t know if it’s because she spared his life and feels responsible or because she’s already in too deep with all the death and carnage.

*But it’d be a shame if the world lost such beautiful eyes,* she can’t help thinking.

Their travels through West Blue are something out of an adventure novel. From large snakes attempting to eat them because they accidentally broke a nest full of eggs to a forced marriage with a rock—life is never boring.

(“Here’s your husband,” she says, tossing a rock with a painted face to Mihawk.

“Your husband,” he says, throwing it at her head.

She ducks, and their shared rock husband knocks out the priest. Every single person on the island immediately goes after them with spears and slingshots. Mihawk must feel amused by the whole thing because he doesn’t actually kill anyone.)

One day, her chance to stop Mihawk from dragging her to North Blue appears. When they stop on a fairly normal island with a heavy Marine presence, she expects it to be nothing more than a quick
rest stop.

Through painful effort, she’s trained Mihawk from going after every Marine he comes across. Whereas she’s had to sink an entire ship filled with dead Marines to cover their tracks, now he barely pays them any attention.

It should have been a relatively peaceful couple of days, but there’s nothing she can do if someone decides to pick a fight with Mihawk.

“You think you can look at me with those eyes?” A Marine captain snarls; a sword is already clenched in a fist.

She watches the confrontation from nearby, hidden behind a pile of boxes. A group of Marines support their captain, each with their own swords being waved about.

The residents of the village have already run inside their homes, doors slammed shut and not a soul in sight. It seemed practiced. She supposes this is the reason everyone was so tense in the marketplace.

“Come then, maggot,” Mihawk says, drawing his blade.

She’s seen this scene many times, seen people react badly to Mihawk’s eyes and the sword on his back. The boy’s never lost once the whole time she’s been with him. She expects all of them to go down in seconds.

The captain has some talent; the Marine is able to bring up a blade to block Mihawk’s initial swing. It’s then that the unexpected happens.

Mihawk’s sword breaks.

The blade shatters in a way that there is nothing left but the hilt. Terrible luck, some would cry; fate, others would say.

In this one moment, she’s given the chance to stop Mihawk from dragging her all over the world, to be rid of Mihawk for good.

When Mihawk glares at the world like he dares it to kill him and the Marines move in like sharks smelling blood, when she notices that he doesn’t reach for a knife because she has it—she moves without thinking.

Her blade clashes against one sword, two, three, four—she slices each Marine down before forcing the captain to his knees. A calm acceptance washes over her as she holds her sword to the man’s throat.

“That’s my servant you’re trying kill,” she says, voice dripping with venom. “You weren’t worthy of his beautiful eyes.”

She ends his life and kicks the body away from her. Mihawk claims the captain’s sword for himself. Grabbing his wrist, she drags him in the direction of their boat. She lets the bodies stay right there in the middle of the marketplace.

“Let’s go,” she says, moving to hold his hand instead; he doesn’t resist. “We’re going to find you the best damn sword. One that won’t break.”

They’ll probably need to find it on the Grand Line, but they can find swords of excellent quality
until they get there. She’ll start shaking people down for information on the next island they go to. The current one is no good.

“You’ll need one as well,” Mihawk eventually says.

She looks down at her white dress with its pink ruffles and bows.

“You think I can find a pink one?”
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Their attempts to cross the Grand Line to get to North Blue go about as bad as she knew they would. Apparently the pirates who claimed themselves to be the biggest thing on the ocean don’t quite live up to their reputation.

Oh, the ship they wound up on went through the Calm Belt just fine. The captain even navigated through the rough ocean and sea monster attacks without a problem. It was the other pirates showing up that caused problems.

“Stowaways?” One of the attacking pirates asks in disbelief.

She keeps her grip on Mihawk’s hand and takes a sip from her teacup. The closet that serves as their room is barely big enough for the two of them, but she’s managed to set up something of a table between their beds.

She was enjoying lunch before the mess all started, before their door was ripped open. Mihawk’s initial reaction to go out and kill was only abated by the sandwich in one hand and her holding the other. She sees the glint in his eyes and tightens her fingers around Mihawk’s. Not yet, she tells him silently. The blond haired man with a scar over his eye continues to stare at them blankly.

“Paid passengers,” she refutes.

“You’re joking,” the man says with a sigh. “You know what? This mess is for the captain to clean up.”

Keeping hold of Mihawk, she grabs her bag and follows after him. She knew the moment she heard the cracking beneath her that their only chance off the sinking ship were with the pirates attacking. Perhaps she can negotiate a deal with them.

A man who can only be the captain—whose hat is emblazoned with a skull and crossbones, which has a mustache that matches the one on his face—looms over her with a wide grin. She takes in the larger-than-life presence and thinks, I’ve seen him before.

“Where were you headed?” The captain asks.

“North Blue,” she says, subtly stepping in front of Mihawk who seems ready to lunge at the man.

“No, no, no. Forget the Blues!” The man suddenly howls before pointing at her and Mihawk with both hands. “You two belong to the Grand Line, but, hm, you’re not ready for this part yet.”

Before she can blink, there’s a large hand clutching her shoulder, and she and Mihawk are being steered to the attacking pirate’s far grander ship. Mihawk’s wide eyes tell her that he never saw the man move either.

“Men, seems we’ve got some strapping young lads to escort!” The captain cries.

“Captain, that one’s a girl.” One of the pirates points out flatly, eyeing her bright gold, lacey dress.

“So he is.” The captain lets them go before spinning around in a flourish. “Now, to Paradise!”
Despite the pirate captain’s orders, it takes the crew a few minutes to load the ship, and she finds herself setting up two beds in yet another closet. She keeps her arm looped with Mihawk’s as much as possible. She sees the glint in his eyes every time he looks at the captain, sees his hand twitch to his sword.

Of course, she can’t keep hold of Mihawk for the entire trip, so she lets him go once the ship sails off. Naturally, he heads straight for the captain with a thirst for a fight. Mihawk doesn’t last two seconds before he’s caught in an unescapable hold designed for children.

“Hey, kid, I think I found a playmate for you,” the captain calls out.

“I don’t need a playmate! I’m a pirate!” A boy with bright red hair shouts out, shaking a fist.

“Nonsense, every kid needs friends their age,” the pirate captain says before throwing Mihawk at the red-haired child.

The two boys are a mess of tangled limbs, and with the way they’re growling at each other, she knows someone’s going to end up stabbed in a few moments. She can’t bring herself to care. Let Mihawk be someone else’s problem for a little while.

“Until I find you another one, play nice and don’t destroy the ship, okay? Rayleigh would kill me!” The captain laughs as Mihawk and the boy get into a fistfight.

“You bet I would! Shanks, don’t use your teeth, that’s unsanitary!” The blond man with a scar shouts.

She leans back against the railing and attempts to tune out the never ending yelling and screaming. For such scary looking pirates, they do sure squabble like a bunch of children. Never mind that one of them is an actual child.

Any attempts by the crew to chat with her get rebuffed. She’s not upset over her plans being forcefully rearranged—the only real plan she’s had is “survive Mihawk”—but being on this ship is giving her a sense of unease.

She doesn’t think these pirates will do anything to them, but there’s a feeling that something’s not adding up. Like she’s woken up from a dream and found her surroundings aren’t what they should be.

Uncaring of her unfriendly silence, the pirate captain soon appears to lean on the railing next to her like it’s the most natural thing in the world. She eyes the fancy red coat and thinks she may have seen it in a book once before.

“Quite the wild animal you’ve got there,” the man remarks, watching as Mihawk and Shanks continue to try to tear each other’s ears off.

“Blood oozes from his beak like a hungry man salivating. So many bodies you’ve fed him, so many lives eaten to fill his belly. Give it a few years, and I’m sure he’d be able to kill even me,” the captain muses with a wide grin.

There’s no condemnation in his words. She thinks, if anything, the man is eyeing Mihawk with something resembling curiosity and admiration. Perhaps he sees it too: the large beast hovering over the boy like a prophecy.

“Did his unbreakable wings draw you in?” The man asks.
She looks at Mihawk, still attempting to slug Shanks in the face, and thinks about how the boy
never lives his life less than what he wants it to be. It’s a morbid and terrible life, perhaps, but
Mihawk is the epitome of what freedom on soaring wings looks like.

“They’re what keep me from putting him down,” she answers honestly.

The silence between her and the captain is a comfortable one, and she remembers where she’s seen
his face before. The man left behind quite the legacy of bounty posters, biographies, and
newspaper clippings.

“Aren’t you Gold Roger?” She asks.

“Gol D. Roger. Very important distinction to make,” the man says, wagging a finger.

Yes, that’s what she was afraid of. She doesn’t think she’s on a ghost ship either; everyone here
feels too alive, too real to be an imprint left behind.

“Aren’t you supposed to be dead?”

“Am I?” Roger moves to look her straight in the eye; he’s uncomfortably close. “Oh, looks like I
am for you! How strange,” he remarks with a blink.

Strange indeed. She’s reminded of the way she met Mihawk to begin with. Clearly Roger isn’t the
one out of the ordinary here. She curls her hand into a fist and finds nothing off with it. She doesn’t
think she’s any less real either.

“You are the most dangerous thing on this ship. Did you know?” Roger suddenly says, eyes
lighting up with a strange excitement.

“How so?” She asks.

He can’t mean physically. She probably can’t take down the first mate let alone the man beside
her. This ship is full of some of the most powerful people she’ll ever meet; she feels it.

“Fate doesn’t affect you. You already broke it,” he says, rubbing his neck. “What a delightful,
terrifying monster I picked up.”

She has a vague idea of what he means, thinks it has to do with her soul not fully belonging to this
plane of existence. She supposes that would make her something of an abomination to the world,
would make her something of a monster.

“I suppose it’s fitting that the wild animal’s master is a monster,” she says.

Chapter End Notes

No, I don’t know when I’ll stop.
The next few days are the furthest thing from peaceful—every hour there’s a monster attack, pirates, life-threatening weather, or worst of all, Roger gets bored—but the red-haired child, Shanks, keeps Mihawk entertained, being the only person who can both fight back and be defeated on this particular ship.

With her servant bothering someone else, she should have been able to stay in her room and get some damn sleep. What she hadn’t counted on is Roger deciding to take over Mihawk’s position of looming over her shoulder and being an annoyance.

“Captain, ah,” one of the pirates falters at her glare.

“The young lady lad doesn’t want to be seen with us in case someone mistakes him for a pirate,” Roger beams before lifting her up proudly and showing her off like a new toy. “So this here is Kali Read! My nephew!”

Roger’s crew looks back and forth from her to their captain. A tinier version of Roger’s fancy red coat covers a dress shirt and pants; a copy of the captain’s pirate hat adorns her newly cut hair.

She knows what she looks like: a kid in a Gol D. Roger costume. At least he listened to her demands of “no cravat.”

The hat shades her eyes, giving her a dangerous look, and she uses it to strengthen her glare. She dares anyone to speak. No one does. Roger twirls her away to show her off to everyone else. Mihawk—who was in the middle of beating up Shanks—nearly gets sent overboard by the distraction.

“We’ll have to get you a good sword. My brother wouldn’t forgive me if anything happened to you!” Roger laughs, patting her on the back so hard her hat goes askew.

“I’m not actually your nephew,” she reminds him sourly. “Do you even have a brother?”

Roger, whether a fan of theatrics or just keeping to his word of not letting her face get recognized, keeps up the charade of having a nephew onboard. Anytime a crewmember starts to call her by her actual name, Roger appears seemingly out of thin air to loudly call for “Kali Read.”

Damn Mihawk for being so amused by the whole thing.

It’s not that she really minds the outfit or the new name—and the male pronouns were always acceptable—but she can’t bring herself to be happy with the cover story of “loving his uncle so much he dresses to imitate him.”

More importantly, she remembers the horror stories surrounding those associated with the Pirate King. If her face ever gets associated with Gol D. Roger…

“She’s going to get me killed,” she says, tugging her hat over her face.

“Nonsense! Now let me introduce you to Newgate! He won’t be able to decide whether he wants to kill you or to give you candy,” Roger laughs, grabbing her by the shoulders and steering her to an exceedingly large man bellowing for Roger to show himself.

The battles between Whitebeard and the Pirate King were legendary, enough so that they were
written into the history books. Considering the sea is currently swirling around them like a large, angry colosseum, leaving their two ships sitting on dry land, she thinks the books may have been understating things.

Mihawk keeps one pace behind the captain and her, and she thinks she can hear his bloodthirst beating like a heart. His hand never goes to his sword. Even Mihawk has to know he’s completely outclassed.

At least I won’t die alone, she thinks as Roger pushes her up to the literal giant of a man. She doesn’t even make it to the top of the man’s knee.

“Finally got yourself a good ship, I see!” Roger calls out cheerfully.

The man, Edward Newgate, bends over slightly to frown at them with squinty eyes. He looks far younger than the bounty posters she remembers. She cranes her neck to get a better look. Long blond hair flows from a white hat, surrounding a lightly wrinkled face.

“Roger,” the man booms, “if you try to throw children at me, then I’m going to—”

“You got it wrong!” Roger says, waving his hands desperately. “I only wanted to introduce my nephew and his friend to the coolest person I know!”

Roger grabs her by the waist and lifts her above his head. She can only blink in answer to Whitebeard’s stupefied expression. She has no idea what’s going on either.

“Work with me, he might share his wine if we do this right,” Roger mutters in her ear.

“This is Kali Read, my nephew who loves me. A lot. So much, he wants to be exactly like me when he grows up,” Roger begins with a sugary tone. “He just lost his parents, and I stepped in to fill the role. Ah, my poor brother. It was a pretty gruesome death, very traumatic! And his mother, oh, she’d be rolling in her grave if I had just abandoned the boy.”

So both her parents are dead then? Good to know. She continues staring at the giant man; something about his face seems off, she muses.

“And this is his loyal friend, Mihawk—” “Dracule Mihawk,” Mihawk interjects pointedly. “—yes, that, who’s going to be the world’s strongest swordsman! I’d grab him so you can see him better, but he’d probably try to bite me.”

Mihawk sure would. She’s honestly considering doing the same herself. Being held up like this is far from comfortable.

“Say hello!” Roger tells her with a shake.

“I thought your mustache was bigger than that,” she blurts as she finally figures out what’s bugging her.

Whitebeard immediately reaches for his mustache with wide eyes. The men standing behind him puff up in offense. The hands holding her tremble, and Roger’s giggles break the shocked silence.

“I see the family resemblance,” Whitebeard remarks dryly.

“Kids these days, ay?” Roger says, finally letting her down. “As you can tell, these two aren’t ready for our kind of fights. Mind taking a break for today? Super traumatic,” Roger reminds Whitebeard with teary eyes.
“Get back to your ship, Roger,” Whitebeard sighs in disappointment.

She’s already heading back to the ship when Roger hurries to pull her back to his side. He keeps a hand firmly clamped over her hat, ensuring she is both frozen and unable to see. Mihawk stays by her side the whole time, but it’s not out of loyalty. She can feel the amusement radiating off the boy.

“Actually, I was hoping you could tell my nephew here some great stories, preferably over some food and wine?” Roger grins.

“Can I just go back to the ship?” She asks miserably.

The hand on her hat disappears, and she adjusts it back into place with a frown. A black boot stands in front of her, and she’s given no warning before a large hand grabs her. She blinks and big eyes blink back. She looks down to see Mihawk straining against Gol D. Roger’s hold with a snarl.

“Have you heard about the time Roger accidentally switched his flag with his underwear?” Whitebeard suddenly asks.

“Hey, now—” Roger sputters before yelping as Mihawk successfully bites a finger.

“No,” she says loudly, “I’d like to hear it.”
If there’s one thing good about her age, is that no one expects her to be able to answer questions about Gol D. Roger despite being his relative. Presenting as male makes her look even younger, and while she puts it to good use by voicing any questions that come to mind—

“Why’s your mustache white if your hair’s blond?” She asks from atop Whitebeard’s shoulder. “Do you shape it, or is it natural? Do you get offended by copycats?”

No one actually asked her if she wanted to perch on the man’s shoulder like a parrot, but the candy that finds its way into her hands while Whitebeard and Roger reminisce goes a long way in mollifying her.

She crunches on a sucker and throws a glare down at Roger. “I think I want a mustache like yours instead of Uncle’s.”

Roger clutches at his chest in betrayal.

—it’s utterly hilarious that Whitebeard’s crew thinks Mihawk’s her minder. She almost laughs so hard that she cries when they praise him for looking out for her. Mihawk, the bastard, nods like the responsible, stoic brother figure they think he is.

“They have no idea,” she whispers to Mihawk as they are forced into something resembling a kiddie table, “no idea what I put up with.”

Despite being enemies, no one on either ship seems to mind the impromptu truce. They set up tables and chairs between the two ships and roll out kegs and barrels. She tries to ignore the raging ocean still circling around them, and the giant sea life still flopping around the former sea floor.

“Clearly.” Mihawk says, eyeing the wine on the table next to them, “or else they would know you are the furthest thing from ‘cute.’ ”

She laughs at Mihawk’s repulsed expression. Out of everything that’s been said, that was the only thing Mihawk took issue with.

If she were to say who Whitebeard reminds her of, it’d be his grandfather that he met only a handful of times. He never knew the man that well, but his grandfather was intimidating, always drinking, and yet, oddly doting.

She can’t say Whitebeard is too young to be a grandfather—depending on the island, having babies young is normal—but most of his crew chant “father.” Even so, she starts calling the man “Grandpa” in her head.

“Say goodbye,” Roger says patting her roughly on the back. “If you stick to the shadows, you won’t ever see Newgate again.” Roger points to Mihawk. “You, on the other hand, will probably be a thorn in his side one day.”

She utters a polite goodbye, but since she’s supposed to be imitating her dear old Uncle, she waits until she’s on the ship to shout with fervent waving,

“Bye, Grandpa!”

Whitebeard’s face is big enough she can see his poleaxed expression from the railing. The sea
moves to rush back into place after being held up for so long, and she holds on to the railing with a
death grip. Mihawk, who stands behind her, reaches around to grab the railing, trapping her
between his arms.

When the water hits their ship, she almost lets go at the sheer force of it. Mihawk grunts as she
knocks into him, but neither of them falls. A few seconds later, the ship is sailing away, and none
of the crew act like anything ever happened.

Such things are normal on the Grand Line, she guesses.

“I’m going to take a nap,” she says with a yawn. “Be my responsible caretaker and take care of me
by not waking me up.”

It’s probably her imagination that Mihawk’s lips curl into a semblance of a smile. The closest he’s
ever came to smiling is when he bares his teeth during a fight.

When her head hits the pillow, she makes the mistake of assuming she’d make it through without a
rude awakening. Everyone’s full of food and alcohol; there shouldn’t be any screaming for a while
yet.

Something jolts her awake, and she’s moving before she’s fully aware of what she’s doing. When
she comes to, she’s strangling a familiar red-haired child whose fingers are sticky with something
that smells suspiciously like strawberry.

She moves her hands away from the child’s neck but keeps an iron grip on his shoulder. There’s an
opened jar of strawberry preserves staining her bedding. This is going to take forever to clean.

“Boy, you have ten seconds to explain,” she hisses.

“It’s not fair!” The child cries. “I get stuck on the ship, and you get shown off as the captain’s
nephew!”

Freaking really, that’s what this is about? She’s never been good with children, let alone
irrationally jealous ones. If she were to think back to Shimotsuki, her experience would tell her to
break Shank’s arm. She doesn’t think Roger would approve however.

“Listen, Shaq—”

“Shanks!”

“Yes, that,” she knows his name, but that doesn’t mean he has to know that, “you know we’re only
here temporarily, right? When the captain drops us off, we’ll have nothing to do with him.”

Kali Read will be no more if she has anything to say about it. Though once Mihawk kills her, she
supposes she won’t have anything to do with anyone.

“It wouldn’t have been a loss if Whitebeard had decided to kill us or take us hostage but you?” She
pauses, struggling to find the right words. “You’re crew. Roger actually cares about you. He
probably would have killed everyone there if anything happened to you.”

She’s seen the captain’s watchfulness every time Shanks decides to help with “pirate things,” seen
how the rest of the crew watch over the boy like a son rather than a crewmate. No doubt Shanks’
age—he’s definitely younger than Mihawk and her—leads to some coddling.

Admittedly, this is still a pirate ship, and she’s seen the crew placing bets on how long Shanks can
last against Mihawk, or debates on whether their fights will cause the boy to lose teeth.

“When you’re older, you’ll be known as the Pirate King’s legacy,” she says knowingly.

She’s just making shit up at this point though. She wasn’t interested in pirate history, so there’s a good chance this boy bites the bullet. Still, if it gets this brat to leave her alone—which means Roger won’t kill her for snapping his neck—she’ll sing his praises all day.

“Me? His legacy?” Shanks whispers.

“Yes, you’re sailing with the Pirate King,” she tells him, “whereas I’m literally training my executioner to better kill me. Don’t be jealous.”

Of course, the kid runs off and doesn’t bother helping her clean the mess he made. She even has to put the leftover preserves back into storage. She can’t help but think, *I hate children.*

“You didn’t stop him,” she accuses Mihawk who watches her scrub her sheets with rainwater.

“If you couldn’t sense such an attack, then there’s no hope for you,” Mihawk says.

“Jokes on you,” she smiles, “this won’t dry in time. Guess whose bed I’ll be sleeping in tonight?”

True to her word, she grabs her pillow and flops onto the other bed. Mihawk, of course, takes that as a challenge to fight her for it. No swords get involved, but even blankets and pillows prove to be deadly. She’s almost smothered twice, but it’s Mihawk who ends up squished against the wall, struggling against her hold in vain.

“Let go!” Mihawk growls.

“Still your master,” she sings. “Try again in a few years.”

She doesn’t know who falls asleep first, but when Roger throws the door open, she’s in the middle of drooling on Mihawk’s stomach. Roger, not caring about her state of dress, picks her up, shoves a hat on her head, and carries her out onto deck. Mihawk, the traitor, never moves, choosing to go back to sleep.

“Tell me, can you hear the wind whisper in your ear? Can you hear the howling of the trees or the song of the sea?” Roger laughs with arms wide open.

“No,” she says, rubbing her eyes.

“Not yet, you mean,” Roger says. “Give it time, give it time.”

The morning air contains a chill, and someone is kind enough to fetch her red coat. She buttons it over her night dress as Roger gazes out at sea with a distant look in his eyes.

“I’m about to tell you something very important. It’s something you’ll need on the Grand Line. They call it Haki,” the captain says with an air of grim determination.

“Now, they’ll tell you Haki is the energy of everything around you, and that you can use it to strengthen yourself, to sense the world around you, to make others fall to their knees—and they’re right! But they’re also wrong.”

Roger never explains who “they” are, but she guesses he means “everyone but me.” Eyes of madness dig into hers, and she almost pulls her hat over her face. She’s too tired for this. Roger’s grin only widens at her blank expression.
“Haki is so much more than that! It’s binding the world to your will! Following these so-called rules just limits what you can do. Understand? Shatter mountains, walk on water, breathe fire—do whatever you want. If you’re strong enough to take on the world, you can take on the world.”

Well, Haki certainly explains the supernatural abilities that don’t come from Devil Fruit. Perhaps this energy is the reason physics is so damn ridiculous in this world.

“And how am I supposed to use Haki?” She has no idea where to even begin.

“That’s something you got to learn on your own. Through trial and tribulation. When people tell you ‘no,’ you have to say ‘yes.’ This world has the power of devils and spirits. You just have to figure out how to use them, to make them reality!” Roger laughs, twirling around her like a maniac.

“Got it. Can I go back to sleep?” She asks blearily.

“Dream the dream of monsters!” Roger waves.

That’s a “yes” if she ever heard one. She trudges back to the closet serving as her room. When she passes by a familiar-looking pirate with a scar over his eye, she pauses and considers things. Roger wasn’t being quiet, so this man probably overheard the whole speech.

“Hey, could you tell Mihawk the standard explanation of Haki when he gets up? I don’t think he’ll care for that one,” she asks the man.

“The standard—did you actually understand what he said?” The pirate asks, dumbfounded.

“Yes?” It’s not like Roger was being cryptic.

When she gets back to her room, she frowns down at her still damp bedsheets. She looks over to see Mihawk sprawled over his bed as if to keep her out of it. Like that’s going to stop her.

“Move over,” she says, sliding in and pulling on the covers.

Mihawk grunts but doesn’t fight her this time. They end up back to back, and she finds it surprisingly comfortable.

(“Why did you tell her that? You know that’s not how Haki works,” Rayleigh sighs.

“But he doesn’t know that, does she?” Roger snickers.

The Pirate King paces back and forth, cackling as if swept away by madness.

“Rayleigh, there’s quite a few things you can do with a sleeping monster. Kill it, catch it, break it, or!” Roger pauses in his pacing to hold up a finger. “Or you can walk away.”

“But where’s the fun in that? Let us poke it with a stick and see what happens!”)
“Oho, Looks like Garp’s come to play!” Roger shouts from somewhere above her.

She snaps her book shut, tucks it under her arm, and heads for her room. She knows by now what that sound of glee actually means. She has no desire to lose her eyebrows—or her head—to some random explosion.

A sharp tug on the back of her coat stops her, and she’s being herded to the side of the deck before she can even protest. She glares up at Roger who beams down at her.

“We don’t have time to fight or escape Garp. If we want to stay on schedule, we’ll have to strike from a different angle,” Roger tells her before reaching into his coat. “Cover your face with this.”

“We’re on a schedule?” She asks but gets no answer.

She’s handed a white scarf, and she decides not to question anything else at this point. Wrapping it around the lower portion of her face, she finds that it’s surprisingly light and breathable. She adjusts her hat so that it shades out her eyes.

“Now Garp might not seem all that bright, but he’s good at pretending in all the ways. If you meet him as Kuina, he’ll say he doesn’t know you even though he will,” Roger tells her, banging on the railing in restlessness. “Oh, I can’t wait to see his face!”

“So what am I doing in this grand plan of yours?” She asks sourly.

“Why, dear nephew, you’re going to work that charm of yours!”

“That’s what I was afraid of.”

Roger must have scarily good perception because it takes a while before a Marine ship appears on the horizon. The moment the white sails appear, however, is the moment hundreds of cannonballs fly towards their ship. Hundreds of cannonballs that are on fire.

She doesn’t know what she expects the pirates to do, but Roger jumping up to send most of them back by punching them in quick succession is not it. The ones that Roger misses get dealt with by the rest of crew, and it’s like watching a group of talented martial artists swat flies.

“Roger! You’re under arrest!”

The yell is loud even to her ears, and she marvels at the person’s ability to project their voice. The Marine ship isn’t anywhere close to them. Another wave of cannonballs get sent their way, coming so fast and strong the sea parts for each one.

“I see he figured that energy stuff out,” she mutters as Mihawk slices a cannonball in half. “That was fast.”

Mihawk’s sword is of excellent quality, but it shouldn’t be able to withstand such a force, which is how she knows he’s using Haki. She won’t make it to tomorrow at this rate. If Mihawk comes at her with superpowers, then she’s doomed.
She’s not sure about trying to punch what is essentially a missile in motion but cutting it might work. She unsheathes her sword, and her heart beats in her ears as she waits.

If Mihawk can do it with only a simple explanation, then she can do it too. *I have to*, she thinks.

Roger, realizing what she’s trying to do, doesn’t cover for her when the next wave gets sent out. She breathes deeply. Spirits give her strength. She refuses to fail here. A cannonball comes her way, and she raises her blade.

“Bind the world to your will. Take what you can, give nothing back,” she utters and swings her sword.

She thinks she feels something go through her arms like an electric current, but it might be because she’s hitting a freaking cannonball with a sword. To her utter confusion, the iron ball neither tears her to pieces nor gets sliced in half. Instead it flies right back to the Marine ship like an overly large golf ball.

“Is it supposed to do that?” She asks, rubbing her wrist.

“Yes! Yes, it is!” Roger giggles. “Look at it swerve as if hit by a drunken seal! Garp won’t know what to do with that one.”

She supposes he doesn’t because no more cannonballs appear after that. Roger jumps onto the railing and waits with a satisfied grin as the Marine ship gets closer.

“Roger, is one of your pirates a drunk seal?” A large, muscled man bearing a white coat yells from the bow of the Marine ship.

The Grand Line is full of giants apparently. As the Marine ship gets closer, she has to crane her neck slightly. The man glaring at them with arms crossed has a powerful presence, but she takes in the black suit straining against bulky muscles which blends into black hair.

“Is that a gorilla or a man?” She questions.

“He’s a Monkey,” Roger tells her before cupping his hands around his mouth. “Hey, Garp! You gorilla! Get off my ocean!”

“Just because you proclaim yourself king doesn’t make it true!” Garp shouts back.

The two supposed men begin trading insults, and she can tell that Roger is quickly forgetting that he *doesn’t* want to fight. Marines flood the deck of the ship across from them, and Roger’s crew begins cracking their knuckles behind her. Mihawk kicks her boot, and she takes the prodding for what it is.

“Hey, can you please let my uncle drop me off before you arrest him?” She asks, getting up on the rail beside Roger.

There’s a moment of confused silence. Garp looks from Roger to her with a dumbstruck expression which makes him look even more like a gorilla. Roger is completely insulted about her lack of faith in him and says as much.

“Uncle?” Garp utters blankly.

“This here’s my nephew, Kali Read! His parents just died, tragically. And it’s super traumatic for him. I was just on my way to drop him off in a good-natured, Marine-friendly environment. So he
can recover from his trauma and figure out what he wants to do with his life,” Roger lies through his teeth.

She gives the Marine a dull stare. If she thinks about it, just being around Mihawk and Roger can be called traumatic. She doubts Roger will actually drop her off somewhere she can recover from them though.

“And are you a pirate?” Garp asks.

“No,” she answers flatly. “Not yet!” Roger corrects her immediately.

A wide grin meets her glare, and she gives Garp her best sorrowful look. The scarf covers most of her face, but if she tilts her hat just so, then he should be able to see the light hitting her tears.

“Please let me get off this ship,” she begs. “I don’t want to end up stranded on an island with him. Or in prison with him. I’d rather die.”

“Super traumatic,” Roger echoes once more, pushing down on her hat painfully.

Garp looks from Roger to her before rubbing his face with a grimace. She would honestly not blame the man if he decided to go ahead and attack. It’s not like she’s wearing a Gol D. Roger outfit or anything.

“Let’s go! I was never here!” Garp declares, turning around and walking away.

“But—” One of the Marines tries to argue.

“I can’t abide putting innocent children in the crossfire. Never. Here.” Garp growls before calling over his shoulder, “Roger, you can’t evade the law forever!”

“Perhaps not, but it’ll be on my own terms,” Roger grins before grabbing her and hopping off the railing. “Onward now! We’re behind schedule.”

She never does get to know what Roger means by “schedule.”

The rest of the day is relatively peaceful from there. Paradise is apparently the nicer part of the Grand Line. It’s not until dinner, when she’s eating in comfortable silence with Mihawk, that she realizes something important. Monkey. Garp.

“Are you telling me that I called myself Roger’s nephew to the ‘Hero of the Marines’?”

And from what Roger said, Garp will know it’s her even outside of her disguise. Lovely.

Chapter End Notes

Mihawk had more than a simple explanation, but Kuina doesn’t know that.
Her friend will be the strongest swordsman 9

There’s a party the night before Roger drops Mihawk and her off on an island in Paradise. They haven’t been on board long enough for such a sendoff, but perhaps the Roger Pirates simply like parties.

She can’t bring herself to dance and sing, but she’s content to watch everyone having fun. Plus, someone has to keep Mihawk away from the alcohol. She snatches a mug of beer out of Mihawk’s hands and tosses it over her shoulder. There’s scrambling behind her to catch it; someone curses her loudly.

“You’re too young,” she says before switching tactics at his unimpressed expression. “Go ahead then. When you get hooked and damage your body’s growth, I’ll be the world’s strongest swordsman.”

There’s a silent staring contest, and she raises an eyebrow. It might be acceptable in this world for kids to drink, but it doesn’t erase the fact that it still causes health issues.

“You will gift me with the best,” Mihawk scowls at her before reaching for water.

“Assuming I live long enough, I’ll find us something to share,” she promises.

Her plans to abstain from alcohol went out the door the moment she started handling dead bodies on a daily basis. If she descends back in alcoholism, she’ll blame Mihawk. If she dies, she’ll blame Mihawk. Everything can be blamed on Mihawk, really.

A familiar head of red hair soon makes its way over to her corner, and she scoots back in case another fight breaks out. Mihawk, apparently too relaxed to bother, simply moves to let Shanks sit down. A straw hat gets shoved into her face.

“This is my most precious treasure,” Shanks tells her with a wide smile before placing it on his head. “When you see me next, I will be the Pirate King’s legacy!”

The hat is too big for the child, but somehow it seems fitting instead of ridiculous. It’s nothing more than a plain straw hat, but for a moment, it looks like a crown. She eyes the water in her hands and wonders if someone put something in it.

“Counting on it, Shook,” she says.

“It’s Shanks!”

Mihawk does end up punching Shanks in the stomach, but he takes care not to mess up the straw hat. When Shanks tackles Mihawk in retaliation, there’s a laugh instead of a scream. It’s cute, she thinks. Mihawk’s somehow made a friend. She wonders what that says about her; she’s as friendless as the day she arrived in this world.

There was a boy once, who could have been her friend.

Before she can lose herself to melancholy, Roger is there, looming over her with a laugh. A plate of grapes gets dropped into her lap, and the captain starts up a commentary on Mihawk and Shank’s fight.

“I’ll have to pick up another playmate for him soon. Perhaps one that’ll make me laugh,” Roger
muses. “I never intended to have one so young aboard, but such is how the world works.”

She bites into a grape and considers the man standing over her. She used to think of Gold Roger as a terrifying man who ruled the world. As someone who inspired terrible acts across the seas. She still thinks that, but now that she knows the man, she thinks there’s far more to him than that, than a legacy of pirate attacks on innocent people.

“What does being a pirate actually mean to you?” She wants to know.

Roger doesn’t answer her right away. Drunken singing fills the silence, and Shanks’ excited gabbing gets lost into the background. Roger gulps down a mug of beer before excitedly pointing up at the stars.

“To go out and find your freedom, to sail the high seas, discover new lands, find buried treasure! This is what it means to be a pirate!” Roger’s arm falls, and he moves so she can’t see his face. “But such a life comes with cost, and we must make the most of the time we have left.”

Before she can say anything, Roger bursts into laughter and gestures around wildly with his mug.

“It may not be for forever, but the price is worth it! To defy the chains holding us down. To be yourself and no one else. To live life exactly how you want with the people you consider family. There’s nothing better!”

Adventure, freedom, and love—what a romantic view Roger has. In her time, in his time, pirates were selfish people who took, uncaring of the harm caused to others. Their bad reputation exceeds even some of the worst Marines.

Looking at Gol D. Roger with his ever-present grin, she supposes not all pirates have to be malicious. The man certainly didn’t have to take in two children and give them a ride. The Pirate King is far more than what any history book could ever attempt to claim. Among the scattered light of lanterns, she thinks he shines the brightest.

“When you die, there will be so many pirates chasing after fortune, freedom, and fame, it will be known as the Golden Age. The world shakes, and chaos follows in your death,” she says.

Roger’s eyes widen, and she thinks he looks far too pleased by her words. He’s never asked about the time she comes from, and she has no desire to tell. Since this is goodbye, she doesn’t see the harm in mentioning the obvious. Of course Roger’s death will have consequences.

“Oh, little monster, you will cause far more chaos than I ever will. My fate is tied to the world’s. You follow no rules, bend to nothing. You will tear the future asunder! I’d keep you if I didn’t think it’d lead me to an early grave,” Roger remarks with a wistful tone.

“Sorry, I can’t be tied down even to your ideas of freedom.”

The island Roger leaves them on is rather normal, oddly enough. The inhabitants have a well-developed town with a busy port and plenty of places to shop at. The buildings look modern and simple, and the people running around look like regular human beings.

“So how are you going to ruin this for me?” She asks Mihawk.

“I am not the one wearing a hat with Roger’s symbol,” he rebukes.

Considering that everyone on the island came out to see the Pirate King, she kept her disguise on. A little girl with blue hair isn’t associated with Gol D. Roger and the natural disaster known as
Dracule Mihawk, and she intends to keep it that way.

“Kali Read will never make it off this island.” she says adamantly. “When whatever you do gets us kicked out, no one with that name is ever heard from again.”

The white scarf remains wrapped around her face, and it serves the purpose of keeping people too unsettled to interact with her. Mihawk’s eyes keep anyone braver away. The ones that watch her without fear are the ones she keeps track of.

It’s not Mihawk who starts the trouble for once; when she’s sitting on a boulder by the beach, attempting to figure out why Roger left her a pistol and how to safely work it, she gets jumped. Spinning in place, she spreads her legs and puts the end of the gun on the man’s forehead.

“You timed your steps with the waves. That’s pretty good,” she admits, being careful of the blade digging into the rock between her legs.

“I thought your group was trying to kidnap me?” She asks, putting her finger on the trigger.

The man has an eyepatch and the scars boasting of many fights. There’s no fear in his remaining eye, only hate. Her gun digging into his forehead keeps him frozen, but that won’t last for too much longer. There are no bullets in the pistol.

“Roger took everything from me. I refuse to keep his blood on our ship. I will take your head and put it on his flag,” the man snarls.

The man’s arms tense, and she gets ready to throw the knife hidden in her sleeve.

“Nothing more than a worm that dreams too big.”

A blade goes through the man’s leg, and blood sprays the boulder instead of her. Piercing yellow eyes meet hers before the man gets thrown away into the sand. Mihawk stalks over to the man with a dangerous air about him, and what happens next makes her cover her eyes with a sleeve.

She’s never seen Mihawk play with his victims before, and it makes for a terrible sight. He must be in a very bad mood.

“You know everyone on the island heard his screams, right?” She says, handing Mihawk her polishing cloth to wipe his face with.

“Let them come. I will fell them all,” Mihawk declares, eyes burning bright.

She taps the dead man’s sword against the boulder and debates keeping it. It’s a good make—all swords on the Grand Line seem to be—and it wouldn’t hurt to see about selling later. It can’t beat the sword Roger “found” for her though.

(“What’s wrong? It’s practically brand new!” Roger cries, waving the katana at her.

“A Sea King threw that up. There’s vomit sticking to it,” she says in disbelief.

Roger mutters unkind words about her, but she doesn’t let her hands touch it until every inch of the sword has been meticulously cleaned.)

There’s nothing wrong with the black wrapped sword Roger gave her, but she wonders if she can get a custom scabbard for it. Something colorful perhaps.

“I suppose I should be saying thanks,” she says, steering clear of the remains of her attacker.
“It was a chance to work on channeling Haki into my blade, nothing more,” Mihawk says stiffly. She doesn’t call him on it, choosing to walk along the shoreline and away from the gore. Mihawk follows behind her, and she pulls down the scarf to feel the wind on her face. She taps her newly attained sword against her shoulder.

“You know, Kali Read really loves his uncle. He’d try to imitate him by going after his would-be kidnappers like an idiot,” she mentions. “He’d probably have fun with monologues too.”

Charging into an unknown group of enemies is the height of stupid, and a great way to claim someone’s death. As Kuina, all she has to say is that she’s a prisoner of a grief-stricken Mihawk, and no one will ever know.

“There seems to be a good many in the group, and they mentioned a ship. It’ll be fairly large. If we find it, we’ll find them,” Mihawk says, considering.

The two of them have been making a list of everyone who watches her with ill-intent. She has no doubt they’re facing a big pirate crew, perhaps a former one if they’ve run into Roger.

“Well, as Kali Read’s first and last battle, this might be fun,” she says.

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“All hail, Captain Kali Read!” Someone shouts, throwing up a fist.

“What,” she says from the deck of her new ship.
Her friend will be the strongest swordsman 10

“What now, Captain?” One of her pirates ask.

She drums her fingers on the railing surrounding the helm; the platform she stands on gives her a good view of the people below her. Mihawk stands beside her, smiling like the bastard he is. This situation may be hilarious from his point of view, but she can’t bring herself to laugh.

She’s now the captain of a pirate crew which contains people that planned to kidnap her. Can she even blame Mihawk for this one?

So it began like this:

“I think the ship with the people wanting to kill us is the one we’re looking for,” she remarks, reaching for her sword.

The ship is a large one, but not particularly grand. The paint is faded and chipped, and the name has been scratched out. Even so, everything looks to be in good shape. From the deck, roughly twenty people aim weapons—from guns to bows to throwing knives—at them.

“Kill them all and take the ship,” Mihawk orders. “Anyone who surrenders will be used to sail it.”

What Mihawk means is that anyone who doesn’t fight back is to become their slaves. The only reason she doesn’t argue against it is because she expects everyone to fight to the death. No matter how many times she’s tried, no one’s ever picked the peaceful option.

There’s just something about Mihawk that sends people into a frenzy. It might be something of an instinctual fight or flight response.

Assuming everyone is on the deck and they all want to kill her is the first mistake. Her second is when she decides to have fun in pretending to be Roger’s nephew.

“I am Kali Read, the Pirate Prince! You lot better kneel and beg forgiveness less you lose your heads!” She cries, raising her blade up dramatically.

In her defense, she thought everyone actually would end up losing their head. Can’t be embarrassed about something no one knows happened, right? Mihawk doesn’t count. He won’t talk; he’ll have to kill her before she lets him.

When the first shot is fired, it signals everyone to follow suit. Mihawk deflects the bullets, and she gets the rest. They make their way to the ship without a problem. Honestly, hitting arrows and knives back to their users is a lot easier than a damn cannonball.

“These seas belong to my uncle. He’s the famous Gold Roger. You’re foolish if you think he’d simply listen to your demands,” she remarks. “He’d rather set fire to the ocean and watch everything burn.”

Mihawk rushes past her to meet someone’s blade, and she tilts her head in a way to catch everyone’s eyes. This monologue thing isn’t too bad. Telling people how stupid they are is kind of cathartic actually.

“But you’re far more than foolish if you think I am simply a child to use for bargaining,” she utters darkly. “I am Kali Read, and I do whatever the hell I want.”
She takes four heads before someone tries to blow the ship up.

“We fall by our own hands!” A lit torch is thrown at barrels of gunpowder.

To stop the torch from landing, she swipes in its direction with her sword, causing something of an air blast. The torch breaks into pieces and the fire vanishes in an instant. She cuts down the person who threw it, and when she turns around, the remaining pirates begin slamming their heads into the floor and doing a full body bow.

“Please forgive us!” “I’m sorry, don’t kill me!” “I beg you to let me live!”

And perhaps more memorably,

“Thank you,” a woman with an overly large head utters. “I want to die on my own terms, not because of that fool.”

Mihawk is next to her, sword still in hand, and giving each pirate a considering glance. She finds herself at a loss. She was hoping to sell the ship and everything on it for a smaller one.

“Remain there with your heads bowed. If you move even a single finger, I’ll kill you,” she says to buy herself some time. “Show me your resolve to live.”

Mihawk stays to watch over the pirates, and she heads below deck to check for any surprises. Everything seems normal—and there are no pirates waiting to ambush her—but when she gets to the cargo hold, well, a surprise is definitely what she finds.

“Slaves,” she hisses, “it’s a wonder Roger let them live.”

Cages big and small hold roughly ten people stripped of their clothes and their dignity. Most of them look human, but there’s a lady that seems to have fish-like legs. Some look at her with fear, some with a dull, lifeless look.

A young woman whose body is littered with scars and burn marks, who has no hair and whose face looks like someone chewed it up and spat it out, lifts her head and looks her straight in the eye.

“I heard you through the walls. You’re the Pirate King’s nephew,” the woman says, voice hoarse. “What do you plan to do with us?”

No one’s making this easy for her apparently. She doesn’t have the keys, but she doesn’t need them. With a quick movement of her sword, the locks break and the cage doors swing open by the force.

“Get out of here and get off my ship,” she says flatly. “Take anything you want, but leave the important stuff. I will strike you down if you take the damn sail like an idiot.”

She makes for the deck, too unsettled to stick around. Mihawk glances at her uneasy expression and frowns. She looks at the pirates still kneeling and wonders how far mercy should stretch. She weighs her options silently until she senses the former captives getting close.

“They were keeping slaves,” she tells Mihawk. “I told them to get off the ship.”

She glares down at the pirates. It’s a shame they haven’t moved; killing them would have solved all her problems. Should she let these slavers go, or should she kill them in cold blood after dangling life before their eyes?
“You could have used the slaves for sailing instead,” Mihawk says, tone oddly gently.

“I have no need for slaves. The world has no need for slaves. They should have never been on this ship,” she says, crossing her arms. “Being a pirate is about freedom. It’s not about taking away anyone else’s. Roger has that right at least.”

“Four people won’t sail this ship,” Mihawk points out.

“I don’t want a crew that only thinks of themselves, and I don’t need a crew that lives in fear of me. I won’t force anyone against their will.”

She doesn’t actually want a crew to begin with. She’s leaning to letting the pirates go and getting a small ship. Perhaps she’ll try to hire a navigator.

“What if we want to go with you?” A hoarse voice asks behind her.

The woman with the scars and burn marks appears to have turned a blanket into something of a dress. The others wear mismatched clothing, obtained from digging through the pirates’ luggage. A few eyes still look glassy, but most of the former slaves have something of a spark about them.

“And why would you want to do that?” She hopes she doesn’t sound dejected.

There’s a perfectly good island right there. She’s sure someone would gladly help freed slaves. She doesn’t want to be responsible for this many traumatized people. She’s definitely not the right person for the job.

“What’s left for us? I don’t even remember where home is,” the woman with scaly legs cries.

“I don’t think I can go back to living on an island,” a man with a mangled arm says.

“I’m too scared,” an androgynous teenager admits.

Mihawk doesn’t voice an opinion, leaving the decision in her hands. She does need people to sail the ship, but it’s not a guarantee these people know how to. She decides to deal with the most pressing matters first.

“So what do you think I should do with them?” She nods to the pirates still kneeling.

There’s a moment of contemplative silence, and she thinks one of the pirates shakes. She pretends she doesn’t see it.

“Do what you want. That is your creed, isn’t it?” Someone finally says.

They’re not wrong. She did say that, and she doesn’t feel like executing anyone, so.

“Raise your heads. I’m letting you go. Get off my ship,” she tells the pirates.

One raises his head immediately and bolts for it. Another man moves carefully and slowly as if not to anger her. The other two pirates remain kneeling in place.

“Pirate Prince, what does being a pirate mean to you?” The woman with the large head asks.

That’s a familiar question. It’d be easy to repeat the words handed to her, but she gives her answer more consideration than that.

“It means fighting against the world. To fight against the society that would enslave you.” She
thinks about Roger. “To sail ever on and find the adventure that makes life worth living. To love what you do.”

She’s still not a pirate, but that would be her best guess.

“You’re young, but you’re definitely Roger’s. I’ll throw my lot in with yours,” the pirate says before turning to the one kneeling beside her. “What about you, Corv?”

“I never liked slave trading and hostages. Going down while finding adventure is more appealing than dying as a thug,” the man, Corv admits.

Wait a minute, something’s not adding up. She needs a sailing crew, not a—

“All hail, Captain Kali Read! All hail, the Pirate Prince!” Someone shouts.

“We’ll need to get some black material for a flag. Should we steal it, or should we buy it?” Someone asks.

“Are we going to be considered part of the Pirate King’s fleet?”

“Excuse me, but what’s the name of your pirate crew? Our crew, I mean.”

Twelve strangers all clamor for her attention, and she feels like the world’s gone topsy-turvy. Unable to find her voice, she turns to Mihawk and silently begs. There’s no help, because for the first time since she’s met him, he throws his head back and laughs.

“Wahhhahahaha!”

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“What now, Captain?”

“We get ready to sail,” she says grimly. “Let’s buy some paint and turn this ship into a work of art. Hopefully art that contains many cannons.”

She doesn’t know where they’re headed, but that’s what being a pirate’s all about. Or so she’s told. She just wishes someone had come up with a better crew name than the Prince’s Pirates.
Her new crew takes the task of getting their vessel ready for pirating seriously, and a paintbrush finds its way into her hands. When asked about how she wants her new ship to look, she shrugs and says,

“Lots of color. Someone with a good sense of design make something good. I suck at it.”

When the shipwright is hired to put the ship in better shape, she doesn’t expect the lone teenager of the group to add large demonic spikes to the ship. Or to have a giant demon head attached to the bow as its figurehead.

She takes in the dark blue ship covered in multi-colored stars, the bright red railings and spikes, the gold accents, and thinks, *they may have overdid it*. It looks awesome though.

“Are you going to be my first mate?” She asks Mihawk, moving around the furniture in the captain’s quarters to suit her tastes.

“I refuse.”

There is a finality to his words that make her look up. Mihawk stands in the middle of the room watching her—the walls are still wet with paint, so no dramatic leaning for him—and she considers what would make him reject it outright.

“Is it the responsibility for the crew?” She questions.

“I care not for their lives. Until I beat you, I will follow you and nothing more,” Mihawk answers.

He makes it sound like he plans to be a guard dog rather a pirate. She knows better than to say as much, but she’s reminded that Mihawk truly desires nothing more than a good fight. Roger’s ideals of freedom, adventure, and love are lost to such a boy.

“Partners then,” she states, moving the desk so there’s room for two beds, “well, until you kill me. You’re not co-captain, but I’m going to rely on you whether you like it or not.”

Mihawk doesn’t agree to it, but he doesn’t refute it either. Good enough.

There are a few more issues that need working out before they set sail, and she gets to work. First are the finances. Roger left her with enough to fix the ship, but there’s a good amount of beli to be had in the useless junk left by the former inhabitants. She stores the money in her quarters under lock and key.

Next is her actual crew. They need clothing, jobs, and medical checkups. More than that, they need to get along.

“I don’t care what happened in the past, but you work it out here and now. If I have to break up a fight, you’ll be thrown overboard. If Mihawk breaks up a fight, you’ll die,” she tells them bluntly.

One look at Mihawk’s chilling glare is enough to convince them of her words. That night, quite a few of them suddenly need medical care, but there’s a more peaceful atmosphere afterwards.

“I should probably start memorizing their names,” she muses, as half of the crew argue over flag designs.
“Most captains would,” Mihawk agrees dryly.

Third is navigation. They need a map and a Log Pose to get around. She ultimately decides to wait and steal those at the last second. Having her crew learn proper sailing techniques is the priority.

Fourth is getting the necessary supplies. No one has medical expertise, so the first aid kits are rather basic and inexpensive. If she’s going to do this properly, she’ll need to pick up a doctor eventually.

Fifth is picking her first mate.

“Corv and Bren, what were your former jobs?” She asks the two pirates.

“Cook,” Corv grunts.

“Gunner, though I like to get up and personal,” Bren grins.

Neither one shows any interest outside of their already chosen profession, and she doesn’t get the feeling she can trust her crew to them. She crosses both off the list and moves on to the next potentials.

“Brine, Hilda, and Tani,” she calls.

She gets three blank stares in return, and she attempts to engage them in conversation. It doesn’t go so well. All three of them are rather listless; their scars run far deeper than the ones on their skin. It’s practically a breakthrough when Tani admits to wanting to knit. She promises to buy some needles and yarn before moving on.

The man with the mangled arm, Baiko, and the androgynous teenager, Nikos, are also crossed off the list. Baiko has deep confidence issues, and Nikos is an airheaded kid that likes to draw. She promises to get them a sketchbook.

“Kaiya,” she says.

“I’m a mermaid, you know,” Kaiya says with a toss of long, greying hair.

“Sure.” Kaiya keeps repeating that, but that doesn’t mean she’ll believe it anytime soon. “Wolt, anything you like doing?”

A large man with incredibly long earlobes hums in thought. She ends up waiting five minutes for him to spit out that he likes making barrels. Since Kaiya’s only thoughts are on skincare products, she removes both of them from the list.

“Fuki, stop stealing people’s plants. You’re not as stealthy as you think you are.” The woman fully believes the life of a plant outweighs the life of her crew, so she crosses her off the list immediately.

“Skim,” she pauses, and the man stares at her with wide eyes, “good job on the rigging. The knots look brilliant.”

The man puffs up in pride, and she walks away without another word. Skim’s not first mate material either; it’s not because he’s mute, but because he bends too easily to peer pressure.

That leaves one person left. If the woman doesn’t end up being a good fit, then she’ll just declare anarchy in case of the captain’s unavailability. When she finds the woman whose skin is littered
with burn marks and scars, she’s in the middle of taking inventory.

The woman sings a familiar tune—a pirate shanty, she thinks—while writing down numbers on a clipboard. It hits her that she doesn’t know her name, so she asks.

“Don’t have one,” the woman says after a long moment of silence. “Was told I didn’t need one.”

“Names define us even if we don’t need them. I’ll give you one until you find one you like,” she tells her.

It’s probably presumptuous of her, but perhaps it’ll prod the woman into finding a desirable name all the sooner. If she has to think of something off the top of her head—

“Melody, because you have a beautiful singing voice,” she decides.

Melody says nothing and goes back to taking inventory; there’s a smile on her face however, so she assumes that the name is good for the moment.

It goes without saying that Melody ends up being her first mate. The woman is literally the only one responsible enough to take over. Not even Mihawk would bother making a list of concerns to address before sailing which turns out to be desperately needed.

“Why did you buy a dress?” Nikos asks before anyone can stop them.

“This is my hope for the future,” she says, stroking the red, silky material, “my desire.”

She made sure to buy the dress a few sizes too large. One day, when Melody has everything under control, she hopes to slip away as an unnoticeable female. She can always alter the dress down to size if need be.

(They wait until their captain disappears into his quarters before looking at each other. Dracule’s lips twitch before moving after Read like the shadow he is.

“So is he saving it for his girlfriend, or is he hoping to wear it himself?” Baiko asks bluntly.

“My money’s on both,” Bren cackles.)

There’s no reason putting off the inevitable once there’s nothing left to do. She’s sure the islanders are more than happy to see her off. The place may be under Roger’s direct rule, but it doesn’t erase the fact the people here had to clean up seventeen bodies.

“You and I are the best fighters here,” she tells Mihawk. “I know you don’t care for them, but I’d appreciate it if you kept the people transporting us around alive and in one piece.”

“We shall see,” is all Mihawk says.

The Devourer sets sail.
By the time they get out to sea, the rumor of her being known as Roger’s nephew has spread worldwide. No doubt that’s what Roger had intended to begin with, but at least the man claims responsibility by intercepting the pirate and Marine ships that outclass her.

While they see plenty of skirmishes with those wanting to take her head, there’s a surprising amount of people claiming themselves her allies. She supposes that answers the question of whether she’s part of the Pirate King’s fleet.

Her dreams of slipping away go up in smoke. Literally, she gets known for a rather…unfortunate signature.

It starts when they land on an island with crude wooden buildings built atop unstable red sand. Most of the island has a sinister feel hidden behind fake smiles. Unlike other places, everyone decides to sleep on the ship.

“Everyone here is a slaver. These are the people who sold me,” Melody hisses in her ear. “That man over there liked to put his cigarettes out on my leg.”

The man has a patchy beard and is currently smoking a cigarette. She memorizes his face. Anyone who makes any of her crew flinch gets memorized.

“Keep your head up. You’re a pirate now,” she says when Melody starts to unconsciously bow to these people.

The Log Pose won’t reset for a while. She takes care not to eat or drink anything provided by the locals and orders everyone to stay sharp without causing a scene. If Melody is upset at being told not to do anything, the first mate doesn’t show it.

She walks around, taking in the sights and examining each and every person with a critical eye. There are no children, and everyone here seems to be pirates living on base than actual citizens. The slave pens are hidden away in wooden structures built between huge rocks.

Four days go by before the Log Pose resets. She looks at the pistol hanging on her hip. She still never figured out how to work it, and it has no bullets. If she can channel Haki through her sword, it should work for a gun.

When she lifts the pistol into the air and pulls the trigger, a loud burst of air gets shot out. It sounds like a roar.

“With me!” She tells her fighters. “Take the slaves and burn the rest!”

Mihawk is already slicing down the swordsmen before anyone can blink. Bren begins firing off a blunderbuss with a laugh, Corv dashes around with large knives, Tani leaps into the fray with a pair of knitting needles and a scream, and Melody—

“I’m going to mess your face up!” Melody declares hoarsely before jumping at someone with a pair of spiked knuckles.
The only thing she leaves behind is smoldering ashes.

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“What are we going to do with these people?” Melody asks with blindingly bright eyes.

There’s quite a bit of passengers on her ship. Far too many people to keep aboard for any reasonable amount of time. They’ll have to rotate sleeping schedules so everyone can sleep.

“See if anyone wants a job, or if there’s somewhere they want to go. Otherwise we’ll drop them off on the next hospitable island,” she decides.

Three people choose to stay on board. One of them happens to be a herbologist, and another turns out to be a guitar player. The third one however—

“I am the greatest wine connoisseur you will ever meet!” Gerardo booms, stroking his large, frilly cravat. “And I know where to find the best wine in all the Grand Line. All the world!”

Mihawk’s eyes spark in interest, and she sighs. Their next set of adventures happen in search of this mythical cask of wine. Supposedly it lies under the sea, in a cave with breathable air, guarded by a three-headed beast. It sounds so damn implausible; she assumes everyone will grow bored of their snipe hunt at some point.

“Huh,” she says as she cranes her neck to better see the giant elephant heads bearing down on her. “It actually exists.”

“Come! The wine is ours!” Gerardo says, lifting his cane triumphantly.

Piles upon piles of gold shimmer behind the beast which screams at them with red eyes. Of course it’s the lone cask of wine that is the treasure to be had. Sharp claws and bulging muscles tense at their approach, and drool drips from three mouths of sharp teeth.

“I’ll sit this one out,” Corv says, retreating to the ship docked in a pocket of air. “All yours, Captain.”

“If we survive,” she says, readying to fire her gun, “I’m going to drink as much of that wine as I can. Age be damned.”

“The first taste is mine,” Mihawk says, falling in a fighter’s stance.

“The one who gets the final blow, gets the first taste!” Bren shouts.

She fires her bullet-less pistol, and the roaring blast of air hits the creature’s leg. From there, it’s a crazy contest of who can actually kill it the quickest. She’s a moment away from piercing its heart, when Mihawk takes all three heads at once.

“Mine,” Mihawk asserts smugly.

The wine cask is large enough that all seventeen of them can have at least three mugs a piece. It turns out that three mugs are too much for even the heaviest drinkers on the ship. Worse, whatever kind of wine it is, the side effects don’t leave them solely drunk.

“I am both a man and a woman, and that’s just how it is!” She howls after a quarter of a mug, scarf around her neck. “I can wear whatever the hell I want!”

This is the very peaceful beginning, when the alcohol seems to only be a strong one. Mihawk gulps
it down beside her and declares,

“I want to fight something.”

“Fight the slavers,” Melody suggests, flopping onto the table.

In her addled state, both of them make sense. The Prince’s Pirates ought to be out fighting something, and they should be killing slavers. Being a pirate is all about freedom, and freedom is all about doing whatever the hell she wants.

“Let’s kill those Marines that keep shooting at us!” Baiko shouts.

“No, those pirates who keeping shooting at us,” Corv argues. “The last one killed my chicken!”

“Plants!” Fuki screams.

She surveys her people with a wobbly eye and nods sharply. The world certainly needs more plants.

“Let’s kill them all!” She declares, banging a fist against the table and shattering it.

This is the last thing she remembers.

_-*_-

When she comes to, the ship is docked in a lake, and she only has enough time to realize that before she spews her guts out over the side of the ship. Then she crawls to her quarters to go back to sleep. Except there is a panda in her bed.

She pushes Mihawk—who’s passed out and wearing a neat looking hat—over and pulls the blanket around her. Her head and stomach hurts. She’ll deal with it all later.

When she comes to next, it’s to Jannice, their herbologist, shoving a homemade hangover remedy under her nose. The liquid is foul, but her desire to jump off a cliff lessens. Mihawk drinks his glass without complaint; the hat is still on his head.

“You’re going to want to read the newspaper first, Captain,” Jannice tells her, handing her the paper with a grim smile.

She eyes her bed, but there’s no panda. She must have hallucinated that one. She concentrates on the front page first and goes stock still. Mihawk places a chin on her shoulder to get a better look. She wheezes.

“Pirate King’s Prince Goes on a Rampage” “Pirate Prince Burns It All” “Pirate Prince, an Actual Demon from Hell”

No matter what page she turns to, all the articles are about her. Skimming each article lists the places she supposedly went to and destroyed, leaving nothing but smoldering ashes. Her most notable achievement, apparently, is the partial destruction of Tequila Wolf and the arming of slaves on the massive bridge.

Everything the newspaper claims about her and her crew—from fire breathing to walking on water to shattering buildings with their fists—isn’t physically possible. She’s only barely learning how to use Haki herself.

“How much time did we lose?” She asks with wide eyes, looking at the newspaper’s date.
“Oh, it gets better,” Jannice says, “everyone got a bounty. Even me. And I don’t fight. Here’s yours and Dracule’s.”

She accepts the posters with trembling fingers, and upon spreading them out, can only stare silently. It’s a side photo of her holding up her pistol. Everything about her looks right, even her scarf’s in place, but there’s something truly disturbing about her eyes. She looks like she’s in the middle of an evil laugh.

Mihawk’s looks similar. His is also a side photo, only he has a sword raised. He looks normal—well, he’s wearing that same hat in the photo—but something about him seems off. It’s as if he’s been possessed by something demonic.

When she puts them together, it’s obvious that both photos were taken while the two of them were standing back to back. She doesn’t remember any of this.

Kali Read, Prince of Destruction,

Wanted: Dead or Alive

800,000,000 Beli

Dracule Mihawk, Shadow with Hawk-Eyes,

Wanted: Dead or Alive

600,000,000 Beli

“Fitting of my master,” Mihawk deadpans, before flopping back down onto the bed, hat moving to cover his eyes, “to have us declared as the world’s enemy before we can even sail the New World.”

Jannice, perhaps afraid of her blank expression, quietly leaves the cabin. She reads the newspaper from top to bottom several times. Supposedly she kidnapped a talking panda—the pride of a popular World Noble zoo—and burned her flag into several buildings along her way to East Blue.

She’s staring at a picture of a skull with spikes sticking out of its head, so she supposes that part is at least true.

“Gerardo!” She finally yells. “GET IN HERE!”

Chapter End Notes

Double feature today! Yes, there will definitely be a direct continuation of this particular chapter.
When no Gerardo appears despite her yelling, and after Mihawk’s attempts to smother her with a pillow, she goes to find him. She stomps out to the deck with the newspaper clenched in a fist and Mihawk sluggishly following behind her. She freezes, and Mihawk bumps into her back. They both wince.

“Tell me there’s not a whole bunch of bodies impaled on the ship’s spikes,” she pleads, “and that those are statue heads on the pool table.” She pauses. “Our brand new pool table we got somewhere.”

The deck is a scene out of a horror film; one where she’s the monster chasing the teenagers. The only good thing about it is that she knows a few of the victims aren’t what she’d call innocent; one of the bastards hanging up killed Corv’s chicken.

“You’ll be hailed as the most terrifying pirate to sail the seas,” Mihawk notes. “Not even Roger’s known to be this vicious.”

She didn’t want to be a pirate. She never desired to have so much blood on her hands. More than that, she’s freaking tired of cleaning up the bodies.

“Gerardo!” She screams.

She bangs a fist on the railing and waits impatiently as her crew assembles below her. None of them speak, choosing to eye the macabre decorations instead. When a tall, round man in a suit stumbles up to her—clicking and clicking with that damn cane—she nearly goes for his throat.

“Gerardo, it has been three weeks—” She waves the newspaper rapidly.

“A month actually. That newspaper’s old,” Nikos points out helpfully.

“—a month. It’s been a month, and I don’t remember any of it! Last thing I remember, we were having a taste of your ‘best wine in the world.’ ”

She inhales and exhales. Mihawk leans on the railing beside her and looks ready to go back to sleep. He’s still wearing the hat; it may be a permanent fixture.

“Tell me what the fuck is going on before I rip your head off and add it to the pool table,” she demands.

She crosses her arms and ignores the frantic whispering of “We have a pool table? Sweet!” Gerardo wipes his forehead with a handkerchief, and she growls in impatience. Mihawk, without even lifting his head, reaches for his sword once the silence drags on too long.
“My dear captain, I had no idea the legends of the Demon God Wine were true!” Gerardo hurries to speak. “I only knew that the Glaucus wine was supposed to be the most valuable wine in all of history.”

“Demon God Wine?” She only knew that the wine they’ve been searching for the better part of a year was called Glaucus wine.

Gerardo explains, in bursts of excitement and dismay, that the wine they drank was rumored to have special properties: the kind that turned people into gods. It supposedly frees inhibitions, giving drinkers powers and a different view of the world for as long as they remained gods.

Which is roughly about a month apparently.

“Perhaps it’s more of a chemical reaction that alters the body temporarily instead of being given divine powers?” Jannice offers. “It might have altered our personalities, thought processes, and perhaps how our bodies can intake and use Haki.”

It’s as good of an explanation as any, and no matter how furious she is, she can’t fault Gerardo for waving away such a ridiculous story. She hadn’t believed the wine had existed to begin with.

“We still have plenty of the Glaucus wine. No one finished more than their first drink,” Melody states. “What do you want to do with the rest of it?”

There’s more of it? A lot more, if she’s doing the math right. As a wine that makes people think they’re gods—or a psychoactive drug combined with Haki steroids—it might not be a good idea to keep it, but they don’t have a choice.

“Put it in my quarters under lock and key. If it really works like how Jannice thinks it does, it’s far too dangerous to leave lying around.”

Skin mimes picking something up and dumping it over the railing. Sign language isn’t a thing in this world, but she’s working on creating one for the crew to learn.

“Why not dump it? Because we’re now the enemy of the world. We might need it,” she says tiredly.

There’s quite a bit of awkward shuffling in the silence following her words. AJ, their guitarist, jumps up to her with an excited grin and an armful of posters. A new, seemingly electric guitar is slung on his back, and she can’t even fathom where he got it.

“Hey, check out my bounty! Isn’t it so cool?” AJ boasts, handing her the poster.

The colorful guitarist is in the middle of strumming his newly acquired guitar, one foot on someone’s neck, and screaming while lightning dances around him. More posters are shoved into her hands, one after the other.

“And here’s Wolt crushing someone’s head. And here’s Kaiya in the middle of a cyclone like some sea-witch. And here’s—”

“Wait, Kaiya’s a mermaid?” She interrupts, dumbstruck.

“I’ve been saying that!” Kaiya shrieks.

“Captain, it’s been over a year. Haven’t you seen her swim by now?” Tani asks hesitatingly.
“Nope,” she says before going through the rest of the posters with raised eyebrows.

Demon God Wine indeed. Seems her motley crew earned their bounties instead of hanging on the back of hers. Tani’s new title of Evil Knitter sounds funny, but the picture certainly isn’t.

“Does anyone have a timeline of what we supposedly did?” She asks, handing the bounties back to AJ.

“I’ve been going through the newspapers,” Melody frowns, “and even hopped on that wine, some of the things sound questionable. As if other people joined in or some of it was made up.”

“I have a gift bag from Spa Island,” Wolt blurts, “with receipts.”

“And then there’s that. The newspapers supposedly cover everything we did, but they certainly don’t say anything about a resort trip,” Melody says.

Putting their heads together, they get a rough estimation of everything they may have done while under the influence. They have quite a bit of new stuff—there’s an aquarium full of goldfish below deck—but some of their money’s missing. They might not have been completely without morals then.

“Put your fears to rest, Captain,” Brine tells her. “I found these in the kitchen.”

Taking the stack of papers, she glances through them only to find a bunch of bounties with a large red “X” marked over the picture. She glances from the bounties to the bodies still stuck to her ship. Looks like she went full on bounty hunter.

“These are old bounties before they were pardoned. All of them evil, all of them the World Government let go,” Brine says with a crazy gleam in his eye. “That man there used to whip my hands.”

“The newspapers don’t say it, but everything we hit were slave houses, Government ‘approved’ brothels, and notorious corrupt Marine bases. I hate to say it, but it appears you, Captain, are,” Melody pauses dramatically, “a do-gooder.”

“How terrible,” she says dryly. “Alright, we’ve stalled long enough. Let’s get to work. Wolt, Skim, Bren, help Brine remove the bodies and clean up. Hilda, Baiko, figure out where we’re at. AJ, Nikos, go around and take inventory. Figure out what we, ah, picked up. Jannice, I’m leaving the wine to you. Corv, kitchen. Kaiya, assess the ship from the outside and take a look around. Tani, clean clothes please. Fuki—” she stops.

“How’s the plants?” She asks tentatively.

“So many,” Fuki answers with wide eyes. “So many beautiful ones.”

“You do that,” she says kindly. “Melody, take care of our readiness for battle. There’s no telling what’ll happen.”

Gerardo remains the only one in front of her, and she taps the railing impatiently. She knows the man is sweating underneath his large cravat, but she has no plans to let him know he’s off the hook just yet. Mihawk shoots her an annoyed look from where he still rests on the railing. She sticks her tongue out.

“What should I do?”
That’s not Gerardo. Whirling around, she blinks as a panda sits in plain sight, chewing on a piece of bamboo. She glances at Mihawk whose eyes sharpen dangerously. He hadn’t noticed the beast either.

“She says blankly.

“You sort of did, but I was already kidnapped to begin with,” the panda tells her. “I was minding my own business when I got shoved into a cage. I was also minding my own business when you burst through my enclosure like a madman.

“Sorry?” She offers.

“Don’t be. I haven’t had this much fun in ages. It’s all, ‘Mommy, mommy, make it talk!’ and ‘Roll over again!’”

She really has no idea what’s happening. Mihawk tilts the hat over his head to block the light, but he remains tense, ready to move into action.

“I’m Kali Read,” she says, unable to figure out what else to say.

“We already introduced ourselves, but I’ll do it again. The name’s Jesper! You made me treasurer,” the panda informs her.

“I did?”

“There I was minding my own business, bored out of my skull, when you just appear and slice everything into pieces, shouting, ‘Freedom!’ I asked who you were, and you said, ‘I’m Kali Read, and I do whatever the hell I want.’”

Don’t tell me I went around like that for a whole month, she thinks with some alarm.

“I asked you what I was supposed to do now. You killed my food suppliers and I had no way back home. And you said, ‘How should I know? Only you can figure out what you want to do. Stay there and rot like the animal they think you are, eat some people, or become my treasurer. Now either get on my ship or get out of my way!’”

Son of a bitch.

“Please stop, I don’t want to hear any more,” she begs, banging her head against the railing and ignoring Mihawk, whose shoulders are shaking.

“Gotta admit, you impressed me. So here I am. I’m not overly strict when it comes to buying things, but I’m the worst when it comes to thieves. Your money’s in good hands! In fact, I’ll go count and check out the ledger,” Jesper says, putting the remaining bamboo behind his ear.

“We don’t have one of those,” she says, lifting her head hesitatingly.

The disappointed stare makes her pull her own hat over her eyes. She can’t win for nothing. Jesper walks off, muttering about how pitiful they are, and she lets out a heavy sigh.

“Shut up, Mihawk,” she says preemptively.
She wishes she knew what possessed her to break into a zoo and declare a panda her treasurer—

(“There’s a zoo on the way to the island, Captain,” Hilda says, handing her a brochure. “Mermaids and Fish-men are displayed there like animals.”

“Its biggest exhibit is a talking panda,” Baiko mentions from where he’s leaning over a map.

She reads through the brochure with narrow eyes. It’s so cheerfully upbeat for such a cruel prison. She leans back in her newly acquired leather couch and tosses the paper onto the floor. Mihawk nudges her shoulder with his own in expectation, and she smirks.

“Slavery, oppression, and humiliation,” she says. “Souls in need of the devil’s luck.”

A picture of a panda with a dull expression looks up at her from the floor. Underneath the picture is the name “Jesper.”

“It’s a good name for a treasurer. Sail on and let’s see how many things we can set on fire!” She laughs.)

—but she has bigger things to worry about now.

“In our search for the Glaucus wine, we ended up with some of the highest quality wine known to mankind. I was saving that for my sixteenth birthday,” she frowns.

Mihawk stares at her in alarm, and she claps him on the shoulder in apology. It’s not an easy decision to make, and she was looking forward to sharing a drink with him. Still, this is an emergency.

“Gerardo, you’re going to help me pick out the best definitely not divine wine we have. I’ve got some business deals to make.”

When Baiko and Hilda come to her, having figured out their position, it leaves her scratching her head. From what the two tell her, their drunken selves had the bright idea to hide the ship in the middle of an uninhabited island…in a lake.

“How did we even do that?” She asks blankly.

Kaiya reports that the ship is completely hidden from the view of the sea. Notes left behind near the helm suggest they were planning to lay low here before hitting another Marine base. That doesn’t erase the fact they somehow put their huge ship in a lake completely cut off from the
“Someone come up with a way to get us out. My brain is melting,” she says, throwing her hands up.

Baiko and Hilda glance at each other before scrambling for a piece of paper. Good luck to them; she doesn’t have the slightest idea of where to begin.

“The ship needs some minor repairs on the outside,” Kaiya tells her next, “but it looks like everything’s been maintained. Oh, and you gained some additions.”

“Additions?” She’s hesitant to ask.

“More spikes. More bodies to go on those spikes. A shark leashed to the ship.”

“What,” she says.

“His name’s Killer Frank. He’s our new guard shark. He doesn’t like the fresh water and wants to know when we plan to leave. He’s also hungry. I’ll go feed him,” Kaiya explains before muttering under her breath about children not taking care of their pets.

Melody, who’s been patiently waiting to speak, silently mouths “Killer Frank?” as Kaiya brushes past her. She shrugs helplessly at her first mate. This whole thing is one big ball of absurd.

“How’s it looking?” She asks Melody.

“Well, the good news is we all somehow upgraded our weapons,” her first mate says brightly before grimacing. “The bad news is that our cannons are beyond repair.”

“All of them?” Her face drops at Melody’s nod. “So we’ll be going out into the open without any cannons. We’ll be near defenseless.”

“Bren may be able to help rig up something temporary, but we’ll need to prioritize it,” Melody says. “I wish I knew how they got into such a state. All the cannons look like they blew up from the inside.”

(“Captain, the Marines are getting ready to fire from the base!” Hilda yells down to her. “Should Baiko move us closer or further?”

“We should get closer! I’ll fill all their heads with holes!” Bren cackles.

She folds her hands behind her back and considers the cannon in front of her. Cannonballs are nothing more than pesky flies to the likes of Mihawk and her, but there’s no fun in just destroying or sending them back.

If she can channel Haki through her gun, there’s nothing stopping her from channeling it through other things.

“Move us in closer and keep us starboard facing!” She yells, putting her hand on the cannon with a smile.)

“We’ll never know,” she tells Melody. “Let’s just concentrate on fixing what we can.”
Wolt’s a busy man; not only does the repairs to the ship need to happen before she feels comfortable sailing, but she needs special barrels made. Luckily there’s an artist on board to help the process go by quicker.

“Make them look as grand as you can. These barrels need to come from a demon god,” she orders Nikos who salutes her with their drawing pad.

Bren, with help from the others, rigs up something that can only be described as a terrifying mixture of machine gun and antitank rifle. A movable metal bar ensures it can be placed to any side of the ship. The test firing decimates a portion of the land around the lake.

“I call it ‘Hell’s Penis!’ ” Bren laughs.

Yeah, okay.

“All the bodies have been removed, and everything’s been cleaned up. There’s no point staying here. Our bounties won’t magically disappear. Any ideas on getting to the ocean?” She asks over dinner.

Corv can’t be called a master chef, but upon finding new spices, ingredients, and recipes packed into his kitchen, he’s been dazzling them with new dishes. She almost has to stab Mihawk for trying to steal her pizza-tasting bread roll.

Perhaps she can use Corv’s cooking to her advantage. What goes good with white wine?

“Well,” Hilda begins, “when we shot off the ship’s new weapon—”

“Hell’s Penis!” Bren interjects with a snort.

“I am not calling it that,” Hilda says adamantly. “When we fired off the thing, it gave Skim an idea. Why not use it to dig our way to the sea? Shoot up the land, let the lake drain and push us out with it.”

“Just be mindful of Killer Frank,” Kaiya says.

It’s worth a shot, and they decide to try after breakfast. Despite a belly full of good food, she finds herself unable to turn in for the night. She ends up lying on the deck, staring up at the stars. To one side of her, Jesper munches on a piece of bamboo—apparently Fuki is growing the plants for him—and Mihawk sits on her other side, eyes closed and most likely meditating.

“Jesper, can you give me an idea of what I’m dealing with? What I was like? I don’t remember anything,” she says, frustrated.

“Let me think,” Jesper replies with a considering hum, “well, I’d have to say you were intense. Take what you can, give nothing back! You screamed that a lot. Before you stole stuff and burned everything to ashes. Or killed people. Or impaled people. Or kissed people.”

She throws an arm over her eyes in agony. She doesn’t want to know, she doesn’t want to know, she doesn’t want to know—

“But all of that couldn’t have happened to better people.”

(An entire village huddles together, children clutching their parents, elderly shrinking back with
knowing looks. Her crew surrounds these people like a human fence; their eyes alight with
madness.

“Do you find my crew’s appearance scary? Revolting?”

She paces back and forth, energy wrapping around her skin like a hungry tiger. Not yet, she tells
the energy, not until she sees the realization in their eyes.

“You must be thinking that they earned those scars in battles or pillaging, but most of my crew’s
scars were given by their oppressors. People like you,” she spits, pointing to a specific man. “You
were the one who took a man’s voice just because you considered him beneath you.”

Skim frowns and touches his mouth. The World Government had not only approved of stealing
children from this island for slavery, but had endorsed cruel methods of breaking them. Tani and
Brine’s tormentors are also here among the villagers.

“My shadow, bring him before me,” she says. “Skim, bring your rope. We’re going to show
everyone here what happens to slavers and those who like cruelty. I can be far crueler than you can
imagine.”

Mihawk grabs the man without a word, and Skim takes his long awaited revenge. It lasts for a very
long time, enough so that she gets the idea to stick the body on her ship’s spike. It’ll serve as a
warning to every person who’s harmed her crew.

“I’m a monster,” she keens.

“Yeah, maybe, but you’re a good one,” Jesper tells her. “The kids loved you.”

“What,” she says, moving her arm to look at Jesper in surprise.

(“These five were the ones responsible for inflicting pain and humiliation on my most precious
people, for treating them less than the humans they are. You must be wondering what’ll happen to
the rest of you.”

She kneels in front of a child whose bones stick out under their skin. Large, sunken eyes watch her
with fright, and she sighs. The energy around this little one is tragic, and they aren’t the only one
with it either.

“Freedom to be seen as people is the only thing that matters in this world. Tell me, kid. Who hurt
you?”

It takes a lot of staring, a lot of being still despite the energy wanting to lash out, but the child
eventually looks to a woman behind them. That woman pales once a tiny, bony finger points to her.

She already knew of course; the child’s energy screams as much, but the kid needs to be the one to
make the decision. Corv drags the screaming woman to their makeshift execution stand, and she
ruffles the kid’s hair before moving to the next.

“Scars happen but they don’t have to keep happening. Who hurt you, kid?”

The village loses more people than it probably appreciates, but there’s enough remaining that she
doesn’t leave the place in ashes. In fact, she sticks around long enough to make a point to any slavers trying to make a stop on the island.

Mihawk, in a rare act of kindness, gives fighting lessons to everyone willing to learn, and she always has a kid on her shoulders for some reason. When they leave, each kid clutches their Tani-made sweaters with tears in their eyes and frantically waves goodbye.)

"Okay, but who did I kiss?" She asks with trepidation.

"You’d kill me if I told you," Jesper replies before rolling away.
The Devourer’s first foray into open water goes better than thought. The only ones willing to attack are Marines, and Hell’s Thing—she refuses to call it by its actual name—takes care of them quickly and efficiently. Considering they’re already running out of ammo, she’s glad most ships are tucking in their tails and running for it.

She manages to get a meeting set up, and the crew takes a day to restock supplies on an eerily familiar island. She almost runs back to the ship once she realizes why.

“My father is the strongest in Shimotsuki,” a boy in glasses informs her fearlessly. “You won’t be able to beat him or our dojo!”

The boy aims a bamboo sword at her, and the feeling of bloodlust behind her sends chills down her spine. She tackles Mihawk into a headlock immediately. He bites her arm, but she doesn’t let go. She’s had nightmares about this exact situation.

“We’re not here to do anything but purchase supplies,” she stresses to Mihawk. “What’s your name, kid?”

“Koshiro.” It’s said like a threat.

“Of course you are.” She sighs before moving to put Mihawk in a better hold. “Kid, tell your father we’re leaving in the morning, and unless he’s doing slavery, we’re going to keep to ourselves.”

Mihawk snarls death threats at her, but she doesn’t release him until Koshiro runs off to relay the message. She draws her sword immediately, and her blade meets the one aimed for her neck.

“Going to have to do better than that!” She says through gritted teeth.

It takes longer than she’d like, but she disarms Mihawk without being injured. Furious yellow eyes remind her that the moment of her death draws ever nearer.

“Why are you getting in my way?” Mihawk asks lowly.

“Because I’d like to be born if that’s how time travel works,” she says dryly. “Just being here is probably lowering my chances.”

The anger radiating off of Mihawk cools instantly, and she tilts her head at the sudden change. She doesn’t remember ever telling him of her being from the future. Mihawk sheathes his sword and moves his hat back into place.

“Is this the secret between you and Roger?” Mihawk asks, eyeing their surroundings critically.

“One of them,” she admits truthfully. “I’d really appreciate you not killing my grandfather or wrecking my dojo.”

She’s never met her grandfather, but she’s seen the paintings. A strict, traditional man, she’s sure she would have hated him. How strange that she has the sudden urge to go meet him.

“You’ve been sickly ever since stepping on the island,” Mihawk muses.
“Well, the people are different but everything else is mostly the same. Even the library I used to visit every day is still here.”

Her love for books has cooled considerably now that she isn’t forced to read them, but she’d probably want to steal every book on the library shelf if she visits now. She’s not surprised that she seems unwell; her emotions really are all over the place.

“I used to spend all my time trying to leave this damn place, but here I am, wanting to go sit in the shade of my favorite tree,” she laughs mockingly.

She’s the dreaded Pirate Prince now. Trying to relive moments of being the dojo master’s daughter would just be a painful waste of time.

“Show me.”

She blinks at Mihawk. Is he demanding that she take him to the dojo anyway?

“Your favorite tree. Show me,” Mihawk clarifies.

“Okay,” she says, unable to say anything else.

Fate still hates her of course. When the two of them are sitting under her favorite tree, enjoying a cool breeze in peaceful silence, her grandfather finds them. He’s exactly how the paintings depict: serious faced and the icon of traditional samurai. With Wado Ichimonji in his grip, he challenges them to a duel.

“I’ve heard about the two of you. The Prince of Destruction. The Shadow with Hawk-Eyes,” the man says. “If you are evil, then it is my duty to strike you down.”

Obviously the newspaper ran by the World Government would paint them in the worst light. Her grandfather just had to be honorable in the worst ways.

“I refuse,” she says before turning to Mihawk. “You do whatever you want.”

She throws her hands up as he shoots her a dry look. Why yes, she begged him not to fight her relatives, but she’s suddenly lost her ability to care.

“I will fight you here as not to shame your students,” Mihawk offers generously, reaching for his sword.

Her grandfather is everything her father claimed he was. There’s no one-second loss to Mihawk, and she can’t help but find herself captivated by the spectacle the two make. This is the first time she’s seen a swordfight look like an intricate dance.

Still, the difference in strength is apparent, and she already plans to purchase incense sticks for memoriam. To her immense surprise, Mihawk lands no lethal blows. When Wado Ichimonji goes flying—it goes straight for her and she catches it by the hilt through sheer reflex—Mihawk sheathes his sword and turns away.

“Are you going to dishonor me so?” Her grandfather demands from where he kneels on the ground.

“I have no interest in you,” Mihawk says deridingly before nodding to her. “Show me his house. I will take a souvenir.”

That’s Mihawk speak for, “Show me your house, and take anything you want.”
She nods her head, unable to tell him how much she appreciates it. She returns Wado Ichimonji to her grandfather, properly and with a bow. He takes it with a stunned expression, and she leaves without a word.

She points the dojo out to Mihawk, but finds herself losing her sense of reality once she stands in front of a familiar door. Her house looks eerily the same. Since crime is nonexistent in Shimotsuki, the door remains unlocked like always.

She closes her eyes and breathes in both familiar and new scents. It doesn’t feel like anyone’s in the house. Grabbing Mihawk’s hand, she leads him to a set of familiar stairs. She eyes them warily.

“I fell here. From the top of the stairs to the bottom. It felt like something grabbed me,” she says. “When I opened my eyes, that’s when I met you.”

“You accused me of being in your house,” Mihawk recalls.

“This is it. My house. In a few decades,” she says. “I try not to think about the how or the why. People go mad over questions that have no answers.”

She ends up stealing a small painting of a native flower. It’s signed by her grandfather, but it’s been thrown carelessly into a box of trash. She doesn’t recall seeing it, so she feels no shame in taking it. Mihawk steals a knife and a polishing cloth.

“Thanks,” she tells Mihawk.

For not killing her grandfather, for not massacring her home like she dreamt he would, for believing in her story. For being the one to find her.

“You’re not unnecessary,” Mihawk replies with a scoff.

She’s not sure what her grandfather tells the locals, but they’re not as hostile as they were previously. Buying supplies goes easier, and purchasing a meal comes with smiles rather than frosty glares.

She slides her favorite Shimotsuki dish of boiled shrimp in front of Mihawk, and she watches in amusement as he stuffs his cheeks like a hamster. She can hear the rest of the crew enjoying their own home-cooked meals from nearby.

“You were hilarious,” Jesper assures the blushing Tani. “I didn’t know you could do that with monkey spleens.”

“Jesper, how many times have we said we don’t want to hear it?” Melody says harshly.

“You guys are so contradicting! ‘Jesper, tell us what we did!’ ‘Jesper, shut up!’ ‘Jesper, what do mean you slept during such a crucial moment?’ Pick one,” Jesper huffs.

She coughs into her tea in an effort to not laugh. Her treasurer might have been the only sober one running around with them, but it turns out the panda sleeps more than the average human, rendering a lot of his potential knowledge useless.

Still, even if the world’s against her and every island she goes to will call her evil, she can’t find it in herself to regret welcoming anyone into her crew. To be able to introduce them all to her home is something she never knew she wanted.

“Hey, Mihawk, when you kill me, can you bury me here? I’d like a stone carved with ‘Kuina’ if
you can swing it.”

She doesn’t get an answer.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, you will know who Kuina kissed. I will say nothing else.
While buying supplies before heading back to the Grand Line is necessary, Shimotsuki is unintended. It causes her to buy a few things on impulse. She doesn’t know what she’s going to do with the bolts of silk she bought, but she’ll find a use for them somehow.

“We’ll be late at this rate,” her first mate warns when she takes too long getting on the ship.

“I’m going,” she says, absolutely not pouting underneath her scarf.

There’s no reason to delay, but the feeling that she’ll never be back cuts deeply. She doesn’t doubt her gut; the Prince of Destruction has no need to bring trouble to a tiny island in East Blue, never mind the “might mess up one’s own birth” thing.

She takes one moment to enjoy the breeze on her bare face—to enjoy it as Kuina of Shimotsuki—before she makes for the ship. A familiar presence shows up as she puts the scarf back around her face.

“Wait,” her grandfather orders when she tries to speed walk away. “For what reason do you lift your sword?”

“For whatever I want,” she answers flatly.

It’s true enough, but the man gives her an unimpressed stare. There’s a silent, “Don’t be stupid and take this seriously” in that stare. She looks longingly at her ship in the distance. She thought he left those awkward family reunions where no one knew how or if they were related behind.

“Originally, I learned it to get away. To protect myself and to gain the right to live a free life,” she says.

“And now?”

That stern face isn’t letting her inch away from the conversation. Her mind remains frustratingly blank in front of her grandfather. It’s not like she ever sat down and considered the how’s and why’s of stabbing people. She’s been too busy surviving what life throws at her to be philosophical about it.

“I suppose I have the reputation of giving other people their freedom. And the reputation of a devil,” she says blandly.

“I do not ask what your reputation is. I ask what you will do with your blade,” her grandfather replies stiffly.

She should have left earlier. She could be taking a nap where Mihawk’s probably lounging on their leather couch. Wracking her brain, she reaches for the basic reasons she hasn’t slipped away as an unnoticeable woman, for why she still calls herself Kali Read.

“To protect my crew. To ensure Mihawk becomes the world’s strongest swordsman. To be someone worthy of killing for that title.” The next words are blurted out before she can stop them. “And if I’m going to be hunted down and demonized for freeing slaves, then I might as well do that too.”

Her own answer surprises her. When her grandfather frowns harshly at her with lines appearing on
his forehead, she stares back silently and steely. Even if she never thought about why she chose to continue wielding the sword, it doesn’t make her words any less true.

To her confusion, her grandfather reaches into his kimono and takes out a scroll. He thrusts it out to her, and she takes the scroll hesitatingly.

“The sword on your back won’t be enough. Give this to the person it is addressed to, and they will help you find a sword that will never break,” the man says.

Blindsided, all she can do is carefully place the scroll into her coat’s inner pocket and bow in gratitude. She makes no attempt to assure the man of what will happen if she gets her hands on such a sword. She smiles, knowing he can’t see it through the scarf.

“Thanks. Later, Gramps!” She waves and sprints for her ship.

Family reunions can suck it.

“I’m not that old!” The man howls at her back.

Getting back onto the Grand Line isn’t as bad she feared it’d be. She supposes having sailed with Roger for some of the New World and then sailing in Paradise for over a year does wonders to one’s sense of danger.

“Sea King!” Baiko shouts.

She puts her sewing needle down to poke her head out of her quarters. A huge, spiky red Sea King roars over their deck. She shares a glance with Mihawk who eyes the beast hungrily. Even if the creature damages the ship, it’s almost worth it for how delicious Sea King tastes.

“First one to kill it gets out of cleaning it! Captain's orders!” She yells, narrowly avoiding Mihawk pushing her down on his way past her.

Bren claims the kill with Hell’s Thing, so she ends up helping clean and cut the Sea King. No one trusts her to help any more than that which is unfair; she’s an excellent cook even if she can only make three dishes. She can’t help it if she has problems frying things.

“Fish goes well with white wine,” Corv tells her. “Can’t say whether a Sea King counts as fish or not, but you should give ‘em this anyway.”

When her rather impressively sized ship anchors next to an even more massive one, she has Corv roll out two barrels of cooked Sea King. Wolt carries two giant casks of wine on his shoulders, and the rest of them carry a barrel of gold or a smaller cask of wine. Except for Mihawk, who hovers behind her like a bodyguard.

With the way he eyes the cask in her arms, she thinks it’s more of a refusal to help than appearing to be her shield. Unfriendly faces meet her, and she keeps her head up and eyes looking straight forward. *Fake it until you make it*, she thinks in an attempt to psych herself up, *I am Kali Read, and I am the Pirate Prince.*

“Hey, Grandpa,” she says, slamming the cask down in front of a large boot.

“You have a lot of nerve—” One of the men begins.

Whitebeard silences them by holding up one massive hand. She swears his crescent-shaped mustache is bigger than when she last saw it. Whitebeard crosses his arms and gives her a
reproachful look. She waves up at him.

“It appears my grandson has decided to outdo Roger in his debut,” Newgate says dryly.


She gestures her crew to place down their barrels and casks. Mihawk frowns and his eyes jump to each cask. She elbows him less than subtly. She’ll kill him if he causes a scene.

“You want to make an alliance even though I’ve sworn Roger to be my enemy,” Newgate states.

Whitebeard has an impressive poker face; she can’t read him at all. She supposes having to crane her neck to even see his face might also factor in.

“Well, I got myself a new hat for a reason,” she says, pointing to her tricone hat that displays her own flag, “but if you don’t want to, I understand. I’d like you to take the gifts anyway.”

The silence drags on, and she does her best to keep up the nonchalant body language. She honestly likes Whitebeard and hopes he’ll at least agree to neutrality, but she’s ready to take a swig of the Glaucus wine hidden away in her coat.

“What will you do now, Kali Read?” Newgate asks.

“Sail on to find adventure, discover buried treasure, and live life the way I want to. Which is terrorizing the World Government,” she admits. “I will continue on and surpass my uncle as the most wanted man.”

Roger is amazing and widely feared, but he’s content to keep exploring the Grand Line. Between a demon off doing his own thing and a demon actively attacking the people in charge of the bounties —well, she has no doubt the price on her head will surpass Roger’s at some point.

“Let us feast with what you have brought. I will give my answer afterward.”

She’s already informed her crew to not hesitate to get drunk, to party; with everyone thinking she’s younger than she actually is, she’s not allowed to drink. With Mihawk and her sober—though with the way he drinks a little from each cask out of spite, she’s not sure she should declare him sober—she can stay alert if things turn bad.

When questioned about her life choices—

“I got drunk,” she says bluntly. “After that, I decided to continue doing what I started.”

Technically true but missing a lot of detail. Whitebeard’s fatherly atmosphere makes her say more than she wants to, but she’s careful to make no mention of Demon God Wine. None of her crew does either, no matter how badly drunk they get.

The worst thing that happens is Jesper recalling incidents they can’t, and them having to go with it. More than once, she has the pleasure of pretending to pretend not being able to recall the incident in question.

“Oh, man, you should have seen them when they got to Tequila Wolf!” Jesper chortles. “They were like, ‘Can we set this bridge on fire? Let’s find out!’ ”

“Jesper,” Melody hisses.
“Oh, but you should have seen these dumbasses when they decided to ram it with the ship!” Jesper howls, banging his mug of wine down.

“Jesper!” Her first mate punches her treasurer in the back so hard he goes rolling.

(“Captain, the bridge is dead ahead. What shall we do?” Melody rasps with a wild look in her eyes.

“We could blow it up!” Bren offers excitedly. “We got plenty of explosives.”

“Set it on fire. Make a statement to the world,” Brine suggests.

“You’re all forgetting the people on the bridge,” Tani points out.

There’s a flurry of voices as the crew brainstorms ideas. Jesper watches them all with shiny eyes, chomping on his ever present piece of bamboo. Mihawk tilts his head to catch her eye and taps his sword pointedly.

Well, of course. Why didn’t she think of that?

“If I can channel Haki through a cannon, I can do it through a ship. Let’s ram that fucker!” She grins widely. “Hilda, Skim, go find out where the slaves aren’t, where the oppressors are, and work with Baiko on where we’re going to hit it. Everyone else, go grab some weapons! We’ve got people to arm!”)

She tugs her hat over her eyes when everyone looks at her judgmentally.

“I was drunk,” she says bitterly.

Somehow they get Whitebeard to agree to an alliance, but only after she receives a long lecture about underage drinking.
With her alliance with Whitebeard secured, the only thing left to do is go down the rest of the list of potential allies. Almost all of her negotiations are with islands. With the Golden Age of Piracy not having happened yet, there aren’t many pirates worth allying with. Mostly because Roger destroys them all.

She does set aside some gifts for the Pirate King now that she’s broken away from his flag. Getting a hold of Roger will be difficult, but they’re willing to attempt the New World to find him. At this point, they’ll have to sail the scariest sea if they want to survive.

It’s when they’re in the middle of making plans and preparations for the journey and their ship is all but sitting idly in the middle of the ocean, that a smaller, familiar ship attacks. To be honest, she doesn’t even know her ship was under assault until someone knocks on her door.

“Captain, do something about him,” Melody says, completely disgruntled and tossing in a hogtied furry creature.

Oh, wait. Not a creature.

“Pirate Prince, I’ll have your head!” A boy shouts, straining against the ropes tying him.

With the way the rope ties down the fur cape wrapped around him, she mistook the boy for an animal. Mihawk sneers from where he’s sharpening his sword, and Jesper sits up from his mattress with a yawn and a stretch.

“Oh, good. It’s the fake,” Jesper grumbles while rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

Jesper, wanting to stay close to the money, can usually be found snoozing away in her former bed. The panda makes for a good pillow though, so it’s a tossup on whether she sleeps there or crawls to Mihawk’s.

She puts her map away with a sigh. She’s trying to figure out their route to the New World—go through the Blues and the Calm Belt or just burn through the World Government’s blockade—so of course an angry teenager wants her attention.

“You know you’ve lost every single time you’ve attacked us. I don’t know why I keep letting you live if you’re stupid enough to keep coming back,” she says, propping up her chin with her hand and leaning on her desk.

The attacks from this kid started the moment she announced herself as the Pirate Prince. He wants to take her down to cement his position as the future Pirate King—it’s what he always yells anyway.

The boy seems to be the same age as Mihawk and her. He’s rather unremarkable, but there’s a spark to him no other pirate besides Roger has. Those are the only reasons she lets him escape each time. No doubt his crew is waiting for him on his heavily damaged ship like always.

“I’ll kill you for what you did!” The boy howls.
Jesper knowing this boy and those words can only mean they crossed paths while she was drunk on Glaucus wine. Hiding her apprehension beneath a dull expression, she prods the boy,

“It’s been a while for me. Remind me what I did to you, Alligator?”

“Crocodile! And don’t pretend you don’t know!” The boy snarls.

There’s a blush on the kid’s face that does nothing for her worry. She catches Jesper’s eye for an explanation. The panda’s mug twists into an alarming grin, and his eyes light up. Oh no.

“He’s not going to say because it’s too embarrassing!” Jesper guffaws. “You thought it would be fun to kiss him until he had to wrap his cape over his pants!”

Pure silence follows that statement, and Melody disappears out the doors quietly. Crocodile’s face turns completely red, and he looks ready to explode. Mihawk’s glare digs into her, and she has never regretted drinking that wine more.

“Oh, great. I probably have STDs,” she says, putting a hand over her eyes.

There’s no telling where her lips have been. Maybe Jannice has a potion to cleanse the germs off. Jesper, her terrible, no good treasurer, insincerely attempts to assure her by throwing more unwanted news at her.

“Nah, you didn’t kiss him directly. You said you figured out how to kiss through the scarf after kissing the Queen of Alabasta.”

What.

“Tell me it wasn’t on the lips,” she pleads.

Please let her have done a knightly kiss on the back of the hand.

“Pretty sure you mentioned angering the king. Oh, and that lipstick’s a pain to wash out of white fabric,” Jesper tells her ruthlessly.

Her head hits the desk, and she gives up thinking there’s mercy in this world. That’d explain the hostility from Alabasta and why the king refused an alliance until the queen intervened. Looking back on it, she also went on a date with the queen, didn’t she?

“At least my lips are safe,” she mutters.

If drunk her kept the scarf around her face, then she shouldn’t have to worry about diseases transferred through saliva. There should be no need for a bitter, questionable potion created by her herbologist. Once she tosses Crocodile back onto his pathetic ship, she can forget all about this.

“Yeah, about that,” Jesper says like the bastard he is.

(Another day, another den of filth left in ashes. Her crew relaxes on the newly furnished deck, and she watches in amusement as Brine uses a head as a bowling ball while Nikos sets up pieces of wood as the pins.

Desecrating the dead can’t come close to the disrespect these savages have inflicted on other people. If her crew wants to have fun with the people who hurt them the most, then she can only
keep the fire burning for as long as possible.

She relaxes into her couch—stolen from a disgusting pig of a mayor who had good taste—and thinks about taking a nap. The drapes around it will keep the couch in the shade and dry from sudden showers.

She’ll have to remove a certain shadow though, if she wants the couch to herself. She glances to her side with a considering hum.

Mihawk shimmers with darkness and death, mixed with passion and determination. It's quite beautiful. There's a giant bird hovering over him like a phantom which oozes blood from its beak, but its eyes are gorgeous.

She finds herself crawling into his lap to get a better view. She places her forehead on his and pulls down her scarf. She smiles at the narrow gaze burning into her.

"You know," she remarks casually, "you're cute in a murderous psycho way."

She rolls off him with a laugh and slides awkwardly down the couch. Mihawk's energy spikes dangerously, and it's the only warning she gets before his lips are on hers. Before she can do more than blink, Mihawk disappears.

"Was that a drive by?" She asks stupidly, touching her lips in disbelief.

It was a quick kiss, enough so that if it wasn’t for the energy still lingering on her she would have thought she’d imagine it.

“I knew it! They’re gay! Pay up,” Bren cackles, motioning to Corv with grabby fingers.

“Hey, wait a minute, if the captain is a woman too then he ain’t gay,” Corv argues.

She throws herself on to the couch cushion in front of her and buries her head in her arms.

“My purity!” She wails.

She probably has an STD now.)

“You also kissed Sengoku of the Marines. Except that was on the—”

“Jesper, I’ll kill you!”

She never does reassure Crocodile that she was drunk.

Chapter End Notes

Technically, they're called STIs, but Kuina doesn't know that.
Her friend will be the strongest swordsman 18

From what she gathers, her drunken self had a good time messing with people which includes a great deal of kissing. Somehow the Alabasta king had angered her—they went to Alabasta to buy a horse apparently, but that deal didn’t go through obviously—so she went after the queen in revenge.

She assumes Mihawk acted the same way and was simply messing with her. Well, that or teenage hormones and alcohol aren’t a great mix. She doesn’t have time to worry about it in any case.

When she takes too long in making her way to the New World, something of an armada closes in. Marines led by Garp pin her ship in the middle of Paradise. There’s nothing but ocean as far as the eye can see which means nowhere to hide. With so many enemy ships incoming, she has to make an important decision.

“Happy sixteenth,” she says, clanging her cup against Mihawk’s.

The deadpan stare she gets is worth having to reach across the table. Mihawk’s vampire-like appearance is hilarious compared to the colorful party streamers and decorations her crew put up. Confetti sticks to his hat and the back of his cloak, but she’s not about to tell him that.

“Captain, are you sure about this?” Melody asks, eyeing her own cup of wine apprehensively.

Oh, absolutely not. There’s a very good possibility that the world will end once she wakes up.

“We’re good, but not ‘Hero of the Marines’ good,” she chooses to say instead. “If the reports from our allies are to be believed, we won’t be able to break through without being surrounded. And even if we do, they’ll sink us from the back anyway.”

Despite the fact that they’ve barely recovered from the first go around, the only way for them to make it through Garp and his armada is to borrow the power of the Demon God Wine. Weighing her options, it’s better to be alive with everything on fire than dead with everything on fire.

“Hopefully with only half us going under, we can keep to the schedule instead of burning down half the world,” Melody remarks dryly.

“I’ll keep a good watch on everyone,” Jesper promises, saluting with a large saucer of normal wine.

“Yes, you’ll watch us overthrow the government and do nothing to stop us,” Melody deadpans.

The panda shrugs at the accusation. No doubt Melody speaks the truth. Most of the fighters will be getting drunk on Glaucus wine with their nonfighters standing by to stop them from going off course. How well that’ll work out, she doesn’t know.

“Bottom’s up,” she says, before gulping it down.

Mihawk mimics her, and the last thing she remembers is yellow eyes that shine oddly bright.
“Oho, awake are you?”

A very familiar set of teeth shine at her. She closes her eyes, rolls over, and screams. It comes out as more of a muffled groan.

“Your potion maker has something for you.”

“I am a herbologist, thank you,” Jannice says before crouching over her. “Captain, drink this. It’ll help.”

She’s forcibly rolled over, and something foul is shoved down her throat. She gags at the taste and manages to swallow down the bile before it can go anywhere. It takes a few minutes, but the throbbing pain in her eyes that go all the way to her teeth lessen.

“Roger, not a word. Not. A. Word,” she says, clutching at her face. She doesn’t have a scarf.

“I’m hurt, dear nephew! We were having such a good time, and now you don’t want to hear my beautiful voice!” Roger cackles.

“Captain, Dracule is still passed out as is Tani, Gerardo, and Baiko. Melody, Bren, and Kaiya are up though Kaiya needs some additional time before she can move. I’ll go keep an eye on them while you, uh, have some family time,” Jannice says with a wary glance towards Roger before fleeing.

Her head and stomach hurts. The floor swaying beneath her isn’t helping matters in the least. A familiar ceiling blocks her view from the sky. She’s in the captain’s quarters, but not her captain’s quarters.

“Our doctor won’t give out hangover cures. Says we earned the pain,” Roger comments with an air of thoughtfulness.

“You can’t have my herbologist. We don’t even have a doctor,” she says, sitting up with a groan.

“You do now.”

Roger grins back at her, eyes alight with mischief, and she almost moves to lie back down. There’s no rest for the weary however. Looking around, she’s somehow gained a new, fancier red coat, and her hat and scarf lies beside her—but the more surprising thing is Roger.

“It’s only been three years. Why do you look so old?” she asks bluntly.

“You wound me right where it hurts!” Roger cries in lieu of an answer.

Well, she might be mistaken. It’s not like Roger’s hobbling around with wrinkles and white hair. He seems to be the same—same grin, same clothes, same annoying personality.

“Are we allies, or am I being held prisoner?” She frowns upon noticing her sword missing.

Roger makes no hostile movement to her as she gets up and puts herself back together, but she’s fully aware he can kill her the moment he feels like it. She looks for a something to throw up in once the nausea hits her badly.
“Both. You’re part of what’s mine now, but you’ve been imprisoned by a lie,” Roger says, grabbing her by the shoulders and steering her out the door. “You can even say you’re a prisoner of that wine you carry.”

She gets shoved at the railing, and she hurls her guts out. Part of her mess gets on the side of the ship, but she doesn’t give a damn at this moment.

“So what did I end up doing this time?” She asks, leaning her head against the railing; she doesn’t bother putting her scarf back on.


She doesn’t even sigh. She knew what she was getting into. So long as her crew survived, she’ll shoulder the burden of hundreds of deaths.

“Is my crew okay?” If even one of them got hurt, she won’t even need the Glaucus wine to go on the warpath.

“As okay as being shown what a combination of heaven and hell looks like. As okay as worshipping and fearing their captain who ascended into a demon god,” Roger laughs. Physically fine, but mentally need time to recover. Got it.

“I’m going back to sleep,” she says, attempting to lie down where she stands.

“Oh no, no, no. You have captain-y things to do! You have a fearsome doctor to reassure and a stray lizard to feed,” Roger says, picking her up like a puppy.

She doesn’t bother fighting against Roger’s hold. Familiar faces that scrape the edges of her memory pass her by, and all of them give her pale face a concerned look.

Her ship is anchored next to Roger’s with wooden boards held between the two ships, forming a bridge. The Devourer is bigger for some reason. Is that a fresh coat of paint?

Roger carries her over to her ship and down into the infirmary. That she doesn’t remember existing. A woman who looks like she’s crawled out of a horror fantasy book greets them with a clipboard in hand.

“Mr. Gol, your doctor agreed to let me give you a complete physical,” the woman says, dark purple lips upturned into a smile.

Perhaps it’s the chainmail draped over a dark purple dress like lace, or perhaps it’s the nails sharpened into points. Nothing about the lady in front of her seems as fragile as the body figure would suggest.

Roger must agree because he throws her down at his feet as a sacrifice.

“That won’t be necessary! Here, your captain is sober and not choking to death on vomit.” Roger pokes her hat, moving it out of place. “Come see me when you’re through. Bring your lizard too,” Roger tells her before hightailing it out of the infirmary.

“He can’t escape me forever,” the woman huffs before turning to her with a gentle smile. “Hello, my dearest captain. You won’t remember me, so I will introduce myself. I am Kessa, and I am your doctor.”
Small hands grab her by the arms and force her into an infirmary bed with seemingly no effort. This lady is definitely not frail.

“Kali Read. Did I hire you, or did I kidnap you?” She asks.

The woman pokes and prods her with a satisfied hum, before writing something down on her clipboard. How strange to be sitting here like she’s in a doctor’s office.

“Neither. You took my castle,” Kessa says nonchalantly. “I had nowhere else to go.”

“Ah. Sorry?” She offers.

“Don’t be silly! I would have burned it down myself if you hadn’t showed up,” Kessa giggles.

Right. Well, she’ll get the full story eventually. With half a crew sober and her already declared the world’s enemy, there’s no way she did as much damage as the first time around. She won’t hold back from asking questions this time.

A flutter from the curtain hanging on the doorway catches her attention, and a hooded figure enters without a hint of sound. The green cloak draped around the person hides them completely, and she narrows her eyes. She doesn’t know this person.

“Oh, Mr. Dragon, the captain’s no longer under the influence, if you’d like to introduce yourself as well?” Kessa smiles.

Chapter End Notes

Is Demon God Wine a cheat? Yes, it is. Is it going to keep giving Kuina headaches that last a lifetime? Yes, it is.

heartshavelegs from tumblr drew pirate Kuina! Check it out! I love it!!!

https://heartshavelegs.tumblr.com/post/186655401890/priate-prince-kuina-here-to-steal-your-girl-your
“Doctor, if you would not mind giving us a chance to speak privately?” The hooded figure nods politely.

“Of course not. I’m sure you know what Roger will do to you if anything happens to his nephew,” Kessa says cheerfully.

With a smile befitting of a spider ready to bite, Kessa moves past the hooded figure, skirt brushing against a green cloak. The chainmail draped over Kessa’s skirt moves to reveal a small axe for a split second before disappearing back under the material.

The doctor leaves her alone with the person known as “Mr. Dragon,” and she takes a moment to ponder her life. Surely there are more mysteriously cloaked figures named Dragon than the one described in the bounty posters.

Dragon of the Revolutionaries, the World’s Most Dangerous Criminal.

She couldn’t be that unlucky, could she? No, wait, she is. With everything she’s done, catching the attention of someone wanting to fight the World Government is only logical.

“I am Dragon. I am aware of your situation, and that you have no memory of what has transpired.”

The man pulls his hood down, removing the air of mystery to reveal a plain, stern-set face. It’s surprising how ordinary the man looks, but the most shocking thing is how young the leader of the Revolutionaries appears to be.

“Tell me, do you believe in justice?” Dragon asks, seemingly out of the blue.

The man grins at her in a way that reminds her of Roger. Despite his plain appearance, Dragon’s very presence reminds her of Roger. Her headache has lessened to a dull ache, but she has a feeling that won’t last for long.

“That’s a fancy word that can mean many things. What kind of justice do you have in mind?” She asks warily.

“Exactly. Exactly.”

Dragon’s eyes burn like a match suddenly struck; it makes her regret not following the doctor out. Never mind him reminding her of Roger, this man is Roger if the Pirate King declared war on the world. Which means he’s going to try dragging her into that mess.

“For Marines, justice is absolute. It is law. For Nobles, their words are justice and their words are law. For pirates,” here Dragon glances to where she knows Roger to be, “justice is freedom from the idea of justice. What is justice to you?”

What is justice? Well, it certainly isn’t going to court and having his people’s treaties declared insignificant and trivial. Justice isn’t killing innocent people in revenge either. If she’d have to take a stab at it, she’d say,

“Being treated like a human being and treating others like human beings. If you’re an asshole, you get treated like you’re an asshole. Justice. That’s my take on it anyway.”
Dragon doesn’t seem satisfied with that. Nothing in his expression changes, but he gives off that feeling. She debates getting up from the infirmary bed to look for some water. To drink or to throw at him, she’s not sure yet.

“If someone who lazed their days away doing nothing finds they have no food for the winter, and they starve to death, do you call that justice?” Dragon asks, voice rumbling low like flowing water.

That sounds more like karma than justice. Either way, she doubts she could stand back and watch someone starve. Rob a person, kill them, burn their house down—his people would do many things, but letting someone starve wasn’t one of them.

“If I’ve got enough food, I’ll share. Maybe I could work out a deal with someone who has plenty. Now if that person keeps lazing around afterwards, it’s obvious they have a problem, and I’ll force them to pay me back for feeding them in a way they can handle.”

It’s just a hypothetical situation, but Dragon’s grin grows wider at her words.

“For one so steeped in blood, you have what many lack. Kindness. Empathy. The ability to see beyond yourself—”

“Getting way too carried away there,” she interjects loudly. “I’m the furthest thing from kind. Pretty sure I’ve traumatized countless people, killed even more, and I’m very selfish.”

It’s evident by the fact she keeps throwing Mihawk at people, knowing it’d end in their death. There’s no way for him to get stronger otherwise though, and Mihawk obtaining his dream is far more important than any stranger.

“I don’t know what you’re getting at,” she says, “but I’m what you call a monster. Just a good one when compared to the monsters that call themselves slavers.”

“When you fought Monkey D. Garp—” Dragon begins.

(“As I thought, you’re not the same kid from before. What the hell are you?” Garp snarls as his fist misses her head, destroying a portion of the deck.

“I,” she emphasizes, “am drunk. On Haki. On the world. On the suffering that screams at me from the ocean’s waves! And on some very bland tasting wine.”

Her ship circles around Garp’s, and she knows she’ll need to jump once it gets into position. Even if the world makes far too much sense to her at the moment—even if she sees and bends life in a way she can’t normally—she knows fighting against the man in front of her is a losing battle.

What a strange man he is to bend a knee to injustice to better protect those from it, to be so strong yet willing to leash himself to protect others.

“What is a person?” She asks, dancing away from another attack. “Why do some people deserve less freedom than others? Where is justice in beating children to obey? To break someone so they can no longer think for themselves?”

“You sound like my kid,” Garp grumbles. “You’d probably try to free the slaves on Crying Cove Island. Wait! Forget you heard that!”
—you told him that you would continue to free slaves. That you would continue on until people are too scared to fathom the idea. That there are places for law, but only if those laws are truly just. Your idea of justice does not include laws made by the World Nobles who place themselves above others.”

Dragon is uncomfortably close. She leans back slightly. That overbearing grin makes her nervous, and she really wishes he’d stop with that compelling voice threatening to lull her into complacency.

“Freedom to all the world. It can be done. Slowly and with effort. With unity among those rejected by unjust laws, who are treated as less than human—”

The curtain hanging over the doorway moves, and her other headache pops in, disrupting Dragon’s speech. With his own frightening grin, Roger strides over to her to slap her on the back. Dragon backs away, and she nearly falls off the bed.

“Hey, now. I think I said to come see me when you were done with the doctoring!” Roger’s grin sharpens into something dangerous. “Dearest nephew, you pick up such fun people.”

Roger turns an eye to Dragon, and the ensuing staring contest makes her feel like she’s witness to world’s most stupid legendary fight.

“A word of warning. Your resolution to fight and change the world is tied to fate. My death which will change the world is tied to fate. This one here,” Roger grabs her by the shoulders and doesn’t let go, “has no fate. He can disappear and the world will let him. He can burn the world down, and the world will let him.”

Yes, there’s the return of her pain. Complete with nausea, hunger, and thirst. Roger’s iron grip on her means she can’t escape either. She eyes the doorway longingly.

“Be very careful what you ask for, dragon-eating lizard. You may find fate abandoning you,” Roger warns darkly.

As if in response to some silent challenge, Dragon’s whole bearing goes from majestic to domineering. Expression shadowed out, the man looms in a way he hadn’t before. The room grows heavier.

“Pirate King, you to whom the world trembles before, your justice is chaos and freedom for yourself. Even with your passing, there will still be innocents burdened by the chains around their necks. There will still be a World Government trampling others beneath it,” Dragon says before moving his intense gaze back to her.

“If I must give up the winds of fate to destroy oppression and injustice, I will.”

Roger’s grip on her grows tighter, and she glances up at him in surprise. Roger never looks away from Dragon.

“Getting ahead of yourself there,” Roger laughs; it’s not a happy sound. “He’ll never join your little movement or march on your orders. No, in that sense, you’re better off begging for the World Nobles to bow their heads for you to cut off.”

Wait, she gets it now. She can’t believe she woke up from an alcoholic rampage to bear witness to a pissing contest between the two most infamous men of all time. It’s possible they’ve met before, and this is simply old ground between them.

“Hey, you do know I’m still in the room, right?” She says dryly before pinching Roger’s fingers
digging into her shoulder. “Answer me one thing, Dragon. Are you part of my crew?”

“No, I am but a mere guest,” Dragon answers.

“Then you can keep trying to recruit me into revolution while I get something to eat. Roger, whatever you want to say can be said over a meal,” she decides. “I am too old for this shit.”
Corv’s expression of relief at seeing her up and in her right state of mind is quickly replaced by an anxious one upon seeing her companions. The cook flees into the kitchen while she takes a seat at the dining table. She doesn’t remember the galley having such a large table, or it being decorated with neon light strips.

Stupid Demon God Wine.

“With one who shines so brightly amidst the chaos of change and one who showers light on those in the dark, the spark of revolution would turn into a blazing wildfire,” Dragon says immediately.

“That’s my nephew you’re talking about. If he were to charge into that fire, Pirate King would be spoken aloud, driving terror into the hearts of both Marines and Pirates alike. Fear would cloud the way of the new age!” Roger argues back without waiting for her input.

A dead-eyed Tani shuffles in with three mugs. Placing two alcoholic beverages down in front of her guests, Tani hands her one filled with tea before shuffling into the kitchen. She sips the bitter tea and grimaces. Medicinal tea. Must be Jannice’s doing.

The beverages go a long way in making her guests rein in their impressive auras, but it doesn’t stop the wordy bastards from doing what they best.

“Rumors of the Prince of Destruction’s savagery towards slavery have already spread. Hope has risen from the ashes left behind. The call for justice has never been louder.” Dragon continues to speak with that compelling voice.

“How many people will hold their hands out waiting for freedom to come to them on a monster’s wings instead of seeking it for themselves? Justice has no place on the seas, only what you can take for yourself!” Roger says before taking a swig of his drink.

Thankfully Corv doesn’t take too long in getting something edible on the table. She’s never been happier to see a bowl of soup in her life. Dining with Roger and Dragon is a tense affair. She sort of knew it would be, but this is just ridiculous.

“Justice—”

“Freedom—”

“Um, Captain? Can I have a moment of your time?” Tani asks, peeking out of the kitchen.

If she gets up faster than is polite and appears to sprint to the kitchen, well, she can’t bring herself to care.

“What’s up?” She asks quietly after the kitchen door swings shut.

“Oh, nothing. You just looked like you needed a break,” Tani admits.

Bless her tiny knitter. Corv hands her a cup of water without a word, and she gulps it down to get the taste of ego out of her mouth. Roger and Dragon really are getting on her last nerve.

“I don’t know how you can stand sitting between them. They’re making it hard to breathe in here,” Tani says.
Before she can answer that it’s because she’s too hungover to care, a loud noise rattles the dishes in the kitchen. She blinks and sticks her head out, but Roger and Dragon haven’t moved an inch. No wait, Roger’s pointing at his mug and waving it around wildly. He wants more alcohol.

“What was that?” She asks as Tani goes to fill up Roger’s mug.

There’s a familiar taste of blood lust in the air. She has a hunch, but she has no idea what could have possibly riled Mihawk up into such a state.

“Must be Dracule. Shanks’ been waiting for him to sober up. The kid learned some fancy new sword tricks,” Corv tells her.

“Ah.” That’d do it.

She can’t stay in the kitchen forever, but she decides to go ahead and rip the bandage off. She asks Corv for the highlights of her latest stunt.

“Well, you circled around Garp, went to an island to free some slaves, circled back around Garp, stopped to upgrade the ship and picked up the creepy Dragon guy, destroyed a part of Mary Geoise to get to the New World—you wanted to burn the place down, but Hilda managed to convince you to just pass through—killed everyone on an island to take their castle because Dracule wanted it, picked up a doctor who was the princess of that castle, lost your sword to a leviathan—”

“Wait, it’s gone?” She blinks, feeling a sudden pang of sadness.

“It regurgitated another one. All your swords are going to be named after vomit at this rate. Let’s see, you found a girlfriend for Killer Frank. Shame it ain’t a shark though. Could of made a killing on selling guard sharks. You made friends with some Fishmen and an abomination from hell, and then you met Roger where the two of you creeped the fuck out of everyone. Ask AJ for the details. Guy decided to journal the whole thing.”

Right, well, it doesn’t sound like she went overboard like the first time. That must be because only half her crew drank this go around. She decides to shelve her forgotten misadventures for another day; her immediate concern is the hostility radiating from her dining room.

Tani wishes her good luck as she heads back in. Taking her seat between the two, she folds her arms on the table and glances between the two. Dragon is unreadable, and Roger’s eyes shine with a hint of madness.

She’s been running the conversations through her head, and she thinks she understands what the fuss is all about.

“Let me get this straight. You’re worried about the future of piracy and want me to lay low,” she nods at Roger before looking at Dragon, “and you want me to fight against the World Government as loudly and visibly as possible.”

Two matching grins beam at her, and she debates the merit of crawling back into her bed and leaving these losers to themselves.

She could run for it. She gets the feeling neither one would bother chasing after her, but Roger wasn’t joking when he said she was being held prisoner to lie. Kali Read is the most wanted pirate after the Pirate King and Whitebeard. She never wanted to be a pirate.

The Revolutionaries hadn’t made too big of stir in the time she came from, but how much different would it be if she got involved? Her words to her grandfather about freeing slaves still stand, but
she doesn’t have the drive that Dragon holds.

Truthfully, she already made her decision once she figured out what they were asking for.

“To disappear or to become a poster boy.” She sighs. “I’ll agree to both terms, but you’re going to have to agree to mine.”

“I’ll give up my title as Pirate Prince to fly under your banner. In return you don’t order me around. Also, you’ll have to clean up my messes. I don’t have the willpower to constantly haul around people in need of homes,” she tells Dragon.

She’ll become his secret weapon when he needs it, and he’ll have to do the actual hard work. It’s a good trade off.

“I’ll do most of my Revolutionary work in secret with only a few appearances here and there. People will soon forget I’m technically a pirate. No more exploration and adventures of the Grand Line,” she promises Roger.

She’s not sure how her ship will become a ghost ship, but she has time until Roger’s death to figure it out. If there’s a place that holds the secret to being invisible on the water, it’ll be on the Grand Line.

“As you are both asking me to give up the rest of my life that I would have spent exploring with Mihawk and my crew, you owe me. I won’t say what just yet,” mainly because she’s drawing a blank, “but it’s an unknown debt that I can call on at any time.”

And of course, she’ll slip away as Kuina when she’s gotten bored of it all. That part she keeps to herself. The only one who knows she’s had that planned since day one is Mihawk, who’ll probably go his separate way once Roger dies.

“Take it or leave it,” she says with an air of finality.
She’d like to say that things between Roger and Dragon went well, and there’s no reason for her to have to deal with their dramatic selves from there on. That’s what she’d like to say. Negotiating between a legendary pirate and a man bent on building the most fearsome army in the world is nothing short of exhausting.

She’s one flask short of Glaucus wine, but Dragon promises to use it responsibly. The promise to read a letter from Roger once his death comes to pass makes her far more uneasy. In return for these two things, she secures their help in finding the person addressed in her grandfather’s letter. It might not sound fair on the surface, but considering where the letter is sending her, it’s more than fair.

When she’s had enough, she retires to her ship’s crow’s nest to get some alone time. The lookout is hidden beneath large spikes, so it’s obvious to anyone who can sense her that she wants to be left alone. The place lets her rest and think.

How much stronger will Mihawk become once he leaves her side? She has no doubt he will. He can’t become the world’s strongest swordsman if he’s unable to challenge others. Lurking in the shadows like a boogeyman isn’t going to cut it.

“Why are you moping?”

“Are you psychic?” She asks as Mihawk jumps down from a spike overhead. “And I’m not moping.”

An unimpressed stare makes her flop onto her back with a sigh. So maybe she’s moping a little bit. Mihawk sits down next to her and crosses his arms. She can practically feel the acerbic comment he wants to say.

“Our time together is about to come to an end. I’m not sure why, but it makes me feel sad,” she says pensively.

Mihawk demands an explanation with narrow eyes, and she tells him what she’s agreed to: trading in her pirate hat for a revolutionary one, disappearing in a few years’ time, and possibly becoming a ghost legend. It’s true that her crew goes where she goes, but Mihawk isn’t part of her crew.

“Being with me will only hold you back, so you’ll have to leave,” she ends up saying. “Our relations with Whitebeard still stand, so that’d be the best place for you to start.”

“Being with you caused a bounty of 600 million on my head,” Mihawk says dryly. “I doubt your efforts to disappear will happen like any of you want it to. I will make my own decision of when to leave.”

Well, that’s true enough. It isn’t like she’s going to stop fighting high class opponents either. Even if she’s not out to take on the World Government non-stop, her fights will probably lean towards world shattering what with her bounty.

“Shouldn’t you be doing what I say?” She asks.

“Shouldn’t you be less of an idiot?” Mihawk counters.

She makes a face at Mihawk who simply raises an eyebrow in return. He looks far too well to be
hungover. It’s not fair.

“You seem to be doing well. I don’t think I can survive a third time drinking that stuff. I might end up emperor or something,” she says with a slight twinge of resentment. “Do you think we did anything embarrassing this time?”

Mihawk considers that with a tilt of the head, hat sliding over his eyes ominously.

“Probably.”

(“Hey, Mr. Revolutionary, how long are you going to stand there looking off in the distance with your arms crossed?”

Dragon maintains a somber silence from the bow of her ship, and she debates trying to shove him off. Trying because she’d fail at doing it, but at least it would let him know he’s the world’s worst ship figurehead. Now a freedom figurehead—yes, that would be good except that’s decades away.

All Dragon’s doing at the moment is making her feel like she should be responsible for something. It’s awful.

“Serious,” she sneers before looking at her shadow whose stoic face makes her twitch. “Everyone’s too serious. You’re ruining my good mood.”

Mihawk throws a knife at her, and she kicks it back at him. His expression never changes, his beastly form lulled into sleep from the songs of blood wrapping around the ship. What could she do to ruin this air of seriousness?

“That’s it! Nikos,” she turns to her artist who’s watching the island getting closer from the railing, “party hats for everyone! No exceptions!”

“Ah, Captain, are you sure that’s what I should be doing? We’ll be docking into this very, very scary island soon. I can hear people screaming. Like right now.” Nikos pale face and terrified gaze is a breath of fresh air to her.

“No exceptions! Make enough so that when we get there, we can put party hats on the people trying to kill us too,” she adds as the thought comes to her.

“You know someone’s going to try to kill us?” Hilda asks, staring out at the island nervously.

The island with its painted swirls and horrified tales, warning people to stay away—she can see why her non-enlightened crew is afraid. Even if the screams and mad laughs weren’t being carried to them, there’d still be an instinctive desire to avoid the island.

“Oh, yes, there’s blood in the water, on the wind, carried on the edge of sound. Every woman, man, child, and creature on that island carries a weapon in hand in attempt to kill with murderous rage. This is the most inhumane island we’ve been to yet,” she remarks.

She thinks that makes Dragon move the slightest bit. Unnerved or interested? He’s a hard one to read.

“And you want,” Hilda pauses as if momentarily losing the ability to speak, “to dock there?”

There are no innocents on that island, no one with their sad eyes and their bleeding scars. The only
thing waiting on that island is death—their death, not hers—and it takes precious time away from finding Roger. She wouldn’t be stopping there normally.

“Need food. We’re getting low. Watching you starve is the one thing I can’t let happen. Now, hats,” she commands, pulling Nikos away from the railing.

When they get off the ship, disgusting creatures come up to them wearing smiling human faces while hiding knives behind their backs. Her shadow steps up beside her and surveys their surrounding with burning eyes.

“I want that castle,” Mihawk declares, red party hat tied on top of his normal one; it has cartoon bats on it.

“As your master and sugar daddy, you shall have that castle!” She tells him while wearing her own party hat; it’s purple with pink mustaches painted on it.

If one were to look behind them, and peer closely to the bow of the ship, one might see a hooded figure in a green cloak standing there with their arms crossed. This figure would be wearing a yellow party hat with a green cartoon dragon on it.)

“Well, so long as we don’t ask, we’ll never know, and I’m fine with that,” she says.

Mihawk grunts in agreement, and a comfortable silence settles over them. Drunken singing coming from below reminds her of the sendoff party Roger held for them.

“How long does Roger have?” Mihawk asks.

“I don’t remember, but it’s soon. The history books say he was caught by the Marines, but my father said he turned himself in. So it was a suicide. I’ve thought about it, but I can’t figure out why he’d do that,” she tells him.

But it’s Roger’s choice, and she can’t take that away any more than she can Mihawk’s. Perhaps he simply wanted to kick off the Golden Age of Piracy sooner rather than later.

“I will be by your side until I can beat you,” Mihawk suddenly says.

His hat covers his eyes, and she finds herself unable to read that stiff body language.

“Okay, counting on it then,” she says.

She forgets sometimes that Mihawk’s goal in life is to kill her, and that she’s literally making it so he can do it. The thought is comforting in a twisted way. He’ll have to keep seeking her out even if he leaves.

“HEY, GET DOWN HERE AND FIGHT ME!”

The scream is so sudden, so loud and high pitched, she flinches and hits her head against the floor of the crow’s nest. Mihawk scowls and sinks lower as if to hide better behind a spike. There’s only one child she knows of willing to scrap with Mihawk.

“What did you do to Shanks?” She asks, rubbing her head.

“You do know his name.”
“Don’t tell him that. So?” She prods.

Screeching from below makes her think Shanks will soon be attempting to chop down pieces of her ship to get to Mihawk. While she won’t let that happen, Mihawk would deserve it if that satisfied glint in his eye is anything to go by.

“When I knocked him unconscious, I made sure everyone knew that he lost shamefully,” Mihawk says.

She peers over the edge of the crow’s nest and looks for bright, red hair. Shanks looks older than she remembers him being with muscles and a sword on his hip. The more mature appearance does nothing for the black ink dried into his face.

“Did you write ‘Loser’ on his forehead? Is that a pair of glasses? You drew Roger’s mustache on him?” She has to bite her arm to keep from howling with laughter.
In a fit of madness, she follows Roger around the New World, completely sober and voluntarily. Her original reasoning is to use Roger as a buffer as she adjusts to the rougher part of the Grand Line, but it soon becomes apparent that Roger is willing to throw her to the metaphorical and the literal sharks.

“It’s a good thing we have Killer Frank and Miss Fluff!” She shouts over the deafening thunder.

Her guard shark is tearing into a giant octopus tentacle with enthusiasm while his girlfriend—a cross between a dolphin and a poodle—rips another one apart with similar enthusiasm. Her crew works hard to keep the hideously deformed and, more importantly, gigantic octopus from latching onto the ship.

The rain falls hard enough to bruise, and she swears she can see Roger waving cheerfully from the deck of his dry, non-octopus attacked ship. She holds up a middle finger at him.

It gets rough when the octopus dies only to be replaced by a maelstrom, but once that fiasco clears, she ends up with a treasure chest loaded with gold and jewels. It also contains a Devil Fruit, but that’s less treasure and more of a consolation prize.

In retrospect, she shouldn’t have given the fruit to Jesper to do with as he pleased. Her treasurer has two things he lives by: beli and never being bored.

“Dearest Uncle,” she says blearily, stumbling onto her deck the next morning, “if you don’t want to be known as the pirate who flew his underwear as a flag, I’d suggest putting that Devil Fruit down.”

Nikos drags AJ over to her with a relieved expression even as both the guitarist and Roger pout. Dragon had woken her up in time, thankfully. She really doesn’t want to see what her musician would do with the power to amplify sound. As useful as it could be, she won’t subject herself to that.

“It was worth a shot,” Roger says, throwing the fruit over his shoulder. It lands into the ocean with a splash.

“Were you hoping to annoy me or to annoy Dragon?” She asks with narrow eyes.

“Yes,” Roger grins.

She can’t hang out with Roger forever though; she has things to do and a time limit above her head. Mihawk tries to hide it, but he frowns a little harder when she announces her intentions to part ways. His daily duels with Shanks that make the ships shudder will be coming to an end.

“You could stay with them you know,” she says. “Roger wouldn’t turn you away.”

“I will remain here,” Mihawk tells her sharply.

Something tells her this will be the last time she sees Roger. Her goodbye is perhaps a little sentimental—
“I have never met someone who screwed up my life so badly. Not even Mihawk did as much damage as you,” she admits as Roger pours her a small cup of sake.

“I’m flattered.” Roger chuckles. “But if I hadn’t provoked you, you would have gotten bored. What a marvelous but dangerous thing that would have been!”

They share a drink together, and she gags. The sake tastes awful.

—though perhaps she can live a more peaceful life without such a chaotic influence in it.

“Goodbye, Shine,” she nods with a tilt of her hat.

“It’s Shanks! I’ll get you to say it eventually!” The boy pouts at her before waving wildly with a large grin.

The boy next to Shanks just folds his arms and glares at her. She probably shouldn’t have made fun of his nose, but it just slipped out of her mouth one day. It’s a clown nose. It’s a miracle she kept her silence for as long as she did.

“The world holds it breath and waits to see what you will do,” Dragon says once they sail off for the unknown.

“It can keep holding its breath,” she replies. “You were looking for a ship of your own when we met, right? Where do you want me to drop you off?”

Dragon doesn’t answer. Having gotten used to the different silences the man emits, she’s pretty sure that Dragon isn’t too sure himself. Well, that’s fine then. Turns out, without Roger there to provoke him into an ideology speech war, Dragon’s a pretty good passenger to have aboard. He’s polite, helpful, and quiet.

She just wishes cameras were a thing. She’ll never forget the time Tani roped Dragon into helping her knit. Dragon had been so polite about the whole thing; it was, quite frankly, adorable and hilarious.

Her passenger sails with her for a shockingly long time—Dragon’s able to establish his movement wherever she goes—and when he does end up leaving a year later, her crew throw a sendoff party that rivals the ones held by Roger.

“It’s like losing an actual crew member,” she tells Dragon as Skim lights off some fireworks.

Color explodes against the sky, and she thinks she understands Roger’s feelings a little better. She’d keep Dragon if she didn’t think he’d sink her ship to get away. The man grins at her from beneath his hood.

“The weapons against injustice can’t be made if left to forge themselves. We will meet again.” This is Dragon’s weird way of apologizing.

The Prince’s Pirates lose their passenger—but not before Tani loads him down with knitted scarves and a knitted cloak—and continue their preparations to become the monster of the Revolutionary army.

For whatever time she has left as one of the most feared pirates in the world, she makes the most of it. She solidifies alliances with people who won’t be forgetting her even as she disappears, finds buried treasure before burying her own, and obtains a shipwright who moonlights as a magician. She even gets Mihawk and herself fancy new swords that will never break. Probably.
“I’m glad the swordsmith agreed with me that its name didn’t fit,” she says, holding up her katana, “but I wish it wasn’t left up to me to name it.”

How does one name a sword that was purchased normally? It’s not like she got it out of a Sea King’s stomach, and it’s not like she can do anything more impressive with it than she’s already done with her old sword.

“It’s certainly,” Melody pauses a touch too long, “a unique sword. I’m sure you’ll find something fitting.”

“Why did it have to be pink? It’s hurting my eyes,” Corv grumbles.

“I like it,” Baiko chimes in loyally.

Hidden behind her long, red coat, most won’t see that the scabbard of the katana is pink, and if she goes on a rampage of pure destruction, most who see the sword in all its colorful glory won’t be alive long enough to speak of it.

“When it’s time, the sword will tell you its name,” Mihawk says, glancing to the large one on his back.

Her sword remains nameless for a long time.

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“Roger’s execution has been scheduled.”

A newspaper lands on her desk, and she frowns at the giant bolded text screaming, “Pirate King Sentenced to Death.” She looks up into yellow eyes and is taken aback at how furious they seem to be. She hadn’t thought Mihawk cared for Roger.

“Looks like they’re wondering what his nephew will do,” she remarks after a quick glance through the article.

“And what is it you will do?” Mihawk asks, taking a seat on a dozing Jesper.

The panda doesn’t even stir, too used to Mihawk and her using him as both a couch and a pillow.

“Probably not what anyone expects,” she says vaguely, throwing the newspaper into a stack of papers to throw away. “It’ll be my first action under the Revolutionary banner as well as my last hurrah as the Pirate Prince.”

She opens a drawer in her desk and pulls out a small bottle of wine followed by two shot glasses. Not the proper way to sip wine, but she’s a pirate. Proper isn’t a thing.

“Drink with me, and I’ll fill you in on my plan,” she says.

Chapter End Notes

I will be speeding up the timeline/chapters from here on to finish the Strongest Swordsman AU story line to a conclusion. Finding Your Wings season 2 will be kicking off soon, and I am not a multi-writer.
But as this is the Silly and the Strange and not its own story, I can always come back and write more chapters out of order.
There’s an island with beautiful palm trees and quaint little houses. The sun sets, engulfing everything in a warm haze. Children shriek in playfulness while most get ready to have dinner. It’s the picture of paradise.

Shame then, what happens next.

The people here ignore the ship that appears from the sudden fog at first. They’re used to pirate ships stopping by, used to Gol D. Roger’s uncanny visits or his associates’. Someone with a sharp eye loudly points out that even though the ship’s black flag has never been seen here before, it’s definitely one of Rogers’.

There is a sigh of relief. The Pirate King may be set for execution tomorrow, but his followers wouldn’t be anything but respectful to his old stomping grounds. When the pirate ship docks with foreboding spikes and sharp teeth etched into the bow, no one pays it much attention.

Later, they will say, “We should have known when we saw that demonic ship.”

A man steps into town, dressed in a way that reminds everyone of Roger. Wearing a long red coat embroidered with gold, a black hat atop short, dark hair, and a white scarf wrapped around his face—this is Roger’s famous nephew they all think. If the Marines come asking questions, they will all say so.

The rest of the Prince’s Pirates are far more intimidating compared to their captain who’s swallowed in cloth. Scars, burn marks, faces that look they’ve survived the worst the world threw at them—these pirates bare it all to the world. They surround their captain like a pack of feral dogs.

Gaze hidden beneath the hat, the captain spins around to survey the island with a calculating gaze, and anyone who catches sight of those eyes suddenly find themselves holding their breath. There is something very wrong.

The ones who did not catch the captain’s eyes are struck with that same thought when the man grabs the pistol from his hip and holds it up.

“Bring all the women before me. I’ll know who to take. Children under the age of two and their mothers go. If the men beg, well, we need someone to scrub the floors,” the cruel words are said with a surprisingly young voice.

The man—boy perhaps—fires the gun, and a roar fills the ears of all who hear it. Most find their vision swimming, some fall to their knees out of dizziness. No one can fight back against the hands that grab and drag them to the young captain.

The pirates are emotionless even as women begin struggling and crying in their hold. Babies are snatched out of arms and houses without remorse. Relatives and friends who attempt to stop them get kicked away heartlessly. In the middle of it all, the captain stands impassively as women are thrown before him.

Some are rejected with a flick of the hand, and the ones that aren’t, the captain points to them and declares,

“Take her to the ship.”
One particular woman, with tears streaming down her face, claws at the ground in desperation. Her kidnapper, a woman with a face that looks to have been mauled, grabs her around the middle and begins pulling her to the docks.

“No, please! My children!” The woman sobs while attempting to reach behind her.

A young child, five years old perhaps, clutches the hand of an even younger one. Tears fall from wide eyes and their mouths tremble.

“Mama! Mama!” The two small children cry.

The captain tilts his head and considers the children with a cool gaze. His gaze goes to the man holding onto them like a lifeline. How terrible it is to see a grown man with such a heartbroken expression.

“Take all three of them too,” the captain says, pointing at them.

In the wake of the chaos, of the kidnapping and the screams, the tears and the pleading—no one notices a beautiful lady calmly walking up to the pirate captain, head held high and hands clasped together like she’s on a stroll.

“You’re late,” the woman says flatly.

“I’m early,” she refutes. “I wasn’t supposed to read the letter until tomorrow.”

She’d been feeling melancholic and had decided there wasn’t any harm in reading it early. While there had been quite a bit of sentimental, confusing, and quite frankly, incredibly dangerous stuff written in it, there’d been a rather lengthy post script attached.

“Please protect your Aunt Rouge.” “She’s amazing.” “You’ll love her.” “It won’t be a hassle, promise.”

Her favorite part had been the last bit.

“We’re aiming for pregnancy, so there may or may not be a mini-me running around. Tell her Junior is too a marvelous name!”

Damn Roger for that little surprise. The infamous deaths in South Blue after Roger’s execution were linked to mostly women as so-called Pirate King insurgents. If she puts the letter’s information together with her admittedly questionable recollection, then she came to the conclusion that the government would be hunting Rouge down.

She’d planned on picking Rouge up in style before spiriting the woman away into the fog. A message from Garp—Garp of all people—told her that the World Government will be stomping out Roger’s bloodline with all the weight of Absolute Justice.

It was written threateningly with sloppy writing and red ink, but she saw the hints for what they were. Pregnant women and infants would be killed on suspicion alone. So she had to alter her plans a bit.

“Roger said you’d be here before I would start to worry,” Rouge says, a hand drifting to her abdomen.

“He said a lot of things,” she says. Thinking of the letter and feeling somewhat petty, she adds, “Said you were right about Junior being a terrible name.”
Rouge smiles slightly before breezing past her to follow a woman being hauled to their ship. It’s terrible business, kidnapping women and children. Still, if it keeps them alive, she’ll keep at it. This island is only one stop of many. She’ll scour most of Roger’s well known haunts for any potential targets.

 (“Where will you keep them?” Mihawk asks as she details the change in plans. 

 She can hardly call sticking every pregnant lady and baby she comes across on her ship as a good plan. The only feasible thing is to relocate the women and children to an island. One already furnished would be nice.

 “Well, there’s a perfectly good castle that no one wants to go near,” she begins.

 “No.”

 “I’ll get you another castle.”

 “No.”

 “Please? I’ll let you drain my money dry. We’ll hire the best builders so you can have revolving bookcases, paintings with moving eyes, and a throne made of swords.”

 She does get Mihawk to agree to let her use the island and its castle, but only after negotiating some more. It’s like dealing with a wild animal that wants to eat her, and she doesn’t come out of it feeling like she won at all. Jesper will probably try to kill her once he realizes she’ll be blowing all their money on Mihawk’s new castle.)

 Her prisoners calm down slightly once they’re given the reason for their kidnapping, and it helps that she has hot meals, beds, and cribs ready for them. She gives the chore of explaining everything to Jannice, Nikos, and Tani, the three less threatening of her crew.

 She’s very intimidating. No reason for her to fail at calming a bunch of hysterical people down, or to give the same lengthy speech over and over again to people too scared of her to hear it. That’s her story, and she’s sticking to it.

 Rouge goes a long way in keeping everyone calm—there’s a magnetic charm to her that makes her words seem important—and there’s no assassination attempt. Out of gratitude, she gives “Aunt” Rouge special treatment.

 She lets the woman sleep in Mihawk’s bed instead of crowding in with the other islanders. The bed’s owner won’t care as long as she washes it later as it’s not been in use these past couple of days.

 Mihawk went to witness Roger’s execution alone. It’s an important first step in her plan to disassociate his name from hers. Mihawk had also wanted to go, conveniently skipping out on the wailing women and babies. She desperately hopes he doesn’t say anything cruel to Shanks.

 She avoids Rouge for most of the morning after, choosing to hide out in the crow’s nest. Skim signs questions asking if she’s okay, and she signs back, “Probably not.” It’s not just the suffocating presence of her so-called aunt that has her looking for a peaceful place to hang out in.
It’s a bright, sunny day, and the shade from the large spikes hanging overhead is the only reason she isn’t frying like an egg. A disturbance from the side of the ship catches her attention, and she jumps onto the rigging to get a better look.

A large Sea King with spikes shaped like a stupid looking mustache calmly swims alongside them. She climbs down while her crew does their best to keep the prisoners from looking over and freaking out. She takes a seat on the railing, and Rouge joins her shortly. The two of them watch the Sea King in silence until it disappears with the sun.

“He’s dead. The world went to watch his death like it’s the most fascinating thing in the world. And it is. But they won’t remember him as he was,” the woman finally says, breaking the silence.

“It’s what he wanted. To shake the world with his death, to be remembered as something greater than he was,” she replies.

Not that Roger wasn’t already great, but he wanted a legacy that spanned generations of pirates, wanted to be responsible for a Golden Age like no other.

“Do you regret coming to get us? Pretending to be his family?” Rouge asks, hand drifting to her abdomen as she looks out into the growing darkness.

Family, huh? When he first came to this world, he didn’t have any. Time didn’t change that, and she soon found herself alone in a dojo before being alone in the wilderness. She was fine with claiming no one as her family. Family only weighs people down.

A star falls in the dimly lit sky, and it’s unusually bright.

“I’m not pretending, and my only regret was not coming sooner.”

(Loguetown is a sight to behold. The small town has never seen so many bodies, all pressed together, eager and babbling in excitement. The sheer amount of people makes it easy for anyone to hide among the masses, and at the center of it all is Roger, kneeling on the execution stand like a king upon a throne.

The man, though sickly, grins in absolute delight, and the fire in his eyes is yet to be extinguished. Despite the blades under his chin and the shackles around his wrists, Roger looks to be the one in control.

“You want my treasure? You can have it! I left everything I gathered together in one place. Now you'll just have to find it!”

Those are Roger’s last words. The blades move, and the rain falls.

It is annoying, this rain. The wind blows it into peoples’ eyes, causing mutters of being unable to see. There’s a sob amongst the muttering. He reaches out and grabs the top of Shanks’ hat, carefully pulling it back until the boy’s face is to the sky without the hat’s protection.

“There is rain in your eyes,” he says.)
Her friend will be the strongest swordsman 24

Chapter Notes

Warning: dark themes for the whole chapter (it's a small look at the castle's origins)

“When you mentioned I would regret offering my services, I never imagined you would be forcing over a hundred pregnant women into my care. Never mind the infants, children, and men that do not understand even basic hygiene,” Kessa says mildly.

She watches from the doorway as the doctor whirls around her new office, stacks of paper being shuffled into folders that take up every bit of space. What was once a bedroom now contains filing cabinets, medical books, and supplies.

“I’d apologize, but I’ve already kidnapped ten assistants for you,” she says flatly.

Well, she did kidnap them, but the assistants all volunteered. Half of them are older women that had begged to be with their daughters, some of them were already working towards a trade in medicine, and the rest simply had nothing else to do. She had suggested that Kessa needed help, and that was that.

“Oh, yes. I do thank you for that.” Kessa covers her mouth to hide a vicious smile.

Of course, everyone who volunteered to be an assistant soon regretted it. Kessa is a harsh teacher who enjoys the suffering of her students. She has no doubt that in a few years’ time each assistant will be a qualified doctor whether they want to be or not.

“Captain, when we first met, I was attempting to take your head from your shoulders,” Kessa says.

(“Intruders of this castle of blood, I’ll add yours to the foundation!” The woman screams, hair flowing around her face like a veil.

She laughs, ducking beneath the swipe of a large axe. The woman shrieks and attempts to chop her head off again, but she dances away. Blood and gore covers the stone floor, seeping into cracks and crevices; the bodies surrounding them have all been chopped to pieces, but she had nothing to do with it.

“My lovely princess,” she says with a bow which also serves as a dodge to the swing of the axe. “Your castle is built on blood and rage, of sorrow and pain. My shadow desires it, so I must have it.”

The princess pauses, staring her down through strands of hair. She smiles from beneath her scarf even as the stones beneath her feet cry out, warning her of the madness before her.

She almost lifts her gun, thinks about aiming it at the woman’s heart and pulling the trigger. How much the stones would like it. Except there is something that pleads with her. It comes from a pocket in the princess’ dress. A syringe of poison. It whispers love and tenderness. How strange, how interesting.
“I want to burn this place down. I want the island to perish beneath the waves. I won’t hand this castle over to you. I will see it destroyed myself!”

This woman burns with a passion different from everyone else. Wicked people full of malice can’t compare. There’s a sincere desire to destroy everything, even the ashes. She finds herself charmed.

“Lovely princess, blood flows from your axe like rain pouring from the sky. Your tears run red. You enjoy carving people up. Why then do you carry poison with you?”

Her words cause the woman to go into a frenzy, blindly attacking everything in sight. She only has to step back every few heartbeats to avoid being hit. When the princess reaches her limit, she collapses, axe clattering to the ground in defeat.

“We weren’t always this way.” The princess’ hair completely covers her face as confession falls from her lips. “I had someone very dear to me once. I remember laughing with my parents. My teacher was so happy when I declared my intention to be the best healer this island’s ever seen.”

Oh, yes, she can see it now. There’s a broken hair piece by the throne; its nearly silent voice speaks of happier times. Of a mother that loved her daughter despite the chilling calls to kill her.

“But the madness in our blood calls to us. Turns out the royal family whose blood ran the purest were the last to fall to it. Everyone here is born with a thirst to inflict pain. I grew up never knowing that. My whole life was a lie.”

The princess lifts her head, eyes shining with the purest sorrow.

“I’ve been dining with murderers and cannibals this whole time and never knew it! Kehahaha! How messed up is this world when a little girl never knew she was eating her missing uncle!” The princess laughs as tears fall.

Delicate hands reach into a hidden pocket, and the princess holds a syringe to her inner arm. There’s no frantic call to stop it, no tragedy in this woman’s death; there’s been too much blood spilled. Still, she burns with curiosity. Why does this container of poison radiate so much love?

“Why the poison?” She asks.

“The lie broke the day my teacher held a knife to my face. He couldn’t stop himself in time. ‘Kessa, you are different. You were born with a conscious. I was saving this for myself, but you take it. When you find yourself unable to go on, use it.’ These were his last words before he took his life in front of me.”

With the way the needle pokes into her skin, clearly the princess thinks now is the time to give up. What a waste of such beautiful eyes, a waste of such passion that could level castles.

She hears the syringe more clearly. Of struggles and experiments to find a cure, before moving on to obtain painless death for a loved one. This woman’s teacher never made it with himself in mind. It’d be a shame if this princess never knows that.

“Get up. I’m taking this castle, and I’m going to kill everyone on this island, but I won’t stop you from taking a few more heads,” she says, kicking the axe back towards the woman.

The princess is too stunned to continue on with the poison.

It’d be beneficial for her if the woman continues on with the killing. Her crew went back to the ship, leaving Mihawk and her to continue culling. She ordered it once the children started showing
up. Even the part of her crew who won’t remember any of this don’t need to have a hand in that.

“My ship still needs a doctor, but I’m afraid I can’t accept a dead one,” she says, moving past the princess to sit on the throne. It’s not very comfortable; she’ll need a new one.

“If you want to go with me, I’ll take you. You’ll get your fill of blood though you’ll soon regret joining me. But when there’s nothing left to kill but yourself, what would you rather do?”

“You were very handsome, sitting in my father’s throne, Captain,” Kessa remarks.

She has nothing to say to that. The Glaucus wine means she can’t remember anything she did while under its influence. Kessa filled her in with detail, but there’s nothing she can do about forgotten feelings.

“I wanted to burn this castle down. I never wanted to be back here again, yet soon there will be children running down the halls, ones free from the madness. Soon people will call this place home, unknowing of the horrors that went on.”

The smile on Kessa’s face is a genuine one. It’s rare to see on her doctor, but it’s becoming more common as they redecorate the castle to fit their needs. For instance, some of the blood stains wouldn’t come out, so they laid carpet down. Kessa had been more than happy to help choose the carpet design.

“I am overjoyed that this place will become a place of life. That I can bloody my hands with birth rather than death. Truly, I am grateful to you, Captain,” Kessa says. “Now, I believe Rouge was looking for you. Something about changing rooms?”

“I better go do that then,” she says but finds herself unwilling to leave just yet. “You’re sure you’ll be okay by yourself?”

She’s given Kessa plenty of alternatives to staying in the castle, the island even, but the doctor remains adamant that she’ll remain with the crew no matter what.

“If it gets to be too much, I’ll go find Jesper. He’s hosting story time for the children, I believe,” Kessa hums, continuing to steadily work without pause.

“Come get me if you want to. Nothing’s too important,” she says awkwardly before stepping away.

She tries to use Haki to find Rouge. She fails. She can only use Haki to observe people at a limited range, and while it’s gotten worryingly sharper lately—she can recognize who’s pregnant and who’s not if she concentrates—there’s a frustration at how useless it can be. Rouge has taken to a garden on one of the balconies, so that’s the best place to start.

(The captain disappears, and the shuffling of paper comes to a stop.

“I originally planned to give this to you, but I thought better of it. I will never let you feel like you are unable to go on,” Kessa says to herself while holding up a syringe.

From the view of the window, black sails can be seen against blue sea. The other swordsman responsible for wiping out half of the island’s inhabitants returns. A gentle smile turns sharp.

“Dracule, if you kill her, nothing can stop me from taking your head.”

"
She leans against a black iron railing, taking even and deep breaths. The island is eerily silent, and the smell of blood seems to be a permanent fixture. From the balcony, the view is deceptively beautiful. She knows however, that the dark spots on the trees below aren’t a natural occurrence.

This is one hell of a place to stick expecting mothers and innocent children in. On the bright side, absolutely no one in their right mind will consider going near the island. Even those unable to use Haki can feel the unpleasant aura surrounding this vile piece of land. At least these people are safe here even if they are forever traumatized.

“Welcome back,” she says.

She doesn’t turn around from where she leans against the railing, continues taking in the sight of the blood-stained forest below. She doesn’t need Haki to know who those steps belong to, whose presence it is at her back.

“He’s dead.”

It’s said so matter-of-fact, most would never realize the anger bubbling beneath. A sudden spike of bloodlust makes her whirl around and reach for her sword. Piercing eyes shine through the shadows of a hat, but when there’s no movement, she relaxes her back against the railing.

“I know. Everyone felt the world move when it happened,” she says with a wary eye.

Mihawk frowns at her, and she curses at how tall he is. It’s uncomfortable having to crane her neck to watch for tells of an immediate attack. There’s a wild energy about him right now that means she can’t leave her back to him.

“You are like Roger. Would you choose to die to change the world?” Mihawk’s gaze is unwavering and intense.

What a bizarre thing to ask. It makes her wonder what went down at the execution.

“Not to change the world, no.”

She glances to the sword on Mihawk’s back. She can’t say she won’t choose death—hasn’t already in fact—but there’s nothing in this world that can make her want to die for it. She’d like to live, to see what Mihawk would do once he obtained the title of world’s strongest swordsman.

It’s an impossible dream.

“What has you in such a mood?” She asks once the silence drags on too long.

“Fight me,” Mihawk utters, eyes bright and wild.

“To the main courtyard then.”

She already knew Mihawk would challenge her when he got back, so she went ahead and made a dueling arena for them. Mihawk’s challenges have gotten more frequent, and her wins have gotten more difficult to achieve. She might not live long enough to be much of a help to Dragon at this
The main courtyard is devoid of anything but stained stone and patches of grass; it makes for a good place for a fight. Everyone’s already been warned to stay away, so she doesn’t need to worry about that. This isn’t like when they were children. There’s a good chance bystanders will get hurt or die.

“Don’t carve up my castle,” she orders, drawing her katana.

“I believe those to be my words. I am letting you borrow it, if you recall,” Mihawk reminds her.

“Well, since I’m still your master, everything you own is mine. That’s how that works, right?”

Grinning, she launches herself at Mihawk who takes care not to send out shockwaves to the surrounding building. She’s fair game as is the dirt beneath her, and three swings sends massive piles of dirt flying onto the roof. She dodges, and meets one of the swings with her own.

In the end, she loses her coat to Mihawk—it’s completely shredded—but she takes her revenge in destroying his black cloak. Unlike her, he doesn’t have a similar one as a backup.

“My win,” she says with a wheeze, struggling to take even breaths.

Mihawk remains stock still on the ground as her blade rests against his neck. She sheathes her sword when there is no protest to her announcement. She’s bleeding pretty heavily from a wound on her arm—there’s a bruise forming under her eye, she guarantees it—but this was a pretty fun match.

She lost her mind a few years back when she realized she enjoyed dueling Mihawk. Though she supposes she lost her mind long before then when she didn’t kill the tiny brat that tried to murder her.

“You look fine. If you don’t need to see Kessa, there’s some bandages and stuff in my room,” she says, offering a hand to Mihawk.

Scowling, Mihawk refuses her offer and pushes himself up. He narrows his eyes at his ruined cloak, but after a quick glance to her still bleeding arm, he slides it off and holds it out to her.

“Take it unless you wish to clean up even more blood.”

She makes a face, but wraps the cloak around her arm. Mihawk walks away without a word—in the direction of her room, so hopefully he’ll use her kit to treat his scratches and cuts—leaving her to make her way to Kessa’s office.

She trips on a scattered brick and scratches her face. Blood gushes from her cheek, and she sighs. It’s going to be that kind of day. When she finally gets to Kessa, the doctor decides the scratch is the last draw.

“Captain, I will put the beast down for ruining your beautiful face,” Kessa tells her with a terrifying smile.

“No, no, I did this to myself! I tripped,” she hurries to say.

“But you wouldn’t have if he’d stop with his silly duels,” the woman refutes patting her head.
Too late, she realizes that her wrist has been cuffed to the infirmary bed that she lies on. She lunges for Kessa, but the woman dashes for the door, grabbing a large axe resting against the wall on her way out.

She tumbles off the bed, arm yanking above her against the restraint. Everything hurts. She twists herself right and tries not to panic. She can’t get herself loose. The restraint needs a key.

If Kessa finds Mihawk, she’ll either lose a doctor or a servant.

When she realizes that the bed has locked-in wheels, she gets an idea. If she can move the bed, she might be able to get her hand on something that can cut through the restraint.

Getting the wheels to lower on the bed frame is a nightmare and a half, and it takes away most of her remaining energy. When she moves the bed around the room, she soon finds out there’s nothing that can be used to get the restraint off. She screams into the pillow before lying against the mattress with a sigh.

“I’m not giving up,” she says with determination.

“Uh, Captain, can I help you?”

She doesn’t look up from where she’s draped over the bed, steering with her weight and moving with her legs. If she’s not careful, she’ll crash into a vase. Or one of the wheels will get stuck. Or she’ll start rolling in another direction.

She doesn’t recommend using a bed as either a wheelchair or a crutch. It’s far too cumbersome.

“I’m trying to stop Kessa from killing herself,” she grunts.

Mihawk’s either in his room or hers. Her gut says he’s in hers, and that it’ll be the second place the doctor checks. If she can cut Kessa off before then, she might be able to salvage the situation. Of course, both of their rooms are on the third floor.

She doesn’t know what she’ll do when she gets to the stairs. Yell maybe.

“Mihawk?” Her musician muses.

“Mihawk.” She confirms.

AJ scratches around his green, spiky hair and gives her struggling form a considering glance. When the guitarist flops onto the bed she’s trying to push, she gives him the best glare she has. Considering how much pain she’s in and the sheer frustration, her glare could level mountains right now.

“Listen Boss-man, you’re on a time crunch, right? I’ve got plan!” AJ grins at her.

Her guitarist isn’t the most intelligent, and he has a tendency to come up with plans made from drug-fueled mania. She really shouldn’t listen to what is no doubt a Bad Idea, but she’s out of options at this point.

“Alright, give it to me.”
A loud strum of the guitar fills the air before a loud, screeching mess takes over. The sound bounces through the castle, making everyone who hears it clutch their ears.

“Hey, Doctor Lady! Come quickly! The captain’s crushed under the bed! He was trying to find you, and it toppled over! He’s bleeding pretty badly—*hey, Captain you weren’t supposed to turn the bed over for real!* Oh shit, your arm’s bleeding. Holy shit that’s a lot of blood. **KESSA!**”

_-*_

“That was a stupid thing to do,” Kessa frowns.

“You shouldn’t have tied me up,” she says.

The doctor wraps gauze around her arm, and even though she’s now confined to a non-wheeled bed for the rest of the day, she feels pretty good. Despite some dizziness and fogginess, she’s not in much pain. Kessa must have given her the good stuff.

“What compelled you to go with AJ’s suggestion? He once thought playing his guitar with his tongue in a lightning storm was a good idea.”

True and it led to the guitarist being unable to eat certain foods for a long while afterwards. Still, she doesn’t regret her decision. She hopes Kessa realizes how serious attacking Mihawk is.

“You were going to get yourself killed. On the chance you didn’t, you would have gotten Mihawk killed,” she says. “Don’t want to lose either.”

The bedsheets are very comfortable. Her eyelids close against her will. She doesn’t feel the hand brushing her bangs out of her face, or sense the presence watching them by the door.

“Dracule, I am still angry. Accidents happen in training sessions, and with duels of your kind, it is only a matter of time before an accident happens, one I can’t fix. I can patch up a hurt person, but I can’t heal a dead one. Think carefully of what you plan to do.”

The presence disappears, and the doctor hums a lullaby from long ago.

(When she wakes up, it’s to pain. Lots of it. When she moves her head, the first thing she sees is a bouquet of roses. That are sticking out of a human skull. The skull looks to be very real. She closes her eyes and goes back to sleep. Maybe when she wakes up again it’ll be gone.

To her dismay, the next time she opens her eyes, the skull is still there. It’s been bleached, and there are black roses sticking out of it now.)

Chapter End Notes

I promise the story will lighten up soon.

Also, Mihawk being able to make an in-joke. So proud of him.
Her friend will be the strongest swordsman 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Whatever her doctor did—because it can’t be anyone else—Mihawk stops challenging her. It makes her uneasy. It’s clear to her that Mihawk’s desire to be the strongest swordsman is turning into desperation. He can’t be the strongest if she can still beat him. There’s a darker look in his eyes ever since Roger died, and she knows it’s only a matter of time before he snaps.

When it becomes too peaceful, Mihawk decides to take off on his own to grow stronger. She feels a sense of loss but also a sort of relief. Her soon-to-be killer has been acting rather peculiarly later; it’ll be nice to have a break from the feeling of impending doom.

“Don’t beat up Shanks too much,” she says, handing him the new cloak she made.

It’s been kind of fun, being able to just mindlessly sew these past couple of days. The castle still needs cleaning, but she’s decided she’s done with that.

“No promises,” is all Mihawk says before throwing the cloak on and leaving.

He’ll be back of course; this is still his castle, and she still has fights with legends to pick. Mihawk wouldn’t pass up the chance to fight by her side, just as he wouldn’t pass up the chance to take her head.

It’s strange how the days creep by. When she’s not helping with the gardening, she’s making baby clothes. When she’s not helping sew things, she goes fishing. Before she can be bored of all that, she goes off and attacks Marine bases and slave camps on Dragon’s orders.

With her shipwright working his magic, whispers of the Pirate Prince turning into a wrathful ghost begin to circulate. She becomes a sort of feared boogeyman that kidnaps bad little children in the night. Though she does kidnap people—they’re mostly slaves—and drops them on Dragon’s doorstep for him to deal with.

Once she’s done wreaking fear and havoc across the ocean, she comes back to the castle and sews up baby clothes, starting the cycle all over again. She could get used to this sort of peaceful life, she thinks.

(Thoughts of grabbing Mihawk and taking to the sea, just the two of them, come to her when she’s alone. No matter how much she tells herself that it’s not possible, they won’t stop.)

It does get a little lonely. Her crew has taken to making this island and its people theirs, so she doesn’t see them very often. She almost requests Jesper move to her room but thinks better of it.

As for the other people living in the castle, well, no matter how many times she’s greeted by the residents, they remain faceless to her. It doesn’t help that the sight of children and babies make her flee in the opposite direction.

The only person she talks to outside her crew is Rouge. While she would be content to take Kessa’s word that Rouge is doing well, the woman continues to seek her out. Mostly to complain about how annoying the other pregnant ladies are being.

“I had to stop her from guzzling a barrel of beer. A barrel. This after being told exactly what it
would do to the baby,” Rouge complains, eyeing the cup of juice in her hand with disdain.

She’s pretty sure Rouge is aggravated that the cup in her hand is juice and not beer. The woman will go to extreme lengths for her child, but that doesn’t mean she’ll do it happily.

“You didn’t hit her, did you?” She asks.

She takes a sip of her own juice and enjoys the serene atmosphere of the garden. The entire balcony is seemingly overgrown, even the bench the two of them sit on has vines covering it, and towering plants cover the view. If one looks closely though, everything is well maintained, and the smell of blood is absent. Fuki does good work.

“As much as it would serve her right, I am not an idiot,” Rouge says.

Rouge packs quite the mean punch, and for whatever reason, the deeper into the pregnancy she is, the less control she has over her strength. With the woman looking like she’ll pop at any second, Rouge’s control is close to nothing.

“I found another child’s skeleton in the pantry. This is quite the gruesome place you’ve chosen to live in,” Rouge says, pouring her juice out into a potted plant.

“I didn’t have an option.”

“No, I suppose not,” Rouge says while giving the garden a considering glance. “Up here, I can almost forget how evil this place is. I can forget the terrible stories the ground speaks, or the scent of decaying flesh.”

Perhaps she’s simply desensitized to it all, but this place feels less like a nightmare and more… simply unpleasant. She can’t say she doesn’t understand what Rouge means, but to her, this is a place that can be cleansed easily enough. One day there’ll be enough alcohol stains from all the partying that no one will notice the dried blood.

“I can’t stay here. We can’t stay here.” Rouge leans back and strokes her stomach with a sigh.

“When this child is born, I will wait until it’s difficult to tell how old they are. I will proclaim them to be a year younger. No one will consider them Roger’s. No one will ever know.”

It’s said so sorrowfully, so deeply, that she can almost see the tears falling. If she closes her eyes, she’ll see a picture of true anguish. Rouge’s eyes are completely dry but such is the effect the woman has with words.

“I will,” she says once the sadness in the air becomes too much. “My crew will. And even if you leave, you won’t be getting rid of us any time soon.”

“If you don’t visit, I will be very cross.” Rouge smiles and the feeling of sorrow dies down.

A month later, one Gol D. Ace is born. A proud, tired Rouge refuses to let anyone hold him and clutches the infant protectively. She’s completely fine with that. In fact, she stays far away from the bed that Rouge rests in to further dissuade the idea of handing the newborn to her.

She is literally the only person in this castle not expected to help with birthing, and she refuses to let anyone think she is anything less than allergic to children.

“He’ll be using my name, but his name will always be ‘Gol.’ He’ll always be Roger’s,” Rouge says, running a finger over Ace’s tiny cheek.
“I’ll note it in his file. Wherever you intend to go will undoubtedly have medically professionals, but I will be checking in every other year or so,” Kessa says.

It’s quite the warm atmosphere considering Rouge has been radiating a murderous aura for the last ten hours.

She keeps her distance from Rouge over the next couple of days, and once little Ace is more than a large potato, she keeps her distance for good. It helps with her claims of being allergic to children, but she doesn’t want to deal with being attached.

She doesn’t know who will disappear first: Rouge and Ace or her.

Ace probably won’t remember her no matter what, and Rouge doesn’t know her well enough to even mourn. She passes her days by sewing, fishing, and getting into fights that leave her bleeding on the floor.

One particular day, when she’s crawling off the ship and to the soft bed that awaits her, a hand grabs her by the shoulder and squeezes hard enough to bruise. She’s soon pushed in the opposite direction.

“Ace, say ‘moron.’ ” Rouge commands to the baby cradled in her other hand.

“Mo’o,” Ace says immediately.

“Since when did he start talking?” She tries to glance at the baby giggling just out of sight.

“Last week. You would know if you didn’t run like he had the plague.” There’s a scary aura radiating from behind her. It feels a lot like an aggravated mother who hasn’t had decent sleep in forever.

“You’re going to have dinner with us, and you will tell me how everything went,” Rouge orders before changing tactics. “I worry. A lot. About my only remaining family.”

Rouge is a lonely soul who still mourns the loss of her lover, and really, does it hurt to just let her know her only nephew is still alive? Placing such worry on top of the stress of being a single mother, for shame.

“If I must.” Her shoulders sag.

Chapter End Notes

Incoming drama, next chapter.
Her friend will be the strongest swordsman 27

Fate.

Everyone she knows believes in it. The most powerful fear it. Dragon, Rouge, Roger—they all loved to monologue about it if you got them started.

She’s not sure she believes in fate, but when she steps into an old temple, looking for any signs of an ancient weapon with Mihawk and her first mate by her side, she feels there may be something to that.

Everything from the floors to the ceiling is made up of worn, off-white stone, and there’s no color to be seen anywhere. The temple is ungodly hot, and bursts of steam shoot out from small vents littered everywhere. Statues resembling angels line the walls at varying heights, but the room is completely bare otherwise.

She takes a breath and feels. There is nothing here but a beast hungering for blood.

“Melody, go back to the ship and write a note to Dragon. Tell him, ‘It’s not here.’”

“Captain?” Her first mate looks uneasy.

“I have something I need to do. If I don’t come back in a few hours, just leave without me,” she says.

Melody tries to argue, but she remains stubbornly silent. She crosses her arms and examines one of the angel statutes hanging above her. It looks to be taller than Mihawk with wings twice as long. It’s a reference to Sky Person perhaps.

When her first mate leaves, when the echoes of footsteps stop, she turns to Mihawk. Beads of sweat roll down her face while need burns bright in those yellow eyes.

“There are better places. What made you choose now?” She asks.

“The Marine ambush.”

Ah, so it was that. Not too long ago, she launched an attack in Dragon’s name only to come face-to-face with most of the Marine forces all at once. It had gotten quite nasty with both Garp and Sengoku there, and without Mihawk to help her, she’d made some foolish decisions to keep her crew safe.

“Were it not for Whitebeard, you would have died. You would have died before I had the chance to beat you,” Mihawk says with a scowl.

This is the first time they’ve been together since she was at full strength. The fact that the duel will be in an old, abandoned and remote temple is inconsequential. Mihawk simply wants to kill her before someone else can.

“This place will come down on our heads,” she points out.

“Do not try to avoid the inevitable. I will beat you. I will take back my life, and I will be the strongest swordsman this world has seen.”

She smiles grimly and steps into the center of the room. Mihawk faces her, body tense and ready to
strike. She pulls the blade from her back and gives the pink sword an apologetic glance.

“I’m sorry I haven’t named you yet,” she says to the katana.

The sword isn’t as strong as Mihawk’s Yoru, but it’s damn close. It should have been named by now, but she never found one worthy enough.

“Come take your life back then,” she says to Mihawk before making the first strike.

The clash of their swords creates shockwaves that shake the very world around them. The ceiling begins falling down on them in chunks, and they have to destroy the stone aiming for their heads while still fighting each other.

The vents around the room don’t let out a constant flow of steam; they seem to be on a timer of sorts. The steam also turns out to be more powerful than she took it for. Too busy keeping up with Mihawk, she steps in front of a silent vent and gets sent flying across the room when it activates. Mihawk uses the steam to follow after her, and it changes the pace of the fight.

One by one, the angel statues are destroyed by wayward strikes, by slashes that are dodged instead of intercepted. Only one remains thanks to its place high off the ground, but she accidentally beheads it while meeting Mihawk in the air.

She has a brief feeling of victory when it looks like Mihawk strikes are becoming weaker, when it looks like she’s getting the upper hand. Thing is, she’s aiming to disarm, and Mihawk is not. Even if his movements are getting weaker, she uses up the remainder of her strength to block lethal blows.

Fate happens.

Her sword goes flying out of her hands, and the tip of Mihawk’s black blade goes straight for her eye. It stops. She glances into beautiful eyes alight with a fierce will and realizes she’s dead. She’s lost, and with the way Mihawk’s arms are tensing, he plans to finish her with one final, grand strike.

She’s not sure she believes in fate, but there is certainly something messing with her life.

Before Mihawk can kill her, a powerful burst of steam breaking up through the ground catches her sword and sends it to a vent blowing out a burst of steam from the wall. Her sword is thrown right back to them, blade first and aimed straight at Mihawk.

She knocks him away, and the blade slides through her stomach. The speed and force of it all sends her flying into the lone angel statue above and behind her. She blacks out for a moment as she’s pinned to stone.

Pain. Pain like she’s never known.

Her feet dangle, and all her weight falls onto the source of pain. She comes to with the realization that she’s being held up by the katana sticking through her stomach. Her throat burns, but it has nothing on the pain coming from her stomach. She can’t breathe. She feels like she’s drowning slowly.

She’s dead, but it’s so much worse than she thought it’d be.

It might be her imagination, but she thinks she can hear Mihawk’s boots clicking over to her. Of course that might just be the sound of her blood dripping onto the stone floor.
“Hey, Mihawk?” These words are said brokenly, weakly, through pain and the taste of blood. “We’re friends, right?”

She can’t lift her head, but even if she could, she wouldn’t have been able to see Mihawk’s expression through the steam. If her she was able to breathe, if she wasn’t in so much pain, she might be able to use Haki to observe him instead.

She chooses to take the silence as a positive one. Even if Mihawk never agrees with her, there’s no way they aren’t friends. Not with everything they’ve done for each other. Funny that it’s taken until now to realize that.

“Hey…you once asked…my dream.” Her tongue is heavy, and she slurs her speech. But she needs to tell him, needs to let him know. “I wanted…stay by you.”

No matter how much she suffered, how much stress and near-death experiences came her way, being with Mihawk had been fun once he stopped the murder rampages. Life had been an adventure, and the world had been worth seeing in both its ugliness and beauty.

Where she’ll go from here, she doesn’t know, but she can die knowing she had lived free and happy.

Ace is three. He won’t remember her in a few years. Rouge can make friends wherever she goes, and everyone in her crew has found their way in the world, has found their own dreams and desires. She leaves nothing behind.

That’s good. That’s…good.

“Bye.”

Her quiet farewell gets drowned out by the hissing of the steam shooting through the floor.
He doesn’t believe in fate. Perhaps it’s because of the girl who took his life from him with little effort, or perhaps it’s simply not something worth thinking about.

His dream, his desire—that however, is worth everything.

He’d do anything to become the world’s greatest swordsman. That hasn’t changed since he took up the sword, hasn’t changed when he watched the light leave someone’s eyes for the first time. He would be the best, and no one could stop him.

To wield the sword is to choose to live and die by it. He feels nothing for the amount of bodies it takes to be the best. It is an honor to fall by his blade, and he will cut down anyone who can threaten his title. No exceptions.

Then the girl came along and messed everything up. The minute she stayed her hand, the minute she ordered him to live, he knew he would kill her. He had to. For his dream and for his freedom.

As his former so-called master is impaled on her own sword, he finds himself thinking, what now?

The lone remaining statue in the room hangs high above him. Its head has been severed, and with the way the blade pins Kuina against the center, she looks like she’s flying in midair on stone wings. Steam coils around the statue, and as the blood drips down, it makes for an ethereal sight; one that’s been twisted and deformed.

He could leave her to slowly die. With the way the sword has gone through her stomach, it will be an agonizingly long time. He could throw a knife and end her life quickly, mercifully.

When the stone beneath his feet begins crumbling, when jets of steam that are hot enough to cook someone alive begin bursting through the floor and the walls, he knows he needs to leave immediately. The heat alone would make lesser people faint.

(“My dream?” Kuina asks, eyes wide with surprise.

He doesn’t look up from he steers the ship. With the way the waves are forming around their small vessel, there could be trouble. If it gets any worse, he’ll need to change course.

The clank of Kuina’s metal dress tells him she’s shifting in her seat while she thinks. Any time she takes a while to answer a question, it’s because she’s giving it careful and weighty thought. The fact she can’t answer such a straightforward question means she doesn’t know or doesn’t want to say.

“I don’t have one. Live and see tomorrow, I guess?”)

I wanted to stay by you.

For anyone else, he couldn’t care less if he crushed their dreams. Either they have the strength to realize their dreams, or they don’t. A sudden burst of steam burns through the edge of his cloak, and he dashes to the statue, stepping lightly on crumbling ground.
“You don’t get to die.”

He jumps and grabs onto the statue’s wing with one hand; he lifts Kuina’s chin with the other. Blood oozes out of her mouth, and she appears to be unconscious. He still has time but not for much longer.

He grabs the hilt of the katana sticking out of her stomach, and it burns the palm of his hand for his troubles. Clearly the sword is chastising him, telling him not to pull it out. He considers a different option.

He lets go, and with a quick slice of Yoru, the statue becomes dust. He catches Kuina before she can fall to the ground and manages to avoid getting stabbed by the pink blade but only just. The sword is a vengeful one. When she comes to, she’ll need to name it. It’s too fine a sword to remain nameless.

Their fight has decimated the temple to the point that steam begins pouring out of every crack. There is no visibility left, and one wrong step will blast them with scalding water. If he doesn’t move soon, they will both die. He refuses this.

With a steady heartbeat, Haki leads him through a safe path. The hallway that leads to the outside is collapsed. A swift kick to a weakened wall solves that problem, but a new one pops up. The temple lies on top of a mountain, and the ship is at the bottom. Kuina won’t live long enough if he tries walking it.

He looks around and spies a large solid stone that’s been smoothed on one side from the steam. He eyes the steep incline with a critical eye. An idea that only someone as stupid as Shanks would have comes to him. Desperation calls for desperate measures.

Sledding down a mountain on a piece of stone is something that will follow him to the grave. If anyone ever asks, he ran.

“What did you do, Dracule?”

The doctor has gone pale, and the rest of the pirates look torn between being distressed and furious. Undoubtedly they felt the duel even from here and are able to piece together why their captain bleeds out in his arms. He has no time for their petty feelings.

“Fix her,” he demands, holding Kuina out to Kessa.

“What did you do?” The doctor seethes before checking Kuina’s pulse.

The fact that there is still a heartbeat, no matter how slow or faint, keeps the doctor from lashing out. Kessa orders for someone to get her tools before glancing around calmly. The mask of a professional does little to hide the wrathful beast waiting with sharp teeth.

“It was an accident.” That is the damnable truth. “Or do you believe me to be someone who would use any sword but my own?”

“Clear everything off the kitchen table and sanitize it!” Kessa orders to whoever will listen before turning to him. “Get her on the table, on her side. I’ll need your steady hands to remove the sword at the exact angle it went in, but only when I say so, got it?”

Kuina cannot afford him to mess up, so he doesn’t. The whole operation is a tense affair that lasts well into the night. There’s not much to think about until he finds himself sitting by a bedside, staring at a heavily bandaged woman who seems smaller somehow.
“It is a damn good thing the captain is superhuman. She would have died otherwise,” Kessa says, clenching Kuina’s wrist gently.

Kuina’s sword has calmed down, and he wipes the pink blade thoroughly. Even if it looks free of blood, he knows from experience that it isn’t. No sword should have its master’s blood on it when the master still lives.

“No more duels. Do you hear me? No more. Accident or not, if you so much as think about reaching for your sword around her, I will kill you. If you look at her with any kind of intent to fight, I will kill you. I don’t care what I’ll have to do, but I’ll make sure you can never do this again.”

The doctor comes from a darker cloth than he. In her eyes, he can see the bloodlust that outshines his own, the desire to maim that he lacks. He’s still stronger, so Kessa will need to come at him from an angle he least expects. It’s an interesting thought, but he currently lacks the motivation to test it out.

“There is no need for me to challenge her again,” he agrees.

He’s defeated Kuina, and he’ll only get stronger from here after. Perhaps the doctor isn’t expecting such an immediate accord because she stares at him with a stupid expression. Her face soon changes to one of fury.

“I am only letting you stay here because you looked ready to cry,” Kessa spits over her shoulder before disappearing through the infirmary’s curtain.

Most likely the doctor is in need of sustenance. Kessa hasn’t stopped for an entire day. He’s tempted to follow suit, but he continues cleaning Kuina’s sword instead. He can’t leave. Having wrapped the worst of his burns, his wounds are minor and thus inconsequential for the moment. Kuina would do something stupid if her sword rusted.

(Kuina’s life force is so dim that he’s forced to check every other minute to ensure she is still breathing. Her frail aura would aggravate his senses if he left now.)

Silence doesn’t bother him, but for some reason it does now. Talking to someone who can’t hear is a waste of breath, but he remembers a time where he heard Kuina’s voice calling to him while he slept. If his words can pull her back from a possible coma, better to try now then not at all.

“I had no intention of killing you.”

Not when he realized she made him laugh.

“For that moment I had you frozen beneath my blade, I merely intended to damage your wrist. Make it so that you could never hold a sword again.”

It is a fate worse than death for a swordsman, but Kuina is different. She loves the sword, gets a thrill out of it that she denies, but happiness does not lie in a blade the same way it does for him. She would fall into depression, but she would recover eventually.

“If you hated me, I would accept it. You would be alive still.”

Death comes to everyone whether they ask for it or not, but those who pick up a sword court death brazenly. Somehow, he thought the girl who held his life in her hands could never actually die from whatever he threw at her.
And she had survived everything he put her through. Kuina deflected every strike aimed her just as he knew she would, but even accidents happen in training sessions.

“Awake so that you can follow your dream.”

Kuina doesn’t stir, but perhaps she hears him.

*Stay by my side.*
Death does not equal sleep, not for his people, yet still she dreams. For an edge of eternity, she dreams, and it feels like grains of sand slipping between her fingers. There is nothing in detail she can recall later, but she’ll swear Mihawk’s scolding voice appeared at some point.

Loneliness. So much loneliness.

“I’m Zoro,” the boy says, holding out a hand, “and I’m going to be the world’s greatest swordsman.”

“Kuina,” she replies, taking his hand.

She’s not alone anymore. Turning around, she reaches out to a boy who seems to be as lonely as she had been. He takes her hand.

When she opens her eyes, it’s to mind numbing pain, cotton sheets, and the familiar smell of antiseptic. Once she’s able to think more than “pain—someone kill me—pain,” she realizes she’s in her ship’s infirmary. She’s been there so often lately that she can recognize it right away.

Unlike most times before, Kessa isn’t looming over her with a gentle smile that cracks at the corners. Instead, there is a shadow, large and encompassing, sitting by her bed.

“Not. Dead. Why?” Her mouth is so dry that it’s a miracle she can form even simple words.

Mihawk doesn’t answer her right away. She tries moving her head to see him better, but her entire body feels like it’s made of stone. Anything more than a finger twitch is beyond her at the moment.

“It was unnecessary.”

The words are said low and heavy. So much is packed into that small tidbit that she has no idea what Mihawk’s actually saying. Perhaps that’s the problem. Maybe she never fully understood everything he meant.

“Why?” She asks again.

“The moment I bested you, you no longer became something I must surpass. Our contract is over.”

That still doesn’t explain why she isn’t dead. The pain coming from her stomach gives her hazy memory a jolt. She should have bled out. The only one there had been Mihawk. He must have saved her, but there was no reason for him to.

“We are neither master nor servant. We are friends. People generally do not desire the death of their friends,” Mihawk deadpans, having seen the confusion on her face.

Oh. Huh. They are friends, aren’t they.

“I will not let you die. Be it for changing the world or because you want to. There is no reason good enough.” There’s a gentle touch like a light breeze on her arm. “I will continue to follow my dream. You follow yours.”
Mihawk disappears soon after uttering those words, leaving her to soak in the reality of being alive.

Whether she acknowledged it or not, there had been a timer counting down to her death, and she had lived knowing that. Everything she did had burned bright with the knowledge that she didn’t have too much longer.

She had given up on life, nearly dying by her own stupid actions. Now Mihawk is the one telling her she must live, and if she’s hearing it right, that she should follow after him as he continues his path of swordsmanship. The irony of it all isn’t lost on her.

She tries to imagine what Mihawk’s face must have looked like as he said those words and huffs out a silent laugh despite the pain. How cute. He must have been embarrassed. She falls back asleep with a small smile.

_*_*

Kessa isn’t happy, which is an understatement, but she can’t say she regrets putting her doctor through such an ordeal. She stays quiet and repentant through every lecture, stern pinch, and guilt trip that comes her way.

“There will be no reason for me to be alive if you are dead,” Kessa says, head bowed and eyes covered by loose strands of hair.

She can’t remember anything that went down between her and the former princess, but she does know that the woman is always one step away from a precarious edge. While it is a heavy burden to be one of the only things holding Kessa back, she can’t bend under it—to stop doing what she wants—because of it either.

“The only one who can kill me has given up. I am going to live for a long time,” she informs the doctor with certainty, “and I’ll make sure you have lots of reasons to keep living by the time I die.”

Her crew sails back to the castle—it needs a name, but everyone just calls it “The Castle”—and she’s carried to her bed where she recovers ever so slowly. Most of her crew swing by at some point or other once she begins staying awake for longer periods of time. Her bedside gets covered in flowers and charms. Once she’s able to sit up without pulling at her stitches, Rouge and little Ace stop by.

“Make sure you give Uncle Read the biggest hug you can,” Rouge coos with an evil smile.

“Uncle!” Ace exclaims as Rouge plops the small child onto her bed.

Small arms squeeze around her injury painfully, and she wheezes. Rouge doesn’t remove the kid until she’s close to blacking out. Rouge pats little Ace’s head who pokes at her bandages with big eyes.

“No more near deaths, yes?” Rouge smiles at her.

“No more near deaths,” she agrees, still wheezing.

She spends most of her days with a needle in hand. She makes jewelry and repairs her coat before considering something she hasn’t done in a lifetime. She ends up requesting soft material and cotton, ends up sketching designs on used scratch paper that Nikos gives her.

He once made plush dolls to give his grandmother, and though he never made one worthy enough for her, it had turned into something of a hobby. She wonders if she can make one with her new
Of course, it’d go better if people would stop breathing down her neck to get a better look. She’s taken to hiding in Rouge’s garden behind large plants to get some peace. When a shadow falls over her as she works, she sighs in aggravation.

“You know, I could probably sell those—” Jesper attempts to say.

“No,” she says immediately without looking up. “Now move. You’re blocking my light.”

There had been the curiosity at first. “What are you making?” they would ask. Once her project hit the midway point and resembled a mess, then came the silent, derisive faces. Now that her doll is near completion, the sudden rain of “Are you going to sell that?” and “Can you make me one?” makes her want to scream.

Case in point:

“At least make one of me. Do you know what I’ve gone through after your little spending spree? There’s no money left to guard!” Jesper howls dramatically.

While Jesper would make a cute doll, and there’s a frustration over their funds being non-existent —

“Yes, but you enjoyed spending every bit of it once Mihawk let you design part of his island,” she says.

“True enough.” Jesper shrugs.

“Don’t worry, we’ll start earning some revenue once our trade deals go through.” She continues on carefully sewing as Jesper steps out of her light.

From promising pirate, to the terror of the seas, to a legendary wraith—she can’t believe The Devourer is soon to be a glorified cargo ship. She’ll still run errands for Dragon, but her number one priority is earning money after spending it all on Mihawk’s Island of Horrors.

She hasn’t told anyone that she’s giving command to her first mate, Melody. That she has no intention of sailing around and trading goods. A Den Den Mushi will keep her in contact, and she’ll be there when it’s time to fight.

She has another chance at life. She’s going to follow her dream.

“I thought you left,” she says as she finishes cutting the last thread on the doll.

Her desk is covered in pieces of thread, balled up paper, and pins. She shoves it all onto the floor and places her masterpiece into the center of the suddenly clean surface. While she doesn’t know if it’s accurate, her doll looks amazing.

“I have returned with a suitable vessel,” Mihawk says before throwing something on her bed.

“It’s not a coffin, right?” The ensuing silence makes her look up in alarm. “Right?

Mihawk’s smirk is not soothing her worry in the slightest. In what is clearly a distraction, Mihawk nods to the bed. Lying atop her dark colored sheets is a bright red material covered in black ruffles.

“A dress. Your sew mistress and your artist helped make it,” Mihawk comments.
Which was not something she had requested, leaving only one person who would. Memories of buying dress after dress only to ditch them due to blood stains or escaping the law come back to her. How nostalgic.

“I guess we’re doing this thing properly then,” she says.

The two of them can never redo the past, but they can certainly make new memories. This time, she has no intention of ruining her clothes or running for it.

She picks up her doll with a smile.

“Hey, Mihawk, let me introduce you to the other member of our party. This is Itty-Bitty Zoro.”

Chapter End Notes

We're getting to the epilogue chapters now. It's been a wild ride, but it's time to go back to FYW!
To her immense relief, their ship is not a coffin. It’s small and looks like something that crawled out of a shipwreck, but it’s built solid. There’s a rather comfortable couch with a fold out table that she claims for herself, and hidden storage compartments mean there is plenty of space for anything she wants to bring. How considerate of Mihawk.

She gives her crew exactly one day of warning before putting her Kali Read coat away. The dress given to her is form-fitting, and while the ruffled sleeves is something she’ll have to get used to, it’s surprisingly comfortable. A quick glance in the mirror shows a very feminine woman staring back. After all these years, it makes for a strange sight.

“The captain’s a woman?” AJ shrieks upon her arrival downstairs.

“You’ve known that,” Melody says, chiding tone not matching her disgruntled face.

Her crew knows of her gender situation by now, but for some of them, this is first time it’s been shoved in their faces. She plays with a ruffled sleeve to hide her discomfort from all the staring.

“Yeah, but he’s never worn a dress before! It’s just, uh, kinda weird?”

“I think it looks great,” Tani says loyally.

“Captain, you sure about this? Even with a different name, you can’t hide that sword,” Corv points out while staring at the katana peeking over her shoulder.

True, her katana is well known in certain circles, and it sticks out like a sore thumb with her dress. Even so, she has no intention of abandoning the sword that tried to assassinate Mihawk for her.

“Tsubasa de Tobu stays with me,” she says firmly.

Her stuff is already stowed away on the ship, and she’s glad for it as her crew attempts to stall her for as long as possible despite the huge party the night before. She has to dodge a poisoning attempt from Kessa.

“It would have only made you a little sick,” the doctor says without a hint of guilt.

Rouge meets her on the way out, hands clasped together and scanning her intensely. Either Rouge is trying to memorize her new appearance or wants to tie her down and style her hair. It could be both.

“We’ll be leaving soon ourselves. Dragon was persistent on his Dawn Island,” Rouge says, running a hand through Ace’s hair.

The kid hides behind Rouge’s leg, eyeing her as if she’s a complete stranger. Ace has no knowledge of Kuina, and Uncle Read said goodbye to him last night. As far as the kid is concerned, she’s a strange lady that appeared out of nowhere.

One day, when Ace is older and capable of keeping a secret, she might tell him the truth. Of course, messing with him forever is appealing too.
When she gets to the ship, Mihawk is there with his arms crossed, hat doing little to hide his displeasure at having to wait. She shrugs at him. It’s not her fault after all. That black hat of his tilts up, and an irritated gaze catches hers before moving down.

Mihawk aborts his attempts at a snide remark upon seeing her dress, choosing to turn around and silently board the ship. She looks down to make sure everything is where it should be.

“Let’s go,” Mihawk calls over his shoulder.

For the next year, the Prince’s Pirates stay low, doing only deliveries. It gives her one completely undisturbed year by Mihawk’s side. Of course, Mihawk remains one of the most infamous pirates of the sea, so naturally “Kuina” gets rather infamous too. Just in a different way from Kali Read.

“And you say you’re his?” Garp looms over her with narrow eyes.

“Fan.” She nods.

When the large, gorilla-like man continues to stare at her, she adds on in a monotone voice,

“Swordsmen are like, hot. Totally.”

Before Garp can recover from such a statement coming from his sworn enemy’s nephew, Mihawk grabs her and jumps off the cliff and onto their ship below. Cannonballs are thrown after them, but they’re easy enough to dodge. Her new reputation after that, however, isn’t.

“Here, they’re calling me your girlfriend,” she says, holding up a newspaper.

The two are them are resting in a quaint little café. Mihawk plans to murder the obnoxious waiter boy who keeps trying to dump water on her, so she’s doing what she can to distract him. Not for the waiter’s sake, but so she can finish her shopping in peace. Mihawk grunts at her.

“But here, I am apparently your slave,” she says, throwing the newspaper down to grab another. “And here, I am apparently your rebound to get over the death of your gay lover.”

The world knows she follows after Mihawk, but it’s apparently undecided on the why. She sticks to her “fan” story, and while some believe her, others don’t. In the end, her attempts to deny a romantic relationship come crumbling down.

It starts with a bottle of red wine and an island with the most beautiful view of the moon she’s ever seen. The island is small with flowers that glow in the dark, untouched by anything but animals. They had simply wanted to stop somewhere to stretch and train for a bit when they stumbled upon it.

The moon shines brightly on white sand, and everything seems to be glowing softly in the dark. She empties her glass of wine and lies back in the sand with a laugh. Mihawk continues his delicate sips next to her, hat lying on the ground beside him.

“If I was going to be kissed, now would be the perfect time,” she drunkenly muses.

She’s not a romantic person, but this place could seduce even the coldest of hearts.

Without her realizing it, Mihawk takes her words as invitation. When he’s hovering over her, lips on hers, she has a moment of sobriety. The mood is far too good to ruin, however, and things get a little more heated up after that.
The first time she sleeps with Mihawk is an accident. Wine and sentimental feelings cloud her judgement. It’s messy and clumsy, but Mihawk doesn’t stop until she enjoys it.

“If I get pregnant, they better have your eyes,” she mutters into the crook of her elbow.

“And if they aren’t?” Mihawk asks quietly.

“Then you get to do the diaper changing,” she says grumpily.

Despite her fears, despite the wait on pins and needles to see if anything comes of it, she does not get pregnant. Her relationship with Mihawk doesn’t change after that night, and she writes it off as a one-time thing. That is until the second time she sleeps with him. It stops being an accident around the fourth time.

Naturally, sex without preventative measures leads to babies. Damn this world with its underdeveloped birth control.

“Hold her down!” Kessa snarls.

Her attempts to knock herself out against the bed frame are halted by strong arms barring her way. She made her way to castle once she could no longer hide her stomach, but being in her old bedroom doesn’t bring her any comfort for the actual birthing process.

“Let me die,” she pleads. “It hurts.”

“Not a good enough reason,” Mihawk says mockingly.

Her attempts to bite him fail. Kessa, her wonderful friend who has been with her every step of the way, slaps him for her.

And so her daughter is born.

He’d made a promise a long time ago to name his firstborn daughter “Kimimila.” He’d never had children, had run at the first suggestion of them. She compromises with Kimi.

She’s not sure if it suits the ugly thing that gets placed in her arms, but—

“She has your eyes,” she tells Mihawk.

The eyes of infants don’t change color in this world, so those beautiful yellow eyes are set in stone. She hands the child to Mihawk before passing out.

Her actions once she found out she was pregnant aren’t something she’s proud of. It involved a lot of running from Mihawk and picking dangerous fights. The fact he chased after her and dragged her to Kessa means a lot to her.

Against every annoying “you’ll love them before they’re even born” statements thrown her way, her love for the child takes time to grow. Mihawk leaving without her to continue carving a bloody path around the world doesn’t help, and she eyes the sea with restlessness.

She doesn’t even realize how much she cares for Kimi until she’s sewing up a Mihawk plush doll for the girl to have once she’s older.

She won’t claim to be a good mother—she’s out fighting armies as Kali Read not even two months later—but she makes sure little Kimi always has more guardians watching over her than is needed. Mostly by using her crew as glorified babysitters.
Even if she can’t be a doting mother like Rouge, the child will never want for attention and love. Perhaps it’s enough.

“Papa.” She waves the Mihawk doll over the crib. “Sword,” she says and waves the sword plush in her other hand.

“Mine!” Kimi says, reaching for both.

This is Dracule Kimi’s first word.

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue 1/3
A reminder that I might come back later and write more for this AU out of order.

For those interested, Kimimila is butterfly, and Kuina essentially named her kid "You" (rudely, like to a subordinate you don't care for). But Kimi used to mean monarch/master back in ye olden days, so take what you will from that.
With over a hundred children at the castle, Kimi has no end to playmates and friends. The sheer amount of people needed to watch this many children means the quiet child has a watchful eye on her at all times, and she feels confident in leaving Kimi behind to sail the seas as both Kuina and Kali Read.

She tries not to go overboard on bringing back souvenirs, but guilt has a loud voice. At least she always comes back unlike a certain someone.

“She is not yet old enough to train,” Mihawk says dispassionately.

“A daughter is more than a potential student,” she says, slightly cross.

Of course, she has no intention of forcing Mihawk to interact with their offspring if he truly doesn’t want to. Kimi doesn’t even have to take Mihawk’s name—they’re not married, and she doubts that will ever change—but the world will know whose child it is anyway. There’s no hiding those eyes.

“You know Kimi’s looking for sticks to give her Mini-Mihawk? She wants it to have a sword. She gets upset because she can’t find one good enough,” she says casually.

The smallest tilt of Mihawk’s head tells her that he wants to hear more, but at the same time, wants to pretend he doesn’t.

“She keeps saying ‘Papa needs it!’ She even skinned her hands trying to break off a branch from one of the black trees,” she continues with an amused smile.

Kimi had climbed a skeleton nailed to the tree to reach said branch which was not quite so amusing, but she leaves that part out.

“Oh, and I had Nikos make me a small painting of her. This is what she looks like now,” she says, opening the locket around her neck.

Inside the gold locket is a small oval painting of a young child. Nikos captured Kimi’s unimpressed stare well despite the tiny canvas. When she snaps the locket shut, Mihawk looks nearly offended at the action.

“I’m thinking of introducing her to Ace soon. Maybe they’ll want to get married when they’re older,” she tells him hopefully.

It’s the final nail in the coffin, and Mihawk knows it. She smiles brightly at the murderous glare aimed her way. Perhaps it’s petty of her, but their ship heads towards the castle the next day.

Of course, it’s only when father and daughter are staring blankly at each other that she realizes how identical they are. Kimi may look like her with Mihawk’s hair and eyes, but Kimi is her father’s daughter in every other way.

“You can only marry the strongest swordsman,” Mihawk tells their small child bluntly.

“Okay.” Kimi nods with a frown.
While the two of them seem content to stare at each other, she personally knows the difference it makes to hold one’s own child. She picks Kimi up and places her in Mihawk’s arms. Two sets of yellow eyes gaze at her in betrayal, and she laughs.

“You look like you dressed her, Papa,” she teases Mihawk.

Kimi wears a fancy dark red shirt under her black dress and, held against Mihawk’s red and black shirt, the two look like they’re standing in misery for a family portrait. She, with her sunflower-themed dress, looks out of place next to them.

Mihawk scowls at her before stomping away to their bedroom, Kimi held firmly in his arms. She stretches and follows after them at a languid pace. The more alone time she gives them, the more time Kimi has to wrap her father around her little finger.

“I wonder how you’re doing,” she says, tapping Itty-Bitty Zoro who’s tied to her sword strap. If she’s done the math right, they haven’t met yet. That’s assuming she’s on the same timeline as her old one, or that both of them exist after everything she’s done. The whole thing gives her a headache. Curiosity makes her want to find out, but the fear of what lies on Shimotsuki’s shores keeps her far from that part of East Blue.

Mihawk keeps to his own island—it’s simply too noisy at the castle—but he makes the effort to visit after that. Shortly before Kimi turns six, she gets the hint that the girl needs to move in with her father.

“Ina, my cloak has a tear,” Kimi says while pulling on the tear, making it worse.

She snatches the material out of the child’s hands before it becomes a problem of sewing a new cloak entirely. A close examination reveals that the tear is definitely not from normal roughhousing.

“Did you tape swords to a training dummy again?” She asks with a sigh.

The pause is too long, and Kimi doesn’t look her in the eye.

“No,” the girl says slowly.

“Don’t lie. You’re not in trouble, but it’s probably going to feel like it,” she says.

She helps Kimi pack her things after sending word to Mihawk. Despite bracing herself for the crying, Kimi’s goodbyes to her friends aren’t anything more than a curtsey and a farewell. The girl gets on the ship silently with her arms crossed, Mihawk doll poking out of her skeleton-print shoulder bag.

“Stick close to me. We’ll probably be attacked the moment we can’t see the island,” she says, patting Kimi on the head.

“Really?” Kimi asks, eyes glinting in excitement. “Can I watch you kill?”

Sometimes she wonders why she’s so surprised that she ended up with Mihawk’s clone. At least this Dracule is a little more sociable.

Mihawk takes his sword worshipping fledgling under his wing, and she eventually moves to the island as well. She’s not sure she can call them a happy family, but there’s a warm feeling in her chest every time they can sit down and have a meal together.
“Papa said cutting off arms gets blood everywhere,” Kimi informs her before taking a bite out of her dinner.

“Did he now?” She asks flatly.

“I have to stab them so they don’t have time to bleed.” Kimi nods seriously.

“You will need to get faster if you desire that,” Mihawk says just as seriously.

Well, she knew what she signed up for in any case. Thankfully Kessa and Jesper move to the island soon after she does, and it gives her a bit of reprieve. In Kessa’s case, the doctor claims to be their personal one.

“My only priority is making sure nothing happens to you or little Kimi when a doctor could have prevented it. Perhaps keep Dracule alive. If necessary,” Kessa says while setting up her new infirmary.

As for Jesper, the panda claims there’s no safer place than where she is.

“Yeah, with the two of you here, ain’t no one touching that gold,” Jesper says, slowly edging towards the bamboo forest he helped plant. “And hey, I can totally do the bookkeeping from anywhere. Anywhere.”

It’s a miracle Mihawk doesn’t say anything when the rest of her crew trickle in slowly after that. Perhaps it’s because they stick to the other side of his castle where they never bump into him. Perhaps it’s his way of making sure she doesn’t get lonely.

“Ina, are you going to kill World Nobles?” Kimi asks once she dons her infamous red coat.

The girl looks so excited, she almost feels bad at having to dash her hopes. She pulls up her white scarf, and wraps her daughter in a tight hug. As always, Kimi looks disgusted at the action.

“No, I’m just going to visit your cousin and sow some chaos. I’ll be back in a month. Be good, and I’ll bring you something,” she says.

She leaves a Den Den Mushi with Mihawk, but it remains silent. As always.

She doesn’t visit Ace right away. She’s been sitting on a plan she made once he was born, and she’s finally able to carry it out. Her crew is confused by the whole thing but help carry out her wishes regardless.

When she does make it to Dawn Island, Rouge is waiting for her at the docks as if expecting her. Rouge’s eyes shine bright, and there’s a newspaper clenched in her grip. Before she can give more than a greeting, the newspaper is shoved into her face.

“This is your handiwork, I take it?”

The headline reads:

“Idols of Pirate King Takes Over the World”

Smaller articles proclaim:

“Images of Gold Roger found on every island” “Children refuse to give up their terrifying new toys” “Marine headquarters burn down in effort to destroy evil idolatry”
She takes the newspaper from Rouge to get a better look. On page 9, there’s a particularly haunting picture of a Gol D. Roger puppet. That one was made by Corv, she believes.

“Well, how else was I supposed to let Ace have this without suspicion?” She says, pulling out the Roger plush hidden in a coat pocket.

As if summoned, a boy pops out from behind Rouge’s dress. He is decidedly not Ace, but with the way Rouge is rolling her eyes exasperatedly, this is a common occurrence.

“Cool! I want it!” The brat with a terrifyingly wide grin says, reaching for the doll in her hands.

She moves the doll far above his head, and the brat screeches at her. When she kicks him away gently, he falls onto his butt with a pout. Instead of tears, that wide grin returns, and she looks from the boy to the doll grinning identically in her hand.

“Oh no, not another one,” she says with horrifying clarity.

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue 2/3

Ina means Mother and is also a pun on Kuina.
“So Dragon tricked you into being his babysitter?” She asks as Rouge wipes dirt from the boy’s face.

Monkey D. Luffy resembles Garp far more than Dragon, but that grin is identical to Roger’s. Dragon likes to bare his teeth too, but there’s a mischievousness in that small face that the man lacks. Torn clothing and a scuffed up appearance speak of heavy play.

“Are you a pirate like Shanks?” Luffy asks, arms flailing in an attempt to get away from Rouge.

“Ah, you know that guy?”

She doesn’t know what led to Shanks stopping here, but he must have took one look at this kid, saw the remnants of his captain, and adopted him immediately. Shanks is sentimental like that, but considering she’s here with a Pirate King plush in hand, she is too.

“I chose to watch over Luffy as well as his brother, Sabo. Ace adores them, and they’re as good as mine,” Rouge tells her, letting go of Luffy who falls over with a screech. “Shanks stops by sometimes to fill their heads of adventure and battle. All three of them want to be pirates like him.”

“And I’m going to be the best!” Luffy yells.

Rouge’s smile is only slightly bitter. Fond exasperation overpowers the thought of losing all she holds dear once again. With the way Rouge runs a hand through the boy’s hair, she knows the woman will let him go if that’s what he truly wants.

She can relate. Mihawk and Kimi won’t stop their path of swordsmanship, but she wouldn’t keep them from it for anything.

“Shanks should be in sometime today, if you want to wait here,” Rouge says.

“No, I better be off. I’ll come by later. These are for you, Sheik, and the kids,” she says before digging out four more Roger dolls.

It’s a good thing she came prepared. On the down side, she’ll have to replace Garp and Dragon’s dolls. On the bright side, she can give Shanks his doll without having to see him.

“So soon? Ace will be so disappointed,” Rouge says, handling all five dolls like a master.

“I’m trying to avoid that guy. Last time we met, I may have accidentally,” she stresses, “proposed something awkward.”

Like say, a threesome with Mihawk and her. Sometimes she gets carried away as Kali Read; especially when there’s alcohol and merriment involved.

“You can’t run from him forever,” Rouge says, eyes sparkling in amusement.

“Give Ace my regards. I’ll catch up with him later,” she says before hightailing it back to the ship.

Rouge never tells Ace that his real name is Gol—or that she’s his adopted cousin rather than uncle
—but every time the kid looks at the Roger doll with furrowed brows, she thinks he close to figuring it out himself. The truth will come out one day, but hopefully she’ll be far from the fireworks when it happens.

She has her own problems to worry about. Namely, the fact that Kimi is growing up to be the second coming of Mihawk. When Kimi turns nine, Mihawk takes her out to sea for training and comes back alone.

“She wanted to stay at the dojo,” Mihawk explains.

“Dojo?”

There’s only one dojo she knows of, and surely Mihawk did not take their child there despite the chance of breaking the laws of time.

“Shimotsuki.” He did.

“Ah.” She’s unable to say anything to that.

Somehow, somehow, Kimi finds a way to bribe News Coo to send letters back home. The seagulls drop off small rolled up paper sealed with wax and a panda stamp. Whenever she unrolls a letter, neat handwriting stares back at her, and she wonders at it.

Ina,

I have decided to stake out the competition. I will ensure I eat well. Tell Aunt Kessa there are doctors here that treat cuts all the time. The dojo master is stupid and says girls cannot fight. I will not learn from stupid people.

I beat all but one of his students. I must stay here and challenge that boy until I beat him.

Love,

Kimi

Ina,

The boy is stupid, but not as stupid as the dojo master. He says girls can be swordsmen too. He is training to wield three swords. I do not understand how I lose to someone who carries around a brick in their mouth all day.

Love,

Kimi

Ina,

The boy’s name is Zoro. He has green hair. He is still very stupid. He had a friend with the same name as you, but she died. There was not a body for the funeral, so he still thinks she is out there somewhere. The dojo master does not like it when he says so. It is obvious she is dead. He wants her permission to use her family’s sword, Wado Ichimonji. It is very sad.
Love,

Kimi

This is the one that sends her to the rooftop until sunset. Itty-Bitty Zoro keeps her company, and she reads the letter until she memorizes it. She had a feeling the boy Kimi fixated on was Zoro, but there was no proof.

It is something, to realize there was a funeral held for her. That her father couldn’t find her and declared her dead. She tells Mihawk as much when he comes to get her.

“What is done cannot be undone, only surpassed. Think no more on it,” Mihawk says, picking her up.

The letter she’s been holding falls to the ground, and Mihawk takes her to the bedroom. She forgets to drink the contraceptive created by her herbologist, and this is how her second child is conceived.

Ina,

Zoro wants to be the strongest swordsman in the world. I told him he could not be. Papa is the strongest after all. Then he said he would defeat Papa, so I hit him. Papa says I can only marry the strongest swordsman, but that I cannot marry Papa. If Zoro becomes the strongest, then I have to marry him. I refuse.

I am going to become the world’s strongest swordsman. Then I will marry myself. Let Papa know.

Love,

Kimi

Her daughter never comes back—and though it sounds awful—she’s soon too busy with her son to do anything about it. Kimi inherited both her parents’ restlessness, and since there are plenty of allies that are willing to keep an eye on the girl, she allows the child to find her own path.

She does get word to Kimi to visit Dawn Island every now and then. She can leave letters and gifts that way. She supposes she should feel honored that Kimi still cares enough to keep writing home.

Kala, her son, on the other hand, turns out to be far different from his father and sister. Though he inherited Mihawk’s eyes as well, Kala is far more emotional…and clingy.

“I’m sorry for everything, Ina,” she says to the ceiling.

Kala, her three year old, keeps an iron grip on her leg no matter what. This includes when she needs to use the toilet or when he’s vomiting. She can’t break his grip either in fear she’ll break his fingers.

“Why do you do this?” She asks the child with a groan.

“M’love’ya,” Kala tells her seriously.

Her son shows no interest in swordsmanship, and it leaves Mihawk at a loss on how to interact with him. The early years are spent mostly with father and son taking naps together, or Kala quietly playing at Mihawk’s feet.

When Kala turns five, the latent crazy comes out. Turns out her kid really, really enjoys hunting. And tricks. And generally just scaring people. Mihawk begins training their son more like an
assassin, and the boy loves it. Knives and bladed fans are the preferred weapons.

“I give up,” she tells Jesper gloomily. “I cannot have a normal family.”

“Well, yeah, obviously. You’re not exactly normal yourself!” Jesper laughs.

True enough. She’s still the most feared wraith on the sea. Dragon hasn’t called on her to collapse the World Government—he wants people to wake up and desire revolution for themselves first—but it’s on her to-do list. Perhaps once her children are old enough, she’ll get started on that.

When Kala is seven, there is an intruder in Mihawk’s castle. Said owner is currently away scaring the World Government and upstart pirates alike, so the job of dealing with the intruder is left to her. She is, however, in the middle of eating wonderful, fluffy pancakes, so she puts it off for later.

Mihawk’s Island of Horrors is a deadly maze to anyone not in the know, and without the keys to the inner castle, there’s no way for someone to break in.

“Hey, I found the intruder! He survived everything I threw at him, so I unlocked the door for him!” Kala shouts, sliding into the dining room and his belt of metal charms clink against each other like a wind chime.

She groans, and Melody pats her back in sympathy. Her crew all remain relaxed around the dining table, completely unbothered. Tani’s needles never stop their clicking.

“Why?” She asks flatly.

Why did she sleep with Mihawk, why are both her children crazy, why can’t she enjoy her pancakes in peace.

“I wanted to mess with him, so I kept changing the hallways to lead to the bladed gardens. He destroyed the garden, it was so cool. Then he made it past Killer Frank Jr. when I led him through the trap door. Then he found a way back to the outer castle, and I wanted to see who it was, so I looked through one of the trick paintings, and guess what?” Kala runs over and slams his hands on the table in front of her; a fork goes flying. “It’s Kimi’s boyfriend!”

Utter silence as they take in the words that fall out of Kala’s mouth in one breath.

“Boy, Kimi’s going to strangle you if she hears that,” Corv warns without looking up from his newspaper.

“She’ll never find me. Ina will protect me if she does, right?” Kala aims wide, tearful eyes at her.

As much as her son is a trickster that enjoys stabbing from behind, he’s a complete coward when faced with head on confrontation. If an intruder demanded the keys to the castle, he’d probably hand them over in a heartbeat.

“Are you a fox or a mouse?” She asks rhetorically.

The boy giggles at her before scurrying away, probably to the vents. She looks at her pancakes sadly.

“I’ll make you more,” Corv grunts. “Go deal with the mess, Captain.”

She stops by her room to grab one very important item before making for the throne room. It’s not technically a throne—and Mihawk hates that it’s called that—but there’s a lone, grand chair that
holds the switches for various parts of the castle. The use of Haki tells her the intruder is nowhere near this part of the castle, keeps running in circles in fact, so she doesn’t bother hurrying.

She settles into the chair and forces the hallways to line up to the throne room. He’ll have to make his way to her eventually. She places Itty-Bitty Zoro in her lap and flicks its gold earrings while she waits. She has to wait longer than she thought she would. It’s sort of fun to track him through Haki, to see him trying to slice through the walls.

“What brings you here?” She asks as the intruder steps into the room.

“Who?” The man’s eyebrows furrow.

She wonders if he’s trying to place her from a dream long ago. She certainly wouldn’t be able to recognize him if it weren’t for the bounty posters.

“My dear friend, who’s going to be the world’s strongest swordsman,” she smiles. “It’s been a long time, Zoro.”

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue 3/3

And then Perona popped up and ruined the mood. Don’t be disappointed if the next update in the Silly and the Strange is not Strongest Swordsman AU; I’ve been sitting on a few things so I wouldn’t ruin the story line.

Thanks for joining me on this wild ride, and I’ll see you in FYW season 2!
When he wakes up to this strange new world, he takes the name “Kuina” for himself and makes the decision to leave. Surely there is more to this world than this small piece of land floating in the ocean, more than the expectation of settling down quietly to have children. She trains in the sword dutifully and never stops looking at the sea.

When she is ten, something very odd happens.

She closes her eyes, opens them, stares, and closes her eyes to start the cycle again. No matter how many times she does this, the Level 1 hovering above her head never goes away. She gingerly pokes the glowing blue words, and her finger goes straight through them.

She’s hallucinating then. Perfect. If she keeps her eyes down, the words disappear. She’d be content to ignore it completely if it wasn’t for the fact that her father has Level 40 hovering above his head. She eats her breakfast slowly and tries to keep her eyes on her plate.

“Something wrong?” Her father asks when she stares too long.

“Nothing,” she lies.

Her father doesn’t ask anything more than, and she drags herself to the dojo. There, every student has glowing blue words hovering above their heads. It varies between Level 1 and Level 10.

“I don’t care if you’re the master’s daughter, today I won’t show mercy!” A Level 1 student shouts at her, pointing a bamboo sword at her face.

Before she can make her usual acidic retort, the boy freezes and words framed in a box appear before her.

Tutorial: Quests

Level 1

Takao challenges you to a duel.

Rewards: 40 Exp. and Reputation

Accept the Challenge?

Yes  No

A quick glance around shows that it’s not only the boy; everyone else is frozen as well. She pokes the bruise on her stomach and flinches. Yeah, she’s not dreaming, but there’s no way this is a hallucination either.

With no other option before her, she reaches a finger out to the Yes. To her surprise, it’s solid unlike the Level 1 floating above her head. The word flashes, and time resumes. The boy before her immediately launches into motion, and she dodges the shinai swung at her.

Quests give rewards such as Experience points, Items, and Reputation—
“Really?” She snarls as the words pop up in front of her eyes. The boy is still trying to decapitate her with a bamboo sword, but now she can’t see him.

—and can be accepted at any time. If a level is too far above you, hit No and try again later.

She’ll have to do this without eyesight. Breathing deeply, she holds her shinai steady, and waits for the boy to make the same mistake he always does. When she hears the whistling sound of a sword being pulled back way too far, she strikes.

The boy goes down in a groaning mess, and time freezes once more as another box—a screen really—appears before her. There are words exclaiming Results, and under that are the promised rewards listed below it. The screen changes to a new one.

Level Up!

Level 2

Tutorial: Leveling up and using Skills

Read?

Yes  No

She hits Yes because she might as well continue this crazy thing until she catches her breath.

Earning enough Experience points will cause Level Ups and more Skills can be unlocked.

Skills can raise Abilities such as Strength and Speed but has additional requirements such as Coins to unlock.

Move Skills and Special Abilities have different requirements but are also locked by Levels. The more you Level Up, the more Experience Points are required.

The screen disappears only after she touches it once more. Time resumes, and the boy she beats whimpering pathetically on the floor. Belatedly, she realizes the computer-thing never mentioned how to use any of it. She feels her eye twitch.

“You didn’t have to hit him that hard,” one of the boy’s friends scowls at her.

She doesn’t bother pointing out that her opponent swore not to go easy on her, and that it’d be dishonorable not to do the same. Honor doesn’t mean much to kids except for when it benefits them.

Time freezes and another screen pops up.

Sneak Attack

Level 1

You will be attacked the moment your back is turned.

Rewards: 45 Exp. and Reputation

Accept the Challenge?

Yes  No
How convenient. It can’t really be called a sneak attack if she gets a warning beforehand. Still, it brings the question to mind, what if she hits No? Will she be attacked anyway and miss out on the so-called reward, or will the boy be forever waiting to hit her in the back?

Deciding to just get it over with, she hits Yes and waits. The boy continues glaring at her as his friend rolls around on the floor in dramatic agony. Oh right, she needs to turn around.

It’s not instant; she takes three steps before the boy swings at her, but she sidesteps, grabs his arm, and throws. He doesn’t get back up. The dojo is unusually silent as she closes the Results screen—not enough for a Level Up it tells her—and leaves to meditate.

She needs some time to collect her thoughts.

“Iktomi, if this is your doing, I swear I will kill every last spider I come across,” she says.

She looks up into the branches of the tree she sits under but finds nothing resembling an arachnid. Iktomi would have shown up to taunt her in some way if he’d been responsible.

“Coyote,” she pauses as she realizes she’s never seen a coyote on the island, “I’ll find a way to make your life miserable.”

She doubts either trickster exists in this world, but she needs someone to blame. She’s aware that these messages—these *glitches*—resemble video game mechanics. It leaves a sour taste in her mouth to contemplate the idea she might be living a lie.

Perhaps she’s dead, and this is the afterlife. Sickening.

Perhaps she’s trapped in a video game. Not too bad in of itself, but it brings “stuck-in-a-computer” questions to mind.

Perhaps she’s being messed with by this world’s trickster spirits. She needs to find them and kill them then.

Perhaps…perhaps she should continue with this for a while and gather clues on what’s actually going on. If this is all a dream, she’ll wake eventually. If this is simply something that’s part of this world, then she’ll realize it once she hits an old age.

Finding her resolve, she continues on with her day and ignores the glowing blue *Levels* floating over everyone’s heads. It’s not until she’s rolling out her futon that she realizes that there is something in her room that shouldn’t be.

On her dresser is a brown, leather book. It’s small and somewhat thin. She keeps her books in a neat stack on the floor, and she knows them well. She does not own such a book, and it didn’t come from the library. There’s no writing on the cover, but upon opening it, the word *Journal* is written in familiar blue letters.

Flipping through the first couple of pages shows Level, Experience points, Abilities, Skills—all belonging to her apparently—and the pages after that are mostly greyed out. One page labeled *Bonds* is filled with nothing but question marks.

There’s a page dedicated to Ongoing Quests and Completed Quests. Past that is the *Story Summary*.

Chapter 1: Shimotsuki stares back at her.
Kuina awakens to her dreary life—“Dreary?” She blinks in disbelief—and trains on the peaceful island of Shimotsuki. Her father’s belief in men being stronger than women fuels her efforts to prove him wrong.

That’s…not quite right. She has no desire to prove her father wrong in any way. She knows from experience that you can’t change someone’s belief unless they’re open to it, and her father is definitely not open to being changed. She could strike down the world’s greatest swordsman right in front of him, and he’d make some excuse as to why she managed it.

Kuina’s days continue uninterrupted until…

“Until? Until what?” She demands, shaking the book.

The Journal remains exactly as is, so she gives up on trying to make it talk. Instead, she flips to another page. It’s littered with greyed-out bars with question marks above them, but at the top is Overall Reputation. The only active bar is Shimotsuki Reputation.

Overall Reputation is currently set to Unknown.

Under Shimotsuki Reputation is Bitch.

Unlike the summary of her life, that one seems to be spot on. She continues thumbing through the Journal well into the night. If her future currently hinges on video game mechanics, then she better master them quickly. Her plans to leave haven’t changed.

From what she can tell, Move Skills are sword techniques. Special Abilities are locked to quests, and Skills have to be first unlocked then learned. Her first Skill is unlocked at Level 3, but requires winning twenty duels to obtain. A greyed-out Strength Booster taunts her.

“Alright book, I don’t know what’s going on, but I’ll play your game for now,” she tells it.

Her idea of this being some joke done by this world’s trickster spirit strengthens once she discovers that while people can see the Journal, they cannot see its pages nor do they care to. She even opens the Journal and shows it to the librarian.

“What does this say?” She asks.

“That’s nice,” the librarian smiles at her blankly.

No one finds it strange that she carries it around even to the bath. The book does not get wet in water, and she can tap its icons like a computer screen to obtain Skills. While she doesn’t care for the tutorials—

“Why?” She screams as she’s launched through the air for a balloon popping mini-game only for words to scroll across her eyeballs.

—being able to click a button to suddenly know a move called Severe Stabbing is kind of nice.

The only thing she doesn’t understand yet is the Coins. How does she collect them? Most of the Skills she wants to obtain need them. Perhaps she needs to progress past Chapter 1. She focuses on grinding her levels until then.

She never turns down a quest even when she really should. Over the years, her father’s students learn to fear her as do bees. Damn bees.
One day, when she’s in the middle of training—she still hasn’t figured out if normal training is useless now that she’s on video game mechanics, but she doesn’t care to find out—a green-haired brat marches into the dojo like he owns it.

“I am Roronoa Zoro, and I am the greatest swordsman!” The brat exclaims.

Above his head is Level 12. She looks up. Level 15.

“Greatest, huh? Watch your mouth or that will get you killed, kid,” she says, pointing her shinai at him.

A quest pops up immediately.

Show Them Who’s Boss

Level 10

Show no mercy.

Rewards: 200 Exp., Reputation, and Coins

Accept the Challenge?

Yes No

It’s over in literally a second. When her Results screen pops up, so does a new one.

Results:

340/800 Exp.

Level 15

Gained:

Overall Reputation and Shimotsuki Reputation

1 Zoro Coin

Tutorial: Coins

Read?

Yes No

Who is this kid that she gains both Overall Reputation and his personal coin? She hits Yes and leans forward with a frown.

Coins are earned by fighting alongside your Bonds or by beating their face in. Use Coins to unlock Skills and power up.

What a straightforward explanation. She looks down at the beaten kid thoughtfully. She isn’t sure she likes the fact this kid is set to be important to her, but in the face of more power…

“Better luck next time,” she says tauntingly.
Teary eyes glare at her, and she smiles back. He’s going to give her more coins whether he likes it or not.

Kuina’s days continue uninterrupted until she meets Roronoa Zoro. Declaring himself to the future’s greatest swordsman, Zoro challenges Kuina every day, shaking up her peaceful life. One fateful night, she decides to leave her family’s sword, Wado Ichimonji, with him and leave to continue her own training.

Chapter 2: Blueberry Island

Sea breeze hits her face, and she leans against the railing to flip through her Journal. Shimotsuki Village disappears, and she runs a finger over the words Blueberry Island. So that’s where she’s headed next then? The book’s still wrong; she’s done with training.

Still, it’s been kind of fun actually. Zoro’s levels continued to grow day by day, and she made sure hers stayed above his. It couldn’t hurt to keep at it. Not that she would turn down quests if she sees them. Some of them give out Beli.

She flips to her Coins page and laughs.

999/999

Her amount of Zoro Coins has been maxed out.

Chapter End Notes

What can I say? I bought Pirate Warriors 3 for the switch to keep me entertained on the chance I’m without power for a couple of days. If I don’t update anything any time soon, that's why.
“Here on vacation?” The man at the desk asks with a fixed smile.

It’s a stupid question, and the man knows it. There’s a bag slung over her shoulder, a brochure in her left hand, and a pair of sunglasses on her head. She puts the money for her stay on the desk without bothering to reply.

After the long hell her boss put her through, she’s ready for a vacation. More importantly, she’s ready to try the famous sushi bar. She’s heard rumors of people eating themselves into a coma, and she’s eager to put it to the test.

“Enjoy your stay!” The man never loses that fixed smile for a second.

Her room is decorated with fishes, and there’s a cute koi pillow on the bed. She looks at it and hums in thought. She’ll have to get rid of something, but would it be worth it?

Yes it would.

“Inventory,” she says, flipping open her Journal.

She had to do a difficult quest to unlock it—carriage racing that entailed jumping from one carriage to the next—but the Inventory was well worth the effort. She can only store three things for now, but it’s three things she doesn’t have to lug around.

“Goodbye bar of gold,” she says, dragging the item out. “Hello, koi pillow.” She throws the pillow at the journal, and it disappears.

She places some beli on the nightstand for whoever cleans up the room after she leaves. She’s not about to leave the bar of gold in payment—she could buy a ship with that—but her arm strength is so great now that it won’t matter if she carries it back to Gold Rum Island.

This way, however, she won’t be forgetting to grab the koi pillow.

When she heads down to the sushi bar, it is completely deserted despite being time for dinner. She knows for a fact she isn’t the only one checked in to stay. The waiters wave at her from the kitchen door, and she looks at the lone person in the room thoughtfully.

There’s a man sitting by himself with ??? floating above his head. Despite a lack of name to go with the level, she knows exactly who it is thanks to the sword leaning against the chair which is cutting into the floor. A screen pops up, and she blinks.

Table for Two

Level 45

Eat with the mysterious stranger.

Rewards: 10,000 Exp., Reputation, Item, and Coins

Accept the Challenge?
That’s a lot of rewards for just eating with the man. The experience points alone tips her off to the fact that there has to be a lot more to this quest than simple dinner.

She glances above her head. Level 44. Not quite the recommended level, but she’s accepted larger gaps and came out fine before. One level shouldn’t be too bad.

She soon regrets that thought when she’s staring at her first Game Over screen.

“What the hell?” She asks as sad music plays while her life literally flashes past her eyes as black and white pictures.

She rubs her chest where Mihawk sliced her wide open. It had been a peaceful enough dinner, but she hadn’t seen the attack coming once they were finished.

“No, really, *what the hell,*” she repeats with seething anger.

A new screen pops up just as she’s coming around to the idea of haunting one Dracule Mihawk. Not that he’d probably care about angry ghosts, the creep.

She honestly doesn’t want to know what would happen if she hits No. Even if Yes leads her to toddlerhood all over again, it’d still be better than giving up and going to the beyond. She still hasn’t seen the rest of the world.

When the world fades back into place around her, she notices she’s back in Rosin’s sushi bar with that damn man back at the table. He’s eating contentedly like he never killed her. The same quest as before shows up.

“*Oh, we’re doing this,*” she hisses through her teeth as she mashes the Yes button.

It’s not until her fourth Game Over that she starts screaming. On the up side, even her hunger reverts after each reset, and she gets to enjoy the sushi each time. On the down side, she can’t seem to stop dying.

At first, beating the quest is a matter of pride. She’s never turned down a quest yet. As Mihawk somehow manages to keep killing her in new and unique ways—his sword slash bouncing off the wall and hitting her in the back was a good one, she grudgingly admits—she doubts anyone would blame her from hitting No at this point.
Too bad she’s stubborn. There’s no walking away until she finds a way to win.

Beating Mihawk is impossible; she realized that as soon as she saw his level was ???. Attacking first results in a Game Over, and trying to predict Mihawk’s movements isn’t working.

“You know, if you kill me, my spirit will never rest. I will follow you until the end of your days until I get my revenge,” she says darkly over a glass of wine.

Her dining companion doesn’t even blink, but she does get the smallest tip of the hat. She chews on a lobster roll and considers her next strategy. Should she prevent the attack in the first place? She’s tried conversation, but that only gets her killed faster.

She pulls out her Journal and flips through it. There’s a Skill, Level 1 Observation, she had passed on for a different one. She is regretting that now. Aside from an entirely unhelpful recap of the quest, she sees nothing of use.

“How does one survive a strike from the legendary Yoru?” She mutters, continuing to leaf through the Journal futilely.

“They don’t,” Mihawk says with some amusement.

Sheer rage causes a full body spasm at those words. She points her chopsticks at him before picking up a crab body to tear in half with her teeth.

“I will survive it,” she says before crunching through shell and meat angrily.

It takes another three attempts, but she eventually deflects the attack with her sword. She’s sent flying into the fish, but she nearly cries when the Results screen finally shows up.

Results:

12,347/3,000 Exp.

Level 44

Gained:

Overall Reputation
Tsubasa de Tobu
Mini-Mihawk
1 Mihawk Coin

Level Up!

Level 48

It’s probably pure luck that she managed to complete the quest. She doubts her dumb joke beforehand actually worked.
(“Your sword’s very big. If you’re going to stab me, either do it gently or buy me some wine first,” she says with humor.)

After so many times of failure, one can only find ways to laugh. She resolutely ignores the shocked silence coming from the kitchen, and brings up her Pink Sword with the full expectation of a Game Over.)

She rolls off the sushi bar and lands on the floor harshly. She digs out her Journal sluggishly. She might be bleeding out, but there’s a Miracle Fixer in her Inventory just for this situation. Once she downs the potion, she notices Mihawk standing over her with unblinking eyes.

“What?” She snaps out.

“How strange,” is all the swordsman says before another screen pops up.

Dangerous Attraction

Level 50

Survive another strike from the world’s greatest swordsman.

Rewards: ???

Accept the Challenge?

Yes  No

“Are you kidding me!” She screams.

(Of course she’s not going to pass up the quest. Do you see that reward? It’s practically taunting her.)

Chapter End Notes

I am NOT making this into a series. I promise. I wrote this while waiting for my turns to play Pirate Warriors, nothing more.
The quest to survive Mihawk for a second time is her toughest challenge yet. To say it takes a few more tries than her previous attempt is an understatement—

“Son of a bitch!” She swears into the void after Mihawk kills her in less than a second.

She taps a finger against an arm impatiently while the sad music plays. When she appears before Mihawk once more, she slams the Yes button and is sent right back to the Game Over screen.

“Bitch,” she says as the sad music plays yet again.

—but she manages to deflect the strike aimed against her person through brilliant strategy.

“Have a souvenir,” she says, throwing the koi pillow with one hand while pressing Yes with the other.

Her distraction tactic buys her just enough time to bring up her new sword, Tsubasa de Tobu—which looks exactly like her old one—and she’s sent flying into the wall. She makes a dent, but she’s alive. She crows victoriously once she sees a screen appear.

Results:
20,347/3,500 Exp.
Level 48

Gained:
Overall Reputation
Grand Line Reputation
Sacred Cursed Knife
2 Mihawk Coins

Level Up!
Level 53

“I deserve some alcohol for that one,” she says sullenly.

She deserves a lot more than what she got, that’s for sure. Considering the attack came at her even faster and stronger than the first time, it’s no wonder she spent half her life at the Game Over screen. She should be given a reward befitting her tenacity; instead, she must suffer the loss of her chosen traveling companion for nothing more than a knife and some coins.

“You killed it, you monster,” she says sadly as she takes in the cottony remains of her pillow.
“Most who throw things at me do not get to live,” Mihawk tells her flatly.

The man eyes the shredded pieces around him curiously. He’s probably wondering where the pillow even came from. No one notices the Journal and its functions, but once items leave it, they turn back into real world objects and can be perceived again.

She’s learned to take things out of the Inventory by reaching into her kimono, but she can’t exactly pretend to hide a pillow larger than her head in her clothes.

Pain and the sudden realization that something drips down her arm brings awareness to her injuries. She reaches up to her neck and hisses. From what she can tell, her shoulders are bleeding heavily; her sword wasn’t able to fully block Mihawk’s slash then.

She does have another Miracle Fixer, but it’s in her room. It’s also her last one. Perhaps she should save it for when she’s worse off. She hasn’t found a way to obtain health items except through quests, and she’d rather use it when she’s in danger of losing a limb.

As if aggrieved of her lack of movement, Mihawk grabs her by the back of the collar and carries her to the kitchen door like a disobedient puppy. Mihawk glares until one of the waiters show themselves. She swings her dangling feet in the long pause it takes for a pale, shaking young boy to open the door; he looks ready to throw up.

“Fix her. This is too interesting to leave for death to claim,” Mihawk demands, throwing her at the poor boy.

“He’s also going to buy me the best tasting wine you have,” she states firmly.

Mihawk, to ensure she’s actually getting treatment, looms over the waiter while she’s stitched up in a dining chair. The boy’s hands shake, and with them, the needle going through her skin. To take her mind off the pain and the presence of the one who caused said pain, she goes through the Journal.

She flips to the Bonds page and makes a face. Sure enough, there’s Dracule “Hawk-Eyes” Mihawk. She suspected as much when she obtained his personal coin, but why is Mihawk’s bond already halfway full?

Deciding not to think about it, she looks at her rewards from the Dangerous Attraction quest. Until she claims them, they’ll sit inside the Journal, but she can still see a description. She looks at the Sacred Cursed Knife and blanches.

Sacred Cursed Knife: Effective against the undead but will attempt to kill its wielder. If the wielder is undead, automatically kills the wielder.

“I’ve been screwed!” She cries in agony.

“I’m sorry!” The waiter boy squeaks above her.

Reputation is completely useless, so that means the only thing she actually got was Experience points and Coins. Admittedly the jump from Level 48 to 53 is not something to sneeze at, but she can’t say it was worth the heartache.

_I wonder what I can get with the Mihawk Coins_, she thinks with a sigh.

She got mostly Strength Boosters from the Zoro Coins, so she looks for something similar. Finding nothing, she moves to the Move Skills and sees something new.
Eradication: A powerful slash that sends out a shockwave in front of the wielder. It travels for 10 seconds, burning everything in its path.

That sounds awesome. Like really awesome. To obtain it, she’ll need...

She lets out a noise that makes the waiter stab her unintentionally. 3/4 Mihawk Coins is displayed under the move. She’s only missing one coin for something that will make her life significantly easier.

(It’s also just really cool sounding.)

“Fight me,” she demands, slamming the Journal shut.

The only answer she receives is silence, and no screen appears before her. She glares into bright, yellow eyes that regard her with amusement. Mihawk takes a sip from his wineglass as if she never said a word.

“I want you to come at me,” she says while the waiter boy quietly wails in her ear.

He’ll give her another coin one way or another, and if she has to initiate the quest herself, so be it. She will get some kind of reward out of this bastard.

“You are in no shape to survive another blow,” Mihawk tells her once she attempts to stand.

“Don’t care. Be a man.” Admittedly, those words are problematic even when taken into context; she wants him to continue beating up a person bleeding out.

Before she can take more than a few steps towards Mihawk, he throws something very heavy at her forehead. She goes down and doesn’t get back up. The stitching needle hangs from her shoulder blades to dangle across her arm uselessly. She moves her face from the floor only to see a screen.

Results:

2,847/3,500 Exp.

Level 53

Gained:

Overall Reputation

Grand Line Reputation

Exquisite Wine

She doesn’t remember accepting a quest.

“If you wish to challenge me, then become stronger.” It’s said like a taunt, and then there are sounds of boots clicking away.

“Come back here!” She yells, struggling to get up. “If you run, I will find you! I don’t care if Zoro wants to defeat you, I’ll get there first!” For that coin!

The only thing she hears is fading laughter, and by the time she sits up, Dracule Mihawk is gone. She lets out a long string of curses before climbing back into the chair. The waiter boy vanished, which means she’ll have to wait patiently for him to grow a spine and come back.
She scowls and takes out the Journal. There’s always a short description on the people attached to Bonds. Maybe it'll tell her where Mihawk lives. She makes the mistake of stopping to look at the Reputation first.

“Why does everything say ‘Lover of Hawk Eyes?!’”

Except for Shimotsuki. That just says Thirsty Sword Bitch.

Chapter End Notes

Here’s a follow-up, but only because you asked so nicely. Still not making a series.

For those who can see the Workskin, I've settled on this format for the Gamer chapters, so no more changing.
In her hands is a finely made porcelain tea cup resting on a saucer. It’s bone-white with red roses decorating the sides. Rose petals float against dark, piping hot tea. *This world is a strange and mysterious place,* she thinks before taking a sip.

“How do you like Alice’s special blend, Your Majesty?”

Across the small, round table, a young girl raises a similar teacup with a smile. Long blonde hair is held in place by a black hairband, and an old-fashioned blue dress pops out against the white leather chair the girl sits in. She leans back against her own chair—red and white, heart-patterned—and considers her answer carefully.

“I very much like Alice’s tea,” she says monotonously. “It’s very rosy.”

“Alice knew you’d like it!” The girl claps her hands in delight.

With the way those wide, blue eyes wrinkle in happiness, she’d never guess this girl to be completely crazy. She glances around at the garden around them and tries not to frown. She doesn’t see any of cages containing the Straw Hats; perhaps they’ve finally been taken to fulfill their “roles.”

“Did you make these as well, Alice?” She asks, lifting up a cookie.

“Oh, yes! I hope they are to your liking, Your Majesty,” Alice says sweetly.

The cookies are decorated with red hearts and roses. She’s sensing a theme. Taking a bite out of the treat reveals it to be crunchy and tasteless.

“Adequate,” she says shortly.

The girl smiles at her, and she tries to figure out what to do next. If she’s remembering correctly, her role is the evil queen. A pleasant tea party with the protagonist of the story is not exactly evil.

“Oh, Your Majesty, I remember the Cheshire Cat mentioning you like games!”

“The Cheshire Cat did?” She asks warily.

“Yes, he told me with that big grin of his,” Alice says.

The Cheshire Cat must be Luffy then. She rather doubts the pirate captain will even bother with the so-called role, but the sea-stone shackles had kept him from resisting. No one had seen it coming either; shackles had literally fallen off the trees overhead and onto every Devil Fruit user’s wrist.

Turns out those trees were “Sea Trees that have forgotten the ground isn’t sea.” Turns out Sea Trees grow Sea Stone shackles. This world is strange and mysterious, but more importantly, it is dangerous.

“Did he happen to mention my favorite games, by any chance?” She asks.

“He mentioned Wonderland croquet was a favorite of yours.”
She has no idea what that is.

“We shall have to play sometime,” she says before taking a sip of her tea.

“Yes, we absolutely shall,” Alice says lowly with a bright smile.

Hopefully she’ll be able to figure a way out of this mess before then. While the situation isn’t her fault—it’s the Straw Hats who have to poke *everything*—this parody of Wonderland is. Whoever Alice actually is, they’re a Devil Fruit user that places their targets inside a story before taking the role as the protagonist.

Problem is, when she was asked, “What tale from your childhood did you enjoy?” she had immediately thought up this story from *his* childhood. His memory had been more than a little fuzzy on the details, and she must have fused more than a few different versions together.

The Alice across from her wears a crown over that black headband of hers. She knows Alice, at some point, wore a crown, but there had been two different books, radio dramas, and countless movies. He’d consumed them all, and now she can’t remember what was true to the tale and what wasn’t.

She knows, however, their eventual game signals the end of the story, and once it ends, so too, do the people trapped in it.

“You know Alice,” she says, tilting her teacup and watching the rose petals move, “I’m also known for cutting people’s heads off if they fail to live up to my standards. It’s a very clean, painless death. There’s no better way to put people down.”

She raises her teacup in a mockery of a toast.

“So don’t disappoint me, Alice.”

Chapter End Notes

Just something written to help keep me awake. I don't know if it makes sense or not, hell, perhaps sea trees *do* grow sea stone. But not as shackles, that's just silly.
For the first few years of her new life, the only thing before her was swordsmanship. Technically, there was also learning how this society worked—no cars, lots of fishing, no animal bigger than a dog, muscles, muscles, muscles—but there wasn’t really anything else other than the dojo.

When the aunties took her to their houses for reading and writing lessons, she did her best to learn with furrowed brows. She assumed they would turn her loose once she was capable of reading and writing fluently. She was very, very wrong.

“Kuina, what are you doing up there?” Zoro asks, craning his neck and squinting.

“They want to teach me finances,” she hisses.

Her nails scrape against the bark of the branch she rests on. She lets out an irritated sigh at the blank stare aimed her way.

“Isn’t that a good thing? You’re always trying to learn stuff,” the boy says.

It’s true that even idiots need to know how to keep track of their purchases, but that’s not what she’s talking about.

“I already know the basics,” she growls. “They want me to learn how to run a household.”

“*You’ll be married soon. You’ll be in charge of keeping the house running. You won’t want your family to starve because you couldn’t manage it all properly, do you?*”

Here in Shimotsuki, this is normal, expected. Every girl goes through this before starting their actual bridal training. Hell, even some of the boys learn this stuff. Learning how to not bring financial ruin to your house is useful, she admits.

Thing is, she’s not prepared to give in to their painted smiles and knowing looks, not prepared for the consequences of letting others think she’s a docile, young lady. She doesn’t want a household to run.

“What do you need more than the basics for?” Zoro asks, and his scathing tone is a like a soothing balm to wounds she didn’t even know she had.

“No idea, but I’m not going,” she says.

She was planning on hiding up in this tree until lessons are over. As much as she’d like to retaliate if the women try to grab her, she knows that her somewhat-absent father would actually step in at that point.

“Fight me instead of wasting your time up there,” Zoro demands.

The training grounds outside the dojo are usually where they spar; it’s also the first place anyone tries when they’re looking for her. But sitting in this tree for a few more hours doesn’t appeal in the slightest.

“Only if you go get me a training gi and some hair gel,” she replies as an idea hits her.
Putting on the clothes and spiking her hair up, she looks like any of her father’s students. She honestly prefers t-shirts and shorts because they’re more comfortable, but the training gi isn’t too bad.

When the whole transformation is done, Zoro stares at her in clear discomfort. She wonders if she overdid it; perhaps she doesn’t look as good as she thinks she does?

“Too much?” She runs a hand through her sticky hair.

“You look like a boy,” Zoro blurts out.

“And?” She blinks.

Whatever he wants to say gets lost as he pulls at his hair. Considering Zoro doesn’t have that much to begin with, she doesn’t think he should be doing that. She says as much.

“Just fight me!” He shouts, pointing two shinai at her.

“Fine, but you have to call me,” she runs a hand through her hair before grabbing at the air dramatically, “Kuniaki.”

“Like hell I am.”

The spar goes worse than usual. While the normal thing is to have the kid go down in seconds, he’s not even bringing up his bamboo swords right. She thinks her appearance is throwing him off. She takes pity on him and continues beating him into the ground until he falls unconscious.

By pity, she means absolute pleasure. Toeing Zoro’s unmoving body, she lets out a sigh of relief as she takes in his moving chest. Still breathing, good. It’s probably just exhaustion.

“Hey, you! Who are you?”

The shout takes her by surprise. One of her father’s older students marches over to her, hand on the hilt of a real sword. Her shinai’s not in good enough shape to take that on. She throws it down and snatches one of Zoro’s.

“Kuniaki,” she says, testing the weight of the shinai.

Before the student’s sword can do more than move a fingernail’s length out of its scabbard, she moves. One hit to the sword hand as an insult, one hit to the back of the knee to make him bend, and a final hit to the back of the head to take him out.

She looks from the student to Zoro. Well, great. Now she has two unconscious bodies to deal with. She should hurry and take the older boy to the medicine lady, but she’d feel better if she tucked her friend away into bed first.

“Hey, who the hell are you?” Another one of her father’s students shouts as he stumbles into their part of the training ground.

“Kuniaki,” she says, tapping the bamboo sword against her shoulder and giving the student a dull stare.

By the time she’s finished—by the time she can actually stand there and think—there are six bodies lying around her. She expects another enraged yell any second, but it doesn’t come.
Shrugging, she slings Zoro onto her back and walks to the small side-building that serves as student housing. On her way there, she runs into her father who simply stands there with arms crossed inside his kimono.

“Having fun?” He asks with that ever-present smile.

“Lots,” she deadpans. “Let me guess, don’t do this again?”

It’s not the fact that she knocked his students out—her father thinks those are great lessons, really—but a boy who randomly shows up and beats up the dojo’s strongest is considered a threat. The students will be alert for days, probably going into a panic.

She side-eyes Zoro, whose head digs into her neck, with something close to irritation. Of course, all that doesn’t apply to this brat.

“I will have a talk with Lady Baba about not being forceful,” her father says in that vague answer of his. “You should show some restraint as well.”

From what she can understand, he’ll tell the aunts not to touch her if she isn’t willing, but in return, she isn’t to put the training gi on again. Well, that’s fine. She didn’t care for the way the material feels against her skin anyhow.

“Oh, understood. I’m going to put this guy to bed,” she says, jostling Zoro’s unconscious body irritably.

She thinks she feels drool going down her neck. Ugh.

Kuniaki never makes his return, and by the time she’s old enough that she can afford her own hair gel and uniform, she finds herself not caring about it too much. It’s too much effort to maintain spiky hair, and her kimono is very comfortable.

Still, she does get a last laugh out of it.

“Kuina!” Zoro’s yell rings through the dojo the next morning.

The students who aren’t still resting at home, stop and stare with wide eyes. Black ink stands out against red skin, uneven from the veins popping out. Upon seeing *My Ass Got Kicked By Kuniaki* written on his forehead, she bursts into laughter.

Chapter End Notes

This is canon to the main story, but serves no real purpose overall.

So, I love you guys and I tried to write another chapter of the Gamer AU for you. It, um. It turned into smut. 2k of it. Sooo, you'll never see that one, and this chapter is me atoning for my sins. If you see "Gamer AU 5" and not 4, that's, uh, that's why.
Gamer AU 3.5

Chapter Notes

The link to the Explicit chapter 4 is in the notes below.

Do NOT feel like you have to read it, if you don't want to or can't. You will not be missing anything, I promise. In Gamer AU 5, anything of importance will be mentioned, but there isn't much to note.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Deciding to find her friend, Zoro, Kuina travels to Loguetown to look for him. There she’s mistaken for a Marine, and she finds passage on a pirate ship to the Grand Line.


The Marine looks around with wide eyes, looking more and more baffled. Standing next to an ice-cream stand, she munches on an ice pop with satisfaction. The Skill, Blend In, along with her high Speed ensures that he even if he sees her, she can move outside of his perception with a single step.

The man walks away with a mutter, his Level 20 fading away with him. She taps the new addition to her Journal with some amusement. She’s going to the Grand Line as a pirate then? Fine, so long as it brings her closer to him.

The Sea King dies, taking Kuina with it down into icy depths. Their frozen bodies land on Blue Rooz Island where Luza finds and resurrects her.

“Your home is very cold,” she blurts out, rubbing her arms with a shiver.

“Oh, no, you can’t be out here without a Rooz suit! Quick, quick! We must get you to the Lodge,” Luza says, breathing a strange fire over her head.

It hovers, and the warmth soaks into her like a tiny sun. Her stiff fingers slowly regain feeling. Luza spits another heating flame above her, and she consults her Journal for anything new. Luza is now on her Bonds page, and there’s a skill that can be unlocked for 10 Luza Coins.

“Wow, I know I saw you riding in on this thing, but it’s so amazing!” Luza gushes, poking at the Sea King’s lifeless body.

“I suppose so,” she says for lack of a better response.

“Oh, where are my manners? We must get you to the Lodge before you’re hurt! Come, this way,” Luza gestures to her, spitting flames every couple of seconds to keep her warm.

It’d be easy enough to get the coins as Luza’s only Level 12, but with the way he’s wheezing in exhaustion by the time they get to Luza’s Lodge—solely from keeping her warm—she’s not sure she has the heart to even raise a hand.

Luckily, there are plenty of quests to be had on Blue Rooz Island, and she gets 10 Luza Coins by the time she completes all of them. She unlocks Dragon Breath, and it’s amazing. Breathing fire is
awesome.

“I’ll come back and visit,” she says before stepping into a weird giant shell. “After I find who I’m looking for.”

“I’d like that very much. Good luck, and I hope you find him,” Luza tells her seriously before slamming the side of the seashell.

Beneath Pigment Ville’s bewitching glamour lies…

She scowls down at the Journal before shaking it irritably. Of course that’s where it leaves off. Most of the quests here are arts and crafts related; she’s been having a relatively good time, but it’s been marred by the feeling of everything being slightly off.

She expected the Story Summary to update by now—most of the quests are finished—but nothing’s happened.

“Oh, I’m sorry!”

She looks down as a girl stumbles backwards out of the tree’s shade. She must have spooked the girl, hidden among these giant leaves. She jumps down to apologize herself, but the girl darts away.

She stares at the girl’s back with a frown. She could have sworn the burn on that person’s face wasn’t nearly as bad the first time she stepped into the Marketplace. She avoided the girl’s table as the artwork hadn’t looked great. She’s also been sticking to the other tables for their quests, so perhaps she’s imagining it.

The girl isn’t at the shabby table the next day, so she rolls up her sleeves and gets to work.

Beneath Pigment Ville’s bewitching glamour lies a dull, broken world. Unable to hide behind the illusion, Mona has one chance to avoid the harsh labor of the Line. As Kuina helps Mona avoid the Line, she takes up the mantle of The Devil Jack.

“What the hell are you?” Someone shouts as she spews Dragon Breath.

“The Devil Jack,” she deadpans before sticking hot iron to the back of their hand; they scream in agony.

The Line is nothing more than a large cave system filled with a twisted form of slave labor. She has no problem with burning it all down, but it’ll only be rebuilt once she leaves. No, the only way to resolve the quest, Help Mona, is by making sure no one can use the glamour anymore.

It’s the first quest where she has to enlist outside help—Anacrusis, Cadence, and Octave are holding a concert as a distraction—but she thinks it’s worth it to destroy a system that rewards burning people while they sleep.

Mona isn’t a terrible enough person to be enthusiastic about burning everyone on the island, but the girl probably isn’t as bothered by it as she should be.

“Look, it’s going to be awesome!” Pablo says, waving his hand to display the dragon-shaped burn proudly.

“Yes, I’m sure it is. Now keep the towel on it,” Mona says, exasperation coming through the soft words.
The three of them sit on the dock, enjoying the peace while wails of sorrow—and shouts of angry pirates swindled out of their money—echo in the distance behind them.

She browses her Journal and debates whether to use Mona Coins to get the Fade into the Night or an Intelligence boost. More stealth seems like a no-brainer, but Intelligence boosts are rare. She’s only ever managed to get two.

“‘I’m not sure how this will change things, but it will change things. Maybe,’” Mona says before whispering, “‘maybe we can learn how to be real artists. Maybe we can figure out what it is we lack.’”

There’s a hope in Mona’s eyes that wasn’t there before. It soothes some of the guilt left by the worst of what she’s done.

“I’m going to make a mask just like yours!” Pablo tells her.

“Considering that it’ll appear in their nightmares, I doubt your people will like that,” she says mildly.

“Now I have to,” Pablo says with a vicious grin.

The wailing and shouting continue on, but the sounds seem to fade away once Pablo breaks out the fishing poles. Perhaps it’s wrong of them to be so content in the wake of destroying a society, but she can’t find it in herself to care.

“Is there anything we can do for you?” Mona asks.

They’ve done plenty for her—she’s leveled up and gotten enough coins for a Skill—they just don’t know it. Still, there is one thing.

“I’m looking for someone. Maybe you’ve seen him?” She reaches into her kimono to pull out a newspaper clipping.

Mona and Pablo lean over to get a better look. They shake their heads, and she puts the paper away. She’ll probably ask the musicians next, but she’s been conflicted about showing them the newspaper considering how badly they reacted to Mini-Mihawk.

“Has he done something?” Mona asks, touching the burn scars on her face pensively.

Oh, has he ever.

“He has something I want,” she utters darkly.

She’s going to find Dracule Mihawk, and she’s going to get that coin no matter the cost.

Chapter End Notes

Gamer AU 4: https://albion-zx.dreamwidth.org/625.html

Don’t know if it’s good or bad, but try not to mention this outside of The Silly and the Strange, okay? This is our little secret! I’m sorry for sinning.
That aside, it all started thanks to this humble beginning here, where I wondered how different Kuina would be and how her journey would go with her gaming abilities.
Moria doesn’t just take pleasure in taking her shadow. When she comes to, she’s sitting in a living room chair, staring at a giant, white snail with an old-fashioned telephone embedded in its black shell.

She doesn’t get to wallow over the ache in her chest for long before Gecko Moria is leaning over the back of her chair, all teeth and excitement. The pure rage she feels at seeing his face circles around to a calm, cold fury.

“He’s expecting your call,” Moria tells her giddily before bouncing over to the massive Den Den Mushi to dial a number. “Remember our deal to keep your friend alive.”

She’s never seen a Den Den Mushi that looked so much like a vampire, but that is what appears to be looking at Moria with sleepy, red eyes. The sleek, black spikes around the top of its shell make it resemble a cape. The Den Den Mushi goes rigid, and Moria cackles into the handset.

She slides out of the chair and stomps over to the Den Den Mushi when Moria holds the handset out to her. Glaring yellow eyes look up at her from eyestalks, and the snail’s face discolors slightly to mimic Mihawk’s facial hair. She snorts.

“You have lovely friends,” she says dully.

“Don’t be stupid,” both the snail and Moria say with varying degrees of irritability.

The Den Den Mushi does its best to reflect Dracule Mihawk’s flat stare, and she wonders how much force she’d need to use to stab Moria with the handset. The Warlord is smart enough to have taken Tsubasa de Tobu away before she woke up, so she’ll need to improvise his demise.

She twirls a finger around the handset’s cord thoughtfully. Strangulation with a telephone cord is a classic.

“As you may have noticed, I am a guest of one Gecko Moria. His accommodations are probably up to your standards,” she says tonelessly. “I am being forced to tell you that I willingly gave my shadow up to save my, quote, ‘special friend,’ unquote, Zoro’s life.”

She pauses to give Moria a death glare over her shoulder. She has to crane her neck slightly. The Warlord is hovering, watching the Den Den Mushi’s expression with glee. The seconds tick by, but the Den Den Mushi never changes its flat look.

“Do not bore me with such a dull confession.” Here the snail glares at Moria before looking back at her. “I am aware of the promise between Roronoa and yourself.”

“And I still hope you die,” she says loudly over Moria’s infuriated shrieking in the background. “Also, don’t you dare read my letter. It’s not for you.”

Gecko Moria shrieks something about cocky bastards above her, but it’s so close to her ear that it interferes with her words into the handset. The Den Den Mushi glares at Moria before giving her a considering glance.
“You sent a letter for me.” The snail blinks before giving off a smirking expression. “I look forward to it.”

The Den Den Mushi disconnects with a flat beeping noise. Sleepy red eyes stare at her, and she lets out a croak in an effort to smother the scream in her throat.

Damn him.

“Call him back this instant,” she demands, waving the handset at Moria.

“I was sure this would be a blow to such a prideful bastard like him!” Gecko Moria roars, seemingly at the ceiling.

“Call him. Back.” She repeats.

The Warlord ignores her, snapping his fingers irritably until a couple of abominations step into the room. These two aren’t like the others, appearing far more human and dangerous.

“Take her to storage. We shall soon see what he’ll think of his lover being nothing more than a frozen piece of meat,” Moria orders.

Storage. Frozen piece of meat. Lover.

Moria’s words seem to echo through her head as the two abominations move towards her, and she takes the cord out of the Den Den Mushi with a harsh pull. She holds the handset in one hand and wraps the end of the cord around the other.

The knife in her obi is still there, but she’ll need that to surprise Moria.

“Do you like classics?” She asks serenely with a tilt of her head.

Chapter End Notes

You can thank treavellergirl for this. Ah, the power of suggestion. Also, thanks to RikkiKikki for reminding me.
When she is staring at the end of her childhood, when waking up to the same old village everyday gives her a sense of impending doom, she begins planning her escape off the island. If her father and Zoro notice her growing restlessness, they never mention it.

She plans to leave two letters and a sword behind and nothing else. She almost gets away with it. Her father gives Zoro her family heirloom, and the boy is too stunned to do anything but retreat to his room to stare blankly at a wall.

(In another life, he waited until morning to go see her, to question her.)

She is up late in the night, brush and paper laid out on her bedroom floor trying and failing to find the words to her stranger of a father, when Zoro barges into her room with all the stealth of a shrieking cat. She looks up to the boy with his red face to back down to her now ruined letter.

“You’re running away,” Zoro says with stunned disbelief, taking in her packed bag and crumpled letters.

There is no way her father isn’t awake, listening in.

“I was,” she says and throws down her brush.

“Why? Why are you doing this? I don’t get it! I don’t get you!” Zoro shouts.

She leans back with a sigh. She could probably say something pretty, something that could mollify both Zoro and her father in one go. It’d be so easy to say she’s sneaking off for bride training from a nearby island, but—

But she’s so tired of keeping silent. Of not being heard. Not to mention, her only friend deserves more than deception on top of deception.

“I want to follow my dream,” she says quietly. “I want to see and learn new things. I want to see the world instead of staying here and waiting for my funeral. I want to live.”

Her words hang in the silence, and she both regrets uttering them and not at the same time. Zoro’s teeth grind against each other, and his hands are by his side, clenched into fists. She swears there are tears in his eyes.

“Then let me come with you!”

“Absolutely not!”

Zoro’s hurt expression makes her feel a twinge of regret. It’s rare for her to yell at him in true anger these days. She takes a calming breath and tries to explain.

“You’re going to be the world’s greatest swordsman, and for that, you need to stay here until you’re ready to move on. I will not be the reason you fail your dream.”

Even if her father doesn’t care about her going, he will agree with her on this. Her father will not let Zoro leave before it’s time. Zoro must understand this because he doesn’t try arguing.
“Then stay here until I’m ready.”

It’s a huge blow. Zoro says the one thing she never wanted to hear from him. She tries to stand up but finds her knees too wobbly to hold her weight.

“Please, I still haven’t beaten you yet,” Zoro adds softly before crouching next to her.

It is the final nail in the coffin; she can’t resist that heartbreaking expression his face. She was never good at goodbyes for a reason.

“Fine,” she says in defeat, “fine.”

Zoro and she do not touch outside of spars and playful shoves, of shoulders brushing against shoulders, but something in the way she stares at the floor brokenly causes Zoro to lean forward and wrap his arms around her.

It’s such a wimpy hug from such a wimpy kid, she thinks with a sniff. It takes a moment, but she eventually figures out how to hug back.

“We’ll follow our dreams together,” Zoro says.

He sounds so serious and mature; it startles a laugh out of her. Her only friend is such a stupid crybaby. When did he grow up?

She supposes she can continue on like this for a little while longer. Until Zoro grows tired of her and throws her away like everyone else.

“That’s what married people do,” Zoro continues just as seriously.

She chokes and is unable to shove him away. She’s stupidly aware she sounds like she’s making an agreeing sound. She tries to find the right words to let Zoro know that their engagement is nothing but a sham and comes up empty.

“You know what? Fine,” she sighs against Zoro’s shoulder, giving up.

Her father is still listening in. Heaven forbid he takes away Wado Ichimonji after what she went through to gift it to Zoro in the first place.

“Just don’t slow me down. I’ve got a world to see,” she grumbles.

She’ll tell him later once they’ve left Shimotsuki for good. When there’s no chance of her father holding onto the sword to wait in vain for another successor.

(She completely forgets to tell Zoro that their betrothal isn’t real.)

“Hurry up, Zoro,” she calls over her shoulder. “There’s a sale on groceries, but it’ll all be gone at this rate.”

“I’m a little busy carrying all your stuff,” Zoro scowls from beneath a tower of boxes containing her newest sewing projects.

Does she feel bad about forcing him to be her pack mule? Not really. Zoro needs to stop agreeing to bets made before spars at some point. There’s being stupid, then there’s never managing a win against her in his entire life.
“It’s not heavy, you wimp,” she says, unimpressed.

She’ll kill him if the eggs are all sold out by the time they get to the market. With how long they have to stay in Shells Town, they’ll need to pinch all the beli they can. Her waitressing and his bounty hunting can only go so far when they’re constantly having to pay for damages from their spars.

Not that either of them can so much as think about sparring here in Shells Town. It’s a strict Marine town that makes her skin crawl in way she can’t quite put her finger on. Still, this is where the bounties have taken Zoro, and at this point, she’s just along for the ride.

They pass by the town’s restaurant, and a little girl runs past, screaming as a snarling wolf chases her. She holds her arms out, and Zoro tosses her boxes to her. He kills the wolf in a heartbeat.

“Thanks, but you probably shouldn’t have done that,” the girl sniffs.

She shares a glance with Zoro. Here they go again.

“Why can’t we just go to an island without uncovering its dark secrets?” She asks as she stabs at Zoro’s bindings.

“You’re the one to blame,” Zoro grunts, rubbing his now free arms. “You have to poke everything.”

“I didn’t do it this time,” she says irritably, tossing Zoro’s swords to him. “You’re the one who struck down the Marines’ pet wolf.”

“You would have done it if I hadn’t.”

“I should have just left you tied to this pole to starve to death.”

Perhaps they shouldn’t be arguing outside in the middle of a Marine base. Every single Marine on the island appears before they can make their escape. It’s quite irritating considering her stealthy breaking and entering to get Zoro’s swords back.

“Roronoa Zoro, you’re under arrest for the murder of Captain Morgan!” Someone shouts.

“He was tied up until right this moment. He’s the one person who couldn’t have done it,” she says flatly.

As if to remind the Marines pointing guns at them, Zoro kicks the ropes on the ground. There’s an awkward shuffling of feet.

“Also, stabbing someone in the back of the head is an insult to Zoro. Don’t you dare charge him with that,” she growls.

She might be the furthest thing from honorable, but Zoro is so far into the swordsman code of honor that it gives her headaches some days.

“Wait, Captain Morgan was in his room. No one but us knows, so how do you,” one of the Marines trails off.

The group of men in front her begin showing expressions of dawning realization. Zoro sighs at her in disappointment, and she moves her hand slowly to her sword.
“Oops,” she deadpans.

She’s been investigating the island for the past week while Zoro’s been stubbornly clinging to the Marine’s challenge of surviving being tied to a pole for a month. Overcome it, and there’ll be no criminal charges for saving a little girl.

She knew from day one that these Marines wouldn’t honor the deal, but Zoro’s a bit of an idiot.

Taking matter into her own hands, she executed Captain Morgan for his crimes. She almost did the same to his son, but she found a diary that stayed her hand. The rest of the Marines, however, are good people stuck in a bad situation.

That makes this all the harder, she thinks as she draws her sword.

“If we don’t kill them all, we’ll be wanted outlaws,” she says as Zoro steps up beside her.

They have two options: kill all the eyewitnesses and get out of here unscathed, or do their best to knock them out and become criminals.

“The world’s greatest swordsman was a pirate,” Zoro states, full of confidence and righteous bloodthirst.

“You certainly make life interesting,” she says sarcastically before sprinting forward.

She’s faster than any bullet, and Zoro follows in her footsteps, trusting her to be his shield. The Marines don’t know what hit them.

(“I’m Monkey D. Luffy! I am the one who will become the Pirate King!” An insanely bright grin appears before her beneath a straw hat.

The bullets bounce back wildly but harmlessly, missing the Marines despite the sheer amount of projectiles. She shares a glance with Zoro. *How interesting*, they both silently agree.)

Chapter End Notes

I’d always meant to make this particular what if? but last chapter just sort of pushed it to the front of my mind.
Thriller Bark is a strange, gruesome ship that pretends to be an island hidden in rolling fog and mist. The lack of visibility puts her at a disadvantage, and she ends up lost in it while trying to make it to the Thousand Sunny.

Dead grass gives way to uneven stone ground; not being able to see below her shins, she stumbles on this change, falling flat on her face. She sighs heavily. It’d be pathetic to die falling into a pit trap after everything she’s survived.

She’s not even sure if the Straw Hats will come for her if she remains lost in this endless fog. Perhaps they’ve taken off already, leaving her behind. Franky better not take apart her wings; she gave them to him for safekeeping.

No, she can’t give up. Stones dig into the palm of her hands painfully as she lifts herself up. With narrow eyes, she continues walking forward, taking careful steps. She tries to place where on the island she’s seen large patches of rocks embedded in the ground. She can’t recall.

The fog clears away slowly, and she finds that the ground is no mere patch of rocks. It’s cobblestone paved into streets which run through an empty city. Lit lampposts stand atop empty sidewalks, and shop names glare back at her from glass windows.

She blinks and looks behind her, but there is only more of the same: light from gas-powered streetlamps glowing dimly over old-fashioned buildings and empty cobblestone streets. Wherever she is, it looks more like Victorian England than it does a medieval castle.

She really doesn’t remember ever seeing this on her flight over Thriller Bark.

The fog has rolled back to show her an eerie city, but it continues blocking out the sun; it feels like night again instead of morning. A bad feeling hits her gut. She begins walking backwards to leave without turning her back to what lies before her.

A chill down her spine is the only warning she gets before an intense burning sensation goes through her right hand. All the streetlamps go out dramatically, leaving her in darkness. Before she can do more than clutch her hand with a hiss, the ground in front of her begins shining as bright as the sun.

Something hooks itself to her, to her soul, and she scrambles for her sword. Her first instinct is that a minion of Moria has activated a trap, but when the lights come back and her hand stops burning, she’s not so sure.

“Are you my Master?”

It is a man that appears, kneeling on the ground where it blazed with light a moment ago. With short, blond hair and a slim, tidy suit, if it wasn’t for the jacket draped over shoulders like a cape,
he’d look the proper English gentleman.

Gentle, green eyes look up at her through a pair of glasses, and she feels revolted.

“I am no one’s master,” she says.

The man stands up and taps at that back of his black gloves. She glances down without meaning to and begins cursing immediately. There, on the back of her hand, is a blood red tattoo: a bird’s head nestled between two wings.

“Those command spells tie me to you. I’m sure you can feel it, the bond we now have,” the man says. “You are, indeed, my Master.”

If she concentrates, she can feel a spirit clinging to her, anchored by this strange mark on her hand. The spirit is no doubt this man in front of her. He is no human; that much is clear to her senses.

“Undo it,” she demands, waving her hand. “I never agreed to this. Untie yourself from me.”

“Unfortunately, once a contract is made it cannot be undone without fulfilling the rules of the Holy Grail War. That neither of us have agreed to this contract is strange,” the man muses. “In fact, if I were to be so bold to make a presumption, I would say this is a warped Singularity rather than a war we have found ourselves in.”

Everything the man says goes so far over her head that she’s left staring blankly at him. Upon noticing her expression, he gives her an apologetic smile.

“For me. It appears I retain memories of Chaldea rather than any knowledge of why I am here. Perhaps it is to assist my master who has seemed to stumble into this blindly. Tell me, what do you know about this situation?”

As she keeps staring blankly, the man begins a rough explanation about what he is and why he’s now attached to her. He is a Servant—a person of renown who has died and who’s spirit is summoned back to fight—and she is a Master; the one the Servant feeds off of to continue existing in their spirit state.

Masters are supposed to be a Magus, a practitioner of Magecraft, and someone who’s supposed to hold knowledge of how spells and incantations work.

“You’re making fun of me,” she says flatly.

“I would not dare,” the man replies softly with a glance to the sword hanging at her hip, “but I am at a loss on how one could be a Master without being a Magus.”

Well, Devil Fruit are magic of a sort. She supposes she can roll with it for now.

The man continues explaining more solemnly now that he knows she didn’t even know magic existed. He tells her that she is now taking part in a battle of some kind.

“Servants are never called for anything less than war,” the man cautions her. “I do not know in what way we are expected to fight, but you will not be free of this contract until it is over.”

In a traditional Holy Grail War, a Servant is summoned to a Master who then goes on to fight the other Masters and Servants to the death. Each Servant comes with their own unique class—Saber, Lancer, Archer, Rider, Assassin, Caster, Berserker—that grants them different abilities. Supposedly, the reward for winning this war is the Holy Grail which grants wishes.
“Undoubtedly, a Holy Grail is involved, but if this is a Singularity, then this city you see now is in a dimension of time that has been displaced and distorted rather than a traditional war. That would mean the rules of the game are different, I’m afraid.”

She is probably no longer in the world she came from, the man tells her with sympathy. The only way back home is to fix the Singularity. When time is righted, everything goes back to its place.

“Chaldea is a group of Magi who monitor and fix the Singularities that appear. You would only need to survive until they get here,” here the man pauses as she begins walking away from him, “not that my Master would do so quietly.”

His words are not bitter, only politely amused, and she scowls as she feels him following behind her. His footsteps are completely silent unlike her soft thuds.

“I have someone I need to go back to. I’m not a patient person, and I won’t rely on a stranger who might or might not come,” she says.

She has no idea where she’s going but standing here won’t do her any good. If what the man says about previous Singularities is true, she’ll be here for a while. She’ll need to start planning, scouting, and making a base.

“You must have a name,” she calls over her shoulder. “What is it?”

This man is now her partner. Neither of them made that choice, but with his spirit attached to her, denial isn’t going to make the fact go away.

“I am Dr. Jekyll, but names give away our abilities, so please call me Assassin instead,” the man says quietly in her ear.

She stops and turns sharply on her heel. Jekyll smiles up at her; he’s shorter, smaller, and softer than her by far. His memories from before are faded, but some things remain no matter how insignificant or meaningless.

“Your name has a horror story ring to it,” she says as a new chill goes down her spine.

“Some stories turn out to be real,” the man tells her, smile never wavering.

The empty city they find themselves in turns out to be London. The place doesn’t resemble Victorian England so much that is Victorian England. With the way the fog hovers sinisterly, combined with the lack of people and animals, it makes her hesitate in creating a base here.

Jekyll doesn’t share her reluctance. The Servant leads her to a luxurious house with its main features being an enormous library…and a secret basement.

“Reestablishing the traps won’t take more than an hour. Please rest while I take care of that.”

Jekyll was a Magus in life, and his traps are magical in nature. She sprawls out on an uncomfortable and expensive couch to watch him work. There’s a lot of mumbling and hand movements, but the feeling of something electric washing over her skin makes her believe.

“Wherever she’s stumbled upon, magic is real. Which means this red mark on her hand is the contract tying her to this world. She pokes the tattoo with a grimace.

“Command spells, that symbol on your hand, serves more than just forming a pact with a Servant,”
Jekyll tells her. “It is made of three spells. Three times your Servant must follow your command unconditionally.”

Command spells are orders that Servants must follow no matter what, even something as impossible as “Become stronger right now.” As the command spells also serve as a contract, once all three spells are used, it’s up to the Servant whether they want to keep fighting for their Master.

“I will, of course, follow you until the end,” Jekyll says, neatly sidestepping what constitutes as ‘the end’, “but I recommend holding onto the command spells unless absolutely necessary. A last resort, if you will.”

Jekyll’s eyes glint red under the light, and she feels the hair rise on the back of her neck.

“You may need it if he decides to show himself.”

She doesn’t bother asking for clarification.

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Weeks of scouting, of lurking in the shadows with shallow breaths, yield strange results. The nearest city west of London is Las Vegas. From New Mexico, United States of America.

She takes in the old Western buildings, the tumbleweeds rolling by, and the ridiculously over-the-top cowboys walking the streets. She turns to Jekyll, but he only shakes his head at her.

The Servant in charge of this city likes to visit the saloon all day before resting in the Town Hall for the night; they use the time the Servant is away to make themselves comfortable. They get to work on making their secret base in the attic of the Town Hall.

She scribbles smiley faces wearing cowboy hats on the walls to cover up Jekyll’s runes. It’s a dangerous game they play to put their base in the enemy’s own, but it’ll be the last place anyone looks.

They get out of the city before the enemy Servant returns for the night, and they set off to see what’s north of London. It turns out to be just as absurd.

There’s an island in the middle of what looks like a Carribean sea. She glances behind her to the gentle rolling hills that fade into fog. She looks back to the clear, blue-green water touching white sand.

“It appears to be a lake more than a sea, but the waves truly give off an uncanny feeling,” Jekyll nods in understanding before frowning at the wooden structures on the island. “It’s well fortified, and with the water surrounding it, it will be near impossible to sneak in.”

Thankfully Jekyll doesn’t mention anything about going in alone. The Servant had tried to persuade her at first, pleaded almost, to stay in London while he did reconnaissance. Her staunch refusal means either they both go or not at all.

“We’ll leave it alone for now, but keep an eye on it,” she decides. “Let’s head east.”

What they find east causes her to purchase terrible-tasting liquor from an underground bar calling itself a speakeasy. She clutches her glass between lacy gloves and glares at her Servant under a floppy hat when he gives her a disappointed look.

“I am wearing an ugly box for a dress—” no, she doesn’t know when she became vain, but this green mess she wears as a disguise is truly hideous, “—I keep having to smile at people who only
want to talk about how great the weather is. And somehow the White House is in the middle of Chicago which seems to be stuck in the Prohibition era.”

She takes a big gulp out of her cheap drink and lets the burn settle in her throat. She’s probably drinking paint thinner, but she can’t muster up the energy to care. The only bright side is that the empty speakeasy where Tsubasa de Tobu is waiting makes for a nice hideout.

“I was afraid you would burn it down when you first laid eyes on it,” Jekyll remarks over her grumbles about the White House.

“I might still do it,” she says petulantly.

“With my memories of Chaldea intact, along with the previous Singularities I was summoned to, I can say that I have a hunch on who resides in this city,” Jekyll muses, nursing a glass of moonshine solely to keep up appearances.

So far, it seems that each Servant is summoned to a city that holds a special connection to them. Jekyll becomes relaxed each time they stop in London, and the Servant in Las Vegas seems to feel the same. There must be something magical about it; she can’t deny the eerie city she first stumbled upon now has a certain feeling of homeliness to it.

“Is it normal to not catch sight of another Master?” She asks.

“Yes,” Jekyll nods, “but in most Singularities all Servants were tied to one Master. I suspect this to be true here as well.”

Which means it’s literally the two of them against everyone else unless that Chaldea Master shows themselves. She isn’t one to wait patiently.

“Let’s go take a look at the south and then go home,” she says, trying not to make a face.

“Go home” is code for “Go back to London base,” but the words leave a foul taste in her mouth. No matter how soothing the dark streets of that twisted city are, it’s not and will never be home.

Jekyll gives her a pitying look before standing up and holding an arm out to her. She takes it, and they leave while people whisper behind them about the couple with the height difference.

South of London is nothing but a large chasm. She tosses a rock into the darkness and never hears an echo back. It’s probably a physical manifestation of this world being torn away from reality, Jekyll tells her. She makes sure to stay as far from the edge as possible.

When they get back to London with their rough map and list of nearby Servants, she takes a night to think it over. She begins preparing for war the next day.

“I don’t know why there’s no one here but us, but it’ll be to our advantage. Put some magic traps down. I’ll get the physical,” she says.

“It will be good to go over any obvious hiding spots. Perhaps also where one might wish to get an aerial view,” Jekyll says while she begins unfurling some fishing wire. “Please don’t set my house on fire.”

She picks up the gas can with a grunt.

“No promises.”
Dr. Jekyll is an Assassin class Servant. It’s quite obvious what kind of combat he leans towards, which is to say, none at all. When he apologizes about it for the hundredth time, she puts a hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got this,” she says with a squeeze.

Jekyll frowns but doesn’t bother denying it. Strange creatures wander this world, and he’s seen her abilities first hand. Those dragons never stood a chance against Tsubasa de Tobu.

“Close combat comes last. We do it the sneaky way first,” she reminds him gently.

“Sneak attacks tend to fail for no apparent reason from my experience. I will give it my best regardless,” Jekyll nods with the expression of someone doomed and trying to be positive about it.

They attack the city to the west first: Las Vegas. From what they see, there truly is no Master, only a discontent cowboy Servant waiting for orders to arrive.

Though Jekyll waits for the perfect moment to strike, the enemy Servant catches Jekyll readying his knife from the reflection of a pot. Considering the enemy only saw it due to a random movement of a curtain, she supposes there’s something to Jekyll’s words about assassinations always failing.

“Oh come on, I was enjoying that,” the Servant whines while shooting at them from behind the saloon’s counter.

The enemy Servant resembles a young teenage boy. While his black cowboy hat and long, messy red scarf don’t do much to make him look like anything but a boy playing cowboy, the pistols he aims at their heads are very real.

“I knew it. You’re Billy the Kid, aren’t you?” Jekyll calls out while ducked behind a table.

The bullets flying at their heads stop immediately. She’d been forced into a side room for cover. She peeks around the doorframe cautiously.

“Who says? I’m way better than that guy!” is the childish reply, but the Servant’s panicked expression speaks a different tune.

“I didn’t do much research, I’m afraid, but from what I remember about Billy the Kid, his Noble Phantasm is relatively weak but can be fired off multiple times,” Jekyll tells her.

Noble Phantasms are Servants’ ultimate techniques, special moves that can make or break the war. For Billy the Kid, it probably has something to do with firing absurdly powerful bullets at them.

“Man, I don’t know who you guys are, but you’re a pain in my neck,” Billy the Kid grumbles at them.

She nods to Jekyll, and they move. Jekyll remains in front of her deflecting what he can and taking what he can’t while she stays a step behind him, sword at the ready. Using her Servant as an actual human shield leaves a sour taste in her mouth, but Jekyll can heal from wounds in a way she can’t.

Billy the Kid is a good shot, Jekyll goes down before the Servant can reach him, but he’s not prepared for her to leap over Jekyll’s body to knock the pistols from his hands.

She sweeps Billy the Kid’s feet from under him and keeps her blade under his neck. The Servant lets out an irritated noise but makes no movement.
“You okay, Assassin?” She asks without looking away from her prey.

“As fine as a pincushion can be,” Jekyll says with an audible wince.

“I figured that guy was the Assassin. You the Saber then?” Billy the Kid sighs.

She shows him the mark on her right hand without letting Tsubasa de Tobu move. The Servant gapes at her. The sheer surprise on his face makes her think she’s completely unexpected in this world.

Behind her, Jekyll is rummaging through the small bag she ditched at the saloon’s door. He’s probably looking for those healing potions he made before they left.

“You have two options,” she says, “give me information about this Singularity and die quickly, or don’t and regret it.”

“Care to bet on a third option?” Billy the Kid asks slyly.

Jekyll steps up beside her, dabbing at the blood on his face with a tissue. Nothing else appears out of place. She’d never known he was full of holes if she hadn’t witnessed it firsthand.

“I don’t want to die, and I also don’t like waiting here on some wannabe priest’s orders. Let me join you. You’ll get a Servant and all the information I have.”

It’s said so smarmily, she almost stabs him on reflex. She glances to Jekyll who’s considering gaze is hidden behind the shine of his glasses. It’s her decision then.

Assuming Billy the Kid is how he presents himself, an outlaw wanting to survive, she’ll be able to trust him until she sheathes her blade. Then he’ll either run away or shoot her in the back of the head.

“Get up then,” she says, moving her blade away from the Servant’s throat. “Let’s share a drink. Assuming you haven’t destroyed all the bottles.”

“I am an amazing shot,” Billy the Kid says, completely offended. “I wouldn’t hit anything by accident.”

She flicks a gaze over her shoulder at a shelf covered in glass and wet with whiskey. Billy the Kid holsters his pistols with a huff.

“I meant to do that. Obviously.”

Jekyll is correct in his assessment of the Servants here having one Master. She’s surprised to learn that with so many Servants, the connection to their Master ends up fragile. Unless the Servant is personally loyal or tied down, many Servants tend to go their own way in Singularities.

What this means is that when she expects Billy the Kid, the Archer, to go crawling off to his actual Master...he doesn’t.

“This stuff tastes like piss,” Billy declares loudly, waving a bottle of liquor found in someone’s empty house.

“I’m not sure I find it comforting that you know what that tastes like,” Jekyll says mildly.

She examines the map and does her best to ignore them. From what Billy tells her, this Singularity was caused by nothing more than the guilt of a clergyman who helped oversee a Holy Grail War.
If such heavy guilt combines with a magical artifact, it is enough to distort time itself. So why is she here? She wasn’t even part of their world before the distortion. No one has a clue.

Billy doesn’t know much more than that—only that the Lancer remains by the priest’s side and a few hints about the other Servants—so it’s back to the drawing board for her. She stares at the drawing of the White House on the map.

“Assassin, who did you say you suspected is in Chicago?”

“I don’t think I said. The Servant may be a Caster by the name of Thomas Edison,” Jekyll replies.

“Edison? That guy? What could he have possibly done to be a Servant?” Billy the Kid scoffs before downing the entire bottle of liquor with a shudder.

“Well, if memory serves, he also contains traces of the American presidents inside his Spirit Origin,” Jekyll murmurs.

She stares at the map blankly as Jekyll’s words go through her head. Of course the American presidents would be in the White House.

“All of them?” She asks faintly.

“Yes,” Jekyll replies warily.

She takes a pen and crosses out the White House on the map. Her actions cause both Servants to straighten immediately.

“Jekyll, you’re a good guy,” she says; her voice feels disconnected from her lips. “You might want to stay here. I have some issues to work out.”

Perhaps it is foolishness that sees her packing and leaving the next day, foolishness that causes her to ignore the Servants who attempt to dissuade her all the way to Chicago albeit for two different reasons.

“I’ve seen you give up your food for those who are starving. I’ve watched as you helped find lost pets and children. You are better than this,” Jekyll hisses to her as they slip through the White House’s doors.

Jekyll’s main concern is the terrible rage sitting in her stomach; he knows exactly what she plans to do once she gets her hands on the enemy. Billy doesn’t quite care about her anger issues so much as her lack of planning.

“We’re all going to die,” Billy wails quietly in her other ear.

The enemy Servant expects them. There are too many security cameras to hide from, and too many rooms to sneak through. Every step they take inside the White House causes a robot to appear, and many traps lie in wait.

She doesn’t let anything slow her down; she’ll break as many robots, as many people, as it takes to get to her target. They make it to the Oval Office where a man with a white lion’s head greets them with a roar.

“You are very bold! I like that in a person, but as you didn’t make an appointment, you are very rude! I hate that in a person! Allow me to show you the door, but first, have some wonderful DC!”
Electricity crackles over a blue spandex suit, and there’s a sudden need to dodge laser beams. Her sword is not exactly helpful against electric volts, and Jekyll warned her earlier that he’s not a good match up for this fight either.

Edison is Caster, which means he likes to stay far-ranged for his attacks. Close-combat should be his weakness. Edison’s lasers and electricity seem to enforce the assumption.

It turns out that the superhero outfit over bulging muscles is not just for show. She only manages to get a stab in before she’s stunned from electric shocks and thrown into a wall.

It’s a far cry from the vengeance she sought.

She only survives because of Billy’s covering fire from the back of the room. Jekyll is soon crouched over her, examining her for any serious wounds.

“Why?” Jekyll asks with sad eyes.

“Because I still dream about them.”

Of a people that were oppressed, beaten down. Of a people she left behind whose sorrow remains even now.

There’s no way for Jekyll to understand what she means, but the sudden compassion in Jekyll’s eyes strikes her through the haze of anger surrounding her heart.

Jekyll doesn’t see the laser aimed at his back, and for this one moment, she forgets that he isn’t human, forgets that he is more likely to survive it than she is. She finds the strength to push him away, and then she is consumed by burning pain.

She wanted to fulfill her dream of vengeance on people long dead, but it doesn’t mean much if it hurts the people she cares about. Shame she comes to her senses just as she’s about to die.

Edison picks her up by the front of her kimono—through heavy eyes she sees Billy and Jekyll lying on the ground behind him—and apologizes for the rough treatment before wrapping a large hand around her throat.

It’s not how she planned to go out. She has regrets over never making it back to the world she came from, to Zoro. Hopefully he won’t wait for her for too long.

Edison’s plans to snap her neck get waylaid by a knife sticking through his shoulder.

“While I admire your dedication, your attacks don’t do much to Casters, Assassin,” Edison says.

“Good fucking thing I’m no Assassin, you over-sized pussy.”

That’s Jekyll’s voice, but it’s completely wrong. Admittedly, she is slowly being choked to death—Edison’s now holding her up solely by her throat—so she might be mishearing.

To her immense relief, she falls to the ground as Edison goes flying into the wall with a grunt. Jekyll follows after him at a slow pace while running a hand through his hair.

Running a hand through very sudden spiky hair. And is without his ever-present glasses. Jekyll’s stance is all wrong too, body contorted into one of intimidation. The Servant lets out a terrifying cackle and kicks Edison across the room.

That’s not Dr. Jekyll.
“Oh, Master,” the man grins down at her wildly, “my lovely Master. You look so beautiful there on the floor, hurt and unable to move. It’s enough to make me want to kill you.”

The chilling words are said with an edge of barely contained madness.

“How sad that I can’t. But I can always keep you that way, like a songbird with broken wings. I can make you a cage out of bones. Yes, when I’m done, I think that’s what I’ll do.”

What the Servant does to Edison is no less than she wanted. Pain inflicted for the sake of pain. Blood paints the walls, but somehow she only feels disgust.

“I dragged each and every one of them presidents out just for you. I think I deserve a reward,” the Servant says, leering at her.

“I never asked you to do that,” she rasps out.

Admittedly, a part of her does feel touched that the Servant went through so much trouble when he clearly wanted to do something a little more sick and twisted. That doesn’t mean she’s anything less than revolted.

“Well, I’m going to have it anyway,” the Servant laughs.

She’s grabbed by the front of the kimono, and red eyes are suddenly too close to hers. Terrible breath hits her face, and a loud gunshot rings through the office. She falls to the ground once more. The man above her howls, grabbing at his torn shoulder.

“Back away from Boss.”

She knew Billy had slowly inched his way to hide under the large desk in the room while Edison was being tortured, but now the Servant stands behind the desk, a pistol in each hand.

“I’m going to kill you. I’ll make you scream so loud the whole damn world will hear it!” The man wearing Jekyll’s face roars.

It might be a trick of the light, but she thinks Billy’s hands are shaking. The guns never falter regardless. How terrible of a Master she is to have let things come to this.

She still has time to set things right, and that’s exactly what she’s going to do.

“That’s enough,” she orders and raises her hand. “I command Mr. Hyde to sleep and for Dr. Jekyll to take over.”

One red wing disappears from her right hand, and Hyde clutches his face with a howl. He curses her name, mutters all the way he plans to hurt her, before his spiky hair falls down as if suddenly splash with water.

When he moves his hands from his face, Jekyll looks back at her with tired, green eyes. She smiles in relief even as Billy refuses to put his guns down.

“Welcome back, Assassin,” she says.

Jekyll is soon scrambling for their medical bag with something close to panic while she attempts to sit up. She drags herself towards the desk to support her back, and Jekyll is soon kneeling next to her with potions and balms.

Billy holsters his pistols when it becomes clear that the only thing she’s in danger of is medical
“Guess that’s where the Beserker went to. Who’d have thought,” Billy remarks quietly.

“Hyde is an uncontrollable evil thanks to my actions, but there was no other way. I can’t fight against Casters as I am,” Jekyll says with displeasure.

She takes a gloved hand still covered in blood and squeezes gently. Her throat hurts, and she can’t seem to find the right words. She hopes he understands anyway. Jekyll smiles at her sadly.

“Learned a lot about you, Boss. Didn’t take you for an Indian lover,” Billy comments.

The Servant sits on the desk above her and spins the cylinder of a revolver slowly, pointedly. He doesn’t trust Jekyll completely, not after what he witnessed.

“I suppose you can call me that,” she says with humor.

“Then you might be interested to know more about Rider, something I forgot to mention,” Billy says, tone deceptively casual. “He loves to talk about that New World he discovered, one that was rich and plentiful.”

“Oh?”

“Something about looking for India and finding something better,” Billy says, smiling sharply under his scarf.

“I see,” she says darkly.

Millions of souls cry out for revenge. They haunt her dreams in the coming days.

Rider, who lies to the north of London on the fortified island, is most likely Christopher Columbus. He has a Spirit Origin and the capability of being a Servant from what Jekyll tells her.

Columbus was an evil man that deserves no praise. He reveled in cruelty while seeking his fortune. Her people suffered injustice while such a foul man continued to be glorified until the end of time.

She’d like nothing more than to launch an immediate attack, but she returns back to home base and recuperates quietly. She doesn’t even bother making plans.

She’s learned her lesson. Jekyll and Billy have wormed their way into her heart over the months. She won’t put them through such a terrible thing again.

She comforts herself with the fact that she’ll have to put a blade through Columbus at some point. It’ll have to be enough.

“Saber’s been defeated. It looks like the Master of Chaldea is here to right the Singularity,” Billy tells them over a game of cards.

Even though she’s surprised at the sudden news, she’s careful not to jerk her hand into Billy’s view; Jekyll is the same. When it comes to Billy, card games are serious business even after they’ve learned to stop betting.

“You’re telling the truth?” It wouldn’t be the first lie the Servant’s told a lie to gain an advantage in the game.

“Yup. My people tell me they just got into Las Vegas,” Billy says.
London is home base for the three of them, but it doesn’t stop Billy the Kid from going back to his city every couple of days. With the secret grin he hides behind his scarf, she’s tempted to ask if he caused trouble for the Chaldea Magi but decides it’s better not to ask.

“I suppose that’s that then. We should just wait here,” she says, trying not to look disappointed. She completely misses Jekyll’s frown, and the reddish gleam in his eye. Billy slides her a shot glass that reeks of bad decisions and hangovers, and she downs it one go. The strong flavor and smell brings tears to her eyes.

It’s the alcohol that blurs her vision for sure; it has nothing to do with saying goodbye to these two forever, or never seeing Jekyll’s house again which is filled with little knickknacks she picks up on a whim.

Her desire to get back to the Zoro and the Straw Hats along with her wish to not upset Jekyll means she stays put in London, behaving herself as the Chaldea Master wanders the world like a drunken horse.

Seriously, she keeps a record of where they go on her map with pins. They should have stopped in London at least three times by now.

When Rider decides to stop hiding on his island to launch an attack on her city, she can say with absolute certainty that she has nothing to do with it.

“He had the advantage. Why did he come here?” She asks, leaning over Big Ben’s railing as explosions go off beneath her.

The height makes her stomach do flips, but Jekyll keeps an arm wrapped around her middle. It prevents her from whimpering and hugging the building like a child. Billy lets out an impressed whistle as a chain of different elemental explosions go off like a series of spectacular fireworks.

“He must have gained word of Edison’s defeat and decided to launch a preemptive attack,” Jekyll says.

Jekyll’s voice is the same mildly concerned tone as always, but there’s something distinctly off about it. She glances at him but only sees fire reflecting in his glasses.

“Looks like Rider’s spotted us. Time to get to work. I’ll cover you,” Billy says, leaning over the railing with pistols in hand.

Jekyll carries her while leaping down the tower. The only thing she remembers from the experience is the sound of explosions and screams ringing in her ears. When she blinks, she’s standing on a rooftop looking down at the man calling himself Rider.

Rider wears an old sailing outfit that comes straight out of fantasy. She makes a face at the gold lining his jacket, at how he grabs one of his men to take the bullets for him. It might be bias, but she swears evil stands before her.

Quick, swift death, she reminds herself. That’s more than she can say he gave his victims, but it’ll have to be enough.

She jumps down with Tsubasa de Tobu in hand and strikes at his open back. A blade meets hers and she’s suddenly in an intense sword battle. Rider circles around her to put her between him and Billy, and she allows him to dominate the battle.
She’s not aiming to win. Billy was the first distraction; she’s simply the second. An explosion goes off close enough to make her ears ring, and she falters. Rider immediately goes for the opening she makes.

“You thought you could get away with taking what was mine. I’ll just have to take your life. I’m sure I can find a use for your corpse,” Rider says with a wide grin.

Jekyll appears from the smoke to slam a knife into Rider’s back. She steps back as Rider fights to continue standing. Jekyll, instead of following up the attack, watches Rider struggle with a frown.

“Finish him, Assassin.” Riders are weak to Assassins; this was never her battle to win.

“Rotten bastards,” Rider gasps, bringing up his sword. “Give me my dreams!”

She can honestly say she doesn’t have a clue about what he means. She glares at Jekyll impatiently. Billy is busy keeping Rider’s men off of them, but the Archer can’t do so forever.

“Yes, you are definitely Columbus,” Jekyll nods. “I remember seeing your picture in the ‘Evil Servants to Not Approach’ pamphlet passed out in Chaldea.”

Well, that’s nice to know. At least she wasn’t imagining the evil aura surrounding Rider. She blocks a clumsy strike from Columbus and calls for Assassin through gritted teeth.

“I have a confession to make. Two really,” Jekyll says softly, taking off his glasses.

She stabs Columbus through the arm and barely manages to avoid losing her hair.

“Servants and Masters can share dreams sometimes. I was always so afraid you’d wander into mine, but to my relief you never did. Instead, I accidentally slipped into yours,” Jekyll says.

Wait, hasn’t she been dreaming hazy memories of Columbus’ diary and the Canary Effect? The distraction nearly costs her, and she calls Assassin’s name once more.

“You fought against your desire for revenge well, but who’s to say you won’t give in eventually? I couldn’t let you run off again. You’d leave me behind next time, I know, so I stole Rider’s precious compass to lure him here.”

Columbus turns to Jekyll with an angry bellow, and she rushes forward with a curse. A glove hand catches Columbus’ wrist, and she stops cold.

“So how about we fight evil with evil, yeah?”

Sharp teeth grin at her beneath spiky, blond hair, and she starts walking backwards. The fog that hangs over London has been lingering at the edge of the city, giving everyone high visibility; now it rolls in, thick and merciless, taking away everyone’s sight.

The last thing she sees is Hyde tearing Columbus’ beard off.

“Let’s get to higher ground, Boss. Listening to these screams and being unable to see does a lot to the mind.”

She tenses as Billy speaks up from beside her. She hadn’t heard or sensed him. The screams and cackles coming from somewhere in front of her kept her distracted.

“All the men Columbus brought with him?” She asks tersely.
“Dead as a doornail. Let’s go get something to drink, Boss,” Billy tells her, grabbing her hand.

Billy leads her to a rooftop with the thinnest fog, and they share a bottle of something that tastes like flavored water. By the time the fog recedes, they’ve gone through three more bottles, and she’s already drunk.

“Mr. Hyde go, Dr. Jekyll come,” she slurs once Billy pokes her enough.

Hyde, who was in the middle of ripping her kimono open, disappears with a curse. She throws a bottle at his head belatedly and misses.

“Forgive me.” Jekyll blushes and fixes her clothes immediately.

Billy piggybacks her to home base—he doesn’t trust Jekyll to do it—and they all stare at the remains of Jekyll’s house. There’s nothing but rubble. Her head falls against Billy’s scarf with a sniff.

“It’s gone,” she says sadly.

“Actually, it looks like it’s just buried beneath the rubble. It must be from the building across the street. My protections should have held,” Jekyll says.

Jekyll’s voice sounds nice, she thinks, completely missing what he says.

“Gone, completely gone,” Billy states firmly. “Which means we should move. That mansion with the bar would be a good place."

“And the fact that it has a shooting range has nothing to do with it, I’m sure,” Jekyll says dryly.

“I wouldn’t mind a mansion,” she says with a heavy tongue. “Long as it’s not a castle or a boat in disguise.”

“That sounds oddly specific,” Billy remarks.

“I’m afraid it’s a moot point. That mansion is currently on fire and discharging lightning from its rooftops.” Jekyll makes a considering hum before asking, “How do you feel about palaces?”

When Chaldea’s Master appears at her door, it is Jekyll that welcomes them in. The Magi that appear in her throne room are a curious bunch, two wide-eyed teenagers with armored Servants following behind.

She doesn’t move from where she sits on the throne; she keeps her arms in her sleeves and watches on with curiosity. Jekyll moves to her side, and she feels sort of like a mobster boss.

“I’ve never seen her before,” a voice filled with computer static says.

“She appears to be Japanese. Perhaps a foreign Heroic Spirit tied to Buckingham Palace?” The Magus with purple hair muses. “Wait, who’s that over there?”

The rattling of chains forces their attention to the corner of the room. Cleaning the floor, in a jacket stained with blood, is a man without a shred of hair and a mangled face. The shackles on his legs keep him from being able to stand.

Jekyll had been just as surprised as she to find out Hyde hadn’t killed Columbus. She’s sure Columbus would have preferred it to his actual fate.
Left with the choice of keeping the Servant alive or putting him out of his misery, she’d chosen a third option. She’d been aiming to warp Columbus’ Spirit Origin to prevent him from ever being summoned again, but it looks like her work has been cut short.

The Magi take one look at the figure cleaning the floor and recoil in horror. Their Servants bring up their weapons without hesitation. The purple haired Magus reveals themselves to be a Servant as well, immediately covering their Master with a large shield.

“I don’t have any command spells left,” she warns as Jekyll takes off his glasses.

Hyde had been very helpful in her experiments with Columbus’ Spirit Origins, but she vastly prefers her nicer Servant.

“You’ll bring me back before the end,” her Servant says with a smile.

A gunshot rings out, and the bullet gets deflected by a large shield. Billy rolls out from his position behind her throne to give a lazy salute.

“Don’t worry, Boss. You showed him what for with the garden hose. That guy’s too scared of you to stick around for long,” Billy teases, readying his pistols.

She laughs and leans back. Jekyll and Billy step forward with grim determination, and she keeps her hand from moving to her sword’s hilt.

This battle isn’t one they plan on winning.

This is the way it must end for her to get back to her world. It’s been a long year, but she doesn’t belong here. Neither does her friends.

There’s no need to say goodbye, they’ve all said it in the drinks and the stories they’ve shared. Jekyll and Billy will return to their Spirit Origins, recalling her only on the edge of their minds, and she’ll go back to traveling the world she came from.

That doesn’t mean none of this ever happened. That their feelings will fade into nothingness.

“Make this one to remember,” she orders.

Chapter End Notes

This monster was planned to be slowly worked on and released on Halloween. I noticed the calendar date however, and knew that Fate had aligned for this, so I rushed it out. I had to get it out today, so I apologize for grammar mistakes and delays to FYW!

Happy Native American day, my friends. If anyone tells you it’s Columbus day on the American calendars, just know they’re wrong. (They aren’t, but you get what I mean)
Water 7 is a very beautiful city. There’s something enchanting about riding down canals while taking in the scenery, to listening to faint laughter mixed with the sound of rushing water as shoes tap against stone at a slow pace.

This island is a sight far better than the one before it: a jungle filled with bloodthirsty creatures, severe thunderstorms, and quests that were mainly about survival. She can’t help but think that Water 7 would be even better without the Marines following her every step.

She glances at her reflection in a nearby window. Level 65. She moves her eyes to the left, and a man with Level 50 above his head unsuccessfully hides behind a newspaper. She doesn’t think the man realizes the white hat with the words MARINE peeking over the paper gives him away.

If she wasn’t so sure a quest was to be gained from her stalkers, she would have already left. She’s actually considering giving up and leaving anyway. All of Water 7’s quests are fifteen to twenty levels below hers, and she’s only been able to Level Up once the whole time here.

There are no challenges to the mini-games, the fetch quests are extremely simple, and even the Rogue Train boss fight went down quick. Over-leveling has made her so bored; she’s actually playing the honest tourist.

Another Marine attempts to walk up to her before turning on his heel and shaking his head at the one hiding behind the newspaper.

She feels her eye twitch. She really can’t enjoy her vacation like this.

The Marines probably want to talk to her but are too scared. She has a feeling her new Overall Reputation has something to do with it: Hawk-Eyes’ Dangerously Shameless Lover. It is, admittedly, a well-deserved reputation and one of her own making. No matter how wrong it still is.

Her attack on Mihawk in the middle of an ocean was...poorly thought out, but she can’t say the rewards weren't worth it. She has, in fact, taken to wearing her new cross-shaped weapon, Mihawk’s Knife, around her neck to keep people from talking to her.

(Yes, she knows what wearing a replica of Mihawk’s necklace means. She just finds the abject fear to it hilarious. The tiny blade is also useful for making dull quests a little more interesting.)

Word of Mihawk and her must have gotten to the Marines rather quickly. Scratched, bruised, but scarily content, Mihawk dropping her off on Water 7 from his tiny coffin boat must have been quite the sight. Maybe that’s why her Skill, Blend In doesn’t seem to be working very well.

(Shimotsuki still says Thirsty Sword Bitch. Part of her hopes that means news hasn’t traveled there yet, but she knows, deep down, that probably isn’t the case.)

It’s when she’s flipping through her Journal, sitting around the most isolated part of the island and sipping on lemonade that the Marines finally decide to approach her.

“Excuse me, Miss?”

She leans back and considers the crisp, white uniform above her. The man fidgets under her judgmental stare. Of course they work up the nerve to speak to her just as she makes a deal off the island.
“You are Dracule Mihawk’s significant other, correct?” The Marine asks.

She swallows down the choked laugh with a loud slurp of lemonade. The two Marines totally not hiding behind their spokesperson look torn between being outraged at her rudeness and wanting to flee.

“You were seen in the presence of Dracule Mihawk engaging in,” the Marine pauses before looking somewhere over her shoulder, “certain acts. There are pictures.”

That makes her straighten up. A threat, huh? She cranes her neck to stare the Marine in the eye until he starts pulling on his neckerchief.

“And just what would you want from ‘Dracule Mihawk’s significant other?’ ” She quotes mockingly.

“Dracule was summoned to Headquarters, but we noticed he has turned around. We need you to contact him.”

“Can’t.” She says immediately.

“What?”

“I don’t have his number. Hopefully I’ll never see that guy ever again.” She smirks before taking another slurp of lemonade. “He can wear a person out.”

“Surely there is some way for you to contact him,” the Marine sputters.

“Nope. If there was, I’d probably throw it into the sea.”

A bit of an exaggeration. She wouldn’t toss a poor, defenseless Den Den Mushi into the sea for example. She’d just toss it onto an uninhabited island.

The Marine talking to her seems to be at a loss for words. She takes the moment to look at the Story Summary. It still only reads,

Kuina lands on Water 7.

She wonders if the Journal or whatever is in charge of it has given up on her.

“You’d better come with us to Headquarters. It’s nothing bad, they’ll just want to figure out a way to notify you if something happens to Dracule,” the Marine finally says.

Lies on top of lies. She just told them she doesn’t want anything to do with Mihawk. The man standing over her attempts to give a calm, reassuring face, but his eyes keep flicking down to her cross necklace.

“And where is your Headquarters?” She asks, idly flipping through her Journal.

“Marineford, ma’am.”

Ah, so that’s it. They’re hoping to use her as bait to lure Mihawk into doing what he’s supposed to be doing. She knows because her pendant knife had been the reward for distracting Mihawk from reaching Marineford.

Obviously, she’ll have to turn these fine gentlemen down, incriminating pictures or no. She’s not about to stupidly walk into being a hostage. Not only would Mihawk not come for her, all her
subsequent quests would be with the Marines. Yuck.

Make a Run For It

Level 60

Escape Water 7 without alerting the Marines or turning them hostile.

Rewards: 2,000 Exp., Temporary Flight, Item, and Beli

Accept the Challenge?

Yes     No

Looks like her Journal is of the same mind. The Experience Points are on the low side, but hopefully Temporary Flight is exactly what she thinks it is.

When she had gained her Metal Wings, she had unlocked a Special Ability named Glide. It’s been useful, but to be able to truly fly, no matter how short, would be amazing.

“Obviously, I would not want to cause trouble for Mihawk,” she accepts the quest and begins lying through her teeth, “so I will go with you to Marineford.”

She shuts the Journal and stands with a stretch. Rubbing her eyes with a kimono sleeve, she lets out an unconvincing yawn.

“After I get some rest of course. My hotel room is already paid for, and I’m afraid I am rather delicate,” she says with a flutter of her eyes.

The Marines don’t fall for it, but they agree to leave in the morning anyway. They keep guard of her hotel room, and her plan to escape into the night goes up in smoke one she realizes a rather big flaw. Her wings are too big to fit through the window.

My flight, she mentally wails while pacing her room furiously.

There’s desperation in the way she flips through the pages of her Journal, looking for the spark of a new idea. She goes over Summaries, Skills, and Special Abilities before looking through her Move Skills. She pauses.

Mihawk’s Knife hadn’t been the only thing she gained from her run in with the world’s greatest swordsman. She taps on the page.

Eradication: A powerful slash that sends out a shockwave in front of the wielder. It travels for 10 seconds, burning everything in its path.

4/4 Mihawk Coins

Obtained!

She hasn’t been able to test the move out yet. From bosses that couldn’t survive against a blade as long as her finger to Bull racing mini-games that disqualified attacks, she’s just never had the opportunity. It’d be stupid to use it.

There’s an itch in her shoulders. Technically, if the Marines get hit from behind, they wouldn’t be able to be alerted or turn hostile. They’d be dead.
She doesn’t know how powerful it is, if it’d even go through the walls, or whether or not she’d bring the building down on top of her.

It sounds so cool though.

In the end, it takes roughly twenty minutes before she succumbs to her desire to use her hard-earned Move Skill. It helps that the Marines outside her door begin talking rather poorly of her louder than they intend to.

She stands in front of the door, Tsubasa de Tobu in her hands, and lets out a breath.

“Eradication,” she says calmly.

Her blade remains steady despite her beating heart, and when she swings it, a blindingly pink shockwave shoots out.

The width of the shockwave expands to the entire wall before burning straight through it. There are no sounds or screams—the pink shockwave hits too fast and too hard, it’s a quick death—and she looks though the charred hole in the wall.

She watches as the shockwave goes through another room, through the lobby, and out the door. Smoke begins filling her vision. She realizes she may have made a mistake.

Results:

3,008/5,500 Exp.

Level 65

Gained:

Temporary Flight

Naughty Photo

5,000 Beli

And that is how she sets a city of water on fire.

Kuina lands on Water 7. Shortly after, the Marines attempt to bring her to their Headquarters in Marineford. Kuina escapes, leaving a trail of destruction and devastation in her wake. Miraculously, the only thing anyone knows is that the Marines are somehow responsible for the mess.
Chapter Notes

If the sizing of the graphics won't work (such as not even turning your mobile sideways), then hit the Hide Creator's Style button at the top of the page!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When she is five years old, a fisherman discovers an odd, clam-like creature that isn’t damaged by prying open its shell. Another person quickly notices that the inside of the creature’s shell is better than any man-made mirror. The poor creature, henceforth called a fleecting clam, quickly becomes popular as a cheap, handheld mirror.

When she turns eight, a curious engineer realizes that fleecting clams have similar psychic properties to snails. They figure out that the clams can connect and mirror the inside of each other’s shells. Sometime after, a mad genius learns that pressing a shape into the creature will send that shape to a connecting clam. This genius puts together a series of stamps that one could say resembles a tiny keyboard.

By the time she hits twelve, CLAMMM “Clairvoyant Messaging Mirror Mollusk” are the new must have. The only upkeep required for the creatures is saltwater, and depending on the model, CLAMMM can be quite affordable. In a world where not everyone can have a reliable way to keep in contact, these clams are heaven-sent.

On her thirteenth birthday, Zoro waves a clam at her and says she has no excuse to not answer. She can only stare on in silent horror as he connects the CLAMMM to his own; afterwards, Zoro hands it over to her father who does the same.

She now has two contacts and the obligation of dealing with instant messaging.
**Contact Name:** Idiot

Zoro: I challenge you

Kuina: It’s past midnight.

Zoro: Fight me

Kuina: You moron, I was sleeping.

Zoro: Youre not now

Kuina: …

Kuina: I’m tossing my CLAMMM into the kitchen and I am going back to bed.

**Contact Name:** Father

Father: Kuina.

Kuina: Yes?

Father: Please stop antagonizing Lady Baba.

Kuina: No. She started it.

Father: Her methods may be misguided, but she knows nothing else. She is simply looking out for you in her own way.

Kuina: Then you go sit on your knees for an hour while she tells you how to breed correctly. Feel her sincerity.
Kuina: Oh, wait.

Kuina: If you had, you wouldn’t be in this mess to begin with.

Father: I will go have a talk with her.

Father: Please stop with the graffiti.

Kuina: I thought the two dogs humping on her door was my best art yet.

**Contact Name:** Idiot

Zoro: Fight me

Kuina: Don’t you ever get tired of writing that?

Zoro: No

Kuina: You know my answer. You're sitting right next to me. Eating. Which I should be doing.

Zoro: When you're done

Kuina: If you don’t let me eat my shrimp in peace, I swear to me.

Zoro: What

Kuina: What?

Zoro: Why would you swear to yourself

Kuina: Because I am so far above you, I might as well be god.

The sound of two clams being dropped is drowned out by screeching and the noisy scuffling of two immature children. Her shrimp goes cold, and she makes sure Zoro gets two black eyes for it.

**Contact Name:** Father

Father: Women do not gain the same muscles as men. You will never be as strong as Zoro. It’s just nature, and that doesn’t make it terrible.

Kuina: Are you seriously still trying to lecture me?

Kuina: I walked away for a reason, old man.

Father: The sooner you accept it, the sooner you can overcome the limit you’ve set for yourself.

Kuina: You mean give up and become a housewife, right?
She gets no reply, and the fact her CLAMMM is a living, breathing creature is the only reason she doesn’t throw it to the ground. Scowling, she shuts the clam and swings her legs over the tree branch violently.

It’s fine. It won’t be long before she leaves, and she’ll just toss the clam into the sea. The creature can go back to its natural habitat, and she’ll never have to put up with degrading lectures again.

**Contact Name:** Idiot

Zoro: Kuina what the hell

Zoro: Fight me

Zoro: Kuina come back now

Zoro: You cant just snd run

Zoro: Come back

Zoro: Answer me

Zoro: Kuina

Zoro: I stil havent beat you

Zoro: I will be the strongest

Zoro: I promise

Zoro: I wont follow you p ask you to come back again

Zoro: Dont ignore me

Zoro: Kuina

Zoro: P;lease

Kuina: Stop crying, idiot.

Kuina: I’m trying to get some sleep. Message me later, okay?

She leaves for another island in the early morning, but something keeps her from throwing the CLAMMM overboard. She doesn’t intend to answer Zoro’s frantic messaging, but her fingers seem to move on their own.

As for her father, she never looks at the messages he sends her. She doesn’t bother trying to explain herself. It’s too much work, and she doesn't have the words.

Despite her resolve, she soon finds herself opening her father's channel anyway. When she sees the indicator that he's opened his CLAMMM, she suddenly finds herself pulling a Zoro.
Contact Name: Father

Kuina: Hey.
Kuina: I killed my first person today.
Kuina: He was a pirate.
Kuina: I had to take out his whole crew.
Kuina: Some of them had swords but they were weak. They didn't leave a scratch.
Kuina: I'm in the middle of calming down, but I don't feel guilty. Not even a little.
Kuina: Is that shock? Is that normal?
Kuina: Is there a way to get blood out of clothes?

She gets no answer, and she doesn't know why she feels disappointed. She kicks the still bleeding head by her feet into the nearby bushes and puts the CLAMMM away in a pocket.

With a steady breath, she wipes her face with the cleanest part of her sleeve and goes to face Maze Island's leader. No doubt the woman will freak out over her bloodied appearance, but there's nothing to be done.

Contact Name: My Idiot

Kuina: Hey, Zoro.
Kuina: I killed an entire pirate crew that was trying to pillage and rape.
Kuina: Aren't people usually grateful for that?
Zoro: Yes wait you did what

Kuina: Don't be jealous, they were weaklings. That kid with the shaved eyebrows could probably kick their ass.
Zoro: His name is Yasushi
Zoro: If all pirates are that weak

Kuina: Zoro no
Zoro: I have an idea

Kuina: Zoro NO
Zoro: I'm going to be a bounty hunter
Zoro is an efficient buffer for the chilly attitudes aimed towards her, but he can only talk to her for so long. When she's surrounded by silent, judgmental stares, when the crew she is sailing with look at her blood-covered kimono and whisper, she nearly dives for her CLAMMM at the soft chime it makes. Upon opening it, she's greeted by a surprise.

**Contact Name:** Father

Father: Butchers and fish cleaners will know where to purchase powder wash. There are different ones for silk and cottons, so be sure to ask. Salt is efficient otherwise.

She only hesitates to answer back for a heartbeat. She still doesn't have the words, but maybe that's okay.

**Contact Name:** Father

Father: Butchers and fish cleaners will know where to purchase powder wash. There are different ones for silk and cottons, so be sure to ask. Salt is efficient otherwise.

Kuina: Thanks.

**Contact Name:** Father

Kuina: I've been advised to buy new clothes rather than waste time saving it.

Kuina: The amount of powder I'll need is expensive, the silk will be faded afterwards, and I'll be outgrowing it all soon anyway.

Kuina: Some of it is still good, so I'm going to cut off pieces and make a bag.

Father: That sounds like a wise decision.

She flits from island to island, never looking back to the village she left. She talks to Zoro near everyday, never for too long lest she damage his training, but the messages to her father are few and far in between. She supposes it's better this way; she doesn't tell her father all the things she does, and he can claim to be ignorant of her misdeeds.

**Contact Name:** My Idiot

Kuina: So I've been kidnapped.

Zoro: Tell me who and where and they'll die

Kuina: Don't mess up your plans on my account. I let them kidnap me.

Zoro: Another crazy idea then
Kuina: What's that supposed to mean?

Zoro: You know what

Kuina: The fish tacos were a marvelous idea. I can't help it if that started a food war.

Zoro: Just like you couldn't help telling both sides that they needed a stand in the same spot

Kuina: It was funny. Besides I wouldn't have done it if you hadn't pushed me.

Zoro: So now you're blaming me

Kuina: Yes.

Zoro: Kidnapping what happened

Kuina: Oh, I killed a marine.

Zoro: What

Kuina: Saved a lady from being kidnapped who's boyfriend got shot. My sword broke.

Zoro: WHAT

Kuina: Lady forced me onto her ship and said she'd buy me a new sword when we reach her home. I think she's a prostitution madam.

Zoro: I'll be right there

Kuina: I'll be fine, really. I still have a couple of knives.

Zoro: You

Kuina: If you don't hear from me by tomorrow, I'm on the Singing Viper headed to Gold Rum Island with Madam Shilla.

Zoro: Kuina

Kuina: But you'll hear from me tomorrow because I'll be fine.

Zoro: ygugu

Zoro: You check in with me every hour

Kuina: Fine.

Zoro: Stab them immediately if they say you can earn money by touching swords

Kuina: Zoro.

Zoro: If they try to put you in a room with bars stab them
Kuina: ZORO.

Zoro: And dont accept drinks or food

Kuina: Knife up my sleeve at all times. Please stop.

Zoro: Will you stop being kidnapped

Kuina: I need a new sword.

Zoro: Then heres some more advice

Kuina: Spirits damn it.

Contact Name: Roberto

Roberto: I have taken the liberty to connect you to Madam Shilla’s channel as well

Kuina: Thanks.

Roberto: My offer to look the other way while you make your escape is still open

Kuina: Are you that worried about me hurting the Madam?

Roberto: On the contrary, I worry she will hurt herself

Roberto: If there is a wolf cub all by itself looking up at her, she may pick it up and take it home

Roberto: That may not be what the cub wants and it will be in its right to bite her

Roberto: And she will have grown attached by then, making the pain worse

Kuina: Don’t worry. I’m sure the cub won’t bite unless she tries to muzzle it.

Roberto: I will keep that in mind

Contact Name: My Idiot

Kuina: Hdflsjl ZoRO ZORO GUESS WHAT I FOUND

Zoro: Never seen you so excited

Kuina: You would be unable to write in my position.

Kuina: So Madam Shilla is now my lover
Contact Name: My Idiot

Kuina: Wait come back Zoro I was joking.

Zoro: Thats a terrible joke

Kuina: But it shouldn't matter. You know our betrothal is fake.

Kuina: ...you still think we’re getting married, don’t you.

Zoro: We will once I become the greatest swordsman in the world.

Kuina: You know what, I won’t even bother.

Kuina: Back to my news.

Kuina: Madam Shilla is good to her word. I have a new sword.

Zoro: And

Kuina: And there it was sitting in a barrel, collecting dust, and mocked with scorn because of its looks.

Zoro: Just tell me before you write a poem

Kuina: Bright, eye watering pink from its hilt to its scabbard. I pulled it out and there, too, the blade was

Kuina: PINK.

Kuina: IT’S ALL PINK.

Kuina: AND YOU KNOW WHAT I BOUGHT IT.

Zoro: Wait does that mean

Kuina: IT’S SUPREME GRADE BABY.

Contact Name: Madam Shilla

Madam Shilla: how is my darling <3<3<3

Kuina: I have no idea. Maybe you should ask him.

Madam Shilla: i was talking to you

Kuina: I’m fine. Is there something you need, Madam?

Madam Shilla: come now don’t be like that
Madam Shilla: this is clamm you don’t have to write the way you speak my dear 😊

Kuina: I don’t have to sound like I’m an idiot either.

Madam Shilla: what ever will I do with my darling kuina

Kuina: Send me more potential clients.

Madam Shilla: oh my you sound like one of my girls~ you should take care of the way you sound ^_~

Kuina: Goodbye, Madam. I’ll be over for tea tomorrow.

**Contact Name:** Roberto

Roberto: Please stop telling the Madam that I can be bought with chocolate

Kuina: But you can.

Roberto: She didn’t have to know that

Kuina: Just think, if you marry her you can have all the chocolate you want. No one will be able to hold it over your head ever again.

Roberto: Except the Madam

Roberto: How much is she paying you for this campaign

Kuina: I get an entire cake every week.

Kuina: It’s chocolate btw.

Roberto: I’m going to stop calling you in for work

Kuina: No you won’t. I’m the best Not A Security Guard you’ve got. I even pay taxes on the wages I am totally not earning.

Roberto: A customer is causing trouble in block A4

Roberto: Go take care of it instead of bothering me

Kuina: On it, Not Bossman.

**Contact Name:** Madam Shilla

Madam Shilla: kuina my love why does your client think you don’t mm?

Kuina: I hide my CLAMMM from her.
Madam Shilla: dare i ask why 😊

Kuina: Because I don't want her mming me. She'd just spam me with hearts and messages in the middle of the night.

Madam Shilla: well that's my kuina for you

Madam Shilla: roberto turned down my offer for drinks

Kuina: Which he should because he's your bodyguard. It's literally in his contract.

Madam Shilla: when do you get off

Kuina: In an hour. Why?

Madam Shilla: i have an entire bottle of peach wine and no one to drink it with. i'm lonely 😊

Kuina: I'll be over the moment I'm off.

Kuina: You can rant about how you can't get your proposal taken seriously and I can cry about being unable to get mine taken as a joke.

Madam Shilla: sounds good i'll be waiting

**Contact Name:** My Idiot

Zoro: Kuina dont be mad

Kuina: What did you do.

Zoro: I joined a pirate crew

Kuina: What.

Zoro: And the crew currently consists of myself and the captain

Kuina: I have no words.

Zoro: Hes going to become the pirate king

Zoro: Youd agree with me if you saw what I did

Kuina: …

Kuina: Walk me through this because it's still not making any sense.

What ensues is a conversation that lasts so long her CLAMMM falls asleep on her. By the time she’s able to message Zoro back, he’s already getting into trouble as a member of a two-man pirate crew. She knew she shouldn’t have left him in the care of her father.
Contact Name: Father

Kuina: You’ve been filling Zoro’s head with strange ideas, haven’t you.

Father: What makes you think that?

Kuina: He’s just become a pirate.

Father: It was only a matter of time.

Father: There are only two options in this world to become stronger. One must either fight under the banner of the Marines or the flag of a pirate.

Father: Zoro, I’m afraid, doesn’t have the temperament to search out a third option.

Kuina: His crew consists of him and a newbie captain. And only them.

Father: I will have a talk with him.

Contact Name: My Idiot

Zoro: I’m fine it was only a scratch

Kuina: Uh huh.

Zoro: It’s a scar to be proud of

Kuina: Sure.

Zoro: I was totally outclassed

Kuina: Yep.

Zoro: But I will beat him count on it

Zoro: I will be the greatest swordsman in the world

Zoro: And when I am wodjs

Zoro: 😊

Kuina: ?

Zoro: 😎😎😎 MARRY ME

Kuina: Luffy, give the CLAMMM back to Zoro.
**Contact Name:** Dracule Mihawk

Mihawk: Little swordsman, you cannot become stronger if you do not leave the island.

Kuina: What the hell

Kuina: How did you get this channel?

Kuina: No wait, how are you showing up in my contacts list? And how are you changing the incoming color??

Mihawk: I obtained your channel from your father.

There are no more replies after that, and she nearly slams the clam shut. She thinks better of it when a thought hits her, and with stiff fingers, she begins typing.

**Contact Name:** Dracule Mihawk

Mihawk: Little swordsman, you cannot become stronger if you do not leave the island.

Kuina: What the hell

Kuina: How did you get this channel?

Kuina: No wait, how are you showing up in my contacts list? And how are you changing the incoming color??

Mihawk: I obtained your channel from your father.

Kuina: You didn’t kill him, did you?

Mihawk: No.

Mihawk: He gave it along with a warning that you were under a betrothal contract, and that I must take up the matter with you.

Kuina: Oh no

Mihawk: I will only be accepted as a potential suitor if I am able to father children.

Kuina: jfeiowfj

Kuina: And you said?

Mihawk: I was too busy laughing.

Kuina: Please tell me you told him afterwards.

Mihawk: No. I do not need to explain myself.
Kuina: You just want to make my life miserable.

Mihawk: Yes.

She does slam the CLAMMM shut then, hard enough that the creature lets out an angry squeak.

Chapter End Notes

A highly experimental chapter, I probably won't do it again.

So I say while writing a few pieces down.

(All grammar mistakes should be fixed now. The ones left are intentional)
Contact Name: My Idiot

Kuina: How’s the liberating going?

Zoro: Fishmen are strong Im stronger

Kuina: Oh, good. Hate to hear you’re bleeding out or something.

Zoro: Im gie

Zoro: Fine

Zoro: Im fine

Kuina: Sure you are.

Kuina: If you can’t talk, just say so.

Zoro: I only need one hand to kill these guys
Kuina: ...don’t tell me you’re mming in the middle of a fight.

Zoro: I can muluyitasdk

Zoro: Multisaks

Zoro: Multitask

Kuina: ...

Kuina: I’m shutting it off. Concentrate on fighting, you moron.

**Contact Name:** Father

Kuina: Father, I heard some rather concerning news.

Father: Zoro is fine, I’m sure.

Kuina: Getting his ass kicked by Fishmen currently, but still alive.

Kuina: No, what I want to know is why Dracule Mihawk has my CLAMMM channel.

Father: You only turn 25 once.

Kuina: Really?? Are you serious?

Kuina: You and I both know 25 isn’t the cutoff date for that contract. Zoro’s being stupid about it.

Father: Hormones are strong at your age. Things can happen especially if you continue to fight.

Father: Better to turn your attention to those of good stature and consider all your options carefully.

Father: Of course, should you find yourself having an accident, I am fully prepared to take in any grandchildren that may happen.

Kuina: Ae you

Kuina: Are you telling me to go have a baby?? A sword baby?? With Mihawk if Zoro doesn’t come around?

Kuina: Father.

Kuina: FATHER

Kuina: ANSWER ME FATHER

Her CLAMMM makes a tiny beep as the mirror goes blank. She blinks.

“He hung up on me,” she says in disbelief.
**Contact Name:** Dracule Mihawk

Kuina: Hey, bastard. I don’t know what my father told you, but I am not having your sword baby.

Kuina: Just so we’re clear.

Mihawk: You couldn’t entice me with your lowly skills.

Kuina: At least I have Options. The only thing you can entice is a block of ice.

Kuina: Not sure it would have you afterwards though. You might be too cold for it.

Mihawk: Have you left the island yet?

Kuina: Why, will you come get me if I don’t?

Kuina: ...you’re taking too long to answer. I will just say yes and close the CLAMMM.

Mihawk: A wise decision.

**Contact Name:** Madam Shilla

Madam Shilla: oh my darling how i miss you 😊

Kuina: Did Roberto leave?

Madam Shilla: i was talking to you

Kuina: Oh. Sorry. I miss you too.

Madam Shilla: you were making a face when you wrote that weren’t you 😓

Kuina: How scary. Are you psychic?

Madam Shilla: no i just know you’re allergic to feelings

Madam Shilla: have you made it to dawn island yet?

Kuina: I don’t think so. But I’ve been enjoying the peace and quiet in my cabin.

Kuina: ...

Kuina: It’s too peaceful and quiet actually. I’ll go check with the captain. Brb.

**Contact Name:** Madam Shilla

Kuina: ;jaerg;haggjkksjdfkhla
Madam Shilla: what’s wrong

Kuina: No one’s here. Literally, there is nobody on this ship.

Madam Shilla: what?

Kuina: I’ve got to go. I’d say a mystery’s afoot, but.

Madam Shilla: pirates ☠️

Kuina: Pirates.

Madam Shilla: well don’t worry dear i’ll come pick you up

Kuina: Thanks, I’ll mm you later.

**Contact Name: My Idiot**

Kuina: Fish-men are strong, but I’m stronger.

Kuina: Probably only because he’s malnourished though.

Zoro: Youre supposed to be sailing to Luffys home

Kuina: I was until pirates took the crew I was sailing with.

Kuina: Bastards left me on the boat and took the sail. The food too.

Kuina: Even the limes. Bastards. Limey bastards.

Zoro: Are you okay

Kuina: Sort of? I’m waiting to launch an ambush. It’s going to take hours. I’m bored. And angry. Extremely.

Zoro: I almost feel sorry for whoever youve got your sights on

Kuina: I won’t stop until they’ve tasted my wrath. But I’m still bored.

Kuina: So bored. I’m in need, Zoro. Tell me a story.

Zoro: I’ll hand the clammm to Usopp then

Kuina: Thank you.

**Contact Name: Big T**
Kuina: Is this working?

Tairona: Yes

Kuina: Cool.

“Don’t forget to delete the other channels, or you’ll receive mms from those guys’ friends,” she says as she tucks her CLAMMM away.

A pile of clams of every shape and size lie at her feet, and the Fishman next to her holds a large, smooth one up to the light of a torch. The CLAMMM used to belong to the captain that held him prisoner.

“Let them.” Tairona’s grin is full of teeth. “If they can’t tell their master is dead then they’ll deserve what’s coming.”

Meaning any friends of the slavers that stay unaware they are mmng the now-free Tairona are likely to be led into a death trap.

“Or you can do that,” she nods sagely.

Contact Name: My Idiot

Kuina: Hey Zoro, does Mihawk mm you?

Zoro: I was too busy bleeding to wave my CLAMMM at him

Kuina: No need to be mean.

Zoro: Wait you wouldn’t ask without a reason

Kuina: No, no. No reason.

Zoro: Wait

Zoro: Is he mmng you

Kuina: Why would he?

Zoro: Kuina

Zoro: When did you meet him

Kuina: Meet who?

Zoro: I’ll kill him

Kuina: Wait it’s not what you think!
**Contact Name:** My Idiot

Kuina: I promise, he really only tried to kill me.

Kuina: Even his mms are like Stop Having Fun and Learn To Not Suck.

Zoro: He shouldn’t be bothering you at all

Zoro: I need to talk to sensei

Kuina: Be my guest. Chew him out for as long as you want. He deserves it.

Kuina: Actually, lay it on thick. Mihawk keeps signing me up for stuff.

Zoro: Signing you up for what

Kuina: I keep getting swordsman daily news and spam from islands I’ve never been to.

Kuina: I swear if I get one more chain letter about losing my shadow...

**Contact Name:** Roberto

Kuina: Roberto, I miss you.

Roberto: What brought this on

Kuina: You are the only one I know of who is actually 100% sane.

Roberto: Dare I ask

Kuina: I’m being stalked by Marines who think I am a Marine.

Kuina: I’m being stalked by pirates who think I am a pirate.

Kuina: I’m being stalked by swordsmen because I am a swordsman.

Roberto: Would you like me to offer my condolences or would you prefer actual useful advice

Kuina: Both please.

**Contact Name:** My Idiot

Kuina: Do you happen to know a Ensign Tashigi?

Zoro: Tell me you didn’t meet her too

Kuina: Nope. But everyone thinks I am her. It’s super annoying.
Kuina: Is my face really that wrinkly?

Zoro: Why do you think she's wrinkly?

Kuina: Anyone chasing after you has to be full of stress lines.

Zoro: You're not wrinkly but that would be a good way to tell you apart.

Zoro: I'll do my best.

Kuina: What about it?

Zoro: To make her so stressed out she'll look like an old granny once I'm done.

Kuina: ...I feel like I should be stopping you, but part of me really wants to see what I'll look like in old age.

**Contact Name:** Unknown

???: do you have a moment to talk about the Will of D? Let me tell you what we believe about the coming Day of Luffy, and what you can do to stay out of his way and avoid the World Government.

Kuina: Oh great. It's a Stupid Persistant Ass Message.

???: I'll have you know I bring words of great wisdom.

Kuina: I'm shutting the CLAMMM now.

???: wait!

???: you're not a World Government stooge are you?

???: you're not a pirate either?

???: who are you to Mihawk?

Kuina: I'll only answer if you tell me how you got this channel and why you care.

???: I'm Mihawk's best friend! and I stole it from his CLAMMM

???: noticed there was a new contact listed with an interesting name.

Kuina: Interesting name?

???: nope, now you got to answer my first question.

Kuina: I'm his baby mama if my father has his way.

Kuina: ...you have been quiet for a long time. You okay?
Sorry, sorry. Blacked out there for a moment. You’re what now?

Kuina: I’m just messing with you. He’s actually just my stalker.

Sorry, you’re still messing with me.

Kuina: Not this time. He keeps asking me where I’m at and what I’m doing to get stronger.

Kuina: If you can tell him to knock it off, I’d appreciate it.

Sorry, oh boy, sounds like you’re in for it.

Kuina: ?

Sorry, he’s got his sights set on you for the big R.

Kuina: I’m going to regret this. What’s the big R?

Sorry, rivalry. You must have impressed him. You a swordsman?

Kuina: Yep. I survived a strike from him when he decided to be an asshole. That doesn’t seem like it warrants being rivals.

Sorry, you have no idea do you. When Mihawk moves things die.

Sorry, you’re in it for the long haul.

Kuina: ...is there anyway out of this?

Sorry, you can cut your arm off.

Kuina: No.

Sorry, then I’d follow your old man’s idea. He’ll run the moment you wave a baby at him.

Kuina: Hell no.

Sorry, I’ll think on it and get back to you.

Kuina: Please do.

Contact Name: My Idiot

Kuina: Zoro, I may have messed up.

Kuina: I don’t know if you can pick this up from where I am, but I’m currently in ice hell.

Kuina: You’re my best friend.

Kuina: So hurry up and come get me.
Kuina: Otherwise I’ll have to marry Luza.

**Contact Name:** Father

Kuina: Father, I don’t suppose you’ll answer?

Kuina: Didn’t think so.

**Contact Name:** Madam Shilla

Kuina: Madam Shilla, SOS

**Contact Name:** Roberto

Kuina: Roberto, I will buy you as much chocolate as you want for forever if you get me off this frozen hellish island.

**Contact Name:** Big T

Kuina: Tairona, hope you’re having better luck than me. Forward the enclosed message to someone if you can.

Kuina: GET ME OFF THIS ISLAND OF SNOW

“How wonderful such a device is. I hope you can reach your friends eventually,” Luza tells her, offering a sympathetic smile.

“How wonderful such a device is. I hope you can reach your friends eventually,” Luza tells her, offering a sympathetic smile.

“Me too.”

**Contact Name:** Dracule Mihawk

Kuina: I suppose you can’t receive my messages either.
Mihawk: And why is that?

Kuina: You're frickin kidding me.

Mihawk: I don't joke.

Kuina: I am on an island where I have to waddle in a suit just to go through deep, deep snow.

Kuina: And I cannot connect to anyone thanks to all the icebergs.

Kuina: But you're all I have to talk to. Really? Really??

Mihawk: I wondered where you went.

Kuina: Mr. Stalker, I don't suppose you'd be willing to come get me.

Mihawk: No.

Kuina: I didn’t think so.

Kuina: Can you at least forward me swordsmen daily news? I'm bored to tears here.

The familiar looking news mm appearing on Mihawk’s channel is a sight for sore eyes. She supposes she should be grateful for this much. And she is until she sees the most recent headline.

“The Marines’ Ensign Tashigi spotted running around with a pink blade? Mihawk’s rumored girlfriend takes down Sea King? What the hell.”

Chapter End Notes

I can't post the next chapter for FYW until tomorrow or Saturday, so I hurried to give you guys a little treat for Halloween. Have a good one!
“Did’ja hear ‘bout Water 7?” A sailor with a barely working bottom lip utters from the chair next to her.

“Yeah, shame that the Marines did all that just as we set off. Feels like bad luck,” another sailor across from them nods.

She resolutely keeps her eyes on the bowl of rice in front of her. For some reason, all anyone wants to talk about is Water 7 catching on fire. It’s irritating considering there are plenty of other topics to talk about. Such as why there’s no meat to go with the rice.

“Bad luck? Aye, it’s already started. Whatev’r spirit that was dragged its bony fingers across all the barrels! We got no food.”

Oh. That’s why.

“We’re in luck though. Lookout’s picked up an island. Good sized town. Good bit of animals. There’ll be plenty of food there to restock.”

The man across from them leans in slightly, accidentally knocking over an empty cup while trying to lower his voice. She flips through her Journal in an effort to avoid looking like she’s scooting closer to better hear. Blend In hasn’t been working lately.

“Odd though. Island’s not on any map heard of. Not supposed to be anything here through this water.”

Talk of the mysterious island ends there, and soon the conversation loops back to the tragedy of Water 7. She withholds a sigh. Surely there are more interesting things happening by now.

She doesn’t think too much on their emergency stop. The Grand Line contains some of the most bizarre islands and weather imaginable; islands popping up where they shouldn’t be aren’t out of the normal.

She soon regrets not being a little more concerned.

“Welcome to Xmas Town!” A rosy-cheeked woman in an obnoxious red and green dress smiles at her.

She reaches up and pinches her own cheek. She glances to the giant Christmas tree gleaming in the center of town before looking back at the woman who maintains a frozen smile. This is real then.

“Can you repeat that?” She asks.

“Welcome to Xmas Town!” The woman says in the same exact tone with the same smile.

The Level 70 hovering above the woman’s head keeps her from doing anything more than thanking her and beating a hasty retreat. She knew there was something weird the moment she saw those fake snowmen.
There’s no time to catch her breath; before she can pull out her Journal, she’s greeted by a man with reindeer antlers and a wide smile.

“Welcome to Xmas Town!” He tells her as more people line up behind him with their own wide, beaming smiles.

It’s like a scene out of her nightmares. She allows five more people to tell her “Welcome to Xmas Town” before she runs for it. She ends up hiding behind a large candy cane ornament.

“Explain,” she orders the Journal, shaking it.

The Story Summary hasn’t updated since Water 7, but she notices a new page behind it labeled DLC. It reads,

Kuina makes a stop at Xmas Town, a very merry island that appears only once a year. Filled with games, gift-giving, and a new land to discover, does she has what it takes to save Xmas?

“You’re kidding me,” she says in disbelief.

There is so much wrong with this that she decides to not even try; she goes back to the ship. To her dismay, the skeleton crew left on the ship turns her away from hanging out in her hammock.

“We’ll only be here a day, missy. You should go enjoy it while you can!” She’s told.

She glares down at her Journal. Of course it wouldn’t let her opt out. She must have made it mad somehow.

Shoulders slumping, she trudges to the nearest building which resembles a gingerbread house. A sign proclaims it the “Nog House.” Upon opening the door, she’s blasted by a quest and the smell of eggs.

Nog For Nothing

Level 40

Make a special spicy serving, but beware the bear that likes spicy eggnog.

Rewards: Item and Beli

Accept the Challenge?

Yes    No

Upon accepting the quest, she’s shoved into a kitchen. A bear stares at her from the other side of a window. She sighs and picks up the ingredient list and cooking instructions.

The whole thing ends up being a mini-game where her Level doesn’t matter. The worst thing to happen is a staring contest between her and the bear. She’s rewarded with a carton of eggnog and a handful of Beli.

To her frustration, almost all the quests in Xmas Town end up like that: non-violent mini-games that give no Experience Points.

Bell Crazy

Level 40
Find the bell making a flat noise among the 500 bells.

Rewards: Item and Beli

Accept the Challenge?

Yes     No

“I hate you,” she says to the quest-giver who maintains a blank-eyed smile. “So much.”

The quest sends her running around the entire island shaking every bell in search of one that sounds off. She ends up having to shake every bell three times. She stops being able to tell what sounds normal and what doesn’t halfway in.

The quest should have been named Bell Hell.

“If I ever have to hear another bell, I’m going to start stabbing,” she promises darkly.

As if to spite her, a man with bells attached to his shoes begins dancing. She unsheathes her sword, and the annoying sound stops. From that point on, she begins slicing off every bell she comes across.

Gift of Caring

Level 40

Show the people in your life you care.

Rewards: Reputation

Accept the Challenge?

Yes     No

She didn’t expect much when she opened the door to the Gift Shop, but so far this is the only quest to give out something other than a unique Christmas Item and Beli. She gets an idea on why that is when a couple dressed like Christmas elves show her to a wrapping room.

“Our unique mail system means we can have your packages delivered by tonight!” Elf number one tells her.

“As our first customer, feel free to use anything in this room for as many gifts as you want, free of charge!” Elf number two chirps.

She looks at the piles of stuff—it’s anything from teddy bears to teapots jumbled together—lying around the room, looks at the colorful boxes stacked to the ceiling and the wrapping paper leaning against the table in the center of the room; she lets out a deep, world-weary sigh.

She opens her Journal and turns to the Bonds page. The blasted book can be at least helpful enough in this regard.

She has no idea if the presents she puts together will actually make it to their intended recipients, but she treats it seriously. For her father, she puts together a tea set; for Zoro, she manages to find a sword kit and a small tiger doll she finds adorable.

She digs through the various piles of items until she finds something she thinks each of her friends
will like. Each gift gets wrapped to the best of her ability—which isn’t much considering she skipped all those childhood lessons—and she turns her attention to the last gift she wasn’t sure she was going to send.

“He did give me that wine. ‘Tis the season after all,” she muses aloud.

Making up her mind, she stuffs the bottle of alcohol into a black box. She immediately begins showering the bottle in glitter. She puts a piece of tissue paper down, lays a knife on top of it, and showers that with glitter as well.

She’s such a great person.

Her final quest in Xmas Town is one she should have seen coming all things considered. It was, after all, in the Story Summary description.

“Santa, why?” She asks tonelessly.

She stares up at the giant man dressed in a Santa suit. Instead of a round, jolly man, the one glaring down at her has muscles as big as her head. His beard looks more like a rough pirate’s than an elderly man’s. The too small red coat is straining against large pecs grotesquely. She can’t seem to stop staring.

“If you wish to save Xmas that badly, show me your Xmas spirit!” Santa says while flexing.

Hit Them With That Merry Xmas

Level 45

Show Santa that his reign is over.

Rewards: Holiday Cheer, Item, and Beli

Accept the Challenge?

Yes  No

She doesn’t know how “go see if you’re on the Nice List” turned into “race Santa around the island in a sleigh before beating him up” but she won’t complain. She’s got a lot of things she’d like to vent.

“Let’s do this,” she says, putting on a Santa hat threateningly.

Chapter End Notes

Kuina did not make the Nice List. She was *Naughty.*
When she blinks to awareness, she is sitting in a lightly cushioned chair, staring down at a piece of paper with a stamp in her hands. Upon her second blink, she realizes she is looking at a form for… sick pay approval?

“Lieutenant, here is the missing file—” A man slides the door open only to freeze upon seeing her. She takes in the black traditional Japanese clothing, the sword on his hip, and the papers in his hands; she puts the stamp down slowly. She leans back in the chair and eyes the open door behind him.

“You are not Lieutenant Hisagi,” the man says, body tensing.

“No,” she agrees easily, “I’m not.”

The man glares at her harshly before looking around with a lost expression. A silent, paper filled office is the only thing awaiting him. She places her hands in her lap, remaining slow and careful in her movements. A slight tug against her sleeve tells her that Tsubasa de Tobu is still with her.

She watches the man’s movements like a hawk. If he so much as twitches towards his sword, she’s going to throw the stamp at his face and go for the throat to silence his screams.

Against her expectations of a hostile attack, the man grabs his face and begins shedding tears. She feels her jaw drop.

“Lieutenant, no! I did not think you were serious!” The man cries through his fingers.

“I’m sorry?” She offers, so utterly confused.

“It is,” the man inhales sharply, “not your fault. I am to blame! I did not take the lieutenant’s threats of replacing himself with a stranger off the street seriously! We pushed him too far!”

Lieutenant, that was a military rank, wasn’t it? Since when did the Marines start wearing black? Or kimono?

Never mind that, how did she even get here? The last thing she remembers is meditating on the Thousand Sunny. Could she have been swapped out with a Devil Fruit?

“I was kidnapped just a few seconds ago. Your lieutenant, how fast is he?” She asks, looking around at the stacks of paperwork littering the room with morbid fascination.

“He’s the fastest in the division. He’s fast enough to keep up with the captains,” the man answers her with a sniff.
That tells her nothing. The strength of Marine captains varies greatly.

“And he could switch places with me in a blink in the eye?” She asks dubiously.

“Lieutenant Hisagi once replaced 11th Division’s food with pictures their own lieutenant drew as they went to bite into it. No one saw him even once. It was a massacre,” the man tells her. “The only reason he was caught is because Captain Tōsen asked him about it. The lieutenant never lies when asked.”

So she’s been switched out with a Devil Fruit ability after all. That explains how she got here, but not how she’ll get back to the Thousand Sunny. Granted, she doesn’t have to go back but getting pulled away from the ship without her say-so doesn’t endear her.

(Getting pulled away from Zoro before she’s said goodbye kind of pisses her off actually.)

“I don’t suppose your lieutenant will switch us back anytime soon?” She asks without much optimism.

“I am afraid Lieutenant Hisagi made good on his threat to leave for the other world,” the man tells her solemnly.

The answer is a resounding no.

She fully expects to be escorted out of whatever Marine outpost she’s ended up in, to stare out at the sea while wondering what to do. Instead, paperwork is shoved into her hands, and she’s left staring wordlessly as her new aide pours a cup of tea across the desk from her.

“Chin up, my good Substitute Lieutenant!” The chipper woman, also wearing one of those weird black uniforms, chirps at her. “Shūhei would never have brought you here if he thought you incapable. Nothing leaves him in a fouler mood than improper paperwork!”

“Okay?” She says as she picks up a stamp and starts stamping the papers recklessly. “I really would like to leave though.”

“Not to worry, my dear Kuina,” the woman says, sliding a teacup over to her. “Once Shūhei’s finished visiting his lover in the human world, I have no doubt he will be willing to take up the burden of his responsibility once more!”

Considering there are now towers of paper stacked to the ceiling with people steadily bringing in more, she doubts the man will ever return. Her fingers are already dried out from the sheer amount of papers that go from the incoming tray to the outgoing.

It doesn’t help that her so-called aide—a 4th seat, whatever that is—can’t seem to stay on track for very long without attempting to compose poetry.

Honestly, it’s no wonder this Hisagi decided to chuck a random person at it all. Too bad she was the one he grabbed, and she isn’t sympathetic in the least. If she ever gets the chance to meet him, he won’t have time to use his Devil Fruit ability to get away.

Her aide takes a sip of tea before leaning in to whisper loudly,

“He’s very emotional, I’m afraid. But that human of his is a soothing one! Yes, Shūhei will calm down soon, and you can go back to Rukongai.”
The words finally penetrate the cotton fluff that her brain has become.

She picks up the paper in front of her and squints: request for a shipment of medicine from the human world. She puts it down and shuffles through the rest of the stack until she sees a form for Soul Reaper candy.

She goes through a stack she’s already stamped and takes the time to actually read it. A few lines in, and she recognizes the battle report for what it is. Soul Reapers slaying something called “Hollows” in District 64 from Rukongai.

It’s the final straw.

“Aki, was it?” She says faintly.

“Ako, but you may call be Amari!” The woman says radiantly.

“Ako,” she corrects herself weakly, “to you, what exactly is a human?”

The calm atmosphere of the office shatters immediately; Ako slams her teacup down, a glint shining madly in her eyes. “We were human once. We kneeled to death and were reaped. Now we reap for death,” Ako recites grandly before grabbing a piece of paper and writing it down. “Well, that is the truth for some of us! Others are born here in Soul Society. It is our solemn duty to light the way for humans to join Soul Society, and for those in Soul Society to fade into darkness in order join the Reincarnation Cycle back to the human world! Humans are only different from us in the worlds we live and the powers we wield.”

“But what, indeed, is a human? Yes, I shall have to consider that carefully,” Ako muses before going into a philosophical rant she doesn’t even try keeping up with.

She stares blankly at another request form; its carefully written letters seem to morph into an unreadable inky mess before her eyes. She takes a sip of her now lukewarm tea. It doesn’t taste like anything she’s ever drank before. …she’s been switched with a Death God. One that might never come back.

(Is she in hell? The paperwork points to yes.)

“Who the hell are you?”

He blinks and suddenly there’s a monkey in a straw hat glaring down at him. He sits up only for a strong rocking motion to send him sprawling back onto what feels like grass. A salty breeze makes him freeze.

Is that the sound of waves crashing in the background? Wasn’t he just in his office? “Guys, Zoro just disappeared in a flash of light!” A woman yells from somewhere above him. …isn’t this scene familiar? Like the time he woke up to a Soul Reaper standing over him. “Oh no, not again,” he says so quietly that it gets swallowed up by the sudden yelling.
I will write a proper Bleach AU one day, just as I will write an extra chapter for Reaping Justice...one day. Expect a Part 2.
Earth is supposed to be in the modern age, isn’t it? With motors and electricity and such? What the hell is he doing on a wooden ship with sails?

Scratch that, could somebody tell these assholes to stop attacking him with reality bending powers for just one second.

“Give back Zoro and Wado!”

“I did not kidnap your people. Quit it!” He snarls.

One scythe clangs against an over-sized fist while the other is braced against a well-polished shoe. For some reason, his blades aren’t cutting through either, and he has to duck to avoid the unnatural rubbery fist aimed at his head.

“And you just happened to show up where our passenger was? What do you take us for?” The owner of the shoe scoffs, eye narrowing underneath a curly eyebrow.

“Pirate or Marine? Doesn’t matter, we’ll keep shaking you until they come back!” The blue-haired wierdo in the thong screams into his ear.

He tries not to shudder in disgust. No idea what bizarre experiment these people crawled out of, but they can’t be human. Aside from being able to touch him in his spiritual form and the weird powers, they don’t look right. Their faces and bodies appear to have been twisted in a fun house mirror.

He folds in his blades and twists so the guys holding him in place crash into each other. He only just avoids a thunderbolt to the head when a set of feminine arms grow out of his shoulders. He has a split second of realization that they belong to the woman crossing her arms before those hands growing out of his shoulders reach up to squeeze his neck.

Thankfully he’s not in a gigai, so he doesn’t need to breathe like a human. Unfortunately, the hands wrapped around his neck still paralyze him. There’s a giant moose gearing up to charge at him.

What the hell is his life.

It is Kazeshini, the ever-present spirit inside his soul, who reminds him that his scythes are double-bladed for a reason. I’ll help you, the Zanpakuto whispers to him. The scythes, as if moving on their own, swing up and backwards until the blade jutting out the back of his weapon pierces the arms choking him.

The arms disappear immediately, but his blades keep going until they slide right into his shoulders. The pain makes him shudder in a perverse way. There’s screaming, so much screaming.

The woman drops to the floor with bleeding arms, but if she screams, he can’t hear it over Kazeshini’s delighted howls. The chain that dangles from his scythes wraps around his neck, healing the damage to his shoulders. The tender action is buried under the call for blood.

Slice them until their voices remain silent. Turn the sea red. Cut them into pieces and feed them to
"Oi, Shūhei! Get away from him!"

The familiar voice shakes him out of his daze. He carefully moves his scythes away from his own neck. Kazeshini must be as rattled as he is to keep threatening him so.

Kurosaki Ichigo jumps down from the mast of the ship—why the hell was he up there?—to stand next to him. A thin, black sword is held up protectively. Kurosaki makes no threatening moves, but the guy in the straw hat begins rotating an arm like a propeller.

His thirst for blood is soon replaced by the heavy feeling of annoyance. Of course it’s Kurosaki. Of course he’s been dragged into something crazy.

“I should have known,” he hisses. “This is your fault.”

“How is this my fault?” Kurosaki demands.

“It just is.”

Damn protagonists and their sphere of influence.

Before Kurosaki showed up, he was fighting purely on the defensive. Now, with the two of them, they’re able to cause some serious damage. And they do. Kurosaki takes the heavy hitters, and he takes on the support. They hold nothing back, and the ship begins cracking ominously around them.

Even as the ship floor begins breaking under the strain, the fighting doesn’t come to a halt until Kurosaki’s blade comes close to skewering the rubbery guy’s straw hat. Everyone suddenly freezes as if holding their breath, and the amount of killing intent radiating out of those wide eyes is a sight to behold.

“Don’t mess with the hat.”

Kurosaki’s brows furrow, but he does nothing except stare back at the rubbery guy. Whatever telepathic conversation happens between them, it makes Kurosaki lower his blade. It’s a foolish gesture, but no one moves to attack. He takes advantage of the moment to step away from the moose.

“Where did you take Zoro and Wado?” The rubbery guy with unnatural attachment to straw hats demands.

“We didn’t take them,” Kurosaki says firmly.

There’s another staring contest, but this one is shorter and less intense. The rubbery guy rocks back on his heels before nodding, and the tension in the air pops like a balloon. With a wide, mocking grin, the guy asks,

“Why didn’t you say so?”

That bitch.

No doubt sensing his murderous intentions, Kurosaki shoves him before he can so much as lift his blades. The moron overdoes it, sending him flying over the rail and into the sea.

He has no idea if the water is cold or not, but being in his spiritual form means he gets to avoid a
messy death by drowning. Crossing his arms, he lets himself sink out of spite. Kurosaki will just have to come get him.

It’s completely silent, here, under the water. Even Kazeshini’s infuriated cries inside his head are dulled. He takes this time to truly think.

He doesn’t know how he or Kurosaki got here, but it required the sacrifice of two people. It has to be a ritual of some kind. That’s all he can figure out.

There’s also the fact that the spiritual energy here feels off. The Reishi here twists and burns, and it feels like he’s breathing in the air of a foreign land, something his body isn’t adjusted to. His body isn’t rejecting the energy per say—he’d be dead if that were the case—but it doesn’t act like it should.

It’s almost like he’s on an alien planet, but that can’t be right. Not even Kurosaki’s luck is bad enough to drag them into another dimension.

…ah, shit.

(It isn’t Kurosaki who pulls him out of the sea. The blonde one in the suit grabs him around the middle and hauls him to the surface.

“Damn Devil Fruit users,” the man snarls, swimming towards a rope thrown from the ship.

It’s impressive that the man is not only able to dive that far, but is also able to swim with him on his back. For whatever reason, the man thinks he can’t move. Perhaps it’s petty of him to remain motionless, but well, he’s still angry. So he closes his eyes and enters his inner world, letting his savior do all the work.)

It becomes clear that she’s being kept a secret from the rest of the Death Gods. Perhaps it’s in the hope that Hisagi will come back before anyone can find out, but her patience is nearing its end.

She’s not allowed to leave her temporary quarters, meals are brought to her, and she has to be escorted to “her” office. She’s not allowed to leave it either.

The worst part is that even though she isn’t actually capable of doing much, she never runs out of paperwork. It never ends. Ever.

Sitting in an office doing such mind-numbing work is the stuff of nightmares. There’s no way Hisagi is coming back to it. She’ll have to find a way out on her own.

It takes exactly three days before she finds her opportunity.

“Captain Komamura was deeply upset at missing his night meeting, you know? I’d like to schedule a new time on the captain’s behalf.”

“I’m afraid the lieutenant is still feeling unwell,” Fuji-something’s voice rings out from where he guards her office door. “He’s not well enough to see anyone right now.”

She puts her brush down and nods to herself. This is it. Taking a deep breath, she folds her hands together and puts on the best serious face she has.

“I’m as good as I’m going to get,” she says, pitching her voice. “Come in.”

There’s a long pause until she hears what sounds like a mad scramble on the other side of the door;
it slides open so hard it breaks off the rails. She looks from the unknown man gaping at her to the now broken door.

“You’re going to fix that,” she orders calmly.

“Where’s Lieutenant Hisagi?” The man demands in bewilderment.

“You’re looking at him.”

“What?”

The man’s hand twitches to the sword on his hip; in return, she gets up and places a hand on Tsubasa de Tobu. When nothing else happens, she moves to stand in front of the man. She looks him straight in the eye.

“I’ve had a sex change,” she says seriously.

Fuji-something lets out a strangled noise from the doorway. Her guest gapes at her before looking down at where her hand remains on her sword. He makes a broken sound.

“Your Zanpakuto is pink,” the man says weakly.

“My Zanpakuto had a sex change too.”

She has no clue what a Zanpakuto is—something to do with a sword perhaps—but Hisagi has one. From what Ako says, it’s the embodiment of male violence.

“It’s all probably temporary,” she says as the silence grows long. “I might change back. In which case, you should forget this ever happened.”

She tilts her head and smiles. It’s all teeth.

Chapter End Notes

I did, in fact, write the extra chapter for Reaping Justice. Guess this was all the kick I needed!
“You ever notice how we don’t seem to age?”

She leans closer to the mirror, pulling on her cheeks. No matter how hard she pinches, her face snaps back into that perfect shape she’s had for over a decade.

She’s never really noticed the lack of wrinkles until now; a normal glance in the mirror turned into a bizarre form of midlife crisis once she noticed her face looked exactly like the portrait hanging up behind her. Nikos painted that particular portrait twelve years ago.

“Stop being ridiculous,” Mihawk tells her from behind his newspaper.

She looks away from the mirror with a glare. Mihawk’s lounging on the couch that rests in front of their bed with his sleep clothes still on—today seems to be a lazy day for him—and he seems utterly content to dismiss her completely valid concerns.

Well, she’s about to wreck his entire day.

“I have had two children, and yet I somehow still look like I’m barely an adult. As for you,” she pauses dramatically, “I bet you look so much like a child that Shanks pointed at your face and laughed so hard you had to grow a beard out.”

The newspaper moves with a snap, and she’s given a menacing yellow-eyed stare. She sticks her tongue out and continues taunting,

“I bet if you shaved that beard off, Whitebeard would give you candy.”

She dodges the knife thrown at her head—still in its sheathe, so Mihawk isn’t too mad—and twirls out the door with a cackle reminiscent of her dear deceased uncle, red coat flaring out dramatically behind her.

She can’t see it, but she has no doubt Mihawk is rubbing his face with a frown. Psychological attacks aren’t really her thing, but considering all the headaches Mihawk’s given her over the years, one day of shared midlife crisis isn’t going to hurt him too much.

Being Dragon’s terrifying monster of the mist is a lot more boring than she thought it’d be. Her targets receive no warning before she strikes, and more often than not, are unable to put up a fight. She pulls a disappearing act shortly after, leaving no time for reinforcements.

Sunglasses shine at her while absurdly large spiked knuckles wave wildly at her from a Marine ship. She has no idea what this guy’s name is, but he’s been tailing her for years, proclaiming himself to be her nemesis.

“Kali Read, today’s the day the World Government will be rid of you!”

She really thought someone would have figured out her ship’s mirror trick by now, but so far, the only bit of excitement she gets is when the Marines manage to ambush her.

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She never had the heart to tell the guy—his name’s Barry, maybe?—that if she has a nemesis, it’d
be Garp. The man is positively unpredictable; he goes from calmly telling her how Rouge and Ace are doing to trying to kill her while screaming loud enough to wake the dead.

Garp is also one of the few people in this world still capable of keeping up with her. The World Government appears to view him as their last line of defense against her.

With all the time they’ve spent fighting against each other, she should really get Garp something for his birthday. Maybe she could bake some Gold Roger cookies? He could pretend he’s beheading Roger with every bite.

The ringing of a Den Den Mushi breaks her out of her musings. She reaches into her coat and pulls out a very tiny snail. She presses down on its shell.

“Captain, you need to come back right now!”

That’s AJ, her guitarist who is supposed to be babysitting her son. And her not-husband. But mostly her son.

“What’s wrong?”

Please don’t let Kala have taken up people hunting, please don’t let Kala have taken up people hunting—

“It’s, ah, what was it? Oh, yeah. It’s Code OSMOAR!”

It takes her brain a moment to figure out what exactly those abbreviations stand for. When she remembers, she inhales sharply.

Code OSMOAR: also known as, Oh Shit Mihawk On A Rampage

“I’ll be there soon. Take cover. And make sure Kala doesn’t make it worse,” she says, shoving the Den Den Mushi back into her coat.

Her son is a coward of the highest degree, but the moment he learned father dearest would never lay a hand on him, Kala liked to see how far he could mess with Mihawk. No doubt the child would push his father further down the warpath if given the chance.

“Sorry, Barry, I’ve got no time to play today!” She yells out before ordering her crew to cloak the ship.

She heads back into her cabin as the large mirrors hidden in her ship move to snap into place while fog rolls out from the lower decks. Too concerned with the idea of Mihawk snapping, she misses the shout aimed at her,

“It’s Martos!”

Half the island is demolished by the time she gets home. None of it is where her crew likes to hang out which tells her this is more of a tantrum than an actual rampage. If Mihawk had truly snapped, he wouldn’t have avoided damaging anything of real importance.

She finds Mihawk standing by the shore with arms crossed. Ire radiates from him, thick and coiling, but it’s not threatening enough that she reaches for the sword on her back. If anything, he feels like he’s upset instead of furious.

Mihawk’s back is to her when she approaches. She stops behind him and waits for a sign of
acknowledgement. When it doesn’t come, she circles around to look him in the eye. She freezes upon seeing his face.

Oh, so that’s what all the commotion is about.

“You shaved?” She screeches as her brain lags behind her mouth.

Naturally, Mihawk takes this as her making fun of him, and he shoves her into the shallow waves of the sea. She sputters, accidentally inhaling as a wave crashes against her ear.

Pushing her hat out of the way, she looks up. One glance at Mihawk’s smooth face causes her to begin giggling uncontrollably. Mihawk lifts a boot threateningly, and she lets loose a cackle. She’s kicked onto her back and under the water, but that doesn’t stop her laughter.

“I was right!” She croons even as Mihawk reaches down and attempts to drown her.

“Shut up,” Mihawk snarls.

“You don’t even look old enough to drink alcohol!” She cries out before Mihawk succeeds in his attempts.

“Dracule, I know you’ve promised to stop waving your sword around like a barbarian, but drowning her isn’t acceptable either,” Kessa says chillingly.

Lying on an infirmary bed, she nods behind the doctor with the air of a blameless victim. Tani pats her arm sympathetically from where she sews next to her.

Kessa has recruited Tani into watching over her for signs of continual drowning. Thanks to Mihawk, she’ll be resting in bed until she’s given the all clear. Well, she knew what she was poking.

“I take it Kala didn’t react well?” She asks, motioning to her face.

Mihawk remains quiet for so long, she doesn’t think he’s going to answer.

“Kimi.” Is what he says, tonelessly and brusque.

Considering how hard it is to see their daughter these days—and adding in how terribly blunt Kimi is—she can only wince at the reply. No doubt Shanks will receive word soon too. Neither child inherited their parents’ avoidance of pointless chatter.

“Hey, Kessa, is it normal for us to look so young?” She asks when her doctor begins eyeing the medical supplies.

It’s a blatant distraction, but it works because Kessa turns away from the scalpel lying on a tray. Mihawk relaxes slightly. Kessa, leaning down, grabs her face and turns it to get a better look.

“I’ve heard it normally hits women all at once in their fifties?” Tani offers.

“Bodies are so varied, there is no set standard for the physical breakdown,” Kessa says before releasing her and patting her head. The doctor soon turns to Mihawk with a glint in her eye. “For most men, however, it’s unheard of to be so youthful this late in their life.”

Mihawk scowls at her before pushing his hat farther down to better hide his face. She doesn’t have the heart to tell him that he looks like a teenager being scolded.
As promised, any and all strongest swordsman au chapters from here on will be out of order. And yes, I'm still working on FYW, just needed a silly break.

If you want to take a look at what some of the characters for this au and FYW look like:


(Mind, that unless written specifically, appearances are still open to interpretation)
The Text Fic AU 3

Chapter Notes

You know the drill, turn off Creator's Style if all else fails!

Contact Name: The Amazing and Awesome Shoya

Shoya: Testing testing testing

Kuina: Working so far.

Shoya: No weird noises or ominous shudders?

Kuina: No. Should I be concerned?

Shoya: Not at all! It’s not like I had no idea what I was doing.

Shoya: I mean, it’s not like I only had an aquatic creature as reference to how psychic signals work. Or that I somehow had to build a machine to mimic said creature.

Shoya: Hint Hint

Shoya: PRAISE ME.

Kuina: You’re amazing and your genius astounds me.

Shoya: Enough for a kiss?

Kuina: No.

Shoya: I thought not. Oh well.

Shoya: Happy kingship. May thy upgraded King CLAMMM serve thee well.

Kuina: You literally just stuck horns on it.

Shoya: And you’ll always have a connection! The horns also stores backup energy and stimulates the creature when it’s trying to shut itself off.

Shoya: You’ll never be thrown from a conversation because the clamppm fell asleep on you. You’re welcome.

Kuina: Thank you.
Kuina: I’ll be more sincere when I’m sure my CLAMMM won’t explode on me.

Shoya: It’ll be fine! Probably.

Shoya: Stop by the Forge when you’re ready. I think I figured out how to get you down from here.

Kuina: Alright, I’ll see you soon.

Contact Name: Lushu the Worried

Lushu: did you make it down okay?

Kuina: Define okay

Lushu: well you're not dead

Lushu: did you break anything should i come down there

Kuina: I'm fine. Only my pride is hurt.

Lushu: well now this should be interesting

Lushu: did you forget how to land?

Kuina: You can't forget something you never knew how to do in the first place.

Kuina: In retrospect, I should have asked for flying lessons.

Kuina: Anyway, I've landed somewhere weird. These two morons seem to think I'm an angel.

Lushu: well, they're not wrong perhaps they've run into some of our kin?

Kuina: Excuse me?

Lushu: our people used to call themselves angelos

Lushu: we stopped using the term when we lost our wings

Kuina: But I'm not one of your people.

Lushu: yes you are

Lushu: did you think we'd let an outsider be king?

Kuina: ...

Kuina: Oh

Lushu: i also claimed you into my family so you now have the Lu name
Lushu: i guess i forgot to say

Kuina: Huh.

Kuina: The things you learn.

Kuina: I suppose I'm Lu Kuina now?

Lushu: and an angelos!

Kuina: Right, well, got to go do angel things now. I'm being stared at like I've done something wrong.

Lushu: try not to get into too much trouble i've got too many white hairs as it is

Kuina: No promises.

Contact Name: The Amazing and Awesome Shoya

Shoya: Hey, did you catch that Jack guy yet?

Kuina: No, I lost him.

Shoya: That's too bad.

Shoya: So hey. Have you been mming anyone else?

Kuina: Not really. They don't do CLAMMM here and I get nasty looks when I pull mine out.

Shoya: Could you not mm for a little bit?

Shoya: Something about your signal looks off on my end. Give me a minute to figure out what.

Kuina: Alright. I need to go anyway. I'm currently being recruited to terrorize people.

Kuina: I'm sitting in Springy Jack's hideout.

Kuina: Clarence has been waiting and sighing this whole time.

Shoya: Wait, that stalker guy?

Kuina: Yeah, turns out he wants me to stalk someone else.

Shoya: Ooh, sounds fun. You're making me want to be there so bad!

Contact Name: The Amazing and Awesome Shoya

Shoya: You busy?
Kuina: Waiting for night to fall so I can scare a woman witless. What's up?

Shoya: So I was right. There is something off.

Kuina: You're taking too long to continue. Is my CLAMMM going to explode?

Shoya: No. It's, well, I don't know how to put this.

Shoya: Right so my WINGMAN system has features your CLAMMM doesn't including the ability to parse waves. The temporal waves aren't the same as they were previously.

Kuina: ?

Shoya: It's your timeline.

Kuina: ???

Shoya: Kuina, you remember when I said using the mail system might mean time travel?

Kuina: NOfgoa

Shoya: Yep, you're in the past.

Shoya: Which is weird because I'm in the present which is currently running on a different timeline from you.

Shoya: But here we are, able to chat thanks to my amazing talents.

Shoya: Kuina?

Kuina: Oh my god

Shoya: Relax, breathe. It's only by a few months.

Kuina: OH MY GOD

Shoya: So long as you don't run into yourself, you should be good. Breathe.

Kuina: I need to find a newspaper.

Shoya: You do that. Remember, nothing bad is going to happen. You're good!

Shoya: Unless I'm incorrect and you blow up thanks to temporal pressure to realine the timeline.

Kuina: Shoya. Shut up.

**Contact Name:** The Amazing and Awesome Shoya

Kuina: I'm back on the first day I entered the Grand Line. There's no chance of running into
myself.

Shoya: Oh, that's good. And I'm sure I don't need to tell you you can't mm anyone until past present? you is on Blue Rooz Island.

Kuina: I sent a few out when I first got here. But I haven't answered back to any of them.

Shoya: There's no telling what will happen if you contact yourself.

Shoya: Since your King CLAMMM is running on my WINGMAN systems, I can put access to your contact list on timer.

Shoya: You won't have to worry about anyone contacting you until other you is taken out by icebergs.

Kuina: Thanks.

Kuina: Never thought I'd have to deal with time travel of all things.

Shoya: You are many things, but boring isn't one of them.

Kuina: Explains the weird mms I got back then though.

Kuina: Zoro swore I'd mm him about being mistaken for an angel.

Kuina: I told him he was being an idiot.

Kuina: Oops.

Shoya: And got it! No one on your current list will be able to mm you except for new contacts.

Shoya: And you should be able to talk to me and Lushu just fine until then.

Shoya: I need to let him know about your situation once he gets back.

Shoya: Oh, idea.

**Contact Name:** The Amazing and Awesome Shoya, Luza

Shoya: Kuina!

Kuina: Shoya, you're back?

Shoya: Yep, and I brought someone with me!

Luza: helo., am i doing this rite

Kuina: Wait, what?
Shoya: I modified your clammm a bit more than I said I did.

Shoya: It can connect to multiple people now!

Kuina: Luza?

Luza: hi

Shoya: Lushu brought him back just now.

Shoya: He's a little overwhelmed, but I thought it'd be nice if you two had someone to talk to through these rough times.

Kuina: Thank you, Shoya.

Kuina: Hello, Luza.

Luza: im not vary good at this yet but im here if you need me

Kuina: Same. Feel free to mm me at any time.

Kuina: Hope you liked the present.

Luza: im vary

Kuina: ?

Shoya: Ah, he's crying.

Shoya: He wants me to tell you that he's grateful.

Kuina: Does he know we're family now?

Shoya: Good job Kuina

Shoya: I just had to explain that.

Shoya: And now he's crying harder somehow.

Kuina: Oh, poor you.

Kuina: Luza, we'll chat later okay? Take some time for yourself right now.

**Contact Name:** The Amazing and Awesome Shoya

Kuina: I just realized something.

Kuina: I can still save my package from Mihawk.

Shoya: Yeah, sorry about that.
Shoya: Why not mm him about the mix up once your timer runs out?

Kuina: Absolutely not.

Kuina: If I tell him about it, he'll open it for sure.

Kuina: And there goes my deniability.

Shoya: Probably for the best

Shoya: If someone mailed me a doll of myself, I'd be either flattered or creeped out.

Shoya: Depends on the craftsmanship.

Kuina: Exactly. The man has already tried to kill me once. I'm not looking for a repeat.

Kuina: Worse, what if he ends up liking it??

Shoya: Why were you sending it to your boy anyway?

Kuina: I wanted to see what Zoro would do

**Contact Name:** Lushu The Worried

Lushu: here's the new version of the water reform

Lushu: eloh isn't pleased with it so make a few edits and send it back so i can go scream at them some more

Kuina: And here I thought jumping off the island would save me from this.

Lushu: convenient that we can keep in touch, isn't it

Kuina: For you.

Lushu: the weight of the crown is a heavy one

Kuina: It's literally made of flowers.

**Contact Name:** Luza

Kuina: How you doing, Luza?

Luza: im. ok

Kuina: Your mother having a good day or a bad one?
Luza: bad

Kuina: I'm currently stopped on this weird island. It's very artsy.

Kuina: But first let me tell you about my room in the hotel.

Luza: ok

Luza: thankyou

**Contact Name:** Anacrusis, Cadence, Octave

Kuina: Everyone connected?

Anacrusis: It is working for me!

Cadence: yes

Octave: This is a test message.

Cadence: that's also a yes

Kuina: Cool.

Kuina: Now that that's settled. You'll stop worrying about me going off my own.

Anacrusis: Mm, nope!

Cadence: sorry, my dear, we'll always worry

Octave: Women don't travel on their own for a reason.

Anacrusis: Who knows if you can open you clam in time!!!

Cadence: what they're trying to say is that the more innocent the island

Cadence: the more dangerous it actually is

Octave: Doesn't help you want to go poking around.

Kuina: I'll be Fine.

Octave: That's what they all say.

Anacrusis: I blame bad influences!

Cadence: i agree

Kuina: What bad influences?
Cadence: sometimes it's better to have loved and lost

Anacrusis: Marriage isn't so sacred you must keep chasing after them!

Octave: You need to let this one go.

Kuina: ...what?

Anacrusis: We know a few men who'd make excellent husbands!

Cadence: they don't mind traveling either

Octave: Do you prefer them sober or not?

Kuina: I'm going to go now. Bye.

Contact Name: Lushu The Worried

Kuina: So Shoya says I should set everything on fire to keep Mona off this slave labor line, but I thought I'd run it by you first.

Lushu: of course shoya said that

Lushu: i don't think i need to say don't do that

Kuina: Well, I am mming you first.

Lushu: right, let's look at this logically

Kuina: Logically, I should burn everyone instead of setting it on fire.

Lushu: NO

Kuina: Maybe make a metal mask to burn their face? It's what happened to Mona.

Kuina: And that'll break the illusion for sure.

Lushu: DO NOT

Lushu: LU KUINA YOU LISTEN TO ME

Kuina: Fine. I'll only burn them a little.

Lushu: im going to grab luza

Kuina: So he can tell me the best way to burn them?

Lushu: so he can guilt trip you into not burning anyone

Kuina: ...I don't think that's going the way you hope.
**Contact Name:** Luza

Luza: try nd keep it discreet

Kuina: Like on the butt?

Luza: do yu reallly want to

Kuina: Not really. Butts be nasty.

Luza: ezactaly. send messege by puting it in place they can see

Kuina: Their hands, maybe?

Luza: yes oh

Luza: use fire annd heat metal into shape thats scarry

Kuina: Like a dragon?

Luza: makeit look like youe mask

Kuina: Got it. You're the best, Luza.

Her efforts to locate Mihawk and get her package back are waylaid by the fact that the ship she's on gets attacked by Marines. Thanks to one Bon Clay, she's soon staring out the bars of a cell with a bleeding leg; her Marine watchers lean over a desk to whisper to each other. She recognizes her Frankenstein of a mollusk in their hands.

Her CLAMMM was taken along with her weapons once she surrendered, and she's never been more grateful for Shoya's upgrades than now. Anytime someone other than her opens her CLAMMM, they get directed to a dummy menu. She's not entirely sure what the two Marines are gasping about, but it has nothing to do with old messages or contact lists.

"That's so nasty!" One of the Marines squawk.

"Do all swordsmen do that with their swords?" The other demands.

No, wait. She has a good idea what they're seeing. Damn it, Shoya.

**Contact Name:** Tashigi

Tashigi: You've faced your last, face-stealer!

Kuina: ...

Kuina: I don't think I'm the face-stealer here.
Tashigi: Evil pirate, you think you can take MY name and escape justice?

Tashigi: You won't get away with this once I notify Hina!

Kuina: You forgot the Captain part.

Kuina: Pretty sure you'll face a disciplinary action for it.

Tashigi: oho you are right!

Tashigi: ill remember that!

Tashigi: did i at least make your heart beat a little?

Kuina: Not in the least.

Kuina: I feel like this Marine that looks like me should sound a little more menancing.

Kuina: Face-stealer is kind of meh.

Tashigi: youd be surprised

Tashigi: not all marines are intimidating like you my dear okama~

Kuina: Not an okama.

Kuina: Are your friends here yet?

Tashigi: patience! i thinking i hear them now~~~ oh youll love the lovely zer0

Tashigi: remember the plan kisses!
( ♥Ah 3♥)

Contact Name: Bonnie

Kuina: Bonnie, why?

Bon Clay: ah Kui~ i think this might be my last message for a long time~

Bon Clay: but we're friends and friends help each other

Bon Clay: remember that

Bon Clay: and if you see straw hat tell him ive still got it

Kuina: You bet.

Bon Clay: bye bye ~*'okama'*~
Kuina: Not an okama.

**Contact Name:** The Amazing and Awesome Shoya

Kuina: I may have made a mistake.

Shoya: Oh, this is going to be good.

Kuina: One shouldn't sail if they don't know how to sail.

Shoya: You shipwrecked, didn't you?

Kuina: Yes.

Kuina: I'm going to have a look around.

Kuina: But I have a bad feeling this is one of those uninhabited islands.

Shoya: Don't tell Lushu or he'll demand I make a device to transport you back up here.

Shoya: You'd never get away from the paperwork.

Kuina: Definitely won't be doing that.

She doesn't know if it's because it's simply time, or if it's because of the island's amazing amount of ozone, but her contact list unlocks. She's grateful considering there is absolutely nothing to do except sit and wait out the worst of the storms.

**Contact Name:** My Idiot

Kuina: Hey, Zoro.

Zoro: Where have you been

Kuina: On a island that blocked signals.

Kuina: But now I'm on an island that won't stop raining. And lightning. And trying to kill me with wind.

Kuina: So, it hasn't been my day. How are you doing?

Zoro: Getting accused of murder

Zoro: Its been fun here too

Kuina: Lovely. Tell me about it and I'll tell you about my new dog.
Zoro: New dog

Kuina: His name is Rex. He's now my son. If we marry, that'll make him your step-son.

Kuina: ?

Kuina: ???

Kuina: Zoro, you there?

Zoro: Sorry

Zoro: Tell me about him

Kuina: Rex is the only reason I'm alive right now but if I tell Shoya that I'll be sucked up into the sky.

Zoro: That made no sense whatsoever

Kuina: Maybe I should start from the beginning.

**Contact Name:** My Idiot, Dracule Mihawk

Kuina: So that's when I met Bonnie

Kuina: Wait, why is it listing Mihawk?

Zoro: What

Kuina: Look at your contact name.

**Contact Name:** My Idiot, Dracule Mihawk, ???

Kuina: So that's when I met Bonnie

Kuina: Wait, why is it listing Mihawk?

Zoro: What

Kuina: Look at your contact name.

Kuina: And now there's a ???

Mihawk: I am in no mood for games.

Kuina: Oh no it's him.

Zoro: What the hell
Kuina: That's my line.

Mihawk: Which one of you did this.

Zoro: Like Id want to talk to you

Kuina: Wasn't me either.

???: it's definitely not me

Kuina: BULLSHIT

Zoro: Bullshit

Mihawk: They are correct. What is the meaning of this Shanks?

???: it's not like i planned this. i was just trying to mess with some settings

???: and then your contact list suddenly popped up

Mihawk: "Suddenly" you say.

???: yeah suddenly. then some crazy stuff happened when i clicked on your R's name

Kuina: You talking about me?

???: yep somehow it linked to the conversation you were currently having

Zoro: Unlink it

Zoro: Whats R

Kuina: Don't worry about it.

???: well i guess we could all just close our clammms to disconnect

???: but you'd never know what R means

Kuina: It's stupid, Zoro.

Mihawk: As it always is when it comes to Shanks.

???: you'll be his R too one day Roronoa

???: sadly i am his ex-R

Mihawk: Shut up.

Kuina: What he said.

Zoro: What is R
Kuina: It's dumb. It just means Mihawk's Rival.

Zoro: Kuina, you're not Mihawk's rival

Mihawk: She is closer to my level than you are, Roronoa.

Zoro: The hell she is

Kuina: Hey now. Watch what you say, I can and will kick your ass.

Mihawk: Even she knows you cannot compare as you are now.

Zoro: The next time we meet I'll kill you

Kuina: Unless I kill him first.

Zoro: Kuina

Mihawk: Is that a threat?

Kuina: Stop sending me shit.

Kuina: I might just need to kill you soon to silence you anyway.

Mihawk: Will you strike her down, Roronoa, if she were to become the greatest swordsman?

Zoro: I'll get to you first and it won't matter

???: geez you guys are so stressed over this world's strongest swordsman thing

???: you know relaxation does wonders for getting stronger

???: so what if all of you got laid?

Kuina: Since no one's saying anything, I'll bite. With each other or with no one in particular?

Kuina: Because I have high standards. And these two don't meet them.

Zoro: Oi

Zoro: You're going to be marrying me

Mihawk: Assuming you can defeat me.

Zoro: What do you mean assuming I'll definitely kick your ass

Mihawk: How could I be defeated by one who can't even use correct grammar. When you fall before me, perhaps I'll take more than your sword.

Zoro: YOU BASTARD
???: ooh it's getting spicy

Kuina: Thanks. Shanks, was it? Thanks a lot.

Kuina: I'm going to have to deal with this for days.

???: enjoy your threesome! 😊
Memories of Days Gone By 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Makeup is an art; a movement of a brush that transforms flat skin into a vision. A nose suddenly thin, blush drawing eyes to a smile, lipstick standing out like a lone flower in a field—makeup, it can be said, is a painting that lasts only for a day.

Unfortunately, there are women who don’t seem to understand what temporary means. In Shimotsuki for instance, there is a woman who seems to be attempting to replace her actual face with cosmetics, never stepping outside without a heavy layer of makeup.

Perhaps the woman uses the cosmetics to hide her insecurities; perhaps she uses it simply because she loves it. Whatever the case, the more she makeup she wears, the more side eyes and whispers are thrown behind her back, causing the woman to apply even more makeup than before.

Is it any wonder that woman dies from poisoning herself to obtain an impossible vision?

Even in death, the woman isn’t free from insults hidden behind shallow sorrow. It’s so tragic, and oh, her poor son, but really, she wouldn’t be dead if she’d just given in and stopped with the silly makeup. It’s not like she could have gotten a man at her age, and no amount of anything could have hidden those wrinkles.

Kuina has absolutely no opinion over the use of cosmetics on a woman past her prime. There’s no love for idle gossip, and insulting people over petty things isn’t entertaining. She just doesn’t care.

What she does care about is the fact her father orders her to help keep the corpse cool while the deceased’s son brings back his siblings from nearby islands and ships. She’s tasked with bringing in ice blocks to turn a bedroom into a freezer and in keeping a watchful eye on prayer candles that some idiot decided must remain lit.

She is supposed to work with the dojo students to ensure makeup lady gets proper pre-funeral care. What happens is that a schedule gets made in five seconds without her input.

Zoro, being the favorite, gets out of doing a damn thing. She, being the unfavorite, gets night duty from midnight to early morning every day that they have to keep vigilance.

She’d kick their ass for the grave insult, but someone goes crying to her father about it before she can blink. Her father all but orders her to follow the schedule, telling her that it is a serious honor to uphold. She stares at him blankly, but his smile never wavers.

This is how she’s stuck watching over a dead person after a long day of training with barely any sleep. She truly, absolutely, can’t wait to get off this island.

The first night goes fine. She sits in the living room and reads a book most of the time. She sticks her hand in the bedroom every thirty minutes to check on the temperature, hauls in a block of ice when needed, and replaces the first set of candles before she leaves.

She avoids looking at the body any more than necessary. Someone tried to wipe the makeup off the lady’s face and failed. It looks terrible.

The second night is a little rougher. She’s tired enough that she can’t focus on her book, and her
anger at being the only one doing this shift every night is amplified. She spends most of her time staring at the candles and dreaming about shoving them up everyone’s butts, flames and all.

The third night is where she makes the mistake of actually looking at the corpse. It’s not a conscious decision; she goes into the bedroom and drops the ice onto its tray before turning around to stare at the lady lying on a futon. It takes a minute for her brain to process what she’s doing.

She takes a step back and pauses. Why go through so much effort, she thinks with a tilt of her head, to see this? Why do the children torture themselves to come home and see this discolored shell when the last memory they had of this woman must have been so bright?

She glares at the corpse that has robbed her of her sleep. Sure, she could sleep in, but then she’d miss training, and she doesn’t know if her father is spiteful enough to teach something new when she isn’t there. She still isn’t an official student after all.

Her thoughts come to a screeching halt when the lady’s arm twitches. She inhales sharply. The entire body begins shuddering, and she races for the door. She looks back and instantly regrets it; one of the woman’s eyes pop open before spinning in its socket.

“Hell no,” she screams more than says before bolting to the living room.

Every lit candlestick makes its way into her hand and gets chucked into the bedroom. Every not lit candlestick suddenly finds itself on fire. Throwing knife practice ensures she never steps one foot near the corpse.

She nails the apparently explosive mountain of makeup in the corner, and the bedroom erupts into flames. An unholy wail that either is the ice melting fast or an angry spirit rings in her ears.

She makes a run for it.

“Hyotaru’s mistake would have been caught earlier had you been on time,” her father scolds her as the sun rises and the ashes of what was once a home grows cold.

She’d alerted her father immediately, and everyone had rallied to keep the fire from spreading. It had taken most of the night, but the only loss is the house and the corpse that lied inside.

“Do you see this,” she says pointing at the dark circles under her eyes, “it’s not like I meant to oversleep.”

She glares at a pale-faced boy picking through the ashes with an urn. Most of the other boys are giving him a wide berth as they dig through the remains of the house silently.

“If we’re going to play the blame game, then you, knowing how tired I was, should have had me switch out with someone that hasn’t done it yet.”

Though it is true that she cannot lie worth a damn, she is so tired and so stunned by the night’s events that her emotions have gone on holiday which means her words are loose while her face and body language give nothing away.

Her father fully believes that it was the boy watching the house before her that caused the fire by knocking over a prayer candle, and she, running late from oversleeping, got there just as the room exploded.

Never mind that prayer candles were lit in the living room. Clearly the kid had moved and left one
in the bedroom. Oddly enough, the boy agreed with her accusations. Must be the shock screwing with his head.

“Perhaps you should go rest,” her father says tiredly.

“You should get some rest yourself.” She puts her hands together and shallowly bows. “I pray for your dealings with the family when they arrive,” she says, tone too even to get across the depth of her sarcasm.

Her father sighs anyway.

Chapter End Notes

This is canon to the story!

This chapter dealing with death is no coincidence. I lost someone dear to me, and that’s why I had to step away from this story for a few weeks. But Finding Your Wings will be back on its normal, somewhat unpredictable schedule soon.

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