Drowning Lessons
by AlucardLovesSteakCakes

Summary

Eustass thought he was prepared to face the unexpected when he crossed into the Grand Line. He is caught off guard when he ends up forming an alliance with the Heart Pirates, and learns of Trafalgar's darkest secret when they are captured by human traffickers. The hoof print of the Celestial Dragons scars Law's flesh, and the horrors of the man's past can no longer be burdened alone.

Focusing on the evolving relationship between Eustass Kidd and Trafalgar Law, this story showcases the pain that comes with recovery, and shows that even the most 'damaged' individuals can find happiness.

Notes

Warnings will be added as needed!
Chapter 1

She was breathtakingly beautiful, even whilst sitting in a cramped room of decrepit decay. The woman focused on her reflection as she combed her hair in the vanity mirror. Despite the cracks littering the reflective surface, her stunning red hair seemed to light the room on fire. She was young, no older than nineteen, yet her posture and clothing portrayed her as a mature adult. Her nose was small and angular, eyes a lovely baby blue, and her fair skin was dotted with freckles mimicking a starry sky.

She set down her comb and got to work applying her lipstick. It was the brightest shade of red she could find in the marketplace, yet it still paled in comparison to her radiant locks. It was her hair that defined her outer beauty, and it was what usually drew her customers.

The frilled white skirt was just short enough to show off her dainty ankles, her feet dolled up in a pair of deadly black stilettos. The purple corset showed off her freckled décolletage, adorned with a faux pearl necklace. Depending on where she was, she could pull off the look of a young woman having a good night out. However, her profession was clear when caught in the daylight, standing at the mouths of alleyways and at the intersections between the low-class and mining districts. Inside her rented room, however, she could pretend to be an ordinary woman getting ready to start the day. The average mother with no obligations other than to love her son.

"Mom! I'm heading out, okay?!!" A streak of red flashed behind her in the mirror and she dropped her lipstick to snag her son as he raced by.

"And where might you be going, my Little Red Cat?"

She hugged the young boy to her chest, nuzzling the fiery hair that matched her own. The disparity between the qualities of their clothing often horrified her, but they were not a wealthy family. Money that wasn't spent on rent or food was put into her makeup and wardrobe. She needed to keep up appearances to bring in clients, and the limitations of their funds did not allow for many new clothes for her son. Even now he wore the same clothes she had seen on him every day for the past three months. The threadbare striped pants and shirt were covered in numerous patches and tiny holes. What had once been a crisp white shirt was now a muddy brown. On his head was a pair of circular goggles, and they helped tamed his unmanageable hair.

"The junkyard!"

She smiled at her son's loud voice, always so much larger than life. He was a rambunctious child, running around all day and night, coming home with scrapes and bruises for her to tend to. He was
the light of her life, even if he was the source of her constant headaches. Despite his nature to disappear for days on end, he always returned to soothe her worries. He was her Little Red Cat, always coming back with presents to cheer her up. So intelligent, her ray of sunshine, already an inventor at the tender age of seven. She could see he was holding one of his newest projects, a small robot he had made himself. She wondered where he got such talent, and if it had come from his father.

Of course, these were dangerous thoughts, as she saw the man every other day, keeping him in the dark about his offspring. He was one of her clients, and she had only known him to be the father once her child was born. Most of her customers were drunken middle-aged men, but sometimes she was purchased by a truly ferocious customer. Many a time she was able to play off her fear as arousal, but sometimes she was not so lucky.

Her lengthy skirts hid the nasty bruises and scars she refused to show her son. Of all the young ill-tempered men who visited her on occasion, there was one in particular with sandy blonde hair and rusty eyes who had a hard time keeping himself in check. Since her son's birth she had hid him away, sending him off to play while she did her rounds. It was not her intention to hide her profession, but she hoped to keep him in the dark for a few more years. As was her son's disposition to surprise her, he had caught on quickly. He never said it outright, a worry in itself, but she caught him watching her on the corner from a distance.

"Mom! I'm gonna be late! The guys will get all the good parts!" Her Little Red Cat struggled in her arms and she kissed his nose for good luck.

"Have a good day, Kidd. Make sure to watch your step and keep out of the others' way." Her son blinked up at her with his unique set of eyes and beamed a brilliant grin.

"Yes! Bye Mom! Love you!" She lowered her head so he could kiss her on the cheek, and he was out the door.

She returned to her makeup, cleaning the red smear from the countertop. She would make the best of the day, for the sake of her Little Red Cat.

Kidd sprinted through the backroads, avoiding toppled trash cans. The town of Oresmith was, for lack of a better word, a trash town. While it had its commonplace market square and town hall, a shopping district and the upper class condos, the town was a dump. Literally and figuratively, as Oresmith made its living off the garbage heaps making up its borders. Surrounded by more prosperous cities and territories, Oresmith had created a wall of the discarded waste, mooching off
its wealthy neighbors.

Most of the townsfolk made their living in the trash heaps, collecting useful items to be resold at a meager price. Many people were starved and diseased, making a living off the bare bones of others. It was eat or be eaten in Oresmith, filled with human scum and surrounded by rotting garbage, as if they had emerged from the filth themselves.

Even at his age, Kidd wasn't a stranger to the world of living garbage he resided in. He had created his own home in its recesses. A place he could play during the day, and at night he had enough blankets to keep warm. The sun was unforgiving in South Blue, and the night was just as brutal. In a neighboring city, one whose name Kidd had yet to learn, there were several factories who let loose their wastes into the air. Tall smoke stacks spewed ash and dust, and those unaccustomed wore masks to breathe. Kidd had grown up in this world of acid rain and rusty metal, of smog and living garbage.

"Fuck! Watch it, kid!"

Eustass ducked beneath a couch two men were moving slowly along the path. He stuck out his tongue and they flipped him off. He hated these people, with their cruelty and lack of care for living things.

If he wasn't careful out here he could get killed by the elements or otherwise, but for the latter he was well equipped with speed. He had lost count of the number of times he had run circles around his pursuers, usually angry collectors trying to take back their stolen loot. But Kidd was greedy, as all children are, and took what he could.

Reaching the foot of "his" trash mound, he began the arduous climb to his hideout. Rusted metal and festering rot, the trash mountain of treasure he had claimed for his own. He had hollowed out a portion of it, using coolers and sheets of metals for walls, created his own little cave. He shimmied through the tight gap that made the entrance, and braced himself for impact. It was conical inside, a tepee just for him.

The darkness was a welcoming embrace from the blazing sun, even if the hovel was eternally warm. During the day the trash mountain became a furnace, with Kidd as the bread. As long as he stayed in the bottom of the funnel, he could rest in relative comfort without having to fear for his life. For light he had a gas lamp he would use in emergency, usually working with the natural light of the sun reflecting off the metal surrounding him.

If he wasn't napping, he was working on his newest invention. The robot he had carried with him
was only one of dozens he had hand crafted out of his pseudo-walls. They were a way to pass the
time, and they became the toys he couldn't have. It had started when he had been chased into the
shopping district after he had stolen a set of discarded leather shoes. Running past the storefront
windows, fogged from the humidity and smeared dirt, he had spotted a red action figure.

Too expensive to obtain without stealing it, he stared at the glossy figurine, rapt with want. He had
promised his mother to never steal anything other than trash, and he would keep to his promise
despite his desire. In its stead he crafted his own toys, action figures of faulty gears and rusted iron.
In his hovel he could pretend to be a superhero, or even a dragon. He could be whatever he wanted,
defeat the villains and save his mom. She loved his robots and his other inventions, like the pocket
watch he had managed to fix for her birthday and the automatic watering can he made for her
garden.

He had always had an eye for fixing things, for creating works of art from the garbage he lived in.
Oresmith was a hell hole, filled with cinder and ash, blood and death, but he could rise above that
in his imaginations. He could sail away with his mother and live happily ever after somewhere far
away. Somewhere with snow, from the season that never graced the burning town.

Yes, snow would something beautiful to witness, a pure, unsullied wonder. What he wouldn't give
to see a snowfall with his mother, to visit a winter wonderland just for them.

Meanwhile, in the North Blue town of Flevance, a boy trudged through the snow. Clutching his
parka, the boy gnawed on the fur lined hood to hold back his tears. His thoughts drowned him in a
downward spiral.

Lami would be alright, his father was a brilliant doctor. He was sure there was a cure, and he
trusted his father's skill. He hadn't shown signs of amber lead poisoning just yet, but he knew it
was just a matter of time. Until then, he had to stay strong for Lami so she would get better, he just
had to keep his faith.

He fervently held on to the hope that in the future he would be just as astounding a doctor as his
father, and that Lami would be able to live out her own dreams. They'd live in matching houses,
side by side, and he would relish their closeness. Never again would he have to trudge through
thick snow to visit her in the hospital on the other side of town. They would never have to worry
about things like amber lead poisoning and white patches.

About dying.
He cursed the snow.
Kidd and his crew had made it across Reverse Mountain with minor injury, in contrast to the giant Island Whale who guarded it. His first instinct was to kill the scarred beast, but Killer had verbally forced him out of it.

As soon as they got close enough to clearly see the buds on its tongue, the whale had let out a mournful cry and moved aside, allowing them to coast into Paradise unharmed. A lighthouse greeted them, stationed on the bank of the Red Line, and a man watched them from the comfort of a lawn chair. He had given his name as Crocus, and urged them to dock so their log pose could set. He seemed like a charitable man, but he took his time answering questions, much to Kidd’s chagrin.

Kidd had ordered his crew to tuck in early, to be ready for the greatest adventure of their lives come morning. Disregarding his own words, he spent the night in the crow's nest, watching the stars with a wistful expression.

He rubbed his bare arms with calloused palms, igniting warmth in his frozen limbs. It was the same as always, a milky sky of bioluminescent freckles, but there was something different about it. Even if they had just crossed the Red Line, not yet at their first island, the step they had just taken was huge.

_I've entered the Grand Line._

Paradise lay before him, the first half of the Grand Line beckoning him to pillage and plunder. He would strike a name for himself in these seas, prove his worth in blood and sweat. Through the tears he had ceased to shed. His mother would have been proud to see him get so far. To see her little boy's face on a wanted poster. Even if he was a wanted man, she would have been happy to see him prosper.

He had donned a last name and left the town of Oresmith nothing but rubble in his wake. He was determined to be more than anyone ever thought he could be, he would stand in the hall of the Greats and bask in the glory.

_I'm going to find the One Piece, the world's greatest treasure, and become the Pirate King._
I'll kill anyone who laughs at my dream.

At his treasure.

"Kidd."

He craned his head to acknowledge his first mate, lounging in the shadows of the ladder rungs. Killer's striped mask glinted in the moonlight, its holes casting ominous shadows along the smooth surface. Kidd looked to the sky and traced his eyes along the Great Hercules Cluster, his mind elsewhere.

"You should get some sleep." said Killer, "In your own words: 'tomorrows gonna be fucking huge'." The blonde man came to stand beside him, leaning forward on the guardrail. Kidd smiled languidly, his expression uncharacteristically soft. Cold spray came off Reverse Mountain, coating their ship in a layer of condensation, and the high swept winds drove the temperature to near freezing. Clouds formed from his breath, and through the holes in Killer's mask.

"She'd be real proud of you, Kidd."

"Yeah, I know."

The Kidd Pirates set sail from Twin Cape at sunrise.

Kidd stood at the pinnacle of the forecastle, a hand on the bow of his ship, eyes trained on the horizon. The sun had just begun to rise, the sky a gradient of orange and red. His thick fur coat kept him warm in the morning breeze, the wind carrying the smell of salt and blooming algae. He'd close his eyes to take in his favorite scent, but he dared not miss a thing.

The expanse of the horizon was clear, and the world was his.
"Captain! You're alright with starting at FaustMouth?!" His navigator called over the clamor of the crew, the only female on board.

"Aye."

He rubbed his fingers over the rail guard, the smoothness of the red wood never ceasing to calm him. Varnished well, the burgundy galleon could withstand the greatest of storms. The ship was handcrafted by its crew, each one a skillful shipwright. Even Kidd himself knew a few tricks with a hammer and peg, though his trade laid with machinery. Nevertheless, they had built this ship together, him and his crew.

"You doing a great deal of staring at nothin', Captain! Take a load off your shoulders and get some damn sleep already!"

Kidd smirked, casting a glance behind him at the blonde navigator situated at center mast. Blaire Gattson was the best of the best, a former marine and formidable soldier. As an ex-Commander, the seventh highest Marine rank, she was superb. Her marine charts were exceptional, her ability to read the weather almost supernatural, and he had yet to meet anyone who could hold their liquor better than she. With a map of Paradise, a relic from her days as a Marine, she was able to keep them clear of her former coworkers with her knowledge of patrols and base locations.

At first glance she was often mistaken for a man, with heavy muscles and broad shoulders fit to steer against the currents. One punch from her and a man was down, and she had a collection of teeth to prove it. She was twenty-nine years old but looked to be in her late thirties, with deep grooves under her eyes and streaks of white in her buzz cut hair. She was never without a cigar in her mouth, never without a good retort on hand. She was a soldier, a warrior, and anyone who laughed at her for being a female pirate got their head cut off. Of course, she had no need for a defense squad, her pride would never allow it, but she was one of the Kidd Pirates.

"Focus on the weather and leave me to watch what I please, yeah?" She was one of the few people who dared joke around with him, nakama or otherwise. Sure, he and Killer were more like brothers, and his crew was his family, but even they knew when not to tread over the lines. Minus Killer, that is, whose gauntlets were made of sea stone to prevent Kidd from making stupid decisions.

His least favorite invention, even if it had saved his skin more than he'd care to admit.

The Kidd Pirates sailed for three days before reaching the first island, FaustMouth. From a distance, Kidd thought he was looking at an enormous horned head in the middle of the sea. Upon
further inspection, the island was composed of an odd-shaped mountain with scattered towns at its base. It looked like someone had fired the world's largest canon at its surface, with a gaping hole and broken fragments jutting out from its sides. Kidd was no geologist or physicist, but he was certain mountains weren't supposed to look like busted piñatas.

"Looks like a fishing town. Blaire says it's an Autumn Island." said Killer, suddenly close behind him, and Eustass groaned in response.

*Autumn Islands just mean cold weather.*

"We should stock up on scrap parts while we wait for the log pose to set. We could be here for any length of time so we should use it wisely."

*If by wisely you mean drinking and/or sleeping.*

"Yeah."

"And you should relax. Honestly, you're so high-strung you've started to chew on your hair again."

Kidd scowled at his companion, still sucking on a strand of red.

"Mind your own business." He muttered, spitting out the hair and darting his eyes away. Kidd knew the masked blonde was right; his nerves were aflame in the wrong way. He wanted to fight. He wanted someone to kill. He would have to settle for getting drunk.

"So a bar, then?" Kidd could hear the smug grin in his voice, and snarled angrily at his first mate.

Upon docking, they were greeted with a nervous clamor by the residents of Mephistos, the island's only town. They spoke a language Kidd could hardly understand, and their accent was so rough it only grated his nerves further. He left Killer in charge of the ship and in distributing duties, Blaire roosting with a fresh cigar while she waited for the log pose to set. He could only pray to Roger's Mustache that it wouldn't take a year. He had been livid when she said the notorious island Little Garden took a full year for the log pose to realign. There was no way he was waiting that long, but Blaire said they wouldn't have a choice if they ran into bad luck.
Kidd wrapped his coat around himself, shivering in the chill. Autumn islands were known for their strong winds and frigid nights, but at least their trees were a marvel to behold. Burnt orange and crisp red fluttered about in a sunset gale, the sky beginning to bleed with their colors. My colors, he thought, grinning to himself. Dusk was approaching and he had big plans for the next twelve hours.

Mephistos was rife with taverns, and, while he didn't care much for top shelf liquor, he sure as hell didn't want an audience tonight. His mother weighed heavily on his mind, and he couldn't guarantee he wouldn't let something slip that would tarnish his bloodthirsty reputation. If push came to shove, he could always slaughter the eavesdroppers to put the gossipers in their graves.

He settled for a bar whose sign was a pair of overflowing mugs. It would serve its purpose, put his mind at ease, and through the frosted panes it seemed deserted. Opening the door he was greeted with a chime fit for a flower shop. In contrast to the bright sound, the tavern itself looked as if it was on fire. Smoke filled the air in a drunken fog, a miasma of spirits and hallucinogenic.

The combination made his eyes water.

It was clear why the place was empty: it was on the verge of falling apart.

Floorboards curled up from their pegs, gaping maws ready to cause bodily harm. There wasn't a single table standing, all of them smashed or toppled over. Even the bartender looked worse for ware, sporting fresh stitches across one cheek, slicing through an eye swollen shut. Wiping a glass in trademark fashion, the man seemed unaware he was catering to ghosts and vermin.

"I know it's rather unsettling in here, but you look like a fellow who would understand what a couple of angry pirates can do when they're drunk. This your first stop on the Grand Line or are you circling back for safer waters?"

Kidd caught sight of piano teeth, chipped and missing.

"Who ransacked this joint?" Kidd asked as he ambled up to the barkeep, taking a seat on one of the few intact stools. The bartender snickered and set down the fractured cup, the cracks snaking along the surface like cobwebs.

"Don Krieg had a meltdown. Couldn't last more than a week out here. He got demolished by a Shichibukai."
"He was known as the strongest military force in East Blue, right? What a twat. Should have realized you can't con your way out here."

"Still, he did plenty damage here without any scams. I'm closing up shop day after tomorrow, moving in with my sister-in-law until the insurance gets sorted. You won't cause me any more trouble, right? Not gonna regret serving you tonight?" The man asked, pointing at Kidd with a stern expression, though his eyebrows were raised in jest. The barkeep alone was putting Kidd in a better mood, good humor had always been a weak spot.

"Yeah, just need something to clear my thoughts. A barrel or two will do."

The bartender threw his head back in a wheezing laugh, pulling at the stitches on his cheek and leaving him wincing in pain. Kidd pointed to a bottle behind the man's head, "That'll do for now. Anyway, that doesn't look like a very good job. You do those yourself?" The man handed what Kidd recognized as a middle-shelf whiskey and shrugged in response.

"No, the local doctor gave me a once-over. He didn't have much time for my face since Krieg ruined people plenty worse. The whole town is still rebuilding after two weeks of that bastard showing up here. Killed enough to make the coroner quit his job, and the insurance guilds have their paperwork so high they don't know where to begin!"

"Town doesn't look so bad - maybe a bit heavy on the gothic architecture, but I have a feeling that was intentional."

"That's cause you didn't see the other side of the island, the town rings the mountain and Krieg did a number on the western front. Whole blocks blasted flat! The man may not be able to survive the horrors of the Grand Line, but he sure as Hell was a horror to us! To be honest, it could take several years to bring this town back to what it was. I'm telling you, the man who brings that fucker to his knees, I'll give him a drink on the house!"

Kidd poured the liquor thick into an offered glass, and took a moment to appreciate the aromatic taste of honey and spice.

"He fuck up the mountain too?"

The bartender laughed, "No, it's always been that way. Helped give this island its name, but that's a
story for another night."

"Hm."

"You know, if you're looking to blow off some steam, the brothel's just a few blocks down. They aren't picky on who they let in, you could swing like a pendulum and you could still find a bed mate."

"Thanks but no thanks, I'd much rather take this bottle to bed."

Only Killer knew of his revulsion towards prostitutes, his crew simply assuming he had better tastes. He just couldn't separate his mother's face from the profession, and saw every hooker and whore another mother with nowhere else to turn. No one wanted to sell themselves, it wasn't much of a life's goal – more of a means to an end. Despite his disregard for life and the morals of pillaging and plundering, he never once participated or allowed a sexual assault if he came upon one.

His crew knew his unspoken rules, and if they were desperate for a fuck they took leave for a brothel when his back was turned. He didn't care if they went to a whorehouse, as long as they didn't drag a hooker back to the ship for a night of fun. He could respect the views of others when it came to renting a fuck, but to him it was just rape.

"Suit yourself, they're packed tonight anyways. Another pirate's docked here too! Came just this evening. A curious bunch, the lot. Funny hats."

"Really?" Kidd paused, setting down his glass gently on the counter. His bloodlust prickled through his skin like a fur pelt. He was still on for a good fight, no matter what the state of the town. It wasn't like he cared much about the problems of others. Killer had always said he was almost too calloused for a pirate. Kidd didn't mind the insult, the lives of others were not of concern to him. He took what he pleased, lives included, and the only ones he would spare and cherish were those of his crew.

He had lost his precious person a long time ago.

"Yup, docked a few hours before you, stationed more to the north so you couldn't see it from where you came in." The bartender chirped, going back at cleaning yet another battered glass, unaware of the pending addition to his insurance claims. "In a long submarine, too. A bright yellow one. You
don't see many of those on the Grand Line, most of you pirates tend to stick with galleons or clippers. Though you have to give him props for foresight. He'll have no trouble getting to Fishman Island."

Kidd remained still, taking in the information with liquor-greased cogs. The foggy atmosphere was getting to him, and only now was he was able to spot its source: an elderly man in an oversized witch's hat, smoke billowing from his mouth like dry ice.

"Don't mind the professor, he's at a tough point in his life. Made a few bad deals."

"I see."

Kidd returned to his liquor, his interest in the old man lost.

"I wouldn't mind meeting this new guest, perhaps he has the same interests as I."

"Perhaps, indeed. Are you after the One Piece or a more reasonable prize?"

"Why can't they be one in the same?"

"...

"Captain~ can I come with you?"

"Sorry Bepo, but I feel like walking alone today. Besides, I'm trusting you to watch the sub."

"Aye aye, Captain!"
"Have a good night, Bepo."

Law didn't have a particular destination in mind, he just knew he couldn't be with his crew at the moment. Their first island and it had barely taken two days of travel. Choosing to voyage by submarine was a risky decision, what with the only route into the Grand Line being Reverse Mountain. It had seemed impossible, but somehow they had made it into Paradise. Penguin had joked that they must had looked like a chubby breadstick coming down the reverse current, and the comment had sent the whole crew into a bout of raucous laughter.

In spite of their celebration and rather pleasant voyage so far, Law was restless. He had taken the first large step of many, and his mind was a cancer. The what-if's plagued him, robbing him of the few hours of sleep he was capable of managing between his nightmares. His nightly terrors had sparked to life once more, haunting smiles and foreign hands taking away the sense of peace he had scrounged over the past eleven years. Finding nakama helped ease the pain in his chest, soothed the festering wound, but now maggots had found their way in once more, and he couldn't help but tear at the itch. Contrary to his crew's confidence in his placid temperament, inside him a tumultuous storm raged.

He caught his reflection in a store window, and was thrust back into the present. Law pulled his hand from his shirt, horrified that he had been scratching some imaginary injury. The yellow of his shirt was glaring, Cora's smile staring back at him from coated glass. He felt as if his jolly roger was mocking him, laughing at his suffering. At his inability to smile sincerely. To feel happiness even when surrounded by friends.

He had tried, God knows he had tried. Everything was yellow, everything reflected happiness, in an attempt to force his mood. But all it had done was sour the color to his eyes, and the florescence of his submarine could not even bring up a false grin. Psychology be damned, I'm the only man who could stare into the face of God and spit in His eyes. I face Him and walk backwards into Hell.

...

He was losing it.

He needed the reprieve only intoxication would bring.

He spotted a wooden sign of a pair of frothing mugs, and knew where he would be spending the night.
Unfortunately, upon entering, the place looked to be the victim of a bull's rampage. It's only residents were a living hat billowing smoke, a flashy redhead at the counter, and the bartender who looked like he had been stitched together by a blind monkey. His internal physician was writhing at the sight of mismatched tissue and double looped stitches, but his depression was making him lethargic.

The acrid smoke was causing his vision to swim, and Law muffled his lung's protest with a curt choke. He was physically and mentally exhausted, and if he was correct, and the man at the counter was a pirate, he had no energy to pick a fight. He had left Kikoku with Bepo, more than apt with his devil fruit power if an emergency aroused, but now he wished it on his person. If anything it would serve as a deterrent for this pirate.

"Top shelf, neat." Law saddled into the only stool standing, an arm's length from the red haired stranger. Out of the corner of his eyes, Law recognized the one hundred million belli bounty, Eustass 'Captain' Kidd.

God dammnit.

Law himself was nothing to sniff at, what with a ninety-five million belli bounty and a crate half full of beating pirate hearts. Gaining eminence in North Blue, he returned to his sea of origin to only wreak havoc. On the seas they called him the Surgeon of Death, and his cruel tactics were infamous. The veracity of such claims were of course up to debate, as when he fought he usually did so outside the sight of his crew. For all they knew, for all they revered him, they may very well be living with a psychopath. He didn't think it was too far off the mark.

The bartender handed him a bottle of top shelf bourbon without a word, eyeing him warily with his good eye. Now that he was closer he was able to view the mess in better light, and it set his hands aflame. What a horrible job, he thought to himself, the layers are uneven. He moaned internally, that's just an unnecessary scar.

The liquor scorched a trail down his throat, and he welcomed its promise of relief from his demons. An exorcism in liquid fire. Five more of those and I can forget the darkness for a while...He told himself, staring ahead at the collection of bottles. For a crooked establishment, the array of liquors was certainly impressive. From Pinot Noir and Merlot to the commoner's beer, the rainbow selection was truly worthy of an eye's browse.

"You sure are a silent drinker, pal." The inflection on the familial term caused the bartender to visibly wince, and Law mentally rolled his eyes at the smug grin in the pirate's voice. Law blinked slowly, drowning his annoyance with another swig. He was in no mood to fight tonight. If Eustass Kidd wanted to destroy the place further, he would have to do it another time. He took a deep breath and tilted his head towards his new drinking companion, looking at him under tired eyelids.
Everything felt so heavy.

"I was hoping this place would be a quiet place to drink. No such luck, it seems." He drawled with a lopsided grin, knowing the circles under his eyes looked like fresh bruises. He flexed a hand out of habit, his knuckles popping loudly.

Eustass Kidd was certainly someone to look at, a handsome pirate with flames for hair and a distaste for shirts. With a dark red fur coat bearing twin spikes for epaulettes, he looked like a demon or a heavy metal rocker, and he was well known to openly embrace the former. The Red Devil, he was called in North Blue. The Flaming Beast, in the South. He sure likes his makeup, Law mused, glancing at Kidd's painted lips and nails. They matched his hair.

"Which way you headed?" Kidd's grin was blinding as he reached for a fresh shot, and Law couldn't help but be impressed by the man's immaculate teeth. Proper dental hygiene amongst pirates was rare but not unheard of, while, up until now, Law had yet to meet a pirate with perfect alignment. He chalked it up to a rich background begetting insurrection. A noble's son on the run, perhaps?

"Certainly not the way I came, though it would be quite the feat." he flashed a charming, tired smile, and wondered why he was even still talking to one of his competitors. Of course, he knew why. He knew why he was so drowsy all of a sudden, why the alcohol tainting his stomach looked so inviting.

He knew why he felt so relaxed, yet so resigned.

He was on the edge of the void once more.

After he got drunk he knew it would be the same song and dance. Overwhelmed with the feeling of hopelessness, he would curl up somewhere and try in vain to kill himself. When he awoke, lucid yet hungover, he would stare at his blood and wonder why he was even born. Down and down the drain he would spiral, returning to his crew with the same false smiles while he vomited in the toilets when no one was looking. His arms would bear fresh wounds for him to heal. To hide before his well-meaning friends caught whiff of his sickness. It could last days, weeks, even months, and at the end of it all he would look at Doflamingo's face in a faded photograph and remember his purpose. The anger would flood his veins and he would be alive as a dead man could.

Just the same song and dance of a man who wanted to die but didn't think he deserved the reprieve.
Eustass Kidd was speaking again.

"Is there a particular reason you've come to the Grand Line, Mr. Surgeon of Death?"

Law put on his best facade, even if the smile felt more strained than usual.

"I see I've been found out. What a dilemma." Sarcasm had always been his forte, though his natural charm prevented a scene. The poor bartender was looking between them with such a frightful expression that did nothing but worsen the tearing of his sutures. He could barely look at the medical catastrophe.

"Your tattoos give you away, Doc. And that shirt of yours isn't exactly subtle."

Law found his fingers unconsciously curling around the hem of his shirt Corazon's smile melted warmly through the fabric, but happy feelings did not arise.

Pity.

"For the record, I'm not here to fight, Eustass Kidd." He punctuated his words by pouring his whiskey into the other man's empty shot glass.

"I am only here to drink."

Kidd looked at the glass, almost perplexedly, and then returned a wicked grin.

"I'll drink to that."

Both on their second bottle of disparate liquors, Kidd leaned over Law to sniff his hair. Reflexes
delayed, the surgeon jerked back with a wider sweep of his arm than intended.

"I was right!" Kidd declared smugly, "You do reek of disinfectant. I smelled it on you when you first sat down, even through all this shit." He waved about his hand in emphasis, the air visibly dissipating in response. The old man/living hat had left long ago, and yet his aura had pervaded into the pirate's clothes with the intent to remain.

"Don't sniff people, its horrible manners."

"We're pirates, who gives a shit?"

"I do, believe it or not."

"Well, aren't you posh?"

"Another topic, please."

"You never told me why you came to the Grand Line."

Eustass Kidd had made his intentions clear through his exploits, while Trafalgar Law was satisfied being seen as an enigma. Regardless of his answer to the fellow captain, it could easily turn into a brawl. The atmosphere between them was tense, and Law noted that the bartender was no longer present. Kidd was clearly in this bar for a reason, having been able to choose one with more company. Fried nerves, irritation - there were an infinite number of reasons why Eustass Kidd would want to drink alone. Law himself wanted solitude, but, naturally, he couldn't have his way. Unlike his drinking companion, Law did not deal with his frustrations through fighting. He wanted to be alone, just not with his thoughts.

His noxious thoughts.

He had no choice but to tell the truth, as Eustass Kidd was too intelligent to bypass with anything else. Despite his brawn and brutal savagery in his escapades, the man was not an idiot. At first glance, he appeared to be a simple beast, a headstrong man painted in the blood of fools. He was keenly observant, gathering information before stepping foot into an unfamiliar situation. Most pirates, even those with the highest bounties, were bloodthirsty muscle daring to be messed with. Eustass Kidd may be many things the newspapers reported: stubborn, strong, childish, arrogant –
but he had foresight.

And that was worth a second glance.

The man sitting next to him had great potential, and, now that they were in the Grand Line, posed a clear threat. Law had come to the notorious waters in search of One Piece, as well as other... clandestine goals. Law was confident in his abilities and that of his crew, but he was after quite a large fish, and it didn't hurt to have some assistance. The possibility of forming alliances had been a frequent topic on his mind, but as a solitary individual he shied from the prospect. It had been onerous enough to form his crew, taking over a decade to build up enough trust to let them in. Even now, most of them were unaware of his darkest thoughts, his most furtive plans.

But alliances would inevitably be made, this he knew well. Starting one this early could prove to be advantageous, though incalculable. Not many pirates searching for One Piece would be willing to form an alliance so early in the game. They were both on their first island, not even in the New World, and here Law was contemplating propositioning of an alliance. Absurd in so many ways, but if he was going against Donquixote Doflamingo he would need all the help he could get. If he played his cards right, he could keep the man in the dark about his true motives.

"Well, I'm here the same reason every other pirate's entered these waters. It's not such an uncommon goal now that we're in the Grand Line." He kept his voice pleasant, his smile more naturally angled, and he closely watched the other captain's response.

Eustass Kidd's grin was feral.

"Is that right?"

He turned to his liquor and drained the bottle. Law watched him set it back down with a smug exterior. He was aware of his own reputation as a cruel and malicious psychopath, and he could admit that it was somewhat true. His kinder side was only known to his crew and he intended it to remain that way. Being a feared villain-esque character to everyone else suited him just fine.

"Since we arrived at the same first island, it can be inferred that we will be seeing each other quite a bit during our journey. It's too late to try another route—would just be a waste of time." Kidd watched him warily, and Law knew the man was his. "Taking each other out now, would also be a waste of time, as well as a waste talent. I see you as a worthy opponent, and despite my, ah... colorful reputation, I do have a sense of honor. I believe you to be the same."
Kidd's eyes narrowed, "What are you suggesting, Surgeon of Death? That we ignore each other until the New World?"

Law flexed his fingers, the aforementioned word emblazoned proudly across his knuckles.

"I am suggesting quite the opposite, Captain Kidd. I am proposing we form an alliance until then."

Eustass Kidd's expression was blank. It could go one of two ways with this man: agree or assault. Law kept his face neutral, keeping his eyes on his potential opponent. He would fight if he had to, neither of them were as drunk as they seemed. His soul was tired, however, and for its fragile sake he prayed the fiery-haired pirate would agree.

"How could you benefit me?" Kidd asked, all humor gone from his voice. The nebulous atmosphere around them was thick enough to cut with a scalpel, and the bartender had yet to refill their drinks. He had probably fled for the mountain.

"For one, I am certain you do not have a doctor on board your ship. Those stitches along your collarbone are badly infected. I am surprised you aren't running a fever."

"..."

"You get into quite a bit of trouble more often than not, and, despite your crew's strength, you do injure yourselves. I follow up with the paper, and you leave behind an impressive amount of collateral damage."

"...What's in it for you?" At the very least, the man did not look furious with him, and he hadn't said no just yet. Law had caught his interest, and now all he had to do was close the trap.

"I mentioned that I am in search of One Piece, but I am also doing a bit of reconnaissance, as it were. Not for the World Government, I can assure you I despise them as much as any of us, but for my own personal reasons. I would only ask that you relay to me the names of the pirate crews you encounter and in which locations."

"Why would you want to know that?"
"I reiterate: for personal reasons. I am search of a particular crew, you see, and their whereabouts are important to me."

"...Any other give and take I should be aware of in the fine print?"

Law allowed a broad grin.

"None whatsoever. I'll treat your injuries and you give me information, and we remain on 'amicable' terms until the New World."

"..."

"Do we have a deal, or should we give this establishment its last performance?"

Kidd picked up the empty bottle, glaring intensely at its confines. Perhaps he was examining his reflection. He turned to Law and silently held out his hand, his face unreadable. Law smirked at the painted, manicured hand and slapped his own into a calloused palm. Kidd had a firm handshake, and his eyes could be like flint when he was dead serious. His palm was overly warm, callouses rough, and larger than Law's own hand. Pulling away, the tense atmosphere lifted as Kidd gave an equally wicked grin.

"Barkeep! Another round, yeah?!" He called out loudly, and on cue the battered man materialized from the backroom with a nervous laugh.

"I trust you two are cooperative terms? The last thing I need is for this place to fall to the ground."

The man fetched them new bottles to replace their old, and wiped a few spills from the countertop.

Law showed teeth as he poured himself a new glass, the smile genuine but for darker reasons. He looked forward to the oblivion the alcohol would soon bring him, disregarding the hangover he would suffer the following morning. He pointed with his pinkie at the bartender as he filled his glass to the brim.

"I must insist you visit my submarine to get those redone. As a doctor they are horrifying to look
at." He turned to Kidd, "And you too, those stitches along your clavicle are infected. I'll be free tomorrow at noon so you two should head over whenever you want. You especially, Eustass Kidd, as I would also like to draw up this alliance on paper. I am fond of professionalism, you see."

Kidd looked at him and laughed, "Sure thing, doc. You really are a stickler for perfection. You won't even give yourself a break after the monster hangover you're gonna end up getting."

Law chuckled and poured another.

"Oh, you have no idea."

Chapter End Notes

AN: so I refuse to believe the Heart Pirates travel in that rinky-dink submarine in the Anime and Manga. No way does Trafalgar fucking Law live in a TINY ASS yellow submarine. NO! He rides only in the most advanced of nautical engineering!

Also, Eustass Kidd is the ultimate mommy's boy! What a cute cinnamon roll, yeah?

Props for those getting all the references to Goethe's Faust.

Points to anyone who can list them all!!:D

ALSO: WARNING! Law has chronic depression but is taking medication so if this makes you uncomfortable run now!

Leave a Review before you go!
Chapter 3

News of the Kidd-Heart Alliance was not taken well.

"I TOLD YOU NOT TO DO THIS KIND OF SHIT WHEN YOU'RE DRUNK! DO YOU REMEMBER THE LAST TIME?! YOU SOLD OUR SHIP TO A MARINE BASE! DO YOU REMEMBER THE LENGTHS WE HAD TO GO TO CLEAN UP AFTER THAT?!! THIS IS NOT HAPPENING, KIDD, I CANNOT BELIEVE YOU MADE AN ALLIANCE WITHOUT CONSULTING ANY OF US! AND WITH THE SURGEON OF DEATH?! HAVE YOU EVEN READ WHAT HE'S DONE?! HE'S A PSYCHOPATH! ARE YOU INSANE?!"

Kidd had never understood how Killer could scream in his mask without earplugs. The blonde ranted and raved for the better part of an hour before someone intervened to rescue Kidd from a proverbial "time out". Killer had always been the unspoken mother of the crew, and especially towards their captain. It didn't matter that Kidd was broader and higher in rank, the blonde could say whatever he wanted to the red-haired devil without restraint. He was the only one in the crew, besides Blaire, who could berate and belittle the man like a small child. As the first mate he had his privileges, but his control over Kidd stemmed from their early bond in childhood. Of course, this only meant that Killer was all but fed up with Kidd's regular antics.

Kidd had never understood how Killer could scream in his mask without earplugs. The blonde ranted and raved for the better part of an hour before someone intervened to rescue Kidd from a proverbial "time out". Killer had always been the unspoken mother of the crew, and especially towards their captain. It didn't matter that Kidd was broader and higher in rank, the blonde could say whatever he wanted to the red-haired devil without restraint. He was the only one in the crew, besides Blaire, who could berate and belittle the man like a small child. As the first mate he had his privileges, but his control over Kidd stemmed from their early bond in childhood. Of course, this only meant that Killer was all but fed up with Kidd's regular antics.

Kid blew a strand of hair from his face as he watched Blaire talk Killer out of hyperventilating. He couldn't see the problem, it wasn't like they weren't benefitting from the coalition. They certainly weren't being taken advantage of. At least, not in a way that was one-sided. He understood his best friend was pissed for not consulting him, but he was a man known for taking an opportunity when it arose. Also, he was constantly misplacing his den den mushi so it wasn't like he could have called.

They were in dire need of a medical professional, as most of the crew was tended non-too-gently by Blaire, who harmed more than she helped. He scratched at the sloppy line of stitches on his collarbone. The skin around the sutures was red and inflamed. He had half a mind to skip his nap all together in favor of getting his wound redressed. Anything to stop the god-awful itching.

Kidd had drank through the night and slept most of the morning, and now that noon was approaching he had no time to complain about a hangover. Of course, that didn't stop him from bitching to himself during the two mile walk to the other captain's ship. Docked in an empty lagoon, Kidd examined the submarine from the shadow of a couple craggly trees. It was good to always use a healthy dose of caution when it came to interacting with other pirates, especially on the tightrope that was a pirate alliance. In truth, Killer was rightfully livid, as pirates were known to break alliances on the simplest of whims. However, those with true honor kept the traditional pact,
and Kidd had determined Trafalgar and him a similar breed. It was a trait that defined the greats such as Dracule Mihawk and Whitebeard. An old fashioned way of thinking that distinguished one pirate from the scum of the sea.

Still...He narrowed his eyes at his newfound ally's submarine, curling back his lips in an open look of disgust.

*Why in Roger's Mustache would that creepy doctor pick such a revolting color?*

Clearly the swarthy male had more than a few loose screws, looking at the vibrant, almost neon, submarine. The bartender had been accurate in describing the craft, it was indeed quite long for a sub. While they were nearly impossible to locate on the seas, he had seen one or two run aground on various islands near Logue Town.

The engineer he was at heart began breaking down the specs of the impressive craft. *Eighty-five meters long submarine with a ten foot beam and nine point five draught. It's got an impressive conning tower, pretty big in terms of a sub... is their jolly roger a fucking smiley?*

He didn't know whether to laugh or walk away slowly at the doctor's choice of symbol. While he had heard of the Heart Pirate's extensive history in North Blue, he had never seen their symbol up close. He had assumed it to be a skull with a heart or something to reflect their name, but he had, begrudgingly, been wrong before. Kidd thought back to the man's attire the previous night, and realized he had teamed up with a complete narcissist. Only someone with an inflated ego, would wear their symbol on their fucking *shirt*, especially if said shirt was the color of their craft! Not to say that Kidd wasn't his own brand of vain, it did take him the better part of an hour to get ready in the morning. But just because he cared about his appearance didn't mean he would strut around with his flag tattooed all over his face.

Kidd decided he had had enough of standing around and headed for the wooded pier tethering the sub. The wooden structure sloped into the water from age and ware, algae slicking its surface as the tide slowly receded. With the submarine tethered to the dock several hundred feet out into the dark waters, he assumed there was an anchor in addition to the docking ropes. The hull loomed over him as he approached the dock's end, the line of braided rope linking it to the dock rising above the water in response to the gentle waves. He wasn't worried about slipping off the slimy wood and into the indiscriminate clutches of the ocean deep, not with his powers. He had learned from many years of practice that he could control magnetic fields, and so, by default, could anchor himself to the ground or lift himself off it. The extents of such flight depended on many factors, and, since he was surrounded by water most of the time, unpracticed. If they came upon an Island big enough to be labeled a country, then he would be sure to test out his power of flight.

Of course, magnetic fields could be manipulated in other ways, such as force fields and energy
bombs. He could do what Killer referred to ferrokinesis, but in short he could manipulate metals to his will. Usually repelling and attracting metals was enough to get him to the Grand Line, and until he was proven otherwise he would continue with this strategy. No use showing his hand before the New World, though he was chomping at the bit to play his cards.

He reached the looming hull and balked at its impressive size. Even if his calculations were correct from the shoreline, it was still quite the jaw dropper up close. He grimaced at the torpedo tubes marring the craft's nose, it's just so fucking yellow. Could he have picked a more a conspicuous color? Beneath the symmetrical apertures for the torpedoes were the forward hydroplanes. He would use them as footholds if they weren't immersed in at least a few inches of sea water, the fins tinged green beneath the waves.

How the hell does his crew manage to climb up this thing? He tilted his head to try and spot any ladder rungs marring the smooth surface. If anything there had to be a way for that bar tender to get inside, unless he had already arrived and the welcoming party had closed up shop. Didn't the man's word mean anything? Weren't they expecting him? He took a deep breath to keep his ego in check, the last thing he needed was to make himself look like a fool. He glared at the periscope mounted on the conning tower. The massive cabin was mounted on the submarine's roof, lacking the windows he would have expected to see. The depths probably didn't allow for windows, and those that could withstand the crushing pressure of the deep ocean were likely not in the budget.

He let out a long, suffering, sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose. He was an impatient man, Killer balanced him out, and he did not have the patience to stick around and wait for someone to give him instructions. Using his powers to forcibly swivel the periscope in the opposite direction, he focused on the planet's magnetic field and felt his feet lift off the dock. He flew forward posthaste, lest the periscope catch him in the act, and landed a bit too sharply. Kidd muffled a curse and braced himself against the broad conning tower, stopping to catch his breath.

The surface of the submarine was redolent of a porpoises' skin, sleek and sturdy under his boots. Keeping himself steady and close to the tower, he shimmied around the control unit. The submarine was wide enough that he could walk around the side of the conning tower with extra meters to spare before he would be in danger of the curving surface. He let out a curse of relief, not bothering to keep his voice down, when he spotted the arms of a hatch. As he walked to the hatch he peered behind him to check it the periscope had turned around, and smirked when he saw it staring back at him. He gave a wave and a cheeky grin before flipping off whoever happened to be watching him. Yeah, you watch my ass you motherfucker! The least you could have done was leave the damn hatch open for me! This was all disregarding of the fact that his coat obscured any sight of said ass.

Rather than do the grunt work himself, and look like an idiot in front of whoever was watching, he let his powers do the talking. Opening silently, Kidd dropped down into the ship without hesitation. His landing made a subdued thud, and he was instantly aware of the metal surrounding him. He could feel it's presence like a sixth sense, and was comforted by its proximity. Kidd winced and rubbed the back of his neck, scratching the back of his knee with his shoe. There wasn't
anything special about his surroundings, light grey metal panels lining the interior of the submarine, lined with electrical boxes. At the sound of something whooshing overhead, he noted that the ceiling was comprised of a variety of pipes marked with different color rings.

His breath materialized before him in white puffs as he exhaled, and he let out a low growl. "Of course it's gotta be cold in here." He craned his head about for any clue how to find the infamous surgeon, only to find a labyrinth of identical halls awaiting him. Unnerved but always up for a challenge, and began stalking down a random corridor. His stomach rumbled in want of a meal, but he quelled his desire for food with the promise of a buffet back on his ship. He grinned, outwardly malicious, at the thought of his rowdy crew.

The halls were filled with empty door frames and every few feet a bare bulb hung from the ceiling in a red cage-like frame. They cast enough light to chase the shadows back to Hell. 

_We should invest in more lamps... I'm sick of tripping on Stephen's tools he keeps leaving around._ Most of the empty rooms were stacked with brown crates and plastic wrapped packages. Looks like this is the storage bay, or something. He passed by a red spiraling stairwell, and decided against it. 

_There's gotta be at least one person on this level, there's no point in continuing this maze blind._

A black blur caught his eye and he turned to see a man in a black boilersuit staring at him only a few feet away. Paused in front of an open doorway, Kidd entertained himself with a staring contest between him and the stunned crew member. On the man's breast was the same bright yellow smiley as he had seen on the side of the sub. The man was bent over a crate of what looked like oranges wrapped in cellophane, and on his head was a vibrantly red beanie.

"Uhh..." The man slurred intelligently, and Kidd grinned in response. The capped man's features melted into an open look of horror, and Kidd just laughed as he stumbled back into the stacks of crates filling the small room. He tossed his head back and cackled as he continued on his way. Kidd relished the feeling of being feared by others, it was exhilarating like nothing else. He had switched places with his childhood tormentors long ago, and now he was the one standing on the necks of the less fortunate.

The brightly lit halls were silent, deathly silent, and the chill around him was bone deep. There was no hum of machinery, only the occasional rush of the overhead pipes and the light clomping of his boots on steel. _How disconcerting_, he thought, _to go underwater in this thing and have no windows to see. I guess you'd only see darkness anyway, if there were portholes. It's like a coffin... there would be no way to escape death if something went wrong._ The knowledge that some pirates chose to travel beneath the waves only made him appreciate his ship all the more.

"Oh, here we go."

The first sign he had seen so far in the metallic labyrinth, and he was lucky enough for it to read
Dr. Trafalgar's Office. He snorted at the self-indulgent sign, a small portion of braille under the name, though he was no less vain. Following the large yellow arrow painted beneath it, he picked up his pace to a brisk walk and wondered again at the silence. If the crew was unaware of the 'alliance', surely they would sound an alarm at his arrival? If not, they were unexpectedly unprepared.

_Maybe it wasn't the best idea to team up after all._

Anyone who slowed him down he would toss aside, unless he had a reason to protect them. _The man couldn't have made it to the Grand Line on reputation alone, then again, that dude that trashed the town survived on bravado._ He turned left at a dead end and was brought of his thoughts by the sight of the one and only door he had seen so far, propped open into the hallway by a rubber stop. Even though it was at the end of the corridor, he could still see the mess of placards pasted to the door's face. As he got closer he could make out a detailed sketch of a brain and a complex-looking plot chart of jagged lines.

He slowed his gait as he reached the door, and listened to the occupants inside.

"There will be unavoidable scarring, as the damage inflicted by misplaced stitching cannot be corrected further without the possible detachment of the facial muscles from the fascia. You are at a particular risk of necrotic of your buccinators muscle. I have prescribed you an antibiotic for the infection and realigned the fragments of your zygomatic bone. Once the stitches are removed you can expect atrophy on the lateral portion of your face due to disuse during recovery. In the rare chance you run about complication, do not hesitate to the see a physician, though I advise you see an alternative to the one who botched your treatment."

Kidd's face split in a grin, _bingo._

Even if his impatience had helped raise his bounty considerably, he knew when not interrupt. He had nothing against the bartender until he got in his way, and he figured the doctoral title meant _something._

"Thank you so much, I'm sorry I can't pay for this. What ever can I do to repay you?"
Kidd sneered at the cliché.

"Nothing to worry about. I don't require compensation for such a routine medical procedure. Just make sure to visit your local physician to remove the stitches and remember to check frequently for infections, though unlikely."

"Thank you!"

The man managed to walk out of the room and around the door fast enough to miss Kidd's form standing by the wall. Listening the bartender's footsteps as he went the opposite way Kidd had come, he marveled at the man's speed. *Must be in a hurry.*

He was just about to move into the doorframe, when the other captain spoke again.

"You can come in, Eustass-ya."

...

*What the fuck?*

Masking his perplexity with smug indifference, Kidd waltz into the doctor's office with aplomb. He masked his disappointment when Trafalgar didn't so much as lift his dead, engrossed in his writing. He watched as Trafalgar tapped his pen against a notepad filled with neat cursive and scattered equations. *Is he a doctor or a mathematician?* Come to think of it, the entire set up of the room didn't match what one expected of a doctor's quarters. The cramped room was plastered with graphing paper detailing complex logarithms and laminated official diagrams. Trafalgar was bent over the frame of a solid steel desk, and flanked by an equally metallic operating table pushed against the opposite wall. Kidd noted that the metal surface of the table was littered with fingerprints and a tray of surgical implements and wads of bloodied tissue paper.

"The least you could have done was leave the hatch open." Since the doctor had yet to acknowledge his presence, he decided to make the first move and see if he could ruffle some feathers.
"I'm afraid the machinery of this submarine will only function at a certain temperature. I apologize if my staff was less than friendly, I was unable to inform them of our coalition as I arrived alongside Mr. Holloway." The man didn't so much pause in his scrawl, marring Kidd's face with a scowl. He assumed Trafalgar was talking about the bartender, and let out a snort.

"What a charitable doctor, working for free." He drawled, raking his eyes about the room once more. Everything in the room was just so elaborate. *His desk's a bit cluttered, though.* He eyed the other male's workspace whilst he continued to loom in the doorframe, glaring at the empty coffee cups littering the desk. Uneven stacks of paper were pushed up against the wall, the desk lamp alarmingly close. Adding to the fire hazards was an ashtray dressing up as a sea urchin, the glass container overflowing with cigarette butts.

His latest comment had managed to rouse the doctor's attention at last, and he smirked in triumph as the male turned his way.

"Do not make the mistake of assuming I make a habit of random acts of charity. I simply cannot condone malpractice. Unfortunately, not all doctors are professional and neglect their craft." Law answered with cold amber eyes, snapping a file folder he had been perusing with one hand. Kidd had missed the set of thin framed glasses perched on the man's nose, half-moon lens rimmed in a striking teal. The contrast of colors was stunning against swarthy skin and golden eyes, and Kidd could admit the man had a proper sense of fashion. Even if he did have a penchant for abysmal yellow smiles and his furry hat left something to be desired.

Kidd hummed, his hands stuffed into the pockets of his fur coat, and rocked back on his heels with a wry grin.

"A professional doctor as the captain of a pirate ship? You've generate plenty of rumors suggesting you aren't as 'professional' as you claim."

Trafalgar's brow seemed to quirk without his consent, as it was swiftly lowered. Come to think of it, the saturnine male looked sickly. He hadn't noticed the dark circles in the fulvous glow of the bar. The stained mugs made sense in the way of his profession, but what sense was there in a doctor who appeared as a drug addict?

"The use of strictly orthodox methods breeds stagnancy, Eustass-ya. It is only by invention do we advance in progress." Trafalgar Law matched his stare with one of apathy, as if Kidd was no more than a stain on a wall. His speech was flat, bearing the distinct Northern accent, and the captain's eyes were so bloodshot, Kidd couldn't help but wonder if he was indeed nursing the needle.
"I hardly count turning entire islands into Swiss cheese progress in the medical field." The raven wasn't even wearing the trademark coat, instead in the same outfit as the night before. The black smiley grinned broadly at Kidd, its yellow canvas spattered lightly with blood. A pair of blue gloves lay rumpled in the tray upon the operating table. Kidd's fingers twitched with the urge to clean, and he cursed his hereditary OCD.

It hadn't come from his mother.

"I remind you that I am as much a pirate as I am a physician." There was a glint of challenge in the male's eyes, and Kidd's stomach knotted in tension. He reigned in his instinct to fight as best he could, his parentage no longer on his mind. He tried to gauge the man, but those eyes were cold. *I better not be dealing with a sociopath.* The man was unnerving in the worst way, but he had dealt with creepier mugs. He masked his unease with impudent flare, a trait he flaunted with misplaced pride.

"Yeah, bet there's quite a story behind that one." At that rather snide remark, Law casually dropped the file folder back behind him with a loud smack. Aptly removing the slim teal frames, he tucked the arm of his reading glasses into his collar. The bags beneath his eyes looked like bruises.

"What of you, Eustass-ya, you must have an incentive to go after the One Piece in such a violent manner. You weren't even on the radar before your explosive entrance to this high-stakes game." Legs crossed and leaned back in the black swivel chair, the man looked for all the world like a drug dealer conducting a negotiation.

Kidd didn't deign the man with a response, knowing the other was aware of his fervor. Open in his desires, Kidd loathed to admit he was an open book, though he concealed his precious secrets well. Trafalgar Law, on the other hand, was a novel under lock and key, a man who roamed the seas with cruelty and dispassion. It was obvious to Kidd that the man had ulterior motives to entering the Grand Line, the alliance itself was screaming suspicion.

"And what about you, Doctor Death? You're some pretty shady character. You got a reason for going the grand prize yourself?"

Trafalgar smirked, the first sign of the sardonic individual from the previous night.

"I assure you, Eustass-ya, I have no singular reason for anything. I pride myself for having a complex thought structure, and, as such, I am veritably multifaceted in my desires."
"Are you insinuating I'm an idiot?"

Kidd's tone was glacial, setting his jaw with finality. The metal around them buzzed in his head, his restraints ready to be undone. The other captain traveled in a death trap when Kidd was involved. It would be simple to crush him in his own obnoxiously colored submarine. However, Trafalgar merely tilted his head and leveled his gaze.

"Not in the least. I would not have proposed an alliance with a mere brute. You may present yourself to others as a barbarian, but your tactical foresight proves otherwise. I was merely asserting that I do not possess a single reason for my actions. My intentions are not as straightforward as yours, and my agenda is colorfully marked. Besides, you seem like a reasonable man, aside from battle, and I believe it to be our best interests to work together peacefully until we reach the New World. It would be a shame to bring the game to a head before it's truly begun, yes?"

Kidd stared at him for a moment before bursting into raucous laughter. The sound resonated in the cramped room, and in his outburst he missed Trafalgar's faint wince. As his laughter died down, the surgeon raised his voice once more.

"Getting to know the opponent in an amicable manner may lead to profitable results in the future, so feel free to analyze my tactics as you wish. My secrets, you will soon find, are far out of reach. I do not share my life as other players might, regardless of with whom I am speaking." Trafalgar gestured at him with the pen he had yet to put down, his eyes glinting with a smirk.

Kidd responded in kind.

"So you're basically an overly complicated bastard of a mad scientist who's got a stick so far up his ass it's replaced his spinal cord."

"I'll take that in jest, Eustass-ya." Trafalgar replied with an inscrutable tone, serious with a lilting jibe.

"Why do you do that -ya thing?" He said, impatient for an answer, the strange verbal tic grating on his nerves. He couldn't tell if the man was mocking him or not.
"We all have our peculiarities, Eustass-ya." For the first time the man's smirk was more amused than malicious, and the deathly sheen to his eyes had died down. Trafalgar abruptly turned back to his desk and fished a set of papers from one of the various stacks.

"Now, as I have a full day today, I would like to draw up this alliance as quickly as possible. That infection needs attention and I don't wish to inconvenience you."

Kidd rolled his eyes, not believing the man in the slightest. What the Hell would the man be doing all day looking like a zombie? Did he run a sort of open clinic for the island? The least he could have done was apply concealer to hide the consequences of overworking himself. To be fair, he himself should be training and planning his next move, but at the same time he enjoyed a bit of leeway. Why not relax for a while to congratulate himself for getting this far? It was the least he could do for himself.

He resisted the urge to scratch at his collarbone in front of the doctor, even if the man's back was still turned as he searched for something in the mess. Kidd made a derisive sound, and pointed at the back of Trafalgar's head.

"As a doctor, shouldn't you be more organized?"

Trafalgar craned his neck to glare at him, hand pausing deep in a stack of colorful pamphlets, "I am only disorganized in my personal affects. You'll find I'm quite orderly when performing surgery. The occupation leaves me with very little time to do anything else."

"Oh, so you aren't a physician?" Kidd asked, feigning surprise. The man looked like he had murdered his way out of prison. Handing lollipops to patients and handing out band aids didn't suit him.

"Actually I qualify as both a physician and a surgeon, though I favor the latter." He replied, returning to his lazy browsing. Kidd was aware he was grinning like a loon, he loved being right.

"So you haven't told your crew yet?" He let out a low whistle, "How irresponsible of you, Doc. I would assume you'd confide a bit more in you crew, granted how much they worship you." Among his rumors of savage torture, there were mixed satires of a hero-worshiping crew and a talking bear who knew karate. Killer had gone through a personal run in with the crew on his own time and confirmed the worship rumor, though the latter had yet to be verified.
"As I said before, I hadn't the time, Eustass-ya." He pulled forth a white quill and pot of ink, brandishing the blank sheets of paper in the other hand.

"Now, let's get this out of way, shall we?" He turned to Kidd and held out the stiff feathered quill, his smirk met his eyes.

He was interesting, Kidd could give him that.

Striking up the terms and agreements of their impromptu alliance took more than an hour. By the end of it, Kidd's was smeared up to his elbows in dark ink, while the dark doctor's slim hands bore nary a smudge. They had been common rules, though it was necessary to bind them in stone. Kidd would give information of the pirate crews he encountered, and would make an effort to reveal the identity of ships even seen on the horizon. Trafalgar would provide any medical assistance required in turn, and would keep no more than a single route from the Kidd Pirates.

They had control over each other's crews if an emergency should arise, though upon the others death they would abrogate the contract. If one wished to see the other for any other reason besides the concurred payoff, they must call in advance via the private den den mushi they had provided one another. They were to commence ceasefire as of the present date, and were proscribed from all forms mutiny against one another, and if a threat was perceived the contract was forfeit. Included in the contract were the names and ranks of their crew members, in which Kidd enjoyed a hearty laugh at the Heart Pirates first mate, dubbed a comedic 'Penguin'.

During the write up, Trafalgar was all business, and there was a distinct lack of witty ripostes in return to his jibes. The teal spectacles were back in play, which was amusing enough to tide him over until the contract was finished. Now he was scratching at his stained wrists as he sat bare chested on the edge of the operating table. His coat and bandolier hung on a hook by the door, his flintlock pistol and dagger in their holsters.

"Rather extravagant pants, Eustass-ya." The doctor commented, gesturing to the black and yellow lizard-print pants. Kidd pointed in turn to the man's hat, as no further comment was needed. Trafalgar matched his smirk, snapping on a fresh pair of rubber gloves. His sleeves were rolled back to expose dark ink staining olive skin, tribal tattoos with obscure meaning.

"You got a penchant for ink?" Kidd asked, eyeing the strange cross-like tattoos on his forearms, enclosed in the oval outline of a sun. It took him longer than he cared to admit to realize the crosses
"Only for those which hold meaning. Flamboyant designs have never interested me, and I content with what I have." He replied, rolling over in his chair to inspect infected flesh. Kidd averted his gaze from the male, their close proximity unwelcome. Trafalgar's clothes smelled of cigarettes and booze, of unwashed fabric and day-old sweat. At the very least, the captain was aware of his state.

"I apologize for my appearance, my night did not include sleeping." Kidd focused on a chart depicting the progression of spinal degeneration in cervical kyphosis as the doctor began to snip away at his sutures. He had always loathed doctors, never being one to care for his health despite his obsession with his appearance. It was too much of a hassle, an unwanted embarrassment and a proof of weakness.

He set his jaw, he was not weak.

Kidd had expected the removal of the sutures to be painful considering the localized infection, but the other captain's deft hands proved otherwise. Soon enough, the broken threads of fishing line were deposited into a clean tray.

"Surgical sutures should always be used to seal a wound, please suggest to whoever tended to your wound to leaf through the pages of Surgery 101."

Kidd barked out a laugh, fingers curled over the edge of the metal table. Blaine wouldn't take too kindly to the doctor's order, and Kidd didn't feel like visiting a dentist.

"I doubt she'd take that well, but she'll be glad to drop the title of nurse."

Trafalgar chuckled, and Kidd's nose reeled at the acrid scent of cigarettes. He peeled his eyes away from the flooded mess of the doctor's desk as the gash was flushed with saline solution. The infection writhed beneath the solution, but Kidd was used to pain and forced it from his mind. His eyes kept darting back to the desk, his OCD screeching in his brain. For all his impulsivity, his willingness to tear apart the world, resisting his mental obsessions was the one kind of compulsion he had learned to resist. Of course, Killer allowed him to give in every other month and clean the whole ship six times in one week.

He was a man who suffered from an avalanche of crippling anxiety-ridden thoughts. He vented his frustrations through mechanical engineering, his creativity and intelligence shining through his
novel inventions. Of course, he was no true shipwright, and would rather create a walking metal castle than a craft of the high seas.

Kidd could see his reflection in the convex surface of the steel lamp, watching in morbid fascination as Trafalgar methodically drained the swollen tissue of pus and accumulated dirt. The saline rise was applied once more, along with debridement of dead tissue, before he brought out the medical sutures and began to close the wound.

Just as the knot was tied, Kidd was called away to answer Killer's den den mushi. Thankfully Blaire answered, explaining that Killer had calmed down and was taking a nap. She happily added that during said nap Wire and Heat turned his hair into a mass of braids.

His visit with Trafalgar could not end fast enough.

Chapter End Notes

Some fun facts about this fanfic for those who are still reading this:

Eustass Kidd's abilities will be explored more in depth later on in this fic, and many of his powers can be likened to Magneto from Marvel comics. As the author of this story, I will most certainly be using all my artistic liberties to exploit what I believe to be inappropriate plot points. Such as Law riding in a small dumb-looking submarine and the ever changing color of the Heart Pirates' jumpsuits. I mean, what the hell? Are they fucking white OR black! Pick one! And what's with the orange and beige ones being thrown around Tumblr? Ugh, forget it. My fic, my ideas.

Those of my lovely readers who are deeply obsessed with submarines might be able to tell that Law's submarine is modeled after the Trafalgar Class Submarine, a nuclear-powered attack submarine in service with the Royal Navy.

Please leave me a review! I would love to hear everyone's thoughts on these chapters! I know it's going slow but that's the point of a slow-build fic, right? Don't worry, the action's gonna kick up soon! :)

This chapter depicts explicit scenes of disturbing content and will continue to get worse throughout the series. The trigger warnings for this chapter are as follows:

1. Explicit violent
2. Nudity
3. Implied sexual assault
4. Murder
5. Mental illness (anxiety)

The log pose calibrated at dusk, and the Kidd Pirates wasted no time in setting sail. In the orange glow of the receding sun, FaustMouth looked considerably less imposing than when they arrived. The destruction of the western face was evident as they coasted around the island, revealing crumbled churches and flatten street blocks, bathed in the shadow of the horned mountain. Kidd stood at the bow, watching the island carefully as they passed, searching for any sign of a neon yellow shirt. The Heart Pirates had their own agenda to follow, and Trafalgar had mentioned he had business in Mephistos and wouldn't be leaving for another day. It wasn't any of his concern, not really, but it was always good to know your enemies whereabouts, especially if they were your temporary allies.

Kidd leaned forward on the spiked rail guard, a foot on one of the large ornamental skull ringing the deck. He couldn't figure out the man's motives, and his air of secrecy irked him. He had never liked being uncertain of the intentions of others, and had always prided himself on extrapolating information through silent observation. Years of leafing through stolen books and learning from others' mistakes had garnered him an impressive mental skill set. People were easy to read once you learned what to look for: a furrowed brow, an unconscious curl of a hand- Kidd liked to pretend he was his favorite fictional detective as he broke down a man's identity from a distance.

But Trafalgar Law was an amalgamation of contradictions.

He looked like a doctor who discovered that piracy was a more efficient way to pay for med school. Sleep deprivation, drugs, an illness, whatever it was, the man looked like a junkie at best. What a man like that was doing prescribing medication or performing surgery was beyond Kidd. He was obviously a murderer, all pirates were, but he could easily be a serial killer. He gave Kidd the creeps, with the strange mix of bright colors and death symbols everywhere. At the very least he had a silver tongue, something Kidd could appreciate. All too often his retorts were left without
a reply, and there was nothing better than a witty riposte.

Obviously the man was intelligent, which was also refreshing from the numskull pirates he had run into so far. The conversations they had held over that evening's early supper was facetious and astute. They spoke over plates of roasted beef in a cafe with a caved-in roof from a cannonball. They spoke of politics, making quips about the 'efficiency' of Marine troops, and of the disgraces that were the shichibukai. Selling their freedom to the government for peace of mind, shichibukai became the dogs of the World Government. It was rare that a pirate had any positive feelings towards the Marines or their 'benevolent' World Government, but it pleased Kidd to see that Trafalgar clearly despised authority as much as he did himself. They fit well together during conversation, amicable enough that their crews could see the alliance as feasible.

But Kidd could feel the tension through the smiles and witty remarks. The hairs on the nape stood tall on alert, his eyes casually raking along the absurdly long sword that the surgeon brought to the table. It was a nodachi, an unusual and impractical sword for many, but Kidd had heard of how the surgeon wielded it. He wasn't deaf, he had heard the rumors, read the stories. Whole islands split in two beneath a translucent dome. A sadistic doctor who tortured men until their last breath.

"Captain. Are you sure about this alliance with Trafalgar?"

Killer's voice behind him stole him from the past, the island no longer in his sights, the sun long set. The moon hung low in the night sky, the soft glow of twilight creating a frosted pane of glass over the ocean's surface. Kidd let out a snort and turned to his first mate, his coat held together by a row of golden buttons to hide the proof of his medical visit.

"If I wasn't sure I wouldn't have agreed, Kill. We need a doctor and the man needs names. Not gonna be a problem if we oust the rogers of whatever schmuck we crush, yeah? It's not too big a pain in the ass, not in comparison to Blaire's awful stitching."

"I heard that!" Blaire shouted from the crow's nest high above, and Killer let out a light chuckle.

Kidd rubbed his shoulder, his neck clicking as he rolled his head. His head lolled back, he admired the fresh night's sky. Away from the dim artificial light of the island, the sky was a mess of bruised skin and bright freckles. Swathes of purples and dark blues intermingled with splashes of lactose and corn meal.

The night was cold.
"Gonna head in, Kill. Little Orange was two days away, right? I'll use tomorrow to fix Maxi’s engine, don't bother waking me up for breakfast." Killer hummed in response as he passed him, Kidd catching the scent of strawberries and stopping in his tracks. Whipping his head around and narrowing his eyes, he audibly snarled at his masked companion.

"You didn't buy me another one of those fucking parfait things, did you? I told you I hate those things."

He watched in amusement as Killer's hair bristled like a cat's tail, something that never failed to make him snicker. Killer spun around to face him, clearly flustered, but Kidd was too entranced by the man's hackles raised in agitation.

"I didn't buy you anything!" Killer practically screeched, and Kidd had known him long enough to know his face was red with embarrassment.

Clearly this had something to do with the man's 'mysterious' love interest.

Despite the man's obsession with privacy, he certainly did not conceal his romantic 'high'. At first, Kidd had interrogated the crew on putting drugs in the man's pasta. After a three-week absence of Killer's nagging or mothering, he was considering that the man had simply snapped. Only Roger knew why the blonde had stuck around Kidd for so long, putting up with his antics and compulsions. It was only when he caught him sighing at random intervals while gazing across the ocean did he realize his friend was besotted with someone. His first act of business was to discern whether or not Blaire had finally found the one man she could tolerate. He had dismissed this notion in favor of preventing his hard work in manual orthodontistry going to waste.

"Alright, don't get your panties in a twist mama bear." He left before Killer could take a swipe at him, snickering as he went.

Their ship was much larger than many of the marine vessels that had the misfortune of meeting them, and yet did not sacrifice speed for size. His crew was not large, certainly not in comparison to the Whitebeard crew at 1,617. He had considerably less than Trafalgar, whose massive submarine housed an equally large crew of 127. He didn't know if Trafalgar's crew members had their own bounties, if they've each made names for themselves. He didn't particularly care, either.

He descended the stairs to his private quarters, the stairwell located on the port quarter. The redwood that composed the ship’s exterior extended inward, the deep rouge paneling awash in the yellow glow of a pair steel lanterns, mounted across across from each other. He designed the lamps himself, modeled after the pair that once hung over his childhood home. The sight of the rusted
finish brought him back to the humid nights of his childhood.

On the rare nights his mother took off work, he would hurry home to snuggle beside her in bed. There was only one bed in the narrow room, just an old bed and a vanity with a broken mirror. The suitcase underneath the floorboards beneath the bed held his mother's hard earned money and the childhood keepsakes she had never shown him. He would take the side facing the large window draped in thin white curtains. Between the drapes he could see the fogged windowpane glowing gold in the light of the lanterns hanging on either side. Their light illuminated the drops of condensation on the frosted pane, the drops gathering moisture until gravity let them slide down the glass like tears. He could never decide which one of them was crying harder.

The stairwell to the deck was open behind him, and before him lay the dead-end that led to his bedroom. To his right was the door to his quarters, and he wasted no time in turning the bronze knob and entering his den. He had built his own room with limited help from the others, and it showed in the different colors of wood. In reality, his room was smaller than what one might expect from a captain's cabin, but he had his reasons.

Taking up the middle portion of the stern, one wall was a thick slab of steel facing the ocean. If one looked close enough, they could spot the glass pane that covered the steel wall. Backed by layers upon layers of the finest steel, he was capable of using his powers to reveal a stunning window to the sea. In front of the steel window was a deep burgundy couch and adjacent ottoman. His king sized bed faced the window, the headboard nailed the wall which made up the hallway. The headboard was gilded in gold, the duvet a startling crimson with golden accents. Between the couch and the bed was a glorious antique rug of intricate patterns.

His room was fit for a king.

Kidd was exhausted, even if the most he had done that day was laugh at Trafalgar's crew of stupid hats. Each one had a fashion disaster glued to their head, and Trafalgar had responded about the Kidd Pirate's selection of pants. The man never got defensive, always ready with a silver-tongued retort. Keeping up with the swarthy male's wit had been a trial in and of itself. It took enormous amount of effort to respond quickly and not sound uneducated. He couldn't understand how the man spouted lines as if he had memorized them beforehand. If the man learned how to smile, he would make a fantastic politician.

*He'd be a criminal defense attorney, if anything, but it's not like those exist, anyway.*

Stripping out of his coat, he folded it carefully and dropped it on the couch. His bones ached, his calves stiff with piercing pain as he moved. He was aware he wasn't slender, but there wasn't an inch of fat on him, either. With his active lifestyle, shin splints became a constant plague. He took painkillers and anti-inflammatories when he could, trying his best to ease the pain. There wasn't
much he could do without a doctor's help, and whenever he ran into one he always forgot to ask. The fluctuating pain of his interosseous tissue became a plague in battle, leaving him an aching mess when the smoke cleared.

*I'll ask Trafalgar the next time I see him, I should write it down so I don't forget again.*

Ready for a long bath, Kidd disrobed and left his garb folded neatly on the ottoman. Hanging his bandolier on the gold peg by the door, he slipped out his pistol as he entered the bathroom. He always kept a weapon on hand, because there was no such thing as an overly cautious pirate.

"Fucking, *finally.*" he moaned, at the telltale sound of water rushing through copper pipes. It was the sweetest of advantages, having a crewmate who could breath fire, he never had to worry about bathing without hot water. Kidd sighed and ran a hand through fiery locks, irked as he remembered the fresh patchwork on his chest.

*Whatever, I'll just take off the bandages and hope for the best.*

The door to the bathroom matched the smooth wall paneling of mahogany and pine, and the lion-headed brass knob roared proudly as it jutted from the doorframe. It was his own personal touch, matching the door to his room, and he was proud of the flawless metalwork. He made haste into the confines of his bathroom, ready to scrub the anxiety from his skin and melt into the water Heat had so kindly prepared for him.

His bathroom was roughly half the size of his bedroom, with most of it being a large built-in bath. Kidd eagerly approached the limestone slab Killer had hewn for his birthday. He certainly appreciated it, as he had never owned anything more extravagant than a wood basin to bath in. Turning and sitting on the edge of the tub, he worked at the bandages slapped to his collar. He sneered at his reflection in the full wall mirror, the back of the bathroom door melting into the reflective wall just as the wood did on the other side. The adjacent walls were dusky, hammered bronze sheets and the wall behind him was the same carved limestone. The only difference was that the texture had been left as ragged as it had been found. The contrasting textures of the room, the smooth limestone tub and floor, the mirror wall, the hammered bronze, and the jagged limestone wall should have kicked his condition into overdrive.

Except, it did just the opposite.

He found solace in this smaller room, an enclave in which he could forget his troubles. Despite his obsession with his appearance and reputation, it wasn't as if he denounced his aspects that one could label 'feminine'. It wasn't as if he hid his like for such things, the makeup, nail polish, and
heeled boots did nothing to stave off such conceptions. There wasn't anything wrong with his likes, either, nor did he consider them female traits. It was just as societal concept, just as men were not supposed to cry and women were enamored with the color pink. They were just stereotypes, installed misconceptions, and, while Kidd wouldn't allow being called a 'sissy', he didn't think the term applied, either.

There were plenty of blatant stereotypes roaming the seas of Blue, from hairy 'okamas' to 'justice'-abiding Marines. Not to say those people didn't exist, but they were all just that. Everyone was just a person, with their own hobbies and beliefs, and there was no need to put them into little boxes and slap on a label just to feel secure with yourself. On that point too, it was sometimes perfectly reasonable to grab a label to clutch to oneself. Learning he could put a name to the pestering voice in his head, to the urge in his step, and the tingle in his fingers had been the most freeing feeling in the world. He felt like he had slotted together another piece of the puzzle known as 'Eustass Kidd'. A piece he would pick up and toss away like one could at any time. People changed, knowledge grew, but there were some things that always remained the same.

Eustass Kidd was born with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Eustass Kidd was born to a prostitute with no last name.

Eustass Kidd's mother was dead now.

He hissed through his teeth as he peeled on the bandage and pressed his fingers to the stinging skin. It was always the slightest of things that brought the most pain, like tweezing and, of course, ripping off a bandage. Kidd winced at the skin which was quickly turned flush, his fingers pulling away sticky with residual glue. It's almost a shame to undo the Doc's work, but it isn't like I don't know how to dress a wound. It's the stitching I can't figure out.

"Oh," he murmured, letting his hands fall between his knees as he stared in the mirror ahead, "The Doc did a really good job."

The stitching was just a fine black line in his reflection, in comparison to the wide loops of Blaire's handiwork. Disregarding the red frame that was beginning to appear around the seam, he stared at his appearance. He had inherited his mother's freckles, not just on his face but littered all over his body. As a child he had hated them, thinking of them as specks of dirt he could never scrub out, proof that he belonged in the trash. But that was after his mother's passing, during his years of self-loathing and self-isolation. It was only when he met Killer that he was able to find his former persona, and he owed the man everything for it.
His body bore the old scars of a rough childhood, thin lines crisscrossing alabaster skin. With age they had faded to silver seams barely visible against dappled epidermis. He was muscular, years of weapons training and heavy lifting had molded him into a juggernaut. They had a fully decked out gym with proper equipment lifted from various exploits of Marine bases.

He scratched at the trail of fire beneath his navel, and stifled a yawn.

Pressing his hands to the cold tile, he reached for the brass knobs to get the water flowing. He was in the mood for a bath to relieve the tension in his muscles, a shower he could do with another time. Along the hammered broke wall to his left sat a tall set of cedar cabinets. In the back of the third drawer, to be specific, he could procure all sorts of bath oils and salts to use, but thought better of it. He glanced at the opposite wall where the toilet and sink sat secluded to themselves. The seat was up, Killer would kill him if he saw it, and it suddenly drew his interest. With a groan he pulled himself to his feet, wincing at ache of taut muscles.

The sound of rushing water echoed in the room as the bath filled with steaming water, quickly fogging the wall mirror. On the way back to the bath he drew a penis at eye level, to give Killer a little surprise the next time he snuck in a shower. Kidd had never met a woman Killer loved more than his own hair, and even though his crew had plenty of beauty queens, none could quite compare to Killer’s obsession with his hair. Most of the supplies in the cedar cabinets belonged to his first mate, though he rarely chastised the male anymore for sneaking in for late night showers. While it disrupted his sleep cycle and pissed him off greatly, he’d grudgingly accepted it after conceding to take a look at the common showers at Killer’s instance.

Heat’s dreads required moderate care, and Wire hogged the bathroom to work on his makeup. The other crew members were equally illogical and competitive for the limited services, acting like stereotypical teenage sisters. While it had been amusing, it was understandable, and now he turned a blind eye when the sound of water rushing through the pipes in the wall woke him up at three in the morning. Of course, it didn't mean he wouldn't leave the blonde aggressive phallic messages in condensation.

Slipping into the tub, he let out a moan of relief as his sore muscles met steaming water. He was usually such a stickler for cleanliness that he took a shower before every bath, but he hadn’t done anything more that day then get a couple ‘check ups’. Dipping his hand into the water, he ran it through his hair, only to realize he was still wearing his goggles. He snorted at his own carelessness, missing them even in the mirror. With his hair the way it was, it had become natural to wear some kind of headgear to hold back the mane. Hair gel wasn’t his thing, and even that could only do so much against the staggering volume of his tresses.

Setting the goggles to the side, he sucked at his bottom lip in aggravation as his hair flopped down into his eyes. He refused to cut it, though, for personal reasons.
He closed his eyes and relaxed further into the water, sliding down until the water stopped at his chin. The sound of water in his ears was calming, the weightlessness allowed by the deep tub mesmerizing. As a child there were no bodies of water he could have swam in, even if he had had the ability to do so at the time. In reality, he could not pinpoint when he had ingested his devil fruit, though he suspected it had happened between his birth and the time of his first memory. There was no description of his fruit in any of the books he had come across, those depicted were predominately logia types. How long had he lived without the knowledge of his power? How long had he assumed that feeling the 'presence' of metal was normal for a child? Did his mother notice any changes?

His eyes snapped open as a frown marred his face.

*Dangerous thoughts.*

He finished his bath with the rub of a damp rag and the plush of a warm towel. He had no plans for the night other than sleeping, even if there was a stack of books beneath his bed he had yet to finish. If he was completely honest with himself, he was restless. His body was exhausted but his mind was whirring with the possibilities of tomorrow. The shock of forming an alliance so early in the game had yet to fade, and the fact that he couldn't gauge his ally wasn't helping his nerves. The man seemed honorable, but what if he wasn't? There were few pirates sailing the seas with morals like those of Whitebeard, and the surgeon's reputation preceded him.

Pulling on pair of ashen drawstring pants, he rummaged through the pockets of his coat for a particular den den mushi. Before parting ways, they exchanged den den mushi to keep in touch, though Kidd had yet to take a look at its appearance. Upon doing so, he had to stifle his laughter at the sight of the pale yellow snail. He snickered as he flopped back onto his bed, setting the sleeping snail on the bedside table.

*How conceited did you have to be to dress up your den den mushi after yourself?*

Besides the smilie dressed as a helm painted on the front, the shell was yellow and black with the t-shaped fringe of the smilie. This was all disregarding the *giant fucking speckled hat* perched on the snail's eyestalks. Blinking at the den den mushi, Kidd lost himself to raucous laughter, shaking so hard he clutched his sides as they began to cramp.

"W-What the f-fuck!" He choked out amidst tear-jerking laughter, arms wrapping around his burning stomach.
The snail remained silent in response, eye stalks drooped in artificial slumber. Its arms were smaller than normal and were located just beneath it's eyes, giving it the appearance of being an armless den den mushi. Adorably stupid looking, Kidd was thankful his own snail wasn't so bizarre.

_puru puru puru...puru puru puru...puru puru puru...

"You've gotta be kidding me..." Kidd mumbled, blinking owlishly at the snail. Sure enough, the damn thing was ringing, and there was only one person who could be calling him. Kidd frowned, _I just saw him, what the hell?_ He reached for the receiver and swallowed a guffaw at the sight of the deadpan stare of a familiar set of tired eyes. *Den den mushi really are amazing, the eyes look exactly the same.*

"Pardon my interruption, I am aware it is rather late."

Kidd snorted, it wasn't even nine yet.

"No problem, Doc. What's up? Missed my voice?"

"Nice try Eustass-ya, but this is just a friendly business call."

Kidd lost any humor in his face at the man's serious tone, healthy caution at the forefront of his mind.

"What do you have in mind, Doc?"

"There's been a change of plans, and it seems we are setting out for the next island in a matter of minutes. With any luck will reach it before you, as our craft is not dependent on the wind. If you wish to, we will be stationed at Little Orange for a few days and will be able to tend to your crew's injuries. I expect you are not the only victim of erroneous medical practice, and you'll find my crew has more than enough medical expertise to suffice."

"Is there a catch here that I'm not seeing? It hasn't even been two hours since we saw each other and it won't take more than a couple of days to reach Little Orange. I'm not going to have any information you wouldn't be able to scrounge on your own. We're following the same route, after all."
"I can see why you'd be wary of my invitation, but I assure you I'm only speaking with your best interest at heart. It wouldn't be any fun if you dropped dead so soon, I'd like to face you in the New World, you know."

"Heheh, my best interest, huh? Sure, Doc, I'll take you up on that offer. I'll keep an eye out for you on the horizon."

"Have a good night, Eustass-ya."

"Same to you, Doc."

Kidd hung up the phone with a wide grin, only to wince as his back muscles tensed in a spasm. Grumbling, he set to stretching his trapezius as he reached for the ceiling, bending his neck to the side. He hated how tense stress made him, how he relied on Wire's massages for relief. He hated looking vulnerable in front of people, even if they were his own crew. He didn't think they would pity him, they were his friends, not his parents. Being vulnerable in front of others brought him back to a time he wished he could forget, reminded him of rain and blood and tears. Of the scent of sweat and sex and the unmistakable rot of death.

Kidd thought of his mother.

He had been well aware of his mother's profession, but there was nothing he could do about it. He had been just a child, after all, in no place to voice his complaints, but he was still her child. It was perfectly understandable that he held contempt for the men who followed his mother into the back alleys and rundown hotels. He had followed them once, terrified at the noises of pain from his mother, and had nearly had a heart attack. He had seen sex before, a man on top of a woman making loving eyes at one another. What he saw his mother doing was not sex, it looked too violent to be something that the books told to be about love.

His mother was bent over a trashcan, her long skirt gathered at her lower back, exposing pale legs mottled in familiar purple blossoms. The strange man was thrusting into her from behind, gnarly hands digging painfully into supple thighs, leaving fresh flowers.

It took everything he had not to scream, and he instinctively fled from the scene. He hated himself for not going to his mother's rescue, but he was too horrified to do anything but run. He didn't return for days after that, huddled in his cave, quaking in revulsion. It was so disgusting he had developed a stomach bug and was violently sick for the rest of the week. It was hard to look his
mother in the eye after that, hard to resist the urge to check her for wounds. Violence like that was
dangerous, regardless of the sexual nature that was beyond his comprehension at the time.

His mother's face flitted before his eyes, mouth slack in death. He could see her eyes rolled back in
her skull, exposing the veins in her sclera.

The taste of carbon dioxide was heavy on his tongue as his breathing quickened, and he squinted
his eyes against an oncoming panic attack.

*Shit, not now!*

With a wave of his hand the snuffs lowered onto the candles, drenching the room in darkness. It
was an inevitability, he knew this well, but the tsunami was always the same. Sweeping his feet out
from under him, he could do nothing against the current. The medication he took to force himself
into a stupor were long gone, just another favor to add to the list of things he had forgotten to ask
Trafalgar Law. Having stood during his talk with the surgeon, he fumbled in the darkness for his
bed. His eyes burned behind their lids and his ears were ringing. His chest felt tight, his lungs
fuzzy, and all the back rubs in the world wouldn't cork the flood. He needed it, this painful release
of emotion. Once tomorrow came, all would be right again.

But still, he hated this feeling of weakness.

*I'm stronger than this!*

*I'm not going to lose to this!*

*Fucking-get a grip on yourself, Eustass!*

*Get a grip!*

A choked whimper made its way from his throat as he curled into a ball on his bed, and the sound
echoed in the darkness. There was a burning sensation in his nose as he held back the tears, and he
mewled a curse into his bed sheets. *I'm so fucking pathetic, look at me, a fucking pirate, crying
because his fucking mom is dead-*
He swallowed the sob that was building in the back of his throat, and it hurt like swallowing air. Kidd gnawed at his knuckles. There was nothing he could do to stop the downward spiral of his mind, and he settled for crying himself to sleep, the back of his hand pressed to his mouth to stifle the sound.

When rain came to Oresmith, it fell like knives.

In the place of hail, the heavy rain left dents in tin roofs, crushing whatever foliage managed to struggle out of cobblestone streets. Those unfortunate enough to lack a dwelling vacated the streets in favor of huddling beneath shredded awnings and sheets of metal. It was times like these that one was reminded of their blessings, or lack thereof.

Kidd was tired of the rain. It only brought pain when in contact with the skin, and for flowers it did brought nothing but death. In the years to follow, he would find it fitting.

"Mom! I fixed that music box you liked so much! It actually plays now! Listen to this! Mom!" Kidd stumbled through the streets, hiding his precious treasure in a burlap sack. She couldn't hear him from a block away, but Kidd was unable to contain his excitement. He had been working on the project for weeks, tuning the metal until the sound rang clear to its original format. He ignored the throbbing in his foot from where he had stepped on a fragment of shrapnel. All the cloth he would have used to bandage his wounds had turned black with grease from his work. It wasn't a problem, of course, because his mother would wrap his wound better than he ever could.

The door to their slum was propped open. Thievery wasn't the issue, as most of the homes in Oresmith had little to no valuables. Squatting was the main concern, and with ample cause. Squalid as it was, Kidd and his mother were blessed with their hovel. An intruder meant they were out of a house, as Kidd knew well that neither of them was capable of fighting.

Slipping into the unlit room, Kidd had trouble processing what he was seeing, and so he stood motionless in the doorway.

A man was straddling his mother, hands around her throat. As for his mother, she was looking at him, head tipped to the side and mouth opened as if she was about to speak. The storefront lights flickered on, illuminating the silent scene, and the image burned itself into Kidd's brain like a hot brand.
Drool and blood dripped languidly out of his mouth, ruby red lipstick smeared around her bruised lips like a spreading rash. Her front teeth were knocked in, hanging down her throat by thin cords of nerves attached at the empty sockets. Her nose looked like it had been sheered off, until he realized it had been flattened to her face by a blunt blow. Blood crusted her cheeks and around her mouth, glistening in the yellow light. Her eyes were rolled into the back of her skull, her sclera flecked with blood. Her shirt was missing, chest bare and covered in gouges from long nails desperately searching for air.

Her chest wasn't moving.

Her arms were limp, one hanging off the side of the bed, her own flesh gathered under her nails. Her breasts looked like someone had tried to bite them off, with teeth marks littered about swollen nipples. The purple skirt was gathered about her waist, exposing bruises, bite marks, and faded scars. Her underwear was hanging off a foot bent the wrong way. From where Kidd was standing he could clearly see how the man's penis was buried inside his mother, semen smeared across bed sheets that had been so carefully spared from such abuse.

The man straddling her was young, with a musculature that showed beneath leather clothes. Large hands were still wrapped around his mother's throat, lightly shaking with the effort. He was a man Kidd had never seen before, with dark skin and shaggy blonde hair. Finally the stranger acknowledged Kidd's entrance, and craned his neck to look at him. His hands didn't move from his mother's crushed throat.

The music box clattered from Kidd's numb fingers, the loud noise drowned out by the roaring in his ears.

...

They had the same eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Points to who can guess Kidd's favorite fictional detective and Killer's secret "girlfriend" :P

Yes, Kidd had braces that he made and manipulated himself.

Yes, the description of his room is bland but there's a reason for that.
Also, yes, criminal defense attorneys would not exist in a world so superficially "black and white". Emphasis on superficial, as One Piece is all about the grey area-what with good pirates and bad marines, and all those in between.

Leave a review and tell me what you think!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Kidd woke to a face full of blonde hair.

He tensed reflexively, only to relax as the owner spoke.

"Good morning idiot, or should I say afternoon?"

Kidd grunted in response, rubbing at bleary eyes. His face hurt from all his crying, tears crusted on his face in a nasty film. He felt disgusting, for many reasons, but annoyance quickly took its toll.

"Can you please get out of my bed? Fuck, what time is it?"

His eyes were burning from their dryness, and he was sure they were bloodshot. The lights weren't helping, but at least Killer wasn't capable of opening his window. His first mate was sitting up against the headboard, a book in his lap obscured by his raised knees. Kidd was curled along his side like a cat, and he quickly stretched out his limbs in embarrassment. It wouldn't do to look so childish right off the bat, who knows how long Killer had been watching him sleep, even if it felt as if he hadn't slept at all.

"It's already two in the afternoon. You missed breakfast like you wanted, but we just finished lunch without you." Killer flatly replied, flipping a page of the anonymous book, a pair of thin reading glasses perched over his striped mask.

"Fuck! Why didn't you wake me?!" He grumbled sourly, scratching at his navel. His body was sticky with sweat, and the duvet was cold beneath him. In his haste to get to bed he had forgone slipping beneath the sheets, and he regretted it now as he shivered in the cool air. He slipped from the bed, a chill running through him as his bare feet touched the frigid floorboards.

They were still on the sea, and with any luck they would run into a rival ship. Having lounged in his underwear so late in the day wasn't the best way to prepare for a battle. Even if the exhaustion and anxiety had shed itself from his bones like an old skin, he hadn't recovered completely. He still wanted to bash someone's skull in, to impale rookie marines on flying shrapnel. That would never change, his lust for blood and vengeful urges against the world would never leave him. Just as he could never get back what it had taken from him.
"I'm your first mate, not your babysitter. Next time set an alarm if you don't want to miss out on food." Killer mused, closing the book with a snap, and leveling Kidd with what the other could only assume was a meaningful stare. The blonde flexed his toes and stretched out his legs, covering a yawn threatening to form.

"And another thing, it looks like you learned how to do your own stitches." He said, gesturing to his chest. The blonde male was dressed in his usual garb, the same black shirt with white polka dots and brown cowboy pants. Thankfully he had enough courtesy to remove his boots before ascending the redhead's bed.

Kidd cursed, eyes widening and hand flying up to cover the stitches. He had forgotten he had gone to bed without a shirt, and above the covers no less. Not to mention he had completely forgotten to redress the wound after his bath. It wasn't like him to be so forgetful, but he could forgive himself for last night.

"Last time I checked your wound was infected. Did Doctor Death give you a check-up?" Killer asked, slipping from the man's bed with a feline's grace. Kidd could now see that Killer was wielding his brand new book on mechanical engineering, a tome he had procured by less than legal means.

Kidd frowned.

"First of all," He snarled, crossing his arms, "-fucking put back that back where you found it. Stop stealing my shit when I specifically told you to lay off my books." He held out his hand and brandished the middle finger, "And secondly, stop calling him that-I hate going to doctors enough, I don't need to associate them with death anymore than I already do."

Killer dropped the book on the floor with a resounding smack, and kicked it casually beneath the bed despite the veins rising on Kidd's neck.

"I'll take that as a 'yes I went and got a check-up'." Killer sighed, and reached up and removed his mask. Blonde bangs reached just below his eyes, leaving the criss-cross of pale scars visible. Killer frowned, a thin line amongst many.

"Honestly, Kidd. I don't trust that man."
"You trust my judgement don't you?"

"Of course, but your judgement doesn't always extend to the actions of others. That man may seem trustworthy, but he's got a dangerous reputation preceding him, and a man like that carries more enemies than we do."

"You think I can't take down a few pirates?"

"I doubt it's just pirates that are chasing after him, Kidd. There's talk of Celestial Dragons and World Government Nobles after his head. Apparently he's done a lot more damage than the papers report."

That would make sense of his weird-ass request.

"So he's being targeted, so what? We may be in an alliance but it's not the kind of alliance that decrees we come to each other's rescue or some shit. It's just a simple trade of services."

"Yes, but what if he uses us as a scapegoat."

"..."

"Just think about it, Kidd." Killer advised, slipping his helmet back on and adjusting his hair. Kidd paused, when the previous night's conversation came to mind.

"Trafalgar's going to be on Little Orange around the same time we are, and said you all could stop by to get your wounds dressed. I think you guys should take advantage of it, especially Saito. He's had a broken leg for what, two weeks?"

"What did I just say, Kidd?"

"Yeah I know, but this is reason we made the damn alliance in the first place. We need a doctor and we haven't found any good ones. It's not like you couldn't take them if they turned on you, you all have easily thrown down crews three times our own."
"You make it sound like you'll be elsewhere."

"I may be, you never know. I'll probably stick around for a while but I'd like to smooth things over with Trafalgar before we part ways. We may be on good terms now, but in the New World we'll be at each others throats. It's best if I get a reading on him now."

"...You know I hate doctors just as much as you."

Kidd rolled his eyes, "Yes, yes, you're afraid of needles, blah, blah."

"I'm not afraid of needles."

"Tell me that the next time you get a shot."

"...

"Who will be treating us?" Killer said after a pause, his head turned towards the bathroom door in thought.

"Trafalgar said his crew was willing to do it."

"Okay."

"I mean if you...okay?"

"Yes."

"...Right..."
"That book of yours is a good read. You should try it before the other ones, they don't word it as well as that one. The author's famous for his jargon and it's a real page-turner." Ignoring the redhead's bewildered expression, Killer slipped his hands into his pockets and made for the door.

"Yeah, who's it by?" Kidd called after him, swallowing his confusion. He padded over to his chestnut wardrobe slotted in the corner between the bathroom door and the steel window. While most of his pants were the same golden lizard-print pants with red fringe, he had quite the collection of outfits. From designer leather boots to exotic silk blouses, his wardrobe was a myriad of lavish golds and rich reds. Of course, most days he went without a shirt, because being Southern-born he was predisposed to having a high body temperature.

"That famous shipwright who built Roger's ship, that Tom fellow."

Kidd paused in tugging on his boots, furrowing his brows, "I thought it was the newest edition. Tom's been dead for years, yeah?"

Killer lingered in the doorway, untangling a lock of his hair from the door knob with nimble fingers.

"That's right, but it's Tom's old work notes revised by that student of his, I believe his name was Iceburg?"

Kidd snorted as his first mate left, closing the door softly behind him. He stopped in the bathroom to wash off his face before beginning to apply his makeup. The top of the cedar dressers belonged to him, the steel box of makeup popping open to reveal a rather small assortment of cosmetics. Foundation was something he could apply without a mirror, but when it came to his eyeliner and lipstick he always needed the help of a mirror. The reflective surface was free from the steam collected the night before, the air crisp and fresh due to the ventilating system installed in one of the upper corners.

The eyeliner he used was a deep charcoal and he smoothed the corners with a fresh sponge fished from a plastic bag of many. The dark outline made his eyes significantly more imposing, and they helped distinguish his reflection from his father. Once his eyes were rimmed in black, he could look at himself and not want to break the mirror. It was abnormal to have such a strong reaction to one's own eyes, but he couldn't help stave the flow of his hatred towards the man who took away his most precious person. With the charcoal ringing his eyes he could breathe easier, and after his breakdown he felt refreshed.
He could stand up and walk again.

The lipstick he procured from the box was a familiar ancient golden tube with the initials CE on the top. It was his mother's lipstick, the one she loved so much. Once she had used it completely she would take the empty tube and get it replaced with the same vibrant shade of red. After her death, Kidd had taken it with him as his treasure. For many years he couldn't bear to open it, keeping it sealed against the world, and it wasn't until his mid-teens that he had uncapped it and tried it on for the first time. As odd and repulsive he seemed to others at the time, he had felt beautiful like his mother.

He took solace in the utter stranger he saw in the mirror, and for a moment his imagination could warp his features into those of his mother. It was a small comfort, but one he could not go a day without.

When he ran out of the precious shade every three months or so, he would go out and refill the dated lipstick tube. He had realized that the Grand Line didn't carry the color so he bought it in bulk and kept it in a steel trunk beneath his bed where his mother's old leather suitcase rested. He enjoyed having a high-rise bed frame, because it was a great place to keep his belongings away from prying eyes. Of course it wasn't enough to deter Killer's wandering paws, but the man knew his boundaries.

Satisfied with his appearance, he smeared on deodorant and dabbed on a dash of cologne. The rich musk of the imported fragrance reminded him of the stolen Alabastan oils Killer kept in the drawers for his hair. He returned his goggles to their rightful place after leaving them on the edge of the bath the whole night. Killer chastised him to put them on before his makeup, but Kidd secretly enjoyed how he looked with his bangs down. Combined with the bright red lipstick, he could see his mother's face more clearly.

Normally Kidd would take a quick shower upon waking, but he had slept in and couldn't waste anymore time. He was usually an early riser, awake before most of his crew, and only slept in when he was sick or recovering from a mental breakdown. He was thankful his crew was aware of his condition, meaning many turned a blind eye to his peculiar habits. Of course this came with the drawback of smothering friends, doting on him without warning and fretting for his wellbeing. He hated being seen as weak, but his crew didn't treat it that way.

He heard a faint knock on his bedroom door through the mirror and wood bathroom door, and gave himself a quick once-over before pacing out. He made quick work of shucking on his bandolier, fishing out his flintlock pistol from where he had shoved it beneath his pillow the night before. He fitted the turquoise sash around his waist with ease, buckling over a green belt with a large clover-shaped buckle.
The knocking returned with urgency.

"I'm coming, hold your fucking horses!" He hollered, snatching up his dark brown fur coat. Kidd had adopted the used coat from a treasure chest they had extracted from a buried cave in West Blue. He had become enamored with the unusually wide, flared collar and had absconded with it immediately. The golden spikes on the shoulders and the ornate square buttons he had attached himself (with some blackmailed help from a professional craftsman). The maroon fur lining had come from a Lapahn from Drum Island whose fur was dyed. Whoever the coat had originally belonged to had long been nameless and faceless, just another grain of sand in the hourglass.

Blaire was at the door, puffing her cigar in his face like all was well. Up close one could spot the light smattering of freckles across the bridge of her nose, and the thin scars lining her face, striking though her pale eyebrows.

"You've got an admirer, it seems." The platinum blonde deadpanned, handing him a white parcel. He recognized it as a tiny message scroll, delivered by passerine judging by the pair of intricate indentations. Not even an inch long, the scroll of parchment was tainted beige and crusted in salt spray. It had been sealed in a tube of plastic, and it crinkled audibly as he closed it within his palm. He could feel the scratch and burn of dried ocean salt.

"The bird?"

Blaire rolled her cigar to the corner of her mouth, gripping it between her teeth as she spoke in the same graveled tone.

"Killer said he ate it."

"I highly doubt that, he loves animals."

"That's what he said, Captain." Blaire shrugged without adjusting her expression, and left without formalities. Kidd sighed through his nose and closed his door once more, pausing under the light above his nightstand and began to slip off the plastic cover. Unrolling the parchment, he was bale to recognize the tight handwriting immediately and darted a quick look at the sleeping den den mushi on the table.

*Much to my embarrassment, your den den mushi has caught a cold and refuses to be used until it*
has recuperated. Do not worry, the creature is in good hands and is being watered as I write this. I am aware I could have waited to tell you this upon our convergence at Little Orange. I am also aware you may be suspicious considering our consultation the previous evening and the arrival of this note. The fact unwanted parties often intercept messages does not ease my own worries, but I am left with no alternative. I thought it would be best to contact you with this information in the case you have an emotional attachment to creature. In the case this message is indeed intercepted and rereleased, I have left this message succinct and anonymous, though I hope you are not trailed in turn. If this message is intercepted without the intention to be rereleased, I humbly request Matthias be released unharmed.

Kidd snorted, his thoughts sarcastic, portraying himself to be such a humane doctor. Whatever, the snail isn't important to me, but it's not like the doctor would let it die. And any idiot who dares to follow me itching for a fight will sure as hell get one.

Kidd spent the rest of trip watching for pursuers off the stern with a waning grin, as stories of a long distance love interest spawned behind his back. It wasn't until the second evening that his gasket blew and shrapnel went flying to put people's suspicions to rest. However, Killer still insisted the bird was dead despite the occasional chirping coming the man's wild mane.

The bird must have been fucking special if Killer risked it shitting in his hair.

Little Orange was not little in any way.

The Summer Island stayed true to its season and namesake, the landscape an eye-catching mix of orange and golds. From a distance it resembled a lumpy mass of spheres, and up close such a perception remained. There was sparse foliage on the island, with an amalgamation of orange and gold domes decorating its surface. They arrived at Little Orange in the wee hours of the morning, the sunrise glinting off the golden domes. The contrast of metallic and frosted domes made for a lovely sight, though Kidd was still baffled by it all. There were countless domes several hundreds of feet high, and as they closed onto the island they grew in size until Kidd was sure the sun had fallen onto an island and multiplied as it buried into the ground.

"There's no fucking land...is the whole island indoors?"
"The books say it's an ancient colony of Alabasta which declared its independence and walled itself away for a thousand years. It only recently came out of isolation, and tourists come here to shop." Killer shrugged, ignoring that his hair was singing the morning tunes of a songbird. He pointed up at one of the towering domes, by itself larger than Faust-Mouth’s mountain.

"Some domes are made up of countless floors of marketplaces, while other are domed cities. It's an interesting concept, at least, and I can't even begin to guess how it was built." The currents were exceptionally strong about the North face of the island, and the coasts were made up of jagged white rocks. It took two rounds of circling the island until they spotted the enclave hidden in the rocks. Making use of the laws of perception, the smooth tunnel hewn in the white stone was hidden behind a distant boulder white concealed the entrance from certain angles.

Their center mast was dwarfed by the towering ceiling, the width of the tunnel several of their ship in length. Kidd marveled at the smooth stone, a chalky white substance caste in a gradient of the rising sun. The tunnel was unlit, giant iron sconces bearing naked black candles. The cavernous area and unnaturally slow pull of the current had his hackles at attention. A nation kept in isolation for a thousand years to just suddenly open it's borders, the natives couldn't be unsuspecting of strangers.

It was unnaturally quiet.

The only sound was the gentle slap of water against the hull as the boat was slowly dragged towards an immense door with iron rings each as big as their ship. Kidd couldn't tell if the door was dark brown or black, but by the thrum in his muscles he could tell it was metal. His crew was silent and tense as they journeyed closer, standing about on the deck with their hands on their weapons and eyes keeping vigil.

Kidd stood on the bow, eyes narrowed at the gates they were dangerously close to slamming.

"Reason for visit?"

A woman's voice echoed through a pale den den sushi staring at them from its upside-down perch at the crux of the vaulted ceiling.

"Log pose recalibration." He responded to the snail above them, fingers twitching as they inched ever closer to what he now registered as steel gates.
Very well, access level 53, see front desk for additional information. Please enjoy your stay.

The gates creaked open with the movement of their ship, opening just enough to guide them into an alarmingly bright area.

Kidd would be lying if he said he wasn't impressed by the grandeur of the site before him. They had entered a dome composed of a hillside meeting a harbor. Limestone piers encrusted with harvested shellfish sat in teal waters, pearl adored lampposts jutting out of a fishing town that had made it's living off oil veins. Stone buildings plated in sliver and bronze tightly packed the hillside. Strings of white lights wreathed cobblestone streets, naked copper statues lining every block. The hillside city reached so high that the colorfully dressed citizens became indistinct amongst the throngs of pedestrians.

"Holy shit," Killer breathed out in disbelief as their ship was docked at a pier worth its weight in gold. Distracted by the opalescence of the dome above them, it took Kidd longer than he cared to admit to realize they were inches from Trafalgar's submarine. The sight of such a tacky object in such an upper-class area made Kidd nearly feel embarrassed for the doctor.

"Name, please."

The 'front desk' was nothing more than a slim woman sitting behind a carved wood desk in the middle of the pier. Each of the nine piers had the same set-up, with what seemed to be the same woman at every desk.

"Name, please." She repeated, a quill poised in anticipation over a neatly printed form. It took twenty minutes to fill out the required forms, much to Kidd's dismay, and after getting bored of responding to the series of closed-ended questions he quickly delegated the responsibility to a resigned Killer.

He spotted a familiar spotted hat a few blocks up the hill, the lanky doctor lounging in a wicker chair chatting with a figure obscured by a golden statue of a roaring tiger.

"Thank you for your patience, here are your bracelets." The woman unhooked a latch in the top of the desk to reveal a collection of studded leather bands.

"Level 53 access allows use of Domes 7, 1, and 12. To reach them please take the train via the access terminal marked in green on the map." She slid back another panel to reveal a set of near
infinite pamphlets.

"Your bracelets contain transmission beacons that will monitor your location. Please refrain from illicit activity and be aware of the surveillance den den mushi keeping tract of your movements." The woman looked pointedly at Kidd with a thin-lipped smile and cold silver eyes, "Do not make the mistake of assuming we are incapable of dealing with pirates regardless of powers and status. We chose to keep a neutral stance in politics, but we have no qualms with allowing three, fully equipped, Marine bases to establish themselves on our soil. Do keep this in mind as you make yourself acquainted with our facilities. Oh, and your bracelets track your remaining hours. You have nine. Do not waste them."

The Kidd pirates quickly collected their bracelets and maps and hurried away from the icy woman, only Blaire matching her stare as she received her share. Kidd could swear their eyes produced lightning.

"Spend an hour on Trafalgar's ship and get yourselves patch dup, then feel free to do whatever the fuck you want." Kidd waved at Killer as he left, knowing the man would pass the information along. He had business with Trafalgar. In his pocket was the list of things he needed to ask him, finally written down in a moment of recollection.

"Yo." He held up a hand in greeting, seeing that the cadmium yellow enthusiast was speaking with an elderly man with a beard as white as the film over his eyes. Trafalgar curled around in his chair to face him, a bored expression matching his sarcastic tone.

"Fancy that, Eustass-ya. To think I was just wondering when you were to arrive." Whatever had soured the male's mood was infectious, and any enthusiasm Kidd had mustered upon spotting him had faded completely.

"I doubt that, Trafalgar." He spit to the side, narrowly missing a pedestrian's foot. Manners be damned, he was a pirate not a politician. The bracelet on his wrist matched the doctor's, though the other had four turquoise spikes that had gone dull as the hour passed.

"Manners maketh man, Eustass-ya." Trafalgar replied with a quirk of his lips, golden eyes narrowed in hat appeared to be amusement. Kidd noticed the man's smile actually reached his eyes this time. It was the first sign of warmth in the otherwise cold man. The swarthy male turned back to his frail companion.

"I'm sorry about the interruption, Mortemer-ya. May I suggest we continue this conversation another time?" He waited for the ancient soul to nod absently, sightless eyes locked elsewhere.
Kidd's good mood was returning as he stood around waiting for Trafalgar to gather his things, once again taking in his surroundings.

The sloped city streets reminded him of any maritime town, with whitewashed cobbled streets and the oriental awnings of seafood vendors. Fresh fruit filled heavy wagons as they were pulled slowly until the incline, pulled by thoroughbred horses with red velvet blinders. The streets were twice as wide as Kidd was used to, the borders crammed with copper tables and chairs stained lavishly in emerald patina.

"I assume you have access to Dome 12 as I do, so let us take ourselves elsewhere, shall we?" Trafalgar stated without waiting for Kidd to reply, passing him and going down the slope towards their ships. He carried his nodachi in the crook of his shoulder, the red tassel swishing in front of Kidd like a mocking lure. This fucker's the one without any manners. Kidd begrudgingly followed him, leering as passerby and delighting when they veered away from him like vermin.

"My crew's being taken care of by yours, by the way." said Kidd, scratching at fine hairs at the base of his neck. He wanted to bring up the list in his pocket but felt a wave of insecurity sweep the opportunity away. It was the only reason he had to speak with Trafalgar, that and to find out what the hell happened to his den den mushi.

The doctor hummed, leading them along the boardwalk without even glancing at their ships. The lagoon sparkled in the light let in by the translucent dome, and Kidd wondered how they hadn't all been cooked alive yet. Even stranger, the atmosphere was almost chilly, despite the unrelenting heat he had felt outside. A small child wearing a lavish coat crossed their path, chasing after a poodle wearing a rhinestone collar.

"Where the hell do they get all this shit if they've just come out of isolation?" He asked, eyeing the buttons on the child's coat, sure they were made of jade. Trafalgar craned his head in a way Kidd was sure the spotted hat would slip right off. It did not, much to his disappointment.

"They may have just opened their doors to humans, but they've been trading with Fishmen for centuries. Of course, this is all under wraps." That smirk was back, and Kidd noticed that the shadows beneath the man's eyes were much darker than before. He had missed them before because his brain had associated them with makeup, the almost black smudges under his eyes couldn't be anything but. He was legitimately concerned for the other pirate's health at this point, those can't be normal. He's a doctor, what the fuck?

They exited the dome via a decorated archway, and straight into a train car. The seamless transition caught Kidd off guard, while Trafalgar calmly took his seat.
"You are too overwrought, Eustass-ya. You should learn to balance your wariness and aggression. Try being more phlegmatic and you'll find yourself less assaulted by commonplace.

As the train began to clack along the tracks, Kidd took a seat as gracefully as he could manage, the spikes of his coat scraping against the metal interior.

Kidd sneered at his choice of vocabulary, "Again with fancy vernacular. Ever get tired of sounding like a rouge Celestial Dragon?"

The car was brightly lit with candles seated in gilded sconces, an antithesis to the utter blanket of darkness that had descended upon the enervated doctor. The pleasurable atmosphere of their raillery dissipated under the male's silent fury.

Trafalgar's malice was palpable.

Kidd's skin broke out in gooseflesh despite the soporific heat of the train car, cold sweat beading beneath the tight press of his leather boots. If he was any other man he would be fishing for an apology whilst fumbling for the door handle, but he hadn't garnered a 100 million belli bounty by being cowed by a single man's hatred.

The curtain lifted as swiftly as it had fallen, the deep grooves beneath the male's eyes returning their purple hue. The red flush of his face had returned to the hearty tan without so much a twitch of muscle. The atmosphere had changed so quickly that Kidd was unsure of whether or not he had simply hallucinated.

"This is our stop, Eustass-ya. Make haste." Trafalgar exited the car and Kidd followed without remark, too busy internally debating whether his eyes had deceived him.

In Dome 12 it was night, was what Kidd first noticed.

Next, would be the noise.

Thousands of voices intermingled into the roar of an oriental marketplace. Paper lanterns floated upwards into a faux starry sky, the view obstructed by stacked high-rises linked by strings of patterned flags and red paper lanterns. The street before him seemed to go on forever, throngs of people jostling about and yelling at vendors of colorful foodstuff. Music filled the air, drums and
chimes thrumming along the dirt streets. The buildings around them were chipped and peeling their fading colors, a rat scurrying across Kidd's boot.

He had no time to wonder at the disparate conditions of the domes, as Trafalgar made his way into the crowd.

"Oi!" He shouted, pushing through the surprisingly resilient horde, lest Trafalgar meld into the fray. *If he wanted to talk, why the Hell would he come here?* Spices assaulted his senses, an overwhelming mix of scents pleasing on their own. All manner of folk squirmed around him, from beggars to the begotten children of the wealthy upper-class. Wallets were stolen from pockets with the deftness of nimble fingers, and drunken couples slipped out of sight into narrow alleys.

He kept his eyes trained on the unique spotted cap and ignored the hands groping at his bare chest. *I should have worn a shirt*, he mused, his face scrunching in disgust at feeling of dirty hands on his flesh. *I'm going to need six showers after this, ugh is that mustard?* He tried not to think of the filth smeared on his valuable coat, lest he lose his cool and land his whole crew in the slammer. It hurt his pride to admit it, but going against the three marine bases would be too much to handle when he was so far from his crew. Even if the elements were in his favor and his crew happened to be cozying up to Trafalgar's. The doctor would likely be roped into the situation, and, after taking down the Marines, would turn on him in the heat of the fray. And then-

"We can speak comfortably in here, Eustass-ya. It's away from prying eyes."

Tangled in his spiraling thoughts, Kidd had been led into a dimly lit room without his knowledge. The amount of dust in the air was ridiculous, drifting about in the yellow light of a bare bulb. Rats squeaked in alarm and scurried behind the wooden crates and pallets. Trafalgar took a seat on a sturdy looking crate, and Kidd's stomach dropped at how utterly diseased his face looked in the light, the jaundice complexion adding to his deathly appearance.

"I wish to amend our contract, Eustass-ya." Trafalgar spoke from atop his perch, crossing his slender legs. He balanced his nodachi over his lap, the impressive length of the sword dwarfing its owner. The man was four inches shorter than him, and he still towered over the common folk. He was still an imposing man, even disregarding his reputation, and his sword would help sway even the bravest opponents. However this was Trafalgar Law and he was Eustass fucking Kidd, and no matter how much he looked like Surgeon of Death on his perch, he wasn't about to take this shit lying down.

Kidd narrowed his eyes and squared his shoulders in a way that drastically increased their size difference. It was another factor that set them apart visually, with the lean-built figure of the Northern born and his own bulky build. Kidd curled back his lips in an audible snarl.
Fucking weasel, I knew it. He drew me here to fuck with me the little shit.

"Fucking hell Trafalgar I-

The light bulb flickered for a moment, and then Eustass Kidd was blinded by an impossible whiteness.

Around him was an infinite expanse of white, and he couldn't see his hands when he waved them in front of his eyes. He blinked furiously, cursing bubbling in his throat, the incessant ringing in his ears threatening to split his skull. He couldn't feel the metal around him, not the blade of Trafalgar's nodachi nor the coins in his pocket. Seized by panic and the pain in his head, he was helpless as his legs were kicked out from under him. He couldn't hear anything but the ringing, not even his own voice. The white landscape was genuinely terrifying, making him feel like a pinprick in existence. There were hands on him, viscously forcing his head back until his neck strained with the effort, his legs already bound at the joints with what could only be sestina shackles. His raging adrenaline blocked the weakening effects of the stone, but he could nothing against his attackers as they bound his wrists behind him, twisting his arms at improper angles.

Before his conciseness winked out, he could only think that Trafalgar had betrayed him.

I should have listened to Killer, God dammit.

Chapter End Notes

I know you're there! DON'T BE LAZY PEOPLE! It's not hard to give a little review! It takes like two seconds!

Also,

Major trigger warnings for the next chapter, please reconsider reading it once it's posted.
Pain followed Kidd into the waking world.

"Shit!"

He snarled, limbs aching.

It took him a few moments to gather enough air for a deep breath, his throat raw and his tongue dry. Gathering a bit of saliva, he forced a hard swallow around the grit in his mouth. His vision refused to clear, black spots flitting across a white landscape from the blood that had rushed to his head. Despite this predicament, he was sure he was lying on his back somewhere. The ground beneath his coat was firm, and, from the cheek pressed roughly into the ground, covered in a fine layer of dirt. Sharp gravel dug into his face, but his neck was too stiff and he was too sore to move. Since his vision had yet to reveal his surroundings, he slid them shut with an exasperated huff.

*My hands are tied*, he deduced, flexing out the pins and needles from swollen fingers. Whoever had tied him had done it well, and he could tell from the absence of his magnetic awareness that whatever was binding him was composed of sea stone. *They used three sets of cuffs? I'm*
impressed, fuckers probably heard about Logue Town. While sea stone itself was hard as diamond, Marines added metal impurities to lower production costs all the time. His notorious stunt of breaking out of a pair of cuffs by brute force alone back at the port town had been child's play, but there was no way he was breaking through three of them.

*It smells dank...this place is underground...* His legs were shackled as well, with chains instead of cuffs, but at least they had let him keep his clothes. *They left me my bandolier but took my weapons...my goggles are gone too...*

The top of his head was just barely touching something, *I think it's a wall...* He stretched out his legs, ignoring his protesting joints, and the treads of his boots lightly scraped a metal bar. His arms were cuffed in front of him, and when he bent his elbows he hit an object on the left side.

*Ah...I'm in a cell...*

His nose pricked as it picked up a distant scent of urine, and a cloying smell reminiscent of fear.

*This isn't a marine's cell...and I ain't in Impel Down...*

The amount of sea stone in the cuffs was enough to render his fruit ability null and sap his strength, but he was able to worm his way into the tight corner, sitting up against the wall with much effort. Putting oneself in a corner was a tactic distinctive of animals, naturally positioning themselves in a place with the least openings to danger. While he was unable to see and protect himself it was best to remain on the defensive. He was humble enough to accept this.

*Where the hell is Trafalgar, did that bastard set me up? I'll fucking kill him.*
He couldn't tell if he was wearing the studded bracelet he had been given upon entry to Little Orange, but he doubted it mattered. The Marines hadn't knocked him out, they wouldn't use such an underhanded method without flaunting themselves around beforehand.

That damn doctor, why don't I ever listen to Killer?

While he lamented over his poor life choices, someone let out a pained grunt nearby.

Kidd's thoughts fled as his muscles tensed, the sound too close for comfort. Like an animal missing an object in its periphery, the thought that someone was sharing his cell made his skin raise in gooseflesh. He opened his eyes again to test his vision, and was met with better results. He was staring at the cell bars that confined him, thick steel poles drilled into a gritty floor. Beyond his cell was a cobbled wall, and from his angle he could see nothing but wall. Turning his head to the right he winced in agony, every muscle in his body locked tight.

A body was curled on its side in the narrow rectangular cell, not two meters away. He recognized the bright shirt at once, and was baffled. Trafalgar? Shit, so it was someone else. The man was turned away from him, his arms cuffed behind him in contrast. Kidd counted two pairs of cuffs, and his ankles were bound with rope rather than chains.

No fair you fuckers.

"You awake?" Kidd growled out as best he could with his barren throat. How long had he been out to be so parched? Had his crew already been deported or was there time to converge? Had they been captured as well? If his crew was with Trafalgar's they could figure out where they had gone, surely the doctor had told his first mate where he had been going. What was his name again, Puffin, or something?
"Unfortunately." Trafalgar replied weakly, breaking off into a coughing fit that had him curling in on himself. Kidd watched him closely in the dim light, the only source of light somewhere off to the right out of sight. Judging from the wheezing shallow breaths, the man probably had a couple of broken ribs.

"Do you know who got us?" Kidd asked, bending his knees under his arms, balancing his bound wrists on his knees. Trafalgar remained silent, his breathing evening out with audible effort.

"People who couldn't care less about turning us in to the Marines."

Kidd frowned, "Revenge?"

"Business."

Kidd whipped his head up at the unfamiliar deep voice, just as its owner strolled in from the left. The man was as well built as Kidd but ugly as sin, with bright pink hair pulled back in a greasy pony tail and lightly tanned skin. He was dressed in a sleeveless white shirt smeared in dirt, his massive forearms covered in thick rosette hair. The man narrowed lime green eyes at the red head, scrutinizing him like one might a weathered antique vase.

"This place just opened itself to the world, so it's no surprise there aren't any Auction Houses here, but that doesn't mean there's an absence of merchandise." The man moved his eyes to Trafalgar as he ended the sentence, with a look that sent chills down Kidd's bare chest.

"Human traffickers, to answer your question." Trafalgar supplied calmly, as if he wasn't being eyed up like slab of meat. He rolled onto his back, revealed the bruise on his left cheek, and used his
hands to curl himself into a sitting position, scooting back until he was able to keep himself upright using the wall for support. He looked at Kidd and offered a wry smirk, but Kidd noted that once again it didn't reach his eyes. The bruise on his cheek was a nasty dark blue, but was still dwarfed by the black bags beneath his eyes. Kidd turned his attention back to his captor and sneered.

"Like hell, you fucking creep."

Despite his menacing glower, the man remained unfazed.

"Oh, where are my manners? I'm Hared, and you two are Captain Kidd and the Surgeon of Death, yeah? You boys are going to fetch quite the price in Sabaody. You like our little light trick? We didn't expect to catch such big bounties, maybe a few residents, a couple of unfortunate animals, but not you two."

Hared looked proud of himself, shoving his hands into white washed denim and leaning back on his heels.

"Of course there's no harm in trying out the goods before we set sail. The drugs will knock you out for weeks, and so any wounds will heal by the time we get there. Hey, you are both after the One Piece, right? This way you'll be guaranteed to get as far as Sabaody! Lucky you!" The man's eyes were blown wide like a kid promised candy. Kidd shivered at the implications, but kept himself composed. Such a small fry didn't intimidate him, and there was no way he was going to let word get out that he had been captured by human traffickers. He'd rather be hauled onto a marine ship then let his reputation go to shit over such an embarrassing detail. Traffickers were worse than pirates, they were the true scum of society. Nabbing those unawares, only to sell them to the highest bidder. And at Sabaody Archipelago nonetheless...

His brain reeled as he desperately thought up a means of escape. Hared joined by an equally burly man as he unlocked the door. He wasn't about to be anyone's plaything, sexually or otherwise. He was Eustass fucking Kidd, and he was ready to bite off his tongue to spare his pride. Hared saw his intentions, however, and in an instant the door swung open and a thick length of leather was shoved...
into his mouth. Kidd gagged and thrashed as Hared secured the gag, horrified when he realized it was a bit and bridle. Tongue trapped beneath the gag and his airway obstructed, Kidd breathed harshly through his nose. Hared was close enough to smell his cologne, and Kidd narrowed his eyes viscously.

If looks could kill.

Hared only smirked staring at him intently, and Kidd used the opportunity to fling his head forward into the others, relishing the cry of pain. Head throbbing and eyes once again dancing black spots on a white backdrop, his neck flared in pain as he was slammed into the corner in retaliation. The shocks to his cranium resulted in a momentary loss of consciousness, and when he came to he found himself tethered to the wall by his waist. The thick chains dug into his stomach, the steel burning a cold line in his flesh.

"Tear off that shirt, Meer. Let's get a look of those famous tattoos."

Kidd's stomach plummeted.

His head was throbbing and his wrists were aching from the sea stone, but he focused his blurred vision on the group of shapes to his right.

Trafalgar was wearing what he presumed was on his own head: a black bridle and bit one would see around the head of a horse or a BDSM connoisseur. Contrary to what he expected to be the man's reaction considering the situation, Trafalgar seemed relatively calm.

Hared grabbed Trafalgar's bound ankles and pulled him back down to the floor, the man reflexively twisting to the side. Meer tore away the man's long sleeved shirt in a single motion, revealing a tribal-style heart tattoo on his chest and simpler ones on his shoulders. He spotted
Trafalgar's jolly roger in the center of the large design and on his back was the same symbol ribbed like a helm.

Hared let out a low whistle, "Someone's got some nice tattoos, why don't we see how far they extend."

Kidd snarled angrily as he realized exactly how things were going to play, and struggled futilely against his bonds. Of all the events he was forced to witness, it had to be the one act he couldn't stand.

_Motherfucking sons of bitches I'm not gonna just sit here and watch these bastards-

Meer pulled Trafalgar by the arm until he lay on his back, his trapped hands forcing his spine to arch in accommodation. Kidd's internal rant came to an abrupt end, his struggling ceasing in surprise. Trafalgar wore a visage of serene resignation. As if the male was both at peace with what was to come as well as vaguely annoyed. It was almost as if he expected it, but could do nothing to stop it.

While Hared cut the bindings on Trafalgar's ankles, Meer held the man's legs to prevent his escape. Kidd noticed that Trafalgar didn't struggle, his body relaxed, and that was perhaps the most disturbing of all.

Hared licked Trafalgar's cheek in a languid stroke and the male simply closed his eyes, keeping himself still and his breathing even. If Kidd weren't so terrified he would be impressed by how the man could keep himself levelheaded in such a morbid situation.

_Holy fuck why aren't you doing anything don't you know what's happening what are you doing?!_
Hared unbuckled Trafalgar belt, the black leather reflecting in the low light, and the male's jeans were yanked down to his lower thighs.

"..."

The room was absent of breath, all eyes pinpointed on revealed skin, disbelief and shock heavy in the air.

Kidd's eyes were as wide as they could go, his jaw slack around his bindings.

He hadn't though the scene could get anymore twisted.

The Grand Line seemed to have a macabre sense of humor.

Air whistled through Hared's teeth as he exhaled in what could only be described as appreciation. He reached out with a large hand and ran his knuckles reverently over the heavily scarred mark on Trafalgar's pelvis. Despite the significant scarring, which looked to be caused by human nails, the red brand was unmistakable.

The hoof print of the Celestial Dragons.
Trafalgar's abdominals tense at the touch, his face relaxed in contrary to the trembling fists Kidd could see hidden behind the male's back. Hared's knuckles descended further along the smooth skin beneath it, the area devoid of hair seemingly because of the offending mark. The man's knuckles met a cleft of skin where Trafalgar penis should start, and Hared's grin was full of teeth.

"Well, well, well...it seems that today the gods have smiled upon me."

He drew his hand away to again reveal what Kidd could not comprehend: the smooth pelvis of a woman.

In his shock, Kidd had forgotten how to breathe.

The bare torso conflicted with what he saw below, the defined pectoral lacking the tissue one would expect to find on a woman. Disregarding the tattoos, Trafalgar was undeniably male from the waist up, even if his overall physique was rather slender and there was a slight curve to his waist that most men did not possess. One could argue he had a feminine quality about him, in the flare of his hips or the sheer beauty of his features, but he was undoubtedly male. He's muscular yet lithe, and from what Kidd can see, though he keeps his eyes well below the obvious, the man's leg's possess the taught muscles that he would have expected. It's just the genitalia then, that must be the only the deviation. A simple curse or complicated surgery, not long drawn-out procedure of hormones to fully meld it into the man's being. It was so out of place on his body that Kidd wondered if he was hallucinating.

Surely, this was not an organic occurrence.

Trafalgar didn't bear the scars of a surgery of transition, but his powers could have easily skipped such a step. Not to mention his tattoos bore such thick lines it was impossible to tell if they concealed the silver scars of a trampled past.
"To think we would stumble upon a Lorelei...such a pretty thing, did you run away from home?"
Hared breathed into Law's ear, straddled the man with one hand on his right pectoral and the other
slipping slowly down Trafalgar's taut abdomen. Law's facade drops momentarily, and Kidd
watches the stoic face melt into a flash of anguish, eyes screwing shut and nose wrinkling briefly as
Hared's fingers dip between his legs.

"Who's your master, hm?" Hared does something that makes the mask fall once more, this time in a
small sound that could have been a squeal or a shout, but was muffled into a warped call through
the bit in his mouth. Kidd thanks whoever is listening that Trafalgar's eyes don't reopen, only
because he himself cannot close his own. The fear in his eyes would never leave Kidd's mind,
branded there as surely as the disfigured mark on the man's pelvis. The movement of his fingers is
coupled by grotesquely wet sounds that echo absurdly loud in the narrow cell. Trafalgar makes no
more sudden outburst, resorting to gripping his fists so tightly that Kidd witness the flesh of his
knuckles part at the seams.

"Such a sensitive breed, Lorelei. Your master will reward me so well I might just buy myself a
place in Sabaody."

The word didn't mean anything to Kidd, but he hardly had the peace of mind to wonder what the
hell a Lorelei was, because Hared gripped Law's hair and fiercely dragged him into a sitting
position as he stands. Kidd wanted to close his eyes and ears to the spectacle, but it was going too
quickly and he was still in shock.

my god just stop this is disgusting! Let go of him!

Most of his disgust he was glad to voice in low grunts and whines, his nostrils flaring with the
effort to breathe properly. His eyes refused to obey his emotions, and he was forced to watch as
Hared swiftly unbuckled his tented pants to free his erection. His penis sprung forth against
Trafalgar's face with a wet slap, coming to rest over the man's right eye. Hared gave a gummy grin
and for a fleeting second Kidd thought he was about to witness what was crassly named "skull
fucking," but was spared as Hared just pulled Trafalgar's hair until he was standing. At this point,
Meer was behind Trafalgar, fiddling with something obscured in the darkness near the ceiling.
From the sound of it, he was moving chains, and sure enough a double length of chain fell down
from a peg. In an instant, Trafalgar was slammed back against the wall, winding him and cracking
his head against the wall.

Taking advantage of his dazed state, Meer spun Law around and ground his face into the wall as Hared unlocked his cuffs. Before Trafalgar could regain his wits, his arms were cuffed above his head, his cuffs attached to the chain.

"Let's get rid of these jeans of yours, shall we?"

Hared lifted his foot and stepped on the crotch of Trafalgar's lowered pants, forcing them, as well as the heeled boots and socks, right off the man's lightly trembling frame. The sight of the man shackled to the ceiling, devoid of clothing, with Hared's hands gripping his hips hard enough to bruise had Kidd's stomach churning with disgust. The rosette-haired man's penis twitched inches from Trafalgar's sex, and Kidd managed to force his eyes shut.

Having forgotten to blink, his eyes burned furiously beneath his closed lids.

He could do nothing for the sounds.

Law's body was cold with pain and adrenaline, but he knew it would not be long before that changed. His heart pumped wildly in his chest, even if he had schooled his breathing into a steady pace. The captain he knew to be staring at him no longer existed in his world, there was only the man looming at his back. The man's fingers were dug so hard into his hips he could already feel
the bruises forming.

His back was arched in a sexual pose, though there was no pleasure to be had. The muscles in his low back had cramped to the point of spasming, and the cold air tortured the folds between his legs. Such a display of dominance and enforced humiliation was not foreign to him, nor was the prospect of a voyeur.

"The eternal virgin, the ultimate pleasure slave." Hared leaned in close to whisper hot breath into Law's ear. His penis was pressing against his lower back like a wet brand, and he shut his eyes against the blurry world. His head was still pounding from being bashed against the wall, and white spots still danced at the corner of his vision.

"I'm gonna fuck your virgin cunt you little whore...I bet if the Marines discovered your little secret they'd take you in for a little pass-around."

Law could feel his grin against his neck, licking a stripe along his shoulder. Revulsion curdled his stomach. He braced himself for what was to come as Hared's member pressed against his entrance.

Hared entered him long and slow, Law silently choking past the pain with the refusal to cry. His loins were set aflame, rekindling memories his forced down along with his bile. The man behind him let out a moan of appreciation, muttering something Law couldn't catch past the roar of blood in his ears.

He wasted no time in picking up the pace, and Law was thankful he couldn't hear the sounds of their connection.

"So good, yeah just like that lean back-oh yeah baby-" Hared grunted against his neck, reaching up and unhooking Law's bridle. Now in the act, Law knew he could wait out the session instead of
biting off his tongue, but Hared still shoved his large finger into Law's mouth to force his jaws open. His ears were slowly clearing, and he could hear the vulgar sound of flesh meeting flesh.

"Wanna hear those pretty sounds of yours darling."

The feelings in his groin were a mix of agony and reluctant pleasure. He wanted to scream but was too busy siphoning what would be wanton moans into a singular prolonged gargling noise. The garbled keening from his parted jaws angered his attacker, driving himself into him that much harder, but Law refused to give him the satisfaction.

Law tried to bite down on the fingers that restrained him, but all he got for his efforts was another painful thrust at his back. With all the pain in his lower back, the hypersensitive feelings of his insides as the stranger violated him, he was caught between physical pain and pleasure. His insides were aching, everything hurt, but his thoughts were the worst of it.

*Inside.*

*It's inside.*

*Too close.*

*Too close.*

*Don't touch me.*
Don't breathe on me.

Don't do this.

Just leave me alone.

Please don't violate me like this.

Please don't look at me.

He refused to look at the captain wedged in the corner, didn't want to see his expression. He didn't know if the man was disgusted or aroused, surely he was the latter, able to see him as a woman given his newly revealed parts. He didn't want to see the erection he undoubtedly sported, his features twisted in lecherous perversion.

Even if he had deemed the man honorable, it was only natural that he was the same.

He had no reason to believe otherwise.

"That's right slut, just like that- ngh-"
Hared's hips stuttered momentarily as he gained pace, and Law squeezed his eyes shut in wake of the inevitable. Sure enough, Hared let out a guttural sound and Law's stomach reeled in horror as heat flooded his insides. His eyes watered without his consent and he sloppily swallowed around the fingers in his mouth. He wasn't going to cry, it was beneath him to do so in front of such a vile beast, but by God did he want to. He wanted to curl into a ball on the bottom of the ocean, these horrible feelings couldn't follow him there. If he couldn't follow Cora to the afterlife then neither could the unwanted convulsive bliss of his own orgasm. He couldn't help it, not with that damnable heat flooding him. He had always been this way, an undeniable slut for warmth. Stemming from being raised in the snow, his body craved heat in all its forms.

In all its forms.

Law choked out a weak sound and clamped his jaw shut with all his might. Hared's grip was pliant in post-coital bliss, and Law took full advantage. It was like biting a carrot in half, the crunch and resounding scream sounds of triumph to Law's ringing ears. Blood filled his mouth and he choked at the severed fingers as they fell unbidden into the back of his throat. As he coughed and maneuvered his head to the side to remove them, grazing his cheek raw against the wall in the process, Hared pulled out of him in reflex. There was a momentary feeling of emptiness followed by relief, and Law ignored the squelching sound in favor of taking a golden opportunity. He twisted without care for his straining vertebrae, and sunk his teeth into Hared's jugular. Copper filled his nostrils and his jaw ached with the effort of biting more than he could chew, but he was resilient.

The reverberations of the man's screams were as pleasuring as his orgasm as the muscles in his neck bulged as he forced his jaws closed around a mouthful of flesh. His face was sprayed in blood as arterial spray showered the cell, the gurgling screams of a dying man filling the air. The urge to rid his mouth of viscera was as overpowering as the stench of blood, but there was no time to waste. Law lifted his leg and spun towards the unsuspecting Meer, using the momentum to catch the man in the head, ignoring how the chain linking his wrists to the wall twisted and shortened its length. Meer's head connected to the wall with a satisfying wet crescendo of cracks as his skull shattered on impact. Blood squirted from his ears as his eyes popped out of their sockets like macabre popguns.

With his assailants down, Law turned his eyes from the scene to spit out the wad of flesh to the ground. It slid from his mouth and onto the ground with a slap of meat, and Law gasped for
precious air. He could no longer smell anything, all his receptors swamped with the overpowering taste of blood. It was everywhere, slicking his face and clothes, clumping at his eyelashes and staining his vision a burning dark red. The stinging in his eyes spurred tears to cleanse his sight, and he allowed himself a moment of weakness amidst the pounding adrenaline.

*You can get through this Law, you can have a breakdown later just get the fuck out of here.*

Focusing on the task at hand, he ignored how embarrassing what he was about to do would look. Taking a deep breath and ignored the eyes burning holes in his back as he toed Hared's corpse for the key ring. Once he had found them he squeezed his eyes shut and braced himself.

Warm, viscous fluid dribbled down his thigh as he lifted his foot to his mouth, curling over to quicken the stunt. Gripping the cold ring between his teeth, he used his tongue to maneuver the keys until he found one that looked like it would fit. The tension in the air was palpable, but he couldn't waste time wondering what the other captain was doing that was so quiet. He could feel eyes on him, but that was natural considering what had just transpired. He had just performed an acrobatic feat in the nude, not to mention ripped out a man's throat and shattered another's skull like ceramic.

*I can't leave him here, and I'd rather not kill him. If he manages to get out on his own he'll spill it all for cash. I'll attempt to force him to keep quiet, but if he shows any signs of selling me out I'll have no choice but to take him out.*

The clicking of the cuffs was deafening in the silence, and Law was hyper aware of his state of dress. He made quick work of the second pair and let out an unbidden sigh of relief as his powers quickly returned to him. He formed a room around himself immediately, and with a quick mutter his underwear, pants, and heels had returned to their proper place. His shirt was beyond saving, but he enjoyed being shirtless so it mattered not.

*Now all that remains is this man...*
Law increased the radius of his room as he searched for his sword, finally turning to face his 'ally'. He locked eyes with the redhead instantly, and he was surprised to see how utterly awestruck the man seemed. It was almost comedic, bound and gagged with the same headgear that had been forced upon him, knees tucked to his chest like a quivering child. His hair was flopped down into his face, giving him the appearance of a wet cat.

Law decided to ignore the tear tracks on the man's face, and chalked it up to his imagination.

With a flick of his wrist his bindings disappeared and he left the man to his own devices as he used scan to locate his sword, satisfied to see it was resting by his hat. He used shambles to retrieve his belongings, and he felt better with hat on his head. He was still drenched in blood, the liquid already drying and cracking on his skin, but he would leave it alone as long as it covered up the more undesirable substances.

"...Are..."

Law turned his head towards the other, keeping up his room to let him know who had the upper hand. He paused unlocking the door at how utterly insecure the other looked, his expression torn between worry and fear.

What an odd man.

Such expressions were unbecoming of such a ruthless pirate, someone who was notorious for tearing up cities like patches of grass, slaughtering marines and pirates like one would crush an ant underfoot.
If he's concerned for my wellbeing...

He couldn't finish the thought.

"If you're done being a voyeur you can start doing something useful. It's likely we've overstayed our welcome," He gestured to the broken bodies on the floor, "in more ways than one."

Yes, nothing is wrong.

Nothing happened.

Pretending is something I do best, after all.

He left the cell without waiting to see if the redhead followed him, only transporting the others belongings at his feet and taking his leave.

They were just one cell amongst many, in a long hallway lined in a solid brick wall and empty prison cells. He hefted Kikoku on one shoulder as he walked briskly along a cobbled floor, his heels clacking ominously as he went. Eustass Kidd's heavy boots began resounding behind him, but Law was busy using scan to scope out his surroundings.

There a door to the left at the end of this all...make an immediate right turn and we'll end up along a dock...bastards, they had us locked up at a fucking port...but those symbols look familiar so we must still be in Dome 12...
"T-Trafalgar!"

Eustass' voice echoed in the hall, and Law winced at the volume.

"Not now, Eustass-ya. If you haven't noticed, the tide is no longer in our favor."

On cue the figures he had been monitoring rushed down the hall towards them, screaming and holding up their swords. He separated the men with ease, tossing them into the empty cells through the bars.

"W-What do you think we should do?"

He smirked at the stammer in the man's voice, still worried and unsure. He didn't know what to make of the man's reaction yet, but he shoved the impulse aside to examine their location. They were on the dock now, and it was no longer night. If they were indeed in Dome 12, they had run out of time to remain on shore 'legally'. Now he knew the marines would be alerted of their presence, as per the conditions of their entry. Penguin would have left the island without him as instructed, and if Eustass Kidd was lucky his crew had done the same. While leaving him behind was part of the instructions he had given his crew at the start of their journey, here on Little Orange they could make use of its loopholes.

"I will extend my room to allow us to move to another dome, if you intend to follow me."

He watched Kidd's expression carefully in the shadow of the dumpster they stood behind. In reality
he had no intention of letting the man go without making things 'clear'.

Kidd searched him face for moment before thinning his lips and nodded silently.

*He's a strange man all right...*

Trafalgar closed his eyes and, locating an appropriate destination, teleported them with ease.

"Shambles."

*But I'm the strangest one of all.*

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a review! It's what we writers live for!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

I deleted the notice and changed the prologue to chapter 1 so that now the chapter number problem is fixed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Law let Eustass Kidd acclimate himself with their temporary abode: a rather shady hotel room that lacked windows and a bed frame. At the very least there was an adjoining bathroom, though it was without a door.

"...S-Should we-" Eustass began nervously, only to be immediately cut off.

"There is no 'we', Eustass-ya. I'll be taking a shower, and you should remain on the lookout. I'll use my phone to contact my crew once I'm out."

Law disregarded the man's uncertain flailing and worrying looks directed his way, in favor of the prospect of getting clean.

The hotel room wasn't the worst he had seen. There was only one bed, though it could hardly be called as such. There was a twin sized bed jammed into one corner, and a fractured lampshade hanging from the ceiling. Other than that, the room was bare. The walls were comprised of cream-colored plaster, the floor covered in the peeling paints chips. The uneven floorboards reminded him of the pub in which he had formed his alliance with the other captain. Said man was staring at him with a rather dopey expression on his face, his arms dangling uselessly at his sides and not at all looking for his own transponder snail.

Law sighed and leaned in the bathroom's empty doorframe with a quirked brow, Kikoku cradled in crossed arms.
"Do you not have things to do elsewhere?" He asked, motioning at the door, his blood-encrusted hand catching him off guard for a moment. The hotel was likely filled with the very traffickers they had run from, which in Law's opinion was the perfect place to hide. *When running from a fox, hide in its den.* The concierge hadn't even batted an eye at his bloody appearance, even if he was sure he looked like a nightmarish specter.

Eustass mutely nodded and noncommittally shuffled out the door. It's fine, he thought to himself as he slipped into the bathroom, *I'll keep Scan on to monitor everyone. No one will come in here without my knowledge, and Eustass won't talk to anyone without my reprimand.* There was only a tub to his disposal and he used his powers to remove the shower head. *It's much easier to clean like this,* he mused, looking at the handheld shower head in his grasp. The metal was rusted around the nozzle's ducts, but it shouldn't affect the quality of the water. *This isn't going to be a sanitary wash by any means, but it'll have to do.* He shucked off his clothes and placed his hat atop Kikoku for safe keeping, letting the immense sword rest in against the sink. There weren't any supplies he could see, but it wasn't like he was going to wash his pants. *I'm down a shirt, however.*

Stepping into the tub, he winced as seminal fluid dripped slowly down his thigh. He grit his teeth and turned on the water, first getting rid of the blood caked onto his body. Law used his nails to scrub the more stubborn flakes from his skin, the flesh stained red in irritation. His feet were less of a hassle, though his boots would have to be thrown away from all the blood inside. *That was good leather too.* The mess between his legs he saved for last, and gave himself a quick douche with the shower head while he kept his mind on other things. It was only when he actually had to insert his fingers to remove the excess fluid did he let his mask drop. He took no pleasure in his ministrations, and let the shower head clang to the floor of the tub so he could grab the edge to steady his emotions. If he was crying, he made no sound, and bit his lip hard enough to draw blood.

Once he was throughly clean, he put back the shower head and dried off with one of that two hanging towels. Keeping scan activated after his little ordeal was draining his energy double fold, and he wanted nothing more than to sink into the likely stained and mite infested bed and sleep away his troubles.

*That's a sign of depression.*
But that's nothing new.

Eustass Kidd had been in the same spot since he had entered the hall: standing still by the door. The man's reaction to his 'peculiarities' were odd, if not amusing. He had expected an eager lecher or perhaps he would feign normalcy and plot the dismantlement of his reputation, in which he would have dispatched the man easily. In the case he had been disgusted, he would have also killed him. To see such obvious uncertainty on how to act and possible concern for his wellbeing, had not even been considered. It was not to say, however, that he wouldn't cut the man down where he stood if he showed the slightest disagreement to his orders of silence. Even if he saw the man as beneficial ally, he was confident that he wasn't much of a threat to him. He certainly wouldn't interfere with his plans, and he'd take precautions and tag him with a surveillance snail before they parted ways.

Law set his hat on its rightful perch before relieving Eustass of his not-unwelcome-but-unasked-for guard duties. He found the man standing stiffly to the right of the doorframe, jumping in surprise as Law opened the door to speak with him. He reminded Law of a frightened cat, momentarily becoming an extraordinary acrobat to escape benign threats.

"Y-You're alright with l-letting me in?" The man's newfound speech impediment coupled with his rather bulky size, made for a comical sight.

He nodded silently and the man's tension visibly lessened.

"My powers more than make up for a lookup, but for obvious reasons I'd rather not be in the same room when showering. The bathroom doesn't seem to have a door, after all."

Eustass trailed in after him, only to jump once more as Law deftly secured the door's lock.
"I said it before, didn't I? You are too overwrought."

The man continued to look despondent and was clearly keeping as much distance from him as possible. Law smiled bitterly, letting his defenses fall in a moment of weakness, taking Eustass Kidd's distant behavior a sign of rejection.

It hadn't come as a surprise, just a fact of life. He was unusual, at best, and an abomination at worst. Few knew of his occluded secret, and yet he had been conditioned to loathe his body. His own father had found him repulsive, and his parents' relationship had bent under the strain of conflicting opinions of him. His mother had pushed hard for his acceptance to medical school, verbally destroying his father's preconceptions that his 'mutation' would impact his intellectual performance. The only thing his parents could agree on in regards to his body was that it should remain hidden to the world. Unlike his parents, he could put a name to his deformity, to his race. The thought of his lineage must have crossed his parents' minds, but the reality would have been too much for them to ponder for long. Maybe it was why his mother let him spend so much time with his baby sister, and let him function as a second caregiver. His father wasn't fond of affection, and instead was prone to mood swings of jovial to furious temperament.

Whether or not he could actually bear children had likely been a point of interest to his parents. As experts in the medical field, his birth was as much a blessing as it was a curse. His mother's kindness had always been halved between her motherly instinct to love him and her scientific urge to study him. If he hadn't been their biological son, he was sure they would have dolled him up to the medical community as a rare congenital discovery.

Eustass Kidd's uncertainly and concern could be a mask for underlying disgust, it had to be, otherwise Law didn't know what to make of the man's pity. He didn't need pity from anyone, certainly not a stranger. Corazon hadn't even pitied him, only loved him, and he was the only sunflower in a field of poppies. He wasn't likely going to find another bright flower among the drab, and he didn't want to. He didn't expect to live long enough to find them, his plans had his death date set in stone, and he was content with his decision. Whatever freedom he held at the moment, it wasn't enough to drag him from his demons. There wasn't anything under the sun that could get him to want to live. His death had been a long time coming.
"Do I disgust you?"

The red haired man's eyes blew wide, as if incredulous to the idea Law implied.

If Law was in a better mood, he might have even laughed.

"Do I disgust you?"

Kidd couldn't believe what he was hearing. He had tried his hardest not to seem like he was put off by the man's predicament in the cell or his revealed 'bits'. It wasn't any of his business, the scene not something he should have seen, and now he was at a loss for what to do. Here was the famous Trafalgar Law asking him if he was disgusted by something that had been out of his control. Either that, or whether having a vagina but being otherwise masculine was a crime against humanity. He didn't fully understand what Hared had been saying about him, but at the same time he didn't want to. It was none of his business, but he couldn't just ignore the question posed at him.

Did Trafalgar disgust him? Not the slightest. Was he surprised at the sight of genitals that normally belonged elsewhere? Yes. Was he disgusted by it? Not really. It wasn't really important in the long run, what someone had in their pants, so why should he care what Trafalgar was packing. What disgusted him was the sight of the Celestial Dragons' mark, and everything it represented. *Slavery, humiliation, the mark of a possession*. It wasn't a brand that belonged on an animal, let alone on human skin.

He had seen the 'slaves' of Celestial Dragons in one of the cities he had docked at in West Blue. Hollow-eyed men and women wearing the outfits of locally famous pirates and townsfolk, each a
haunted shadow of their former selves. They wore metal collars and shuffled after their flamboyant masters like beaten dogs too afraid to disobey. It was a disgrace to humanity, even the Marines understood its vulgarity, but no one dared interfere. A Celestial Dragon was still a lethal figure even if they were worlds away from their precious capital. It had taken all of his rationality not to break the fishbowl on the woman's head and snap her neck in one hand, if only to remove her hideous hairstyle from sight.

Trafalgar was smiling at him bitterly, and it was gut wrenching in the worst of ways. The man had been raped for Roger's sake, and here Kidd was not even being able to get a sentence out without the man shutting him down. How bad must he feel at the moment? How humiliating to be sexually assaulted, and in front of someone who was in reality his enemy. To have his barriers torn away and his pride defaced beyond recognition, and still be able to take charge of the situation. To be capable of being forcibly stripped down to his most vulnerable in front of an opponent, and still pick himself up and dust it off like nothing. This man was tortured, by someone in his past, by complete strangers, by himself, Kidd didn't think his pride would stand the humiliation without killing everyone who saw him fall.

But here Trafalgar had let him live and escape with him to a safe house. This man didn't act on his emotions like Kidd did, didn't let his feelings drive his actions. Killer helped him when he couldn't control himself with willpower alone, but this man here was capable of doing it all by himself. But even marble statues were not without fissures, and in Trafalgar's broken smile and dead eyes he could see a man who had grown up rejected from the world for his very existence.

If Killer was in his place, he would probably respond with some reassuring spiel straight from a novel that could make grown men weep, while simultaneously leafing through a pamphlet on how to properly deal with a rape victim. But Kidd was not Killer. He wasn't capable of acting on rationality alone. He had always been a burning flame without a snuff to curb his passions, and now was no exception.

In two strides he had closed the gap between them and wrapped his arms around the slender male without even registering what he was doing. Trafalgar stiffened upon contact, but didn't struggle against the embrace. In retrospect, this is a horrible idea. Aren't you not supposed to touch rape victims? Kidd waited to be split into parts or stabbed in the face, but pain never came.

"What do you think you are doing?"
Trafalgar asked in a monotone voice, body as tense as stone. Kidd noticed how cold his body was, even through his clothes and after a presumably hot shower. *Is this something that Northerner's have?* He loosened his hold a bit but refused to move, keeping his chin above the man's shoulder.

"I'm showing you I don't think you're disgusting."

...

The captain remained still, muscles taught and silence unforgiving, waiting patiently for the man to react. *Is he going to hug me? He better not laugh. I'd rather not have to clock him.*

"Are you retarded?"

Kidd was unable to prevent Trafalgar's hands from slipping between them and pushing him away with a single rough shove. The male looked unimpressed, his arms crossing in front of him as he settled his weight to one foot and quirked a brow. All traces of the bitter soul had been replaced by an irritated sheen in golden eyes.

"You are very peculiar, Eustass Kidd. Tell me, was that your attempt to have me lower my guard? Or are you just a sappy fool?"

"What the fuck?! Neither!" He scoffed, affronted.
"Then pray tell why you deemed it reasonable to *hug* me?"

"I was *trying to console* you, you ungrateful prick!"

"Do I look like I need consoling?"

"W-What?! You asked me if you disgust me while looking like you just won the lottery but your dog died as a trade-off!"

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

Kidd could feel his face begin to light up like his hair.

"You're impossible! Just forget it! What the hell do you want from me?!!"

"I didn't ask you for any-!"

Trafalgar doubled over in a coughing fit. His body shook violently as he seized up with gasping breathes, his hands wrapping around his chest protectively. Kidd had completely forgotten about the man's broken ribs, and apparently so had Trafalgar. Kidd watched as Trafalgar's legs tremble as he braced himself from falling, the sounds coming from his throat increasingly desperate. On reflex he went to the man to steady him before he hurt himself further, but the moment he put a hand on his shoulder he found his vision blurring as he was rushed into a wall. The air left his lungs and he
felt no pain from shock, his hands reaching up to grip the wrist of the single had that held him up by his neck. If he was in a sound state of mind he would be impressed Trafalgar could lift his bulk a whole foot off the ground.

The clamp around his neck loosened up enough so he could catch his breath. Kidd's back burned in agony, and the back of his head throbbed as he saw stars. *He's fast!* He instinctively thought about kicking Trafalgar in the groin to get away, only to be caught pondering whether than would work on female genitals.

"Don't touch me."

Law's nostrils flared in utter fury, the muscles in his neck visibly bulging. His eyes were bright yellow in the light, but they weren't looking at Kidd. Well, they were, just not at him.

"Okay." Eustass removed his hands from the other's wrists, whatever leverage he had managed gone.

"Look, see? I'm not touching you." He waved his hands about in a show, his neck growing increasingly painful. He didn't want a bruise that showed he had been manhandled, but he had concealer for that.

Trafalgar let Kidd drop to his feet, replacing his hand with Kikoku's sharp blade. Kidd's hackles raised in alarm at the feeling of cold steel against his jugular. He could feel hot lines of blood streaking down his chest. The man must sharpen his blade every day, as Trafalgar wasn't applying any pressure. Trafalgar closed the distance between them, golden eyes finally looking at him now, only to burn him with their piercing gaze.

"Listen here, and listen good." He began, his breath hitting Kidd full in the face.
"I'm not a fool, and I'm going to assume that neither are you. We both know what transpired in that cell can be used to work in your favor, regardless of whether or not you find me repulsive. If you managed to corner me again you could sell me for more than any number of devil fruits combined."

Yeah, Hared did say something like that. But I'm not scum.

"If by chance you are content with your monetary status, which I sincerely doubt, you could always blackmail me to eliminate the competition in the New World. Not only did you witness my debachery, and discover that I do not possess proper male genitalia*, you learned that I was once a World Noble's slave. Any of these you believe you now have free to your disposal, but I am here to highlight your misconceptions."

Kikoku pressed into his throat ever so slightly, and Kidd bit his anxiety as the blood began to audibly hit the floor in a steady flow.

"I made this alliance with you to keep away from those who seek to reclaim me, and do not make the mistake of attempting to get involved. This is not your fight, and certainly not a form of gain. I know how to torture a man until he snaps, Eustass-ya, and I am capable of slaughter. I will not hesitate to tear you apart if you so much as look into my origins, out of curiosity or perversion. If you intend to use what you have witness for defamation and slander, be assured that I do not have to be in contact with you to destroy you. There are plenty of ways to take someone apart without killing them, after all."

His grin was all sharp teeth. The creases around his eyes excentuating the black bruises beneath them. Even the red bruises on his face and torso did nothing to diminish his predatory look. Kidd had no doubt that this man could kill him with little effort. Disregarding his sinister tattoos and shadowy appearance, the man didn't even walk normally. No, this man didn't walk, he stalked. He didn't travel the seas by ship like the average pirate, but underwater where he could silently stalk his prey unseen. The Surgeon of Death was a harbinger of death who came and went like a hallucination, casually slipping past the hands of exasperated Marines and the curious laymen.
Those eyes were worse than the infamous Dracule Mihawk's: a vibrant yellow iris tinged with utter madness. These were not eyes of someone to be messed with.

This man was certainly not in his right mind.

But who could blame him? Trapped in a body he detested, Trafalgar Law must have grown up in a world separated from others. The mark on his pelvis showed signs of possible self-harm, and told of a story that was sadly more common than not. *How young was he whisked away by World Nobles to be their sex slave? How long did he have to endure that? How hard could he have had to fought to have escaped the unescapable?*

"I'm not going to turn you in, or anything like that." Kidd began, wiping across his chest to attempt to save his pants from further ruin.

Trafalgar narrowed his eyes, and wasn't that the most terrifying thing.

"I do not take kindly to the people who betray me. I can see everything you do."

"I don't use underhanded methods like that. I'd rather face you head on in the New World, that is..." He flashed a canine in a haughty smirk, running bloody fingers along the back of Kikoku's blade.

"If you're strong enough."

He shivered as Trafalgar's head cocked to side like a curious vulture, a kind of primal fear bubbling in his gut that he refused to acknowledge. It didn't help that the man refused to blink.
A feral smile spread across Trafalgar's face.

"Is that a challenge?"

Kikoku left his throat and his hand quickly replaced it to stem the blood flow. From what he could tell it wasn't as deep as he had thought, the man had stopped just before sawing through the muscle. Kidd watched silently as the man began to laugh to himself, the spark of madness replaced with the lure of competition. *At least his eyes aren't dead anymore.*

"Go take a shower, Eustass-ya. You've still got mustard on you."

He *did* feel disgusting, as if he was covered in a second skin of grime of blood. Sweat and filth coated his skin, and his coat was matted in tufts of crimson. His pants were beyond salvage, looking as if he had urinated blood. If anything, his goggles were still intact.

"Yeah, yeah." He groused, unconsciously shifting towards the bathroom. "You better not start telling what to do, Trafalgar."

Law excused himself to the hall while Eustass made use of the shower. He had forgotten to call his crew, and they were long overdue for some knowledge as to his whereabouts. *They're probably throwing fits, and Bepo's surely crying. They should be used to my absence by now but they're just far too attached to me. I doubt their affection will have waned when the time comes...oh, it's Shachi.*
"Captain~! Where are you Captain?! We were so-gaH!"

"Captain!"

Law slid to floor with a small smile, resting Kikoku on his lap as he got comfortable.

"Hello, Bepo. How are things going on your end?"

"Terrible! We miss you!"

The first real smile in several days blossomed on his face.

"As do I."

He held the receiver away from him as it exploded with squeals and static.

"On the topic of missing people, where are you currently?"
"We're submerged at the west side of the island, if only to get the Kidd Pirates to leave us alone for a while."

"Hello, Penguin."

"Hello Captain, can I assume you are with the aforementioned captain? They are quite a bunch of worriers, we had to remove the receiver from their captain's den den mushi. The poor thing is still so sick it sounded like it was crying whenever it rang, which was quite often."

"Yes, we are currently residing in a hotel in Dome 73, it seems the Marines have been looking for us."

"What happened, Captain? It's been 18 hours since the Marines sounded the alarm. And don't tell me lies."

"It seems we ran into a spot of trouble in Dome 12, and after it was resolved we lost our way."

"I said no lies, but very well. We will speak when we collect you by the Southern Gate. You can access it through Dome 41. I'm sure you can figure out the rest yourself. And do try not to cause too much of a raucous, we are behind schedule as it already is."

He smirked in response, Penguin's deadpan stare being reflected by the small snail. I really can't put anything past you guys.

"We'll will meet there in exactly a half hour, tell the Kidd Pirates their captain is fine."
"Will do. Hurry up so you can explain what happened, you don't deal well with the things you lie to me about."

Law ended the call without responding, his chest seizing as he began to hyperventilate. He squeezed his eyes shut and drew his knees up tighter to his chest.

Not now! I don't need this right now!

His shoulder burned with the ghost of Eustass Kidd's hand.

Was he concerned for me? I don't need his pity!

Eustass Kidd is just a man.

He's just a pirate.

There's no telling if his motives are pure.

There's no reason he's different from Him.
There were very few people he could open up to. Each member of his crew had been painstakingly garnered throughout the years, and though each of them adored him and were indebted to him, there were few among his crew who knew his complete story. His cremates all came from similar situations of captivity and neglect. They were a crew of kindred spirits, and Eustass Kidd was just a pirates. His reputation spoke volumes, and he wasn't above killing those he stood in his path. He was a barbarian like all the rest, and though Law himself wasn't a pacifist by any means, he was not nearly as bloodthirsty. Their goals were different, and it was likely Eustass Kidd would never make it to New World. He had seen many noteworthy pirates, with honor in spades, all fall down at the hands of the stronger warrior.

_I have to stay calm, I can't have my breakdown here._

_I have to wait until I get to my room, safe with my crew._

_Don't be weak!_

The hall he sat in was thankfully empty, with the occasional rat popping up from the woodwork. Law curled in tighter on himself, as if to protect himself from the world. His groin was no longer burning, the bruises having long receded from his flesh, but he still had not been able to fully remove the detestable man's seed from his vagina, and his folds were still slick with the liquid. It wouldn't leak through his jeans, not if he was lucky, but the easy slide of skin was revolting. He gripped Kikoku until the scabs on his knuckles split once more. Better his knuckles than his wrists, he mused, head buried between his knees, the cold hilt of his sword pressed against his clavicle. The sword brought him as much comfort nowadays as did the color of his submarine. Since he'd entered the Grand Line, all they did was remind him that he was rushing headlong into the man who held his leash.

_Don't think about Him, this isn't about Him._

"Oi, Trafalgar!"
Eustass Kidd's voice came from behind the closed door, and Law quickly uncurled himself and stood up.

*Speak of the Devil and he shall appear.*

"If you are ready we should depart promptly. Our ships will pick retrieve us at the Southern Gate which is not far from here."

Eustass Kidd opened the door and followed him without response. In reality, he could increase the size of his room to encompass the Island and teleport them directly onto their ships, but doing so would undoubtedly attract unwanted attention. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that the male's hair was still wet from the shower. His own hair had already dried, the perk of having short hair. His eyes lingered longer than they should have on the vibrant red locks. *What a strangely beautiful shade, I wonder if it runs in the family?*

"Any word about my crew?"

"They are pestering mine. Quite the worrisome lot, it seems."

"That sounds like them."

Once Law had located the gate via Scan, he set up his room and wasted no time in teleporting them. The gate was identical to the one they had entered upon arriving, scaled down to less than a foot above Law's head. He huffed, seeing that his crew had not yet arrived at the surface, and
turned to the red-haired male.

"Do we have an accord?"

He locked gazes with Eustass Kidd, holding out his hand while his eyes promised pain.

Eustass Kidd didn't hesitate to to slap his own palm into his.

"Aye."

Chapter End Notes

* Just want to make things clear. On the subject of "proper male genitalia" I want to emphasis that I believe (as many of you do) that there is no such thing, as men can have vaginas and women can have penises and whatever pronouns you use or gender you identify as do not dictate what genitals you "must" have.
Chapter 8

Kidd kept a healthy distance from the surgeon's fan club/crew as they crowded around the man in the narrow hall of the submarine. He would have preferred it if his own ship had picked him up, but they had no choice if they were to keep a low profile. He had snuck out a call on his sickly snail, much to the dismay of Trafalgar's many crew members, and told them to go on ahead to the next island. It turned out he had a concussion and needed several wounds stitched. Honestly, he just needed more time to come up with a decent story for Killer.

On the bright side, it turned out that Killer was telling the truth and Trafalgar really did have a talking polar bear in his crew. He watched the aforementioned beast pick up the surgeon and throw him into the air like a toy, pulling the man down into a deep hug that had the male fighting for breath. The polar bear had a voice too deep for its childish appearance, and the baritone voice caught Kidd off guard.

"Captain! What happened to your shirt, Captain?"

"I left it behind, it's nothing to be concerned about." Trafalgar reassured his companion, patting the furry head. Kidd had noticed that the man's bruises had faded into faint yellow smudges. If it was a side effect of his Devil Fruit, the man was entirely overpowered.

The bear set the surgeon down gently, and leaned his muzzle down to sniff Trafalgar head. His ears flicked once, before he straightened up and put a paw on Trafalgar's shoulder and retreated silently into the crowd. Some of the crew noticed the odd behavior and trailed after the talking bear while others dispersed, satisfied their captain was back.
Trafalgar motioned to Kidd, and they began the lengthy trek to a familiar propped door. The tight hallways made Kidd claustrophobic, even when being surrounded by his element brought him innate comfort. The place was the same drab colors he recalled, the same sound of water rushing through pipes echoing overhead.

"So this really is your office."

"You know where to sit." Trafalgar replied, searching for something amidst the clutter on his desk. Kidd sneered at his dismissive tone, he wasn't just going to stand there and be treated like a child. Instead he shoved his hands in the pockets of his coat and observed the hand drawn anatomical diagrams. Sketched it what looked to be black ink, each picture was drawn with painstaking detail. There was no signature on the medical posters, but he had a feeling he knew the artist.

"You draw these yourself?" He asked, pointing to a close-up depiction of the human heart.

Trafalgar paused for a moment, turning his head but otherwise remaining in his stooped over position.

"Yes. I've found most medical charts to be insufficient for my line of work."

"You'd think anatomical accuracy would be more important."

"You would be surprised at the number of charlatans in this business."

A half-filled ashtray caught his eye, the collection of stubbed cigarettes quite less than he
"You smoke?" He pointed with his hand still in his pocket, and once again he was rewarded with Trafalgar ceasing in his search. *This is so fun. I'm catching him off guard.*

"On stressful occasions." The sound of rustling papers resumed, the man's attention one again lost. Kidd snorted, bobbing his head in amusement, "You're stressed a lot."

Trafalgar freed what he was looking for with a more drastic motion than called for, and turned to Kidd with a narrowed glare.

"It comes with the profession." He replied, tugging out his chair with an earsplitting screech, and sat down in front of Kidd. The other man kept silent as Trafalgar snapped on a pair of latex gloves and began leafing through the pamphlet he had pulled from the pile. The thin-framed glasses were back, once again in a striking contrast of teal, and the surgeon's bright eyes briskly scanned the pages as he thoroughly ignored his patient. Momentarily satisfied with the rise he had gotten out the man, Kidd leaned back on his perch.

The steel table was covered in a sheet of long paper, which he had already torn in several places as he adjusted himself. Aside from the walls and the desk, the room was free of clutter. In the cramped room, which couldn't have been more than seven by seven feet, there were a couple of low shelves crammed with medical texts of varying languages. Beside the desk was a matching steel file cabinet with an anatomical model seated atop with the abdominal cavity revealing its precious plastic organs. Beneath the desk he could see numerous crumpled wads of paper that had clearly been swept to crowd against the wall.

"Alright, take off that coat. It reeks."
Kidd inquisitive mood gave way to indignation. *Stupid fucker, this is a wonderful coat. Even if it does need a good wash.* He hadn't even slipped it off one arm before Trafalgar tugged it away and tossed it haphazardly at a plastic chair wedged by the door. The heavy article swamped the small seat, the arms seeming to wrap around the base like it was giving it a hug. Kidd had no time to react before the bandolier tightened for a moment as Trafalgar swiftly undid the buckle.

"Alright, I get it!" Kidd barked, slapping the offending hands away and ignoring the resulting scowl. He set the band down beside him gently, folding the leather so the pistol and dagger wouldn't clang against the metal. Noticing the twitching eyebrow, he turned to Trafalgar with a smirk, staring down the male who sat across him.

"Impatient, much? Have something you have to do in a hurry?"

"Actually, yes. I have to take care of a petulant child who refused to heed my warnings. *Look at this.*" He gesticulated at the uncovered line of stitches at his clavicle, the skin faintly swollen around its border. "You fucked up all my hard work. Now I have to waste good antibiotics on a terminally hopeless endeavor."

Copper eyes rolled in their sockets. "Stop being so dramatic. It's not like you're required to treat me."

"Actually, I recall we made a pact on detailing just that. Or was I mistaken when I signed my initials?"

Kidd didn't deign to respond, admitting his momentary defeat, and allowed Trafalgar to enter his personal bubble to examine his stitches. The whole room smelled of cigarette smoke, and of the condiments and dirt caking his coat. He kept his line of sight above Trafalgar's eyes to avoid making the situation awkward, though with the new yellow shirt donned he could pretend the last few hours hadn't even occurred. His pants were stiff with drying blood, and he had left a trail of flakes as they had made their way to the surgeon's office. The door had been closed upon arrival, and Kidd wondered if he kept it closed while he was smoking and let himself ferment in the toxic
fumes. The presence of cigarettes in the office of a medical profession seemed unbecoming, but he
did happen to look like a stoner gone zombie. Their close proximity brought images of Trafalgar's
assault on him in the hotel, though the manic glean was gone from the currently calculated eyes.

"Take these and I'll check for a concussion."

He remained silent as he swallowed the tiny pills with an offered cup of water, and let Tralagar
even shine a small flashlight into his eyes. When the man asked him to follow his finger he did so
without complaint, even if his vision was dotted with black and white. He surprised himself by
going so far as staying still as the surgeon reached around and felt the back of his head.

"Where exactly were you born, Eustass-ya?"

His stomach went from somewhat hungry to a solid lump of ice. Of all the topics he thought the
other man would bring up, this was certainly not included.

"What's it matter?"

Thoughts of the rubble that was his hometown lead to thoughts of blood-soaked rainy nights,
which inevitably lead to thoughts of his father, which ultimately lead to thoughts of his mother. His
last panic attack was only a few days ago, and before that he had already gone through his
customary downward spiral of anxiety. He wasn't due for another push off the cliff for another
couple of months or so. Those precious few months in between whole seasons of crippling anxiety
and depression. He caused his most bloodshed during those months of distress, was at his most
volatile. That season of violent mood swings was what got them through the last stretch to the
Grand Line, and he had looked forward to the mellow the next couple of months would bring.

Starting the cycle again so soon was just too cruel.
"Why, for genetics it can matter quite a bit."

"Excuse me?"

Trafalgar was treading on dangerous territory, and, rape victim or not, alliance or not, if Trafalgar insulted his mother's hair he couldn't vouch for the man's life. He clenched his fists in anticipation of the usual mockery, the walls around them rippling lightly with energy. Trafalgar didn't seem to notice the potential oncoming assault, nor the tremble in his stature, too engrossed in the pamphlet he had painstakingly retrieved. Trafalgar turned to him and fixed his glasses with an index finger, Kidd ready to turn the submarine into a likeness of the sheets of paper beneath the others desk.

"Yes, I initially thought your hair was dyed. It slipped my attention that your eyelashes match until just now. Such a vibrant shade is only found in warmer climates and, as such, I am not accustomed to seeing it as a natural shade. It's a very nice color, to but it bluntly. Do you know your heritage?"

The only sound in the room was the ticking of the small clock wedged between tipping stacks of papers.

The words 'nice color' rattled about his skull like a rubber ball, unable to grasp the concept of someone complimenting his hair color when it was so often ridiculed.

"Hah?" Was his only intelligent response, his goggles deciding that it was the perfect time become loose and slip a few centimeters down his forehead.
"I come from North Blue, where dark skin and hair are the norm. Most of my crew is from East and West Blue, which are predominately dark hair and light skin. It is only in South Blue that lighter hair colors and skin tone are predominately present. There are exceptions, of course, where borders overlap or the gene pool is diverse, but according to sources you hail from South Blue, correct? I was wondering what region or town, to gain a better grasp on your genetics. Cultures and societies tend to keep within themselves, and carry their genetics with them. For example, seaside fishermen in West Blue are more likely to have green eyes than, lets say, a coal miner from the same region."

"Thank you, I think. Uhh..." Kidd wasn't in the mood to talk about his mother, he never was, and certainly not about the man who killed her. Of course, if he dismissed the conversation it could result in a sour tone, and he wanted to continue the relatively pleasant mood they had going so far. Anything to keep the dull or manic shine out of the others eyes. Anything to keep their minds off of what had so recently transpired.

"I'm from Oresmith, but my mom, my mother, was a gypsy from Corsanth."

Trafalgar nodded, "I speculated that might be the case. Those of a wandering lifestyle in the South tend to have vibrant shades of hair color. Gypsies in particular have a tendency for red hair. Green or blue eyes or more common for Southern gypsies, however, your eye color suggests one of your immediate family members hailed from a more gathering lifestyle. Was your father a farmer, perhaps?

"My father was a shit-fed fuck."

The words came out his mouth like a curse, unable to be stopped before they fouled the air with their presence.

"How pleasant." Trafalgar replied, "So was mine."
The rest of the examination and dressing of his wounds continued in a comfortable silence. Their shared animosity for their fathers had led to a sort of unspoken camaraderie between the two. His neck would take several days to heal, and since he had neglected to recover his previous treatment, Trafalgar added extra tape to ensure he left it on.

"What about when I bathe?"

"It's water repellant, Eustass-ya. Did you not listen to what I told you last time?"

Kidd stuck out his tongue in childish retaliation, fingers running along the thin line of bandages ringing his neck.

"Apparently not." Trafalgar huffed, putting away his threading needle and taking off his gloves with a snap of latex.

"Now, are you experiencing a headache or neck pain?"

"No."
"What is the year?"

"XXXX"

"What day?"

"Tuesday."

"Are you nauseous or experiencing ringing in your ears?"

"No."

"Loss of sense of smell or taste?"

"No."

"Alright, Eustass-ya. You're clear for a concussion for now, but since you will be in my care for the next few days I will check on your health periodically." Trafalgar snapped the file folder shut after jotting down his responses. He opened what looked to be a stone cabinet, wedged between the bookshelf and his desk, and retrieved a small envelope.
"Here are some analgesics to help with the bruises on your abdomen, and here is an anti-inflammatory for your wrists. Speaking of which, I forgot to treat the abrasions, pardon my carelessness. I am not usually so forgetful." He deposited the slim packets on his desk and reached for another pair of gloves. Kidd watched his movements carefully, pity welling up his chest like a rising flood. *Is he just going to pretend it never happened? Is that how he copes?*

Trafalgar dabbed a calming cream onto the burns on his wrists caused by the sea stone, which Kidd inspected the surgeon. The area around his mouth was still faintly red from the bit and bridle, even though his own mouth was free from irritation. His lipstick was no longer visible, however.

"Is your father a doctor as well?" Kidd asked, striking up a conversation for fear of descending into spiraling thoughts. Trafalgar tensed in his application of bandages, before continuing the smooth motion as if nothing had happened.

"Yes," He replied, "Both my parents were doctors."

"Did you want to follow in their footsteps?"

"No. They were upstanding citizens who wouldn't have dreamed of piracy...but I wanted to become a doctor for my little sister's sake."

"Ah, was she sick?"

"Yes."
The conversation ended there, and the use of past participles was not lost on Kidd.

"You're mother..." Trafalgar started up once more, Kidd tensing at his words. "Did you travel with her?" The surgeon had finished bandaging his wrists a while ago, moving back to his desk to jot something down on a loose leaf paper. Kidd's insides began to twist themselves up in knots, strangling his heart.

"No," He desperately hated the obvious straining to his voice, he prayed Trafalgar would ignore it.

For once the gods answered his request, and Trafalgar continue to scribble on the sheet without pause.

No, he hadn't ever gotten the chance to leave that shithole town with his mother. He wasn't able to take her somewhere she could finally see snow. He didn't ask her questions about her past. He didn't know anything about her that he hadn't found in that trunk. If given the chance, he would have gladly become nomadic with his mother, living with a caravan and pickpocketing to survive. He didn't even know why she had settled in Oresmith in the first place, or why prostitution was her only option. If his father hadn't killed her, if he hadn't been there that night, then he might be able to ask her those questions today.

Kidd's voice echoed in the small space and the blood drained from his face as he realized he had said it all out loud. Trafalgar was staring him, equally blanch, the pen abandoned on the desk. The man offered a weak grimace, "Well I'm no therapist," he began, face regaining its color, "but, at the very least, it sounds like your mother was very important to you. I'm sure she was a wonderful person."

Kidd stared back at him, his hands limp in his lap. "Yeah," He replied, trying to process what was happening, "She was great."
The awkward silence dragged as they stared at each other, in which Kidd's pistol looked like a friendly out.

"My parents aren't around either, but its been over a decade since then. Like you, I didn't particularly mourn for my father." Trafalgar tugged the chair to sit down in front of his desk as if to keep a safe distance, the scraping metal adding to the indentations on the floor. The sound cut through the awkwardness of the situation, and Kidd felt spurred by his damnable curiosity to continue the conversation further. Trafalgar interested him more than anyone had in a long time, and he felt a strange connection with the man with many secrets.

Kidd balanced his elbows on his thighs, leaning in, "So how did you go from aspiring doctor to psychotic pirate? There must be a story there worth telling, yeah?"

Trafalgar stared back at him, his paperwork abandoned behind him.

"Perhaps," He shrugged, eyes anywhere but on Kidd, "but it's not one worth listening to. Besides-" He looked up at Kidd with tired eyes, "It's a rather long story and I'm in no mood to play storyteller. You can understand that I'm in dire need for a rest. Shachi will show you where to-" He was cut off by a staccato pinging coming from somewhere in the sub. Kidd clasped his hands over his ringing ears, the noise loud enough to hurt. Trafalgar looked up at the ceiling and let out a shuddering sigh. The signal went on for another few seconds before cutting out abruptly.

"What was that?" He groused, rubbing his throbbing temples.

"The diving tone. We're submerging."
"What? I thought we left ages ago!"

"It takes time to get a submarine of this size up and running. My crew usually does this in advance so we can leave on schedule, but like yours they are a worrying lot who don't get much done when I'm not updating them on my whereabouts."

"Yeah, you looked like you had a real fan club back there."

"They are indeed a clinging bunch, but they are dependable."

"I'm sure."

Kidd stood to his feet, ready to leave, only to remember the list still in his pocket. It was wrinkled and torn in places when he pulled it out of his back pocket, but the writing was still legible.

"Actually, Doc. I wanted to ask for some medication I could take back to my ship."

He wasn't sure how he would explain why he wanted a sedative, other than to reveal his disorder, but maybe it would be better to do so and create an open ground between them. On one hand, he was Eustass Captain Kidd and he didn't make friends outside of his crew, but on the other, he was more interested in getting to know Trafalgar than he had been about anyone he could remember. He and the man shared many similarities, and he would be lying to himself if he said he wasn't the least bit curious about the others dark history. He wasn't trying to get to know him out of pity, though he felt ashamed he couldn't help him in the cell.
"I'm not going to prescribe you recreational drugs, Eustass-ya. I may have questionable morals but I don't give away my medication for the frivolity of others. You'll have to find a different dealer if that's you game."

"I'm no druggie, though you certainly look the part. I...uh, I actually need sedatives."

"Unless you fully explain your reasoning, you cannot blame me for assuming you have more detrimental motives."

Kidd rolled his shoulders, his neck popping as he stretched it to the side. He was buying time, not used to giving out personal information that made him seem weak. But here he was, shirtless and inquisitive, ready to give out a secret of which not even his cremates were aware. He figured he should just say it outright, lest he stammer and make himself look vulnerable.

"I have panic attacks."

"..."

Trafalgar looked almost impressed, if not initially caught off guard. Kidd was experiencing acute nausea, ready to empty his stomach into the overflowing waste bin. Trafalgar turned back to his desk and fished the pair of envelopes containing his analgesics and anti-inflammatories.

"I have several medications that could work for you, unless you have been using one in particular, in which we should go with that."
"Uh, yeah, I use..." He squinted at his own handwriting, "Clonazepam." He enunciated each syllable slowly so as to pronounce the word correctly. Trafalgar tapped his pen with a thoughtful look before heading over the cabinet and retrieving another slim packet.

"Take these only when absolutely necessary, and make sure to read the side effects and dosage instructions I have printed out for you inside." He paused, running his fingers over the manilla packet. "I must say I did not peg you as the anxious type. Speaking of which, your crew mates each went through a physical and have files of their medical history. To be your physician for our voyages, I need to conduct a physical assessment as well as fill out a case file. Since you are spending the next few days as our untimely passenger, I recommend taking the opportunity to get this out of the way."

"Okay," Kidd said, nervously taking the outstretched packet, "Should we do this now, or?"

He really did not want a prostate exam at the moment.

"No. No, I don't currently have the patience to fill out more paperwork than I already have. Besides, you look famished and the kitchen is always open. Ah, Shachi, just on time."

Kidd turned in surprise to see a ginger-haired man standing in the doorway. He wore the same black boiler suit that seemed to be the crew's attire, with the yellow smilie emblazoned on his breast pocket. On his head was a blue and pink cassette-style hat, with his eyes obscured by a pair of black sunglasses. His nose was sharp and somewhat crooked, and he stood with his arms crossed and a frown marring his face.

"I'll show you where you will be staying." He groused, clearly displeased with having to deal with Kidd. Of course, two could play at this game, and Kidd used his own state of dress to pull out the rug from beneath the others feet. "Why, you gonna join me pumpkin?" Openly leering, he stuffed the packets he had received into his back pocket as he waggled his tongue lasciviously. He received a sharp kick to his calf for his efforts, and he spun around to face a scowling Trafalgar.
"I would appreciate it if you would not hassle my subordinates. You will be on this submarine for several days, and, unless you plan on pulling triple all-nighters guarding your door, I would advise you keep on your best behavior. There are no small fries in this crew, and many of them specialize in assassination. Shachi here, in particular, has an adoration for knives and a loathing for immature children."

Kidd had no time to respond before his coat was thrown his way in a flurry of motion.

"And do give that a good wash on the second floor. It's positively rancorous."

Kidd dejectedly trailed after Shachi, glaring daggers at the smilie adorning the back of the man's boiler suit. He wouldn't admit it outright, but the coat slung over his shoulder was indeed foul. The door to Trafalgar's office slammed shut behind them, but he didn't have time to pause and check if the other man had left. Shachi was almost a foot shorter than him, but took long strides that quickly left Kidd in the dust.

"Oi!" He called after the other, jogging lightly to catch up. He didn't expect the man to turn sharply to face him, almost causing them to collide. The man's eyes were occluded with his large shades, but Kidd had no doubt his eyes were furious.

"I don't know the exact details of what transpired in Little Orange between you and Captain, and I doubt he'll ever tell, but don't think that everyone on this ship can't see what happened. We're under oath to keep by that contract you two signed, but don't think for a second that if you step out of line you won't wake up with some missing parts." He spun around once more with a sharp snap of his boots, and continue to beeline down the hall with the pace of a man out for blood.

Great, they're all just as crazy as Trafalgar.
Law leaned forward on his desk, burying his face in his arms. The cold steel burned his arms through the thick cotton sleeves, and he was reminded of his snowbound homeland.

He was so very tired.

Every inch of his body ached with a pain no amount of medication could soothe. The cabinets hadn't been locked yet, he could still grab enough to off himself, but he knew it would just cause trouble for the others. Every night before he retired to his room, Penguin would come to lock the medicine cabinets so he wouldn't be tempted to overdose during the night.

There was a reason the cabinet was made of seastone.

A knock disrupted his corrupted mindset, drawing him from the cold steel desk with a sluggish acceptance. He couldn't rest, not yet. His crew was surely in need of answers, and he had no doubts as who was at the door.

"Come in, Penguin."

The door slid open silently on greased hinges, to reveal his first mate. Closing the door with a soft click and sliding the latch, Penguin took off his hat and bowed deeply. Law watched his friend
with dull eyes, his elbows still propped on the desk.

"My apologizes, Law."

Penguin's voice was rough with emotions as he bowed lower, his black hair dangling like a velvet waterfall. Law sighed, wordlessly beckoning the man over. Penguin's eyes were a vibrant neon green, quickly brimming with tears as he approached his captain with a stiff upper lip. The usually stoic man broke down into silent sobs, gripping his hat tightly to his chest.

"I-I'm so sorry Law, I'm so sorry..." His chest heaved with sobs as his spasmodic breathing filled the silent air. He kept a few feet between them, as if afraid to enter his personal space. Law felt apathetic towards his distraught friend, and he was sure his eyes reflected his deceased emotions.

He reached out and pet through his companion's soft tresses, which only caused the man to crying harder. Law felt nothing for his friend's pity, just a empty void he knew all too well. The shock of his assault had faded, and what appeared was the hollowness. He was a doll, a royal's plaything. There was nothing to be gained from sexual encounters for him, nothing that could be attributed to pleasure of his own free will. He was a tool, and he had been used. The desensitization was different from the disassociation he often felt in the shock of the aftermath.

This was his neutral ground.

His patch of torn flowerbed.

"Bepo, yes? I can't keep secrets with that nose of his." Law lamented, no sentiment to his voice. His anatomical drawings on the walls drew his attention, the charts of past diagnoses glaring him in the face. If it wasn't in his bloodstream, it didn't matter for his body. The bruises on his body had already faded into natural tan of skin, his ribs mending their structure. It wasn't a byproduct of his
powers, nor some secret technique his family had passed down from generations.

His bedroom held document upon document detailing his heritage. There was a family tree tacked to the underside of the desk in that room, nailed to the wood. He had gone back almost as far as the Void Century, but it was obvious that his body was not from his bloodline. There were no other Lorelei before him, no men with misplaced parts. It had been but a project to soothe his worries, to cement what he already knew. What had once been a reality-shattering revelation force upon him was now but a bitter course he was naturally inclined to follow.

He was a Lorelei created by Celestial Dragons, one of hundreds poisoned by their mothers tainted drinking water. There was no rhyme or reason to his creation, he was an abomination amongst mankind. Nothing about his genetic makeup was natural, not even his mind. For his friend to weep here for yet another night of his use was nothing to him. It was only natural he would hits bumps along the road to retribution. He could only take solace in the golden rule of any good monster story.

... 

*The monsters always kill their creators.*

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: As a sufferer of chronic anxiety I take Fluvoxamine and have Clonazepam for the really bad attacks. Talk to your doctor to find out what you need, however, as everyone is different and the possible side effects may drastically outweigh your need for them.
Chapter 9

Kidd found that sleeping in a submarine was, without a doubt, the most terrifying thing. Not only was "his" room shared by three other people who loved to stare, but he was forced to share said room by way of bunkbeds.

... 

Bunkbeds.

... 

And he was going to get the bottom bunk! The bottom-fucking-bunk!

Each bed was the standard naval bunk, with sturdy wooden walls and an unpleasantly hard mattress. He had strongly objected to the installation of such sleeping quarters when making his own ship, lest he subject his crew to sleeping in makeshift coffins. How anyone could feel comfortable boxed in like a sardine, Kidd would never know.

His bunk mates were also obnoxiously interested in him, or rather what he wearing. After tossing his blood and dirt stained clothes at someone who looked like they would clean them correctly, he sought out a shower once again. He was uncomfortably sticky from wearing his bloody clothes, and he couldn't deny the smell of mustard his hair had already absorbed despite the thorough washing he had given it not even an hour before. He was given a black boiler suit to wear, thankfully without the yellow accents, and directed to the showering complex. Despite his protests and internal rant on how tacky the jumpsuit was, he was told to wear it unless he wanted to freeze to death. The communal showers were surprisingly spacious, with checkered monochrome tiles and
polished steel finishes. Unlike his own ship, the submarine was without tubs, but Kidd didn't mind standing up for a shower. His own bathroom had an open shower in the back of the narrow room, which he usually just used to rinse off before soaking in his tub. There was no reason he should stew in his own filth.

"So...you're C-Captain Kidd, right?"

He lifted his head from his stoop on the rock-hard mattress, glaring daggers at the only other occupant. The man wore a hat just like everyone else on the sub, but looked far too slim to fit in with the others Kidd had seen. Lime green hair stuck out from beneath a purple beanie, pale skin and magenta eyes the only visible facial features. The male wore a white surgical mask over his mouth and nose, making his wispy feather-light voice sound slightly subdued. He had thought the other was a female upon first inspection. His lashes were certainly long enough, and he held a certain delicacy to his frame Kidd had only seen in women. His boiler suit was rolled up at the sleeves, exposing slender arms and dainty fingers that were most definitely manicured.

"Yes."

The boiler suit bulged and tugged where his muscles protested against the fabric, and the pant legs were a tad too short to be tucked into his boots. He felt ridiculous in the garment, even if his goggles gave him some sense of security. The fabric was too scratchy, even with the underclothes he was given. He was itching to tear them off and chase after his clothes, but he knew that Shachi was right. He hadn't noticed it when he wore his coat, but the air around him was cold enough to turn his breath into white puffs.

The green haired male seemed to grin behind his mask, "Oh, good! I was worried I got your name wrong, Noro says I do that a lot." He stuck out a slim hand, and Kidd already knew his own would utterly dwarf it. He shook the man's hand and wondered at its fragility, frowning at the limp grip.

"You didn't tell me your name."
The males eyes widened, and Kidd was caught off guard at how pretty the boys eyes were. This has to be a chick, no man is built like that. He mind wandered to Trafalgar and he silently chastised himself.

"Oh! My apologies! Noro says I do that often. My name is Rei."

Kidd nodded to himself, already annoyed with the forgetful male. His mind was on other things, and he easily tuned Rei out as his thought strayed to Trafalgar.

So he was once owned by a Celestial Dragon who is now chasing after him...he has to pass through Sabondy Archipelago to get to the New World...if he makes it that far...bastard better make it that far...

"Oi, Rei shut your mouth. Who the fuck is the human flare?"

His internal musing were cut short at the callous voice coming from the open doorway. The submarine did not seem to come with many doors, and most of the empty doorframe he had passed led to bedrooms and bathrooms. He didn't see a person standing in the doorway, but as he looked down he realized there was a black cat glaring at him from beyond the threshold. The red-eyed cat stalked into the room, heated gaze never leaving Kidd perplexed stare, and leapt into Rei's lap and curled up there as if it was where he belonged. He gave Kidd a bored glance, licking at the pads of his feet.

"So who's the blazing inferno over there? Oi! Rei! I'm talking to you dipshit!" His ears flicked back and he sunk his claws into the boy's pants, Kidd wincing at the act. The pink-eyed boy didn't seem to notice that he had been virtually skewered, and just giggled to himself, petting the grumpy talking feline.
"This is Captain Kidd, Noro! He's going to be sleeping here for a few days!"

Ears titling forward in interest, tail curling absently around the boy's wrist, Noro turned carmine eyes back to Kidd.

"Whatever, just don't snore and I won't take a dump in your shoes during the night."

Maybe they were a rare breed, Kidd had never seen a talking cat before, but he had no qualms with killing the infuriating furball.

He was in for a rough few days, it seemed.

Law glided to his room with little on his mind. There was an emptiness inside him no food or drink could fill, and in his deranged state he wondered about scooping out his insides to see what remained. He was a hollow shell, a walking corpse, and he knew the signs of shock better than anyone else. While he had successfully disassociated himself from the situation until it was resolved, as he was proficient in doing, he could no longer stave off the inevitable. He hadn't yet succumbed to despair, just beginning the denial stage of grief. He couldn't fathom what had occurred, not after so long going without intimate touches of pain and reluctant pleasure. The misery he had left in his childhood was coming back to snap at his heels, to gnaw at his ankles until he could no longer continue forward on his path.

Of course, his closest crew members knew his pattern, but they had never witnessed him react to sexual assault so soon after it had occurred. They were used to nightmares and panic attacks of a past unforgotten, of suicidal impulses and long bouts of consuming depression. They forced him to
eat and bathed him when he was too forlorn to leave the relative comfort of his bed. They could listen to his plights and soothe his worries the best they could, but not even Bepo could save him from his own inner demons. Penguin had left him to his own devices only out of respect for his right of privacy, but he knew the man had him on surveillance to assure his safety.

His largest hazard was himself, after all.

His room was located at the submarine’s rear, just below the turbines. The back of the submarine consisted of only the motor room, allowing him enough distance from his crew and enough background noise that no one would hear his screams. Only Penguin, Bepo, and Shachi held the transmitters of the surveillance snails in his room so they could come when he needed them. At first he had protested such treatment, likening the devices to baby monitors, but after his first failed suicide attempt in their presence, he could no longer deny the obvious. The three of them shared a room together, with the receiver to his bedroom snail monitor located somewhere out of sight from prying eyes. Every room in the submarine was also soundproof, which added to the the trio’s argument that he needed to have people to come to his aid during the night.

He could only pray they didn't resent him for the lack of sleep.

The door to his room was always locked, and he did not have the key. The only key was in the hands of Penguin, but in any case Law preferred using his powers to teleport himself inside. With a small flick of his wrist he was transported passed the steel frame and into his small bedroom. The only light in the room came from the small lamp by his bedside, revealing the disaster of his bedroom. The room was only ten by ten feet, with a queen-sized bed taking up five by seven of those 100 cubic feet. His bed was unmade, grey comforter and white sheets tangled up in a ball around one of his pillows. The headboard rested against the center of the steel wall, facing a dark blue painting. Upon further inspection one could notice the churn of bubbles and motion to its surface, revealing it to be a sheet of glass several inches thick. He normally pulled the dark curtains affixed on either side to block out unwanted underwater visitors, but in his absence Penguin must have opened them for the atmosphere. Staying in the dark would only worsened his depression, he would say, but Law didn't need his reminders.

His room already spoke for his broken state of mind. The shelving on either side of the room were stuffed with papers to the point of near collapse, the desk in front of the window pilled high with books and charts he had read a thousand times. The plush carpet was completely obscured with
wanted posters, medical files, wads of tissue, empty bottles, a plethora of discarded cigarettes, and miscellaneous papers. The room was musty and collecting mold in soiled paper. Penguin was under strict oath to leave his mess where it was, despite his protests. Everything in his room was the way it was supposed to be, and he considered it his den. The foul odor that hit his nose upon arrival had already integrated into his senses and disappeared.

He spotted a half empty wine bottle sitting under the bedside lamp like a present from a god he didn't believe in. In a moment he had chugged the thing down, ignoring how warm and noxious it was.

He wanted to get drunk.

He wanted to forget.

He wanted to sleep and never, ever, wake up.

If he hadn't left the room when he had, he was sure he would have snapped the cat's neck without a care. He could deal with the feminine airhead, but he was not going to put up with an impudent talking cat. The only reason he hadn't killed the rude feline was because Rei reminded him too much of an innocent child to shower him in his 'friend's' guts. If he was going to be spending three days in that room, it was certainly not going be at anytime Noro was present. Which was why he was now stalking the frigid halls of the submarine with a murderous aura. He wanted his coat back so he could get out of the nearly skintight boilersuit. It did well enough to keep him warm, but to keep him comfortable? It could do much better in that department.
He felt like he had gone circles around the vessel and yet, for the amount of passengers he knew to be on board, there was no one to be found. Many of the rooms he passed had neither door nor occupants, and he was at a loss for where to go.

He was so very, very lost.

Kidd's stomach voiced its protest. *Fucking Shachi-shit didn't tell me where the fucking kitchen is and there aren't any goddamn signs!* He couldn't remember the last time he had eaten, and it felt like ages since he'd been on his own ship.

*What I wouldn't give for a plate of scrambled eggs with cheese...isn't it noon?*

They had boarded Trafalgar's submarine at daybreak, quickly fleeing the island in hopes that Marines wouldn't catch on. While Kidd had little regard for Marines, he was tired and wasn't into the mood to crack heads. He was thinking too much, and he wanted nothing more than to eat away his worries. His high metabolism would take care of the rest.

He heard someone's voice faintly down the corridor, and hurried to its source as quietly as possible. The one only person he had come upon so far had nearly shat themselves in terror at his approach, and had run before he could get out a single word. He'd rather not lose the opportunity to snag a meal, and so he tred lightly.

"I know, me too, but at the very least they've finally met one another. They seem to be on good terms at the moment, but of course I didn't ask what they thought."

He didn't recognize the soft low timber wafting from what looked to be a dark storage room. From his vantage point, pressed against the wall, he could only see brown crates and the outlines of large baskets hidden in the gloom.
"Is that right?" The person let out a chuckle, "Ye of little faith."

Clearly they were talking on a den den, and judging by the hushed whisper of their voice they likely didn't want to be found doing so.

Kidd's natural curiosity was piked, hunger momentarily forgotten.

"Well, Captain is...Captain had a rough time, and yours' didn't look much better, to be honest."

Wait, is he talking to someone in my crew? What the fuck?

He couldn't think of anything anyone in his crew had said about the Heart Pirates to suggest they were on amicable terms. Killer had mentioned encountering the crew on his own nearly two years ago, when the Heart Pirates were just getting a name for themselves. But it couldn't be Killer, right? He would have said something...

"No, I think he's fine, but Captain is...he's probably in a wreck right now, but I know he needs his space. I just...I knew going to this place was going to be a bad idea! I told him about the shit heads in that place, running the black market, but of course he already knew that. It wasn't like we had much choice, though, we had to stock up and this was the island the log pose chose...but I just-I hate this, Killer! I feel like a failure!"

Kidd's blood ran cold at the confirmation, his exposed arms going numb from something other than the chill. He didn't know what to think at the moment, his mind had simply flat-lined. He barely
"I know it's not my fault, but I can't help it...and you know he feels like it's his fault, he always thinks that way. He takes everything onto himself so others don't have to, but he doesn't seem to realize we care about him! I can't tell you how many times he forces me out the door when I come to his cries at night, hiding his face so I don't see him cry. He wants people to think he's a heartless machine of a person but all of us here know what nightmares are like."

"..."

"...Yeah, this morning was nice...it was refreshing to see you after so long, it's been three weeks, I thought I would die."

Kidd's brain worked at a sluggish pace, picking up the lovesick tone in bits and pieces.

...

...Oh...

"Thank you for taking such good care for Matthis, Killer. I only sent him because I thought you might like him, Freya was under the weather."

...Matthis is the name of that bird Killer kept in his hair, yeah? Holy shit who the fuck is this guy-Killer had a boyfriend the whole time I thought he was straight and with a Heart Pirate?
"You really are wonderful, Killer. Thank you, ah-oh damn it, I should probably check on Bepo and see if he's fairing alright. I'll call you later today, alright? Yes...Uh-huh...I love you too...have a good day, Killer."

Kidd's body moved before his brain reacted, retreated behind a corner as the unknown man began to leave the room. His behavior was entirely ridiculous, there was no reason he should be acting so fearful of this man, he simply wanted to know their identity and why Killer hadn't told him. He peeked around the corner and grit his teeth when he saw a man walking in the opposite direction down the corridor, wearing a familiar flapped hat.

*That's Penguin, right? Trafalgar's first mate? What the fuck?*

He was angry, confused, and indignant. He didn't care who Killer was fucking, he just cared that the other had felt it right to hide the relationship from him. Countless times he had brushed off his lovesick behavior as a product of Kidd's imagination, no matter how often he confronted him.

*Does he not trust me as much as I thought?*

He didn't want to think about that possibility.

*...Did Trafalgar know?*

It would explain why Trafalgar was so trusting in allowing his crew to see to their treatment. It would make sense why he was casually letting him stay on his ship for an extended period of time,
allowing him to roam the ship in the others absence. Kidd's temper flared, and he went back to scouring the ship, this time for Trafalgar's whereabouts.

The submarine seemed to only have one map, and he sped off toward the end of the ship as he located 'Captain Trafalgar's Quarters' printed in bold on the plaque.

_He lives behind the fucking motor room?_

He spun the latch and entered the engine room, clasping his hands over his ears at the piercing sounds. Pipes screamed and something was clanging incessantly in the overcrowded space. Arrows rotated in their gauges, steam jettisoning from capped valves. The bronze pipes were organized in four rows, and Kidd submitted to shimmying through the cramped aisle. He held his breath as he passed between the scalding metal, the fabric of his boilersuit only centimeters from catching fire. The room itself was a sauna, the enormous fans overhead doing nothing for the sweltering atmosphere. He slipped out of the room as fast as he could, sweat dripping down his body and cooling in response to the cold air outside. As soon as he had spun the lock back in place, he let out a breath of relief. Now he was colder than ever, his sweat drying as frozen bullets, his clothes sticking to his skin and causing him to shiver.

_There's not a single light! How the hell is anyone supposed to find this bastard's room when it's like an abyss in here!_

He stumbled in the darkness with his hands running along the wall, searching for the tell tale sign of a door latch. True to the map's depiction, there was only a single door in the horizontal hall. When he tried to turn the latch, however, it was if it was jammed shut and wouldn't budge an inch. Sighing through his nose, he drew a deep breath and knocked on the steel door. The echo resounded through the corridor in an eerie crescendo, and Kidd found himself longing for a light to ignite beneath the door frame.

...
"Kidd-ya? What do you want?"

Trafalgar's voice came muffled through the solid door, Kidd straining his ears to hear him.

"Did you know our first mates hooked up with each other?!" He shouted in the darkness, getting down to the point.

...  

"Yes? Is there a problem with that? I was not aware you were in the dark about it."

Kidd felt his eyebrow twitch, missing the way Trafalgar's voice sounded fainter than before. He hadn't thought about what to say, especially not if Trafalgar had thought he knew.

"...Whatever, where the hell is your fucking kitchen? That killer whale ran off before I could ask and your ONLY fucking map didn't say anything about it!"

...  

"Sorry about that," There was the sound of shuffling papers, and Kidd heard the distinct sound of a steel waste bin toppling over, "Patients are usually led to my office, and we've never had visitors."
Trafalgar's response was delayed, and Kidd felt like he had been doused in flames. In his rage over Killer's tryst he had completely wiped the previous situations out his mind entirely. *Fuck, I shouldn't be here. He's in no mood to talk, I'm such an idiot!*

"...Trafalgar?"

He didn't know what he wanted to say to the man, or what he could possibly say considering the circumstances. Here in the darkness he was reminded of the icy fingers of fear, and was humbled by it. Not being face to face gave him a confidence and autonomy he likened to participating in a confession. Of course, neither of them were qualified for playing the part of a priest.

"What is it Eustass-ya?!!" He shouted in clear exasperation, "If you had any working brain cells at all you'd realize that I'm not in the mood to listen to your complaints!"

...  

"Well, how about I listen to your's, then?"

...  

"I beg your pardon?"
"I'm...I'm not going to say I understand what your going through, because that's something only you know, but I'm here...to listen, I mean...I'm not to tell anyone about any of this...I've got morals...believe it or not...and, uh...do you...do you want to talk about it?"

...

...

Silence was the only response. After a few solid minutes of waiting in darkness, Kidd was ready to give up and go back to searching for food, only to freeze at a small voice.

"Can I trust you?"

Kidd swallowed thickly, the sound defening in the icy corridor.

"Yeah, I won't breathe a word."

"...You won't laugh?"

"I won't laugh."
"...You won't leave?"

"I won't leave."

...

"I want to die..."

...

Trafalgar's voice sounded like a child's, thick with tears and sorrow. He dared not breathe, in case he missed the soft voice.

...

"I think I've always wanted to die..."
"I'm not...I'm not normal. You saw it. You know. I'm just the product of tainted tap water, a mutant for another's fancy..."

... 

"My own mother didn't know whether to love me or dissect me, and my father would rather I not exist at all. They were well-renowned doctors of the highest caliber. I was just a stain on their ledger, as far as he was concerned. My mother wanted to masquerade me as a girl, while my father refused to pretend anything was wrong in public. They...they never thought to ask me...if I...if I thought I was a girl or a boy..."

... 

"Mother considered me her daughter, and tried to force me to foster my baby sister Lami as some sort of experiment...I think she loved me...I...I think so..."

... 

"Have you ever heard of Flevance? The White City?"

... 

"It was a town in North Blue known for its amber lead. It was a white ore more valuable than gold,
and it was ubiquitous in nature. Our buildings, our food, our flora, our weapons...our whole world was a glossy white...it matched the snow...

"Our country was prosperous...We could afford every advance in medical technology, and so we became the pinnacle of the medical community...My father was the greatest doctor in the whole country...but even he couldn't save us from ourselves..."

"What the World Government and our own Royal Family failed to inform us was that Amber lead was incredibly toxic. Amber Lead Syndrome was a non-contagious, hereditary disease caused by the accumulation of the lead in the bloodstream after constant exposure. It was unnoticeable in the early stages at low concentration, but as it progressed each passing generation was given shorter lifespans. Everyone in Flevance had the same accumulating concentration of lead poisoning, and, by the time my generation was born, we were expected to die before we ever came of age."

"No one on the island was able to cure the disease, not even my father, but at the very least he held hope since it was not contagious. However, the Government refused to disclose such information...and they decided to quarantine us. The victims begin to break out in white patches all over their body, and their hair becomes bleached white. The patches caused chronic pain, and eventually led to a painful death...One day...the royal family snuck out across the border...and the World Government came in to exterminate us..."
Kidd was silent throughout the revelation, though his breathing labored as his throat constricted with grief. Every word out of Trafalgar's mouth was detached, apathetic, and Kidd could practically see the man's vacant expression as he stared back into his past. He had nothing to say in response, after all, what was there he could possibly say?

"...I was smuggled myself out under a pile of corpses...but even then I wasn't safe from the Government. They, who knew the disease was non-contagious, spread false information across the seas to kill any citizen of Flevance on site lest they risk contamination. No hospital would treat me, no cure existed, and in the end...I became nihilistic..."

"I was ten years old with only thirty-eight months to live...I despised the word and wished for nothing more than the death of everyone around me...so I decided..."

"I wanted...I wanted to take down as many people as I could with me...so I...joined the Donquixote Pirates."
Kidd found it hard to breathe, the strange feeling he got whenever he glanced at the man's jolly roger finally clicking in his mind. It was a modification of the infamous bifurcated grinning roger. His brain worked clumsily, connecting the dots sluggishly as if he was wadding through a viscous mixture. His heart short-circuited entirely at the following sentence.

"You can surmise for yourself what usefulness I provided."

The mess of his room had been exacerbated in the last half hour or so, and Law's anxiety had followed suit. When Kidd had knocked on the door, even whilst scan was active, he had barricaded the door with his body. It wasn't as if it was entirely irrational, not with the red-head's convenient magnetism. Calm down Law, he had consoled himself, you could take him apart before he even tried. You're safe, you're safe, you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe you're safe.

But then Kidd had gone on about Penguin and Killer's illicit relationship, and he chastised himself for his skepticism. Eustass Kidd may be an intelligent man, but he was an open book and seemingly incapable of concealing his intentions. Except, he corrected, when he pretends to care about me. It was his first coherent thought in an hour, but it was not a fact that frightened him. He was in a flux of emotional distress, and there was nothing stopping him from taking a letter opener to his veins. If Kidd had not interrupted him when he had, a different set of people would have been banging on his door.

They had then proceeded to have a short, predominately one-sided chat about nothing. He was uncomfortable where he was sitting, wrapped up in his own limbs and sorrow, but it was than leaving his room open for assault. The other captain was trampling on his already frayed nerves, and he just wanted to be left to his own detrimental devices.
"What is it Eustass-ya?!" He had barked, "If you had any working brain cells at all you'd realize that I'm not in the mood to listen to your complaints!" He had thought it was over and done with, that the idiot would leave him be. Eustass "Captain" Kidd seemed fond of proving him wrong.

"Well, how about I listen to your's, then?"

It was like bathing in ice water imbued with hellfire.

"I beg your pardon?"

He wanted to shut his ears against his response. He wanted to forget the man even existed. The thought of explaining his past, to anyone, was more frightening than repeating his time in that cramped cell.

"I'm...I'm not going to say I understand what your going through, because that's something only you know, but I'm here...to listen, I mean...I'm not to tell anyone about any of this...I've got morals...believe it or not...and, uh...do you...do you want to talk about it?"

They were almost the same words.

The same words.
Tears welled in his eyes at the thought of a black feather coat, wisps of cigarette smoke curling about a tousled blonde head of hair. He had been, was, Law's eternal salvation. There was no possible way he could have survived without that man—with his eternal well of patience and unrelenting pursuit of Law's own happiness. He may not have been able to give Law happiness in the end, but he sure as hell had never been happier in the arms of another man.

"I don't understand what you're dealing with, how could I? This pain is yours alone, Law, but that doesn't mean you have to bear it alone. I'll listen to your grief and stay with you until the storms finally clears, yeah? Talk to me, please, Law."

His lower lip trembled, tears like stalactites as they fell down his chin, and the words tumbled from his mouth without even thinking. All the while he bit back the inevitable sobs threatening to break free. It was surreal, even as he grieved, speaking such words so freely even when his heart was in a vice. How long had it been since he last recounted his past to a living breathing person? How long since someone had lent an ear to his sorrows without breaking down and making it all about themselves. His crew was his family, they knew his plights, but sometimes even they were not enough to curb the loneliness from his being. He was a walking storm cloud, saturated with despair, and ever now and then he needed to lighten his load.

The man was quiet on the other side of the door, and Law was too frightened of abandonment to use his powers. If he was there, he was there. If he wasn't...Law wasn't sure he would survive the night if that was the case.

"You can...surmise for yourself what usefulness I provided..." He finished with a whisper, the tears never stopping. If he had heard himself on playback, he was sure his voice had cracked a thousand times. If he had sounded comical, Eustass never said a word. In fact, Eustass had yet to speak at all.

Fear of rejection boiled in his stomach like a disease, and with every empty second he came closer and closer to vomiting. He waited for the wave of apologies. The customary pity party.
...Well, that sucks.

...Law floundered at the response, mouth imitating a gasping fish, before bursting into a bout of raucous laughter. He hadn't expected the words in his wildest dreams. Such a blasé reaction was mortifyingly unbecoming of such a tragedy. Yet, it was the perfect response from the red-head. He was unpredictable in the best of ways, which was why Law had tolerated his existence from the beginning. The world was overrun with mundane people, and even his own crew had become infuriatingly predictable. Though he loved them with everything he had, his interpersonal skills of observation had ruined any surprises they thought to throw his way. They were endearing and precious to him, able to comfort him in his foulest moments, but they could not hold a flame to his insatiable mind.

Eustass Kidd escaped his reading skills, and the change was thoroughly refreshing.

"T-That's the understatement of the century, Eusatss-ya!" He wheezed, clutching at his sides as he heaved with laughter. Eustass' voice echoed his own, booming laughter filling in the hall that separated his bedroom from the motor room. A wave of giddiness passed over him, and he let his head fall against the steel door with a resounding thud. His brain was high as kite, and he couldn't deny any secondary influences.

The belt around his upper arm wasn't just for show.

_I made a mistake_, his rationality supplied, but his heart felt lighter for it.

_What's one more?_
With a flick of his wrist he had a body pressed against his side, cramming him between the wall and a warm body. His coherence was waning, and he hoped that the confused man beside him would chalk up his sob-story to a drug-induced fantasy. It wasn't hard to believe, his past sometimes didn't even seem real to him.

"W-What the hell?!

His new companion was ruffled, but at least he was attractive in a boilersuit that didn't remotely fit him. As Eustass backed himself further into a file cabinet, realizing their position, Law let his eyes rake along swollen biceps straining against polyester fiber. His pupils dilated as heat pooled in his belly, and he shifted his legs at the telltale warmth between his legs.

His sexual preference was limited by his aversion to sex, due to his negative history with the activity, but he appreciated a good looking man when he saw one*. He had no interest in women, and his preference for men tended to streamline towards people who reminded him of his beloved Cora-san. Such specimens were usually in looks alone, and Kidd happened to be the only one so far who resembled the man in sentiment.

This did not change the fact that he detested sex and all forms of physical contact that he did not enact himself. But he was influenced by a mixture he had concocted himself. It left him inhibited and foggy, and gave him less aftereffects than if he had gone with something else.

"C'mere" Law husked, and grabbed Kidd's face in his hand, missing how the man's eyes locked on the tourniquet. Law lifted himself to his knees and took advantage of Kidd's attempt to speak with an open mouthed kiss.

....
The taste of blood and chocolate**.

Chapter End Notes

*This is not how sexual preference works. Rape victims aren't always asexual and certainly don't link an aversion to sex with asexuality (speaking as a well-informed sex-repulsed asexual). Of course your sexual preference can change afterwards, aversion to sex stems from trauma and fear of bodily contact. Research for further information with the knowledge that I am not a complete expert on the subject and can have facts wrong. I am human.

**This is an expression for being 'bittersweet', which I believed was fitting for the situation. Law wants to express his thanks to Kidd's patience the only way he knows how, but is doing so without clarity or judgment. He wants skinship like anyone who craves contact, but must drug himself to the point of delusion to do so. His past exposed, Law seeks the comfort he found in Cora, and does so with the person who mimicked his actions, in other words, using Kidd as a crutch for his sorrow.
Kidd froze as a tongue found its way into his mouth, the open-mouthed kiss catching him completely off guard. Trafalgar flesh was scorching against his, fingers curling in red hair-tugging him to stay still. His eyes darted back to the leather belt fitted snugly around the others upper arm, dark skin pinched beneath the make-shift tourniquet.

_Holy shit, he's kissing me!_

_Holy shit, he's on drugs!_

_Holy shit, he's kissing me!_

Kidd's mind played on loop as Trafalgar rolled his tongue in his mouth, leaning forward until Kidd was pressed against the wall. He instinctively pushed away, grabbing the man roughly by his forearms and leveling a glare that was denounced by his swollen lips.

"Stop it. You're high right now."

He could see the telltale signs of pupil dilation, his sclera alive with angry red veins. He lolled bonelessly in his grip, tipping back and exposing the swarthy expanse of his throat as he stared aimlessly at the ceiling. Watching the man's chest rise and fall rapidly under stress, the flush of his ears and the contour of his face had him hopeless aroused. He became a furnace of shame as he stared down helplessly at the tent in his trousers, and swallowed thickly. The exhilaration and confusion of his teleportation combined with the gentle stimuli of the kiss had fried his nerves and maxed his heart rate.
He needed to do some push-ups, sit-ups—anything to direct the blood flow elsewhere!

Kidd let out a ragged sigh, his hand still curled around Trafalgar's bicep. The muscle was firm beneath his palm and he couldn't deny, despite his slim build, that the man was muscular.

He couldn't deny the man was beautiful.

He shook the obtrusive thoughts from his aching head and hoisted the pair of them to their feet. He hadn't noticed it due to his own burning shame, but the man was freezing cold. He swore lightly under his breath and backpedaled the nearly unconscious male into the cot shoved against the wall. Taking precaution not to let his head slam into the wall, Kidd gently propped Trafalgar against the steel with cautious hands. The male sagged to the side in response, and Kidd had to right him to get at the tourniquet.

"L-Let's get this off, ugh, shit—you really were a druggie after all." He joked to himself without humor, making slow work of the tightly bound leather. The cold around them was pervasive, the steel lacking any type of insulation to shield them from the icy hands of the ocean deep. Kidd's teeth began to chatter despite his high body temperature, his fingers numb and slipping as he worked furiously on the silver buckle.

"My, my, Eustass-ya~" Trafalgar's voice was airy, and his body began arcing to the side once more. "Won't you undress me of other things? Hmm?" He arched off the wall in a feat of strength, and leered at the red-head with eyes clouded by lust. The bitter taste of bile rose on the back of his tongue, and the tourniquet slide off the tan arm silently. He didn't know how to deal with the situation, but surely it couldn't be much different from dealing with a drunk? All he had to do was make sure he didn't roll over in his sleep and drown in his vomit, and if he supervised his behavior then he wouldn't die, right? He had no idea if the surgeon had overdosed, the man had just confessed to being suicidal, after all. Should he call one of the Heart Pirates to come get him? He didn't see a den den anywhere on the cluttered shelves, and he didn't trust the man not to keel over if he went off to find help.
"Look, I'm gonna wrap you up in blankets and we are going to fucking sit here until you come down from whatever plane of existence your on, okay?" It was the least he could do after listening to such a tragic story, after failing to do anything in the cell. Trafalgar gave a lopsided grin and leaned back, "We could do some fucking, alright." He looked to the side a let out a series of nervous giggles that caused Kidd's stomach to roil unpleasantly. His tan skin was pasted a sickly jaundice in the dim light, and the shadows beneath his eyes accentuated the sunken press of his sockets. His eyes were bright and wet with a feverish glow, pupils wide and searching for something unseen. The skin beneath Kidd's palms had grown clammy with a cold sweat, and the male's thighs shook against Kidd's hips.

"Shit, shit, shit! Fucking hell Trafalgar!" He swore, snatching up the wad of blankets and proceeding to wrap the male as tightly as possible. Cocooning a drugged rape victim was certainly not the best course of action, but it was either that or let him flail about in an attempt to have sex with him, something neither of them truly wanted, surely.

Trafalgar let out a high-pitched giggle, "You're supposed to take off my clothes, not wrap me up more."

"Stop it, Trafalgar, Fuck, I'm trying to help here!"

"Law. Call me Law, Eustass-ya~."

Kidd sighed through his nose, gathering the straight-jacketed bundle into his arms like a child.

"Fine. Law. Can you tell me the side effects of the drugs you're on."
"Mmm...besides the obvious?"

His smile was infectious, like a small child with something mischievous in mind, and Kidd couldn't help but join in.

"Yes, besides you being a loopy idiot. Are you going to have seizures, or something? Isn't that something you gotta watch out for with drugs?"

"This is my own personal make...so no, I'll be tired tomorrow but that's nothing to worry about. Besides~" He squirmed violently for a moment and managed to free his arms so he could stoke Kidd's face lovingly. The anxiety in Kidd's chest was growing, and he couldn't look at Trafalgar's doe eyes without feeling nauseous.

"Aw, don't be like that. Don't you want to fuck me?" He punctuated the word with a swipe of a thumb over Kidd's lower lip, and he pressed back against the wall in reflex to escape his touch.

"Hell no. Don't you remember anything that's happened in the last twenty-four hours? Besides, I'm not some asshole like you make me out to be."

"I don't remember much of anything like this. That's the point, after all. And for the record I don't think you're a bad guy."

His grin became lopsided.
"I think you're a rather nice catch. So, what do you say? I swear I'll be the best you've ever had."

Kidd shivered.

It was not in pleasure.

"I say go the fuck to sleep, Law. This should blow over in a few hours, right? So sleep it off and get out of my hair. Literally." He moved his head to dislodge curious fingers from his mane, wincing as Law's slim digits snagged red strands in their grip.

"Well I say you're a killjoy. But I much admit I'm rather tired." Law sagged in his arms, resting his face in the crook of Kidd's neck. The redhead was having trouble referring to Law by his first name even in his thoughts. It felt too intimate, when he didn't deserve the right. If Law started calling him Kidd-kun, he might just break off the alliance entirely.

Kidd promptly ignored the way Law decided to breathe into his collarbone, and situated himself until he was comfortable. As he drifted off into a dreamless sleep, he faintly came to the realization that he had left the lamp on.

Kidd awoke to a pair of eyes staring at him from across the dimly lit bedroom of Trafalgar Law. Green eyes glared from the stalks of a den den mushi, looking at him accusingly from its perch on a stack of medical tomes. He strained his neck to the side, wincing as it popped and creaked from disuse. My fucking body aches like hell, shit! He blinked blearily, his eyes feeling as if they had been doused in chlorine. Nothing had gone as planned, and his growling stomach had gone quiet soon after it realized it would not be fed anytime soon.
Not while he was holding a snoozing Trafalgar Law.

He sat upright on the man's bed, holding said male in a bundle of blankets as he slept soundly. He himself was growing tired, but he dared not move in fear of waking his lithe passenger. Kidd was propped up in the corner of the room, the headboard digging into his side with a vengeance, the steel at his back chilling his bones. He had swathed Trafalgar in as many sheets and comforters as he could find in the cluttered room, leaving him with nothing to fight against the encroaching cold.

The living bundle shifted in slumber, nuzzling his face into Kidd's collarbone. The light puffs on air were more calming than arousing, and the numbing cold left his hypersensitive nerves unresponsive to the gentle stimuli. Kidd had always been likened to a furnace, keeping him warm against the most inhospitable nights, but now all his heat was being absorbed by the man cradled against him.

Not that he minded, though.

He couldn't see Trafalgar's face as it was nestled beneath his chin, but he was sure by the contours against his skin that it was peaceful, contrary to last night. The brown leather belt which had been constricting Trafalgar's arm was discarded on the floor, the tourniquet's silver buckle glinting in the low light, laughing at his ineptitude.

"I watched how you dealt with the situation, and wanted to thank you on Law's behalf." The familiar voice of Penguin drifted softly through the room, and Kidd's eyes widened as he remember his tryst with Killer.

*I'll mention it later, I guess.*
"Law is not going to wake up for at least five more hours, so if you want to speak go right ahead."

"Uh..."

"How articulate, but I digress. I was privy to Law's divulgence of his history, and, as much as it pains me to admit, I never quite believed Killer when he said you were a kind listener."

"..."

"We're pirates, and, despite this temporary alliance, we are enemies. We may very well kill each other in the future. For you to lend a sympathetic ear to a situation to which you had no obligation, was unexpected. I can tell that Law trusts you, otherwise he would have never told you what he had, not even under the influence of narcotics."

"...About that. Does he do this often?"

"More often than we would like, I'm afraid. But it's only one of his numerous maladaptive coping methods. You won't hear me calling any of them beneficial, even if they are effective. As you've noticed, Law has numerous medical issues, many of his own doing after what he's tried. I take it you were there, ah, when what happened on Little Orange...happened."

"...Yes."

"I have no idea the detail of what transpired, but I have the gist of it. Considering how you acted I can assume you know of the marks and situation of Law's body."
"...Yes."

"You're a good man, Eustass Kidd. But not a good ninja, I'm afraid. Next time you spy on someone be sure to keep a larger distance. For the record, Killer had told me he had informed you. Rest assured, I fully chewed him out while you slept. I'd give him a call if I were you, once you're done taking care of my captain. Rest well."

"...Yeah...I'll give him a call."

Law slept curled up like a cat in Law's lap until Eustass' stomach carved a hole in the silence.

"You're stomach is very loud, Eustass-ya." Law croaked, shimmying out of the redhead's embrace. Eustass let him slip away without complaint, keeping his eyes trained on Law's. Despite the rude awakening, the atmosphere was pulled taut. There was a sour taste on his tongue, and his eyes felt heavy. At the very least, he was well rested. Eustass, on the other hand, looked like a train wreck, with dark smudges under his eyes that weren't there previously. His arm was sore from his injection, the telltale wrap-around bruise of the tourniquet was an throbbing ache.

"You okay?" Eustass whispered, and Law's stomach dropped at his tone. The words he had spoken flooded him like a cold shower, and abruptly his stomach did not agree with him. He lurched to the side and tumbled to the floor, his arms failing to catch his fall in his lethargy. Among a sea of paperwork and broken glass, Law scuttled across the room like an infant and emptied the churning contents of his stomach into the steel bucket of the waste basket.
"Shit!" Eustass exclaimed, and the large hand rubbing his back just made the spasm of his muscles worse. The noxious fumes of his bile was mixed with the pungent reek of alcohol fumes. His eyes watered and spilled over with tears, and, as his heaving ended, his sobbing began. He curled in on himself, choking on his tears and the smell of his vomit.

The hand on his back was still there, curled like a vice over his shoulder. "Shhh," Eustass whispered, his voice descending upon him like a shroud. "You're okay. You're okay." He repeated this like a mantra, the low-decible voice boring into Trafalgar's roaring ears. Soon he could no longer smell the putrid mixture, his nose filling with mucous and dripping down his face as he broke down. Despite the beating inside his skull and the tightness in his chest, he felt a relief he could only ever gain from crying.

Even when he got back to his room and tried to get high enough to forget the world, he couldn't bring himself the relief he was getting now. Telling his history was a balm in and of itself, but even the crying he had done then had been lost in the flush of narcotics. The heat of the hand on his should had grown hot like a brand to his frigid skin, and he lurched back in the search for the source of that glorious heat. There was a shout of surprise, surely because he had nearly broken the man's nose, before Law had turned and tackled Eustass "Captain" Kidd to the floor in a suffocating hug. His shoulders shook violently as he wailing into the black polyester of the man's borrowed boilersuit, even more so when arms wrapped slowly about his torso in a comforting vice.

"There, there." Eustass' chest rumbled beneath Law's ear like a snoring volcano, and it took him back to the cold nights where he'd cry into Cora's shirt after another failed hospital run. This man here was kind to him, and seemed genuinely worried for his wellbeing. Maybe he wasn't like other men? Maybe instead of aroused at his rape he was horrified? Maybe he was a decent human being who actually cared about Law's self destructive lifestyle? If he was playing a game to use him for his own gains, he was a better actor than Law.

"Thank you!" Law cried, digging his fingers into the redhead's shoulder blades. "Thank you so much!" He could recall what he said during his trip, the way Eustass had refuted advances he could have easily pursued. He may not know the full truth about what he was, but he was obviously a creature of desire-there was no way sex could be unpleasant with him. But he had calmed Law down and held him until he fell asleep. He had worried about him as a person, and that was more than he deserved.
He deserved Eustass having said 'yes'.

But he hadn't.

Kidd winced as he shifted onto something sharp, digging into his backside like the edge of a broken bottle. He'd move more, but he had an armful of a sobbing man acting like a limpet. He wasn't complaining, not really, he knew it was best for Trafalgar to let it all out rather than bottle it up again. Of course, he was no true charity case. He didn't help people if he didn't feel like it. If they didn't prove to be worth it to some degree. Trafalgar Law had struck a nerve in him, in the hatred for fathers and oneself. He shared a bitter past full of bloodshed and regret, and it was clear that he was the biggest danger to himself. If they weren't destined rivals, he was sure they would have made fast friends.

"You don't have to thank me for anything."

Trafalgar felt like a skeleton against him, all sharp angles and flat planes of skin pulled taut over muscles. He was muscular, but lithe, and there was a brittleness to his figure one could only detect by holding him. Kidd wanted to protect this man, and felt a surge of maternal instinct as the man curled over him like a small child fearful of the dark. He began to rub circles into his yellow shirt soiled by sweat, wincing as his fingers passed over prominent vertebrae. For how muscular he was, he was surprisingly pliable, in a way that didn't make sense to Kidd.

He shook like a leaf in his hold, tears glancing off the water-resistant suit and slipping across
Kidd's ribs. He thought about what Trafalgar said to him, because he wouldn't call the man Law until he gave him permission when he was sober.

*So he was 'owned' by Donquixote Doflamingo...fuck, I wish it didn't explain so much...*

"You can surmise for yourself what usefulness I provided."

He shivered and tightened his arms around the grown man loudly sobbing into his chest. Trafalgar's tears seemed incapable of ceasing, and his heaving choking noises of sorrow tore at Kidd's heart strings like nothing else. He didn't want to even contemplate what 'usefulness' Trafalgar had 'provided', even though in his gut he knew the answer.

After some time, the gross sobbing decreased to a low sniffling and, finally, even breathing. Kidd's body was stiff and aching, and the hunger in his belly had once again reared its head and made its presence known.

"If you leave him in his bed he'll sleep the rest of the day."

Kidd craned his neck to see a familiar pair of eye stalks peering down at him over the edge of the desk.
"I can't just leave him like this."

"You've done more than enough, and besides, you sound famished. If you give me ten minutes I'll unlock Law's door to let you out."

"It's fucking locked from the outside?"

"Yes, and only I have the key. For safety reasons, clearly."

With that the receiver clicked and the stalks drooped from view, and Kidd sighed in resignation. It was disturbingly easy to carry the napping male. *He's so fucking light, does he even eat?* He ducked the man in with straining limbs, his back creaking in protest beyond his years. At the very least, Trafalgar was sleeping peacefully, and his first look at the man's sleeping face was well worth the wait. In the low light of the bedside lamp, the delicate contours of Trafalgar's face were silhouetted on the wall. Kidd flushed as he found himself staring at bruised lips dry and cracked from misuse. Trafalgar's skin was still sallow and the grooves beneath his eyes were dark chasms, but the lines of distress were no longer present. *He's working himself to death,* Kidd mused, giving into the impulse to thread his fingers through charcoal tresses.

The locks were softer than he had expected, slipping through his fingers like a liquid. He had thought Trafalgar's deteriorating state would cause his hair to be brittle and dry, but instead he bore the healthy hair of a stallion. *His eyebrows look soft as well...Fuck I have to stop, this is getting weird.* He was undeniably attracted to Trafalgar Law, but he couldn't see anything wrong with that. *He's handsome even though he's looks sick as a dog.* But, then again, Kidd was always attracted to people and things that were beautiful. He supposed it stemmed from his adoration of his mother, but he hesitated to dwell on the similarities between his objects of affection and his late mother.

The sound of the door unlocking drew him from his ministrations, and Law's face tensed a moment before he rolled over to face the wall.
Penguin appeared in the doorway with a broad grin that was mildly unsettling.

"Sorry about the wait, I'm sure you're starving. C'mon, I'll make sure you eat a feast."

Unfortunately, he not taken into account Kidd's notorious sweet tooth, and was looking on with a helpless expression as Kidd practically ate him out of home and house as he inhaled pancakes like air.

"That is the sixteenth pancake you've eaten. I thought you said you wanted eggs..." Penguin trailed off, looking morosely at the untouched plates of scrambled eggs and cheese that were growing cold. Many Heart Pirates had experienced starvation and, despite their visible fear of the ravenous redhead, were slowly snatching up the forgotten plates of food that lined every inch of the long table. Penguin hadn't lied when he said he'd lay out a feast, and the cooks had dished out plate after plate, albeit in confusion, for the redhead's solitary consumption.

Watching the man eat was starting to make his nauseous. If I weren't so grateful for your help I would tell you to stop acting like a pig. Killer didn't say your manners had an off-switch. Penguin rubbed his clammy palms together in an attempt to alleviate the awkward atmosphere.

"So, um, you should call Killer after this..." He watched as a strawberry the size of his fist disappeared into Kidd's mouth and felt his lunch make a reappearance in the back of his throat.

Kidd swallowed the mouthful so hard Penguin has sympathy pains, "Why can't you just tell me his
Penguin thanked whoever was listening that the captain had the decency not to speak with his mouthful. He took back his gratitude when Kidd started on a plate of donuts.

"W-Well that would be inconsiderate of Killer, I think. You should speak with him instead and listen to what he has to say."

Kidd huffed around a swollen mouthful of sweet dough, but had the decency to remain silent. Penguin kept in mind Killer's warning that Kidd's aggression could be a loose cannon, and decided to hold his tongue on the matter. If he pushed too hard the man's temper could easily outweigh his altruism.

"Whatever." Kidd shrugged, and gestured vaguely behind him. "So is Doc gonna be okay if we just leave him like that?"

Penguin's heart swelled at the gesture, once again warmed by the man's compassion. He was glad Killer served such a kind man.

"He's going to sleep for the rest of day, and he'll most likely be out tomorrow as well. I hadn't noticed it but he added a tranquilizer to his medication this time. He probably wants to sleep it all off."

"...That can't be healthy."
"No, it's not, but most of us here are certified physicians and we'll keep an eye on him. He's done this before to pass the time, when he doesn't want to deal with the world."

"..."

"Look," Penguin sighed, resting his forearms on an uncluttered part of the table. "I appreciate what you did, more than you can imagine, but...this really doesn't concern you and I suggest you refrain from pursuing this curiosity any further." He saw the rage bubbling in the man's eyes and continued quickly, "For Law's sake. Honestly, the last thing he needs is to worry about someone else getting involved with his dilemmas. He just needs his space and lots of time, but he'll pull through. He always has."

Penguin watched Kidd's face carefully, calculating the furrow of his brows and the slope of his frown. Kidd let the silver spoon in his hand clatter loudly to the table, drawing attention from nearby Heart Pirates. Penguin bit his lip and lowered the brim of his hat as the man wordlessly pushed back from the table, the metal bench tipping back and crashing to the ground, echoing loudly in the mess hall. Kidd left the room in silence, leaving Penguin to stare at the mess he left behind.

Of course...it has never been so bad before...

Chapter End Notes

I'm very sorry about the delay of this chapter and how short it is but most chapters from now on will be this length. I've had a very eventful spring break and college is eating me alive. Thank you so much for your continual support!
Law let out a heavy sigh, allowing himself to slump boneless onto his cluttered desk. For once, he deigned to leave the blinds open, and, because of their shallow mooring, his room was bathed in the fluctuating blue of the ocean's calm. The sight outside his large bedroom window was breathtaking, with large rainbow parrotfish over two feet long coming to inspect the yellow intrusion into their maritime world. The light reflected off the water and decorated his bedroom in a surreal dance of mismatched patterns, but Law was too exhausted to admire either the view or his environment. Apathy had wormed into his marrow, and he could care less about small wonders.

Coupled with the anhedonia his depression brought him, apathy dealt a fatal blow to his fragile cycle of self-care. His room had become filthier, with half-eaten plates swarmed with ants in the corners, and dirty clothes littering the muddled floor. It heaped up to his calves, and wading to the door had become more of a chore. Work was meaningless to him, and the charts and books upon which he rested his weary head had collected a fine layer of dust in his absence. It had been two weeks since he had last sat at his desk, and the chair under him was crusted with some dried substance.

Bepo could no longer enter with how foul it smelled, leaving Penguin and Shachi to don face masks when they checked on him. He himself was unaware of the scent festering in his room, even though he could register the damp cloy of the air as mold collected in the nooks and crannies.

Law went days without showering, something he hadn't done since he was a teen on the streets. His hair was matted with grease and his skin felt like it was layered in sweat and dirt. All the makeup and deodorizers on the market couldn't conceal his malnourishment. The sallow of his skin and the
depression of his cheekbones had his crew whispering worries when he thought he was out of range, and the two pirate groups they had dismantled hadn't recognized him until it was too late.

Law tucked his knees beneath him as his gut writhed. He let out a whine and dug his nails into the flesh of his arms against the pangs of hunger. He body was starving itself, as anything he put in his system came back up without fail. To prevent himself from fainting at inopportune times, he had taken to intravenously feeding himself before daybreak. But it was not enough to keep his stomach at bay.

He whimpered in the confines of his solitude, dragging his cheek along the dusty cover of *Mummification Skills of Alabastan Embalmers*. The action disturbed the layer of silt and had him choking on air in seconds, rearing back and clutching at his chest. The violent motion tipped his chair off balance, and in an instant the world tipped upwards and the wind was suddenly gone from his lungs. His back flared up in pain and his eyes watered as he fought for air, gasping helplessly. When he remembered how to breathe he wheezed for relief.

His windpipe burned and his eyes blurred with unbidden tears. Law felt like a child again, scared and vulnerable. He was hurting, he was hungry, he was tired and dirty, and above all he was alone in his agony. He forced himself to roll stiffly off the chair and into the small mountains of garbage, settling his face against a bloodstained shirt. His temple rested atop a stiff patch of dried blood, and his nose was hit with the faded scent of iron.

In his weakened state, disposing of the last pirate crew was too much for him to handle. They were a local band of middle-tier looters set on raiding their submarine, and Law arrived late to the party. Caught up in scouring the believed-to-be uninhabited island for medicinal herbs, he was left to ambush the ambush. Even being given the upper hand hadn't been enough to temper his feeble body, and he had received several lacerations for his half-baked efforts. Though he had sealed the wounds closed with his power by the time he returned to safety of his room, he was too exhausted to use his powers to repair the damage to his clothes.

He stared with half lidded eyes at a rotting apple wedged between a discarded boot and a wadded napkin. The sugared flesh had withered brown and white as green mold had frothed alone the edges of the single bite mark. He couldn't hold down much more than a few bites of an apple on the best days. He was well aware what it looked like to the few in his informed circle, but the only one of the trio who accosted him was Penguin.
...*Are you...pregnant?* Penguin had asked, wringing his hat in nervous hands.

_No, I am not._ He had replied, his voice steady despite the tense atmosphere.

He had lied.

He resisted the urge to rest his hands on his toned stomach. There was no reason he should be affectionate or protective over something he refused to keep. He knew his decision, and had no qualms about the matter other than it would dredge up memories he loathed to visit. He was putting off the inevitable to stave the further degradation of his sanity. He was already a man on a slippery slope of depression and self-harm, and then he had to fall into the grubby hands of human traffickers. If it had only been a case of sexual abuse he could take a few weeks of serious despair and then get back into his swing of negative emotions without much of a drop in his abilities. Naturally, things were never simple with a body like his. If precautions weren't taken, he would get pregnant. It was a fact he had to live with, nailed to the back of his brain like a putrefying taunt.

It was what made him the perfect reproductive machine, after all.

He had any number of vials handy in the confines of his cabinets that would deal with his unwanted resident without the waterworks. Even if he didn't do anything, his own bad habits would take care of the problem within the next week or so. But he'd rather it not come to that. _No_, it had to be by his own decision.

He had to be the one to make the choice and nothing else, not even his own body.
But that was what made it so difficult, because it would remind of the times when it had not been his choice. Of the times when decisions were made about his body without his consent.

Without his knowledge.

Of the times when he had been treated less than human.

As an object.

He grit his teeth and willed his tears to stop, knowing it would just cascade into a tantrum if he let himself break down just yet. Today was the day he was going to push through this and get his life back on schedule. But he was scared, *oh so very terrified*. His mental barriers were blocking out those dreadful memories to protect him, and now in order to complete his objective he had to unlock the doors to his personal hell.

*I can do this...*
Law fished blindly for the snail he knew was taking advantage of the abandoned sheets of lettuce lost in the debris, and let out a triumphant huff when fingers skimmed a smooth shell. The snail knew when he was needed, and slid obediently up his arm with adoring eyes aimed at his master. Law's stomach turned momentarily in the comparison, before patting the snail's shell appreciatively.

"Thank you, you're being a huge help here." The snail merely nuzzled his hand in response with moisten eye-stalks, and Law chuckled at the open display of affection. Den den mushi were victims too, in his opinion, taken from the wild to be used by humans indiscriminately. Most people treated them like furniture and slammed their receivers too hard, creating imbalances in their chemistry and disrupting their digestive systems. Many mushi-activists asserted the government lied to public with claims it was a mutually beneficial relationship between humans and snails, and Law had to agree. With the way the snails acted to simple acts of kindness proved they were mistreated, and here he was once again reminded how innocent and childlike the small creatures could be.

The demons of his past giggled in his brain at the treacherous word, scratching at his back and stroking his belly. Law quickly picked up the receiver and dialed Eustass Kidd's number without hesitation, closing his eyes and willing his anxiety away. I need a distraction, Eustass-ya. So please, please pick up I need-

"Yo."

The familiar voice filled him with warmth, and brought back images of a soothing embrace and a sympathetic ear. His emotions in flux, tears filled his throat.

"Hello Eustass-ya." He felt so foolish, calling his enemy for comfort, but that sleep he had in the man's arms had been the best he ever had. Never mind the sedatives and the exhaustion added to the mix.
"You don't sound so good. Did you get what fucking Heat got after drinking at that last island? What the hell was it called...something fucking stupid...Basket Island?"

"Casket Island."

"Shut up, don't fucking correct me!"

"My apologizes Eustass-ya. I was under the impression you would want to avoid looking ignorant in front of your own subordinates but if you insist..."

"Fuck off, Trafalgar."

"Ah~, you wound me, Eustass-ya."

"..."

"..."

"So...I assumed you called for a reason, yeah? What's up?"
"What's wrong, Trafalgar? Do you want us to meet up somewhere, because, I mean, it's not like I have anything better to do what with Heat puking out his guts and our log pose not calibrated. We're docked at Nummett Island, by the way, finally we hit an island on a different route from you guys. It's been weird seeing you guys everywhere, but we got our share of adventure so it's all good."

"...

"Law I'm serious, we can meet whenever. You wanna talk over the phone? I'm in my room and it's basically soundproofed."

"...

"...

"Why are you being so kind to me?" Law whimpered, pressing the heel of his palm against aching lids until white spots sparked within the black. He was hiccuping back sobs without success, his mind grasping at straws as he drowned.

"Are you fucking stupid?! I already told you, didn't I? I'm a decent person, dammit! Just because you've met a bunch of scumbags doesn't mean I'm automatically one of them, you know? I listened to you before, and I have no problem doing so again."
"...Are you sure you aren't doing this to soothe a guilty conscience?"

"What? Sure I feel guilty about not being able to do anything, but I'm listening because I care dammit!"

"Why?"

"Again with this?"

"There is no logical reason why you should be willing to listen to me without some sort of gain on your end. Just because we relate on a few points doesn't mean you and I are good friends, Eustassy. Just because you...just because you were kind to me once doesn't mean you'll always be so selfless and I-shit! Why did I even call? Fucking hell!" Law gnawed at his knuckles to stave off another bout of crying, his head throbbing with congestion and unshed tears. If anything, calling had made his hormones go haywire, and he was doing nothing for his poor frayed nerves.

"Fuck, fucking hell please don't say that and don't hang up! If you hang up now I'm going to have to go and see if you're alright or I won't be able to sleep tonight."

Law chuckled mirthlessly. He wouldn't come for me. He doesn't care at all. I should just hang up I should just...

"I'm pregnant."
The words tumbled from his lips without preamble, and he felt as if he had been dropped from a tower.

"..."

"...

"...Oh. O-Oh shit, oh shit that's bad um-

Eustass Kidd's voice flooded the line with static as he dropped something in the background, but Law was too busy having a panic attack to notice. The world seemed far away as he hyperventilated in his small corner of sanity, chest heaving and pectorals straining in pain with the effort. Everything's over. Why did I say that I'm going to die. Yes, this it is, I'm going to die-Law scrambled onto an uneven surface of his trash mounds and tipped to the side, landing face first in damp papers. Kidd's voice grew louder somewhere in the real world, while Law scrambled desperately into his bed, leaving the distraught snail somewhere in the filth.

Under the covers he could pretend to be a child in his family's home. Yes, he was six and he could huddle in blankets at the sound of thunder if he wanted too. Lami wouldn't mind if he brought her into bed to cuddle, it wasn't like he needed the comfort or anything. His face was wet and something smelled like urine. Was he crying? Did he wet the bed? Mother would be angry with him. Father would probably hit him again. No, no it was the alcohol from the papers. He was twenty-four years old. His name was Trafalgar Water D. Law. He was born on October sixth. His family was dead but never buried. He was currently three and half weeks pregnant and Eustass Kidd was yelling at him from his lap.

No, he looked down, blinking furiously against the burn of rum, at the frantic snail crawling up his thigh. He felt as if he had just broken the surface of the ocean, the sheet around him flickering with the reflections from his window, his lungs filling with clear, filtered air.
"Oi! Trafalgar?! If you're doing drugs again I'm gonna be pissed!" Irate copper eyes glared at him sightlessly, the decorative hat nowhere to be seen.

"Ah," Law swallowed, his tongue thick and raw in his mouth. "I-I'm fine, Eustass-ya."

"Like hell you are!" The surgeon winced at the man's shout, and gently curled his fingers under the snail to bring it to eye level. The sheet surrounding him slid off slowly, and he was sure his hair looked quite the mess. At least he can't see me...

"Alright, Eustass-ya, I'm not fine." He had to fight to get the words to flow, and his chest ached terribly. "I'm pregnant and suicidal and not fine at all."

Copper eyes narrowed.

"You better not be trying to kill yourself."

"No, not yet."

"NOT EVER!"

Law blinked, the snail doing the same as it momentarily reverted back to its own mentality, eyes wobbling from the shriek echoing out of the receiver.
"Volume, Eustass-ya. We wouldn't want your den den mushi coming down with another cold so soon."

"Yeah, well, don't do anything stupid."

"Far from it, I consider myself a highly intellectual individual with no comical points whatsoever."

"Yeah, yeah, I saw those fucking polar bear underwear you dweeb so don't even think about lying."

Heat rose from the back of the neck to color the tips of his ears as his eyes darted to the pair of monochrome panties he had partially tucked beneath a stack of manila folders. His underwear were the only feminine articles of clothing his body 'required' him to wear. Briefs had too much extra room and the overlap of boxers under his jeans drove him mad. Just because he enjoyed the 'cuter' side of undergarments didn't make him any less of a man. Neither did his taste in shoewear and jewelry, others' opinions be damned.

"Well, I believe we have reached an impasse, Eustass-ya."

"Indeed."

Laughter bubbled in Law's chest at the absurdity of the situation. This man had no filter, and yet his mind was as sharp as a tac.
It was refreshing to be able to converse with someone who could hold their own in conversation.

"Trafalgar...do you have a plan? I mean, do you know what you want to do about...you know..."

It was all he needed to sober up, and the harsh reality descended once more.

"Yes. I won't keep it. I have no qualms about terminating it. At this point its nothing but a cluster of cells and I'm not one to preach about the importance of souls, or such nonsense."

There was silence on the other line, in which Law feared he had let too much of his own beliefs slip through.

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"I mean, that's what you want to do, yeah? I don't see anything wrong with that. It's your body, Trafalgar. You should do what you want with it."

Ah, Law brought the back of his hand to his mouth, swallowing thickly around the knot in his throat.
"Too kind to me."

If Eustass knew what he was doing to Law's heart, perhaps he would no longer be as accommodating. But *maybe he's just nice*... He found himself wanting to tell Eustass everything. More than just an insipid monologue. But truly sympathetic individuals were hard to come by, and he refused to let his newest companion leave him for something as trivial as his own need for comfort.

"Thank you, but I'd rather put it off as long as possible. So talk to me. About anything. Anything at all."

"..."

"Please distract me, Eustass-ya. I-" His throat closed as the sobs returned, and he shut his eyes tightly to hold the pressure back. He was losing control of himself. He would never act so desperately otherwise. How disgraceful, Cora would turn his nose up at his antics.

"Alright, so this island, Nummett, has these indigenous people who are just insane! Well, first of all, the place looked completely deserted when we first docked. We thought it was just gonna be a rest stop, but the second we docked these savages come running out of the forest- which was made entirely of corn stalks, I shit you not- butt naked. So these naked people are running at us screaming something none us could understand but they keep pointing at the volcano-this is a volcanic island, by the way- and try to climb onto the ship! So we pull out, naturally, and the crew wants to fight them but I don't see the point when these people don't seem to be attacking us or have weapons of any kind. And then the volcano decides to erupt and the natives are all swimming after our boat as their whole island basically goes up in flames and I swear one guy was still on the beach with his hands in the air like he was praising the eruption! Half the crew is laughing their ass off because, I mean, you know our streak of bad luck has just been awful these last three islands, and the other half is trying to keep the natives from scratching the paint job."
Law giggled softly, eyes bright with amusement at Kidd's avid storytelling.

"Priorities, after all."

"Of course. So anyway, there's these popping noises and when I look up I see the island literally erupt with popcorn! Popcorn! I thought it was snowing at first, but when the islanders started to eat it I realized it wasn't So apparently, the islanders actually speak our language and were screaming at us to get out of the blast zone of what is this annual festival attributed to the gods of corn, or something. It was like the day when the gods gave them popcorn…and destroyed half their island with lava, but apparently the popcorn made that alright. It was actually pretty tasty, though there were a couple burnt pieces that were absolutely nasty."

"So you're still there?"

"Of course we're still here! Free popcorn motherfucker! It's plain and we don't have enough salt for everyone but dammit it all we're going to stay here until we have more than enough to travel with! Blaire's actually in the crow's nest right now, swimming in snacks! I have bucket of it here next to me, listen!"

Law didn't bother hiding his smile as a crunching noise resounds through the speaker.

"I see you've got yourselves a lazy day ahead of you. Are you going to explore the island or just move on once you've stored up?"

"Probably move on, I mean, there's so much popcorn that when I tried going onshore it came up to my waist for at least five meters. I don't see a reason to continue, and there's still lava around so I wouldn't test my newfound luck."
"I see. The few maps I've been able to procure of this section of Grand Line aren't detailed at all, but it looks like we will be parting ways from here on out."

"Yeah, but at least we'll be able to have unique adventures from now on."

"I'm sure you'd be able to do that even if we were nearby, to be honest. You seem like the kind of man who gets into trouble with earnest."

"Oh, shove it."

"What an elaborate comeback, Eustass-ya. I can see your IQ points dropping from here."

"I wouldn't be talking if I were you. I saw you picking apart your sandwich on that pier. Too good for bread, huh?"

"Bread is disgusting, Eustass-ya, and my preferences are my own. I happen to enjoy a variety of culinary dishes. Just because I prefer not to consume a leaven form of flour-and-water-based-dough does not mean I have dysfunctional palate."

"Oh yeah? What kind of foods do you like?"
"I prefer seafood to anything else, mostly grilled fish and onigiri. I enjoy heated dishes, such as soups and stews, and also have a preference for dishes involving rice."

"...That's not the most varied of palates, even though I wouldn't call it dysfunctional..."

"Oh? What do you enjoy eating, then?"

"Anything sweet, really."

"So, desserts."

"Pretty much, yeah. But I like my red meat like anyone else."

"Fair enough."

"Mmh."

Their conversation relaxed into a comfortable exchange of otherwise useless information. Law found himself growing increasingly sleepy as he listened to the deep baritone of the other male's voice. His anxiety was almost nonexistent, and the last thing on his mind was the impending procedure.
"When I was seven my mother spent all of her savings on a strawberry shortcake, and the next time I was able to afford it was five years later. It's my favorite taste in the world."

Law perked at the information. He wanted to know more about the red-haired anomaly, but never expected the man to voluntarily bring up his family. He hadn't missed the man's apprehension in his clinic when asked about his heritage. His malice for his father had been palpable, and Law wanted to know if they shared more in that department other than obvious distaste.

"It sounds like she was happy to make sacrifices for you. She sounds like a wonderful parent."

His own parents never gave him affection if it hadn't been hard won through good grades, and even then they were praising his genes rather than his achievements.

"...She sacrificed...a lot, for me...shit, I really hate talking about my mom. Most of the time I try to keep her out of my head. What about you?"

"What?"

"Do you have any specific techniques you do to keep your unpleasant history out of your mind?"

"...I don't exactly have a good answer for that, Eustass-ya, when I am a man living solely in the past. I am the worst person you could ask for advice, in anything unrelated to my field of work."

"Is that...the whole reason you even came out here?"
"Law are you going for the One Piece or not?"

"..."

"Law ended the call with a heavy expression, a weariness sunken into the grooves beneath his eyes. His body had grown cold in the silence, the soothing warmth of the other man's presence gone with a single gesture of Law's weakness. Despite the beauty of the turquoise world filtering through his window, his room felt void of life without Eustass' voice."

Cracking his spine as he stretched out on the bed, Law decided to take a nap before doing anything else. Eustass had given him plenty of material for an enjoyable dream. All he had to do was pray Doflamingo didn't decide to show up instead.
Chapter 12

Kidd wiggled his bare toes in the damp sand, nerves tingling in response to the ocean's call.

As a fruit user, this was the closest he could get to the ocean. He stretched out with a parting of his jaws, fingers brushing sand as he arced them far above his head. *The sand's softer here than on Nummett...I wonder if this place has a proper name at all...*

Kidd lay in only his pants along the edge of the shore, basking in the sun like a lethargic cat. The somniferous heat lulled him in and out of a dreamless sleep, his limbs pliant and warm. He had the island to himself for the time being, as his crew ventured deep into the jungle to discover its concealed riches. *If they find anything*, Kidd mused, shivering when the waves skimmed the beneath pads of his toes, *this place might be deserted...either way I get a few hours of peace...*

Don't get him wrong, he loved his crew. He wouldn't sail with them if he couldn't tolerate them. But almost two weeks with no sight of land and a dwindled supply of unsalted popcorn, one could get a bit antsy with the most compliant of folk.

*I haven't spoken to Trafalgar since we set sail, either...*

The conversation they shared over the phone weighed heavily on his mind during the lull of travel. Even more so in conjunction with the long monologue given of his past, and, now that Kidd knew how raw and broken the infamous doctor was, he could no longer see the man in the same light. He knew well how unwanted and repulsive it was to be pitied, but it wasn't altruism either.

In his leisure he had browsed the small library they had on board and read as much as he could find on the small country of Flevance. Unsurprisingly, most of what Trafalgar had said had not
matched up with what had been recorded in the history books.

...a highly infectious disease spread rapidly throughout the prosperous nation, and the borders were quickly closed to prevent further contamination...

...several citizens attempted to escape their country in hopes of a cure, but instead became the plague they so intensely feared...

...Any poor souls attempting to find treatment were violently turned away...

...Within the year, the Flevanch had become extinct due to unforeseeable tragedy...

...No survivors...

...The proud people of Flevance turned away all attempts to aid them...

Every book that spoke of Trafalgar's lost city only spewed lies and convenient coverups that would show the World Government in a positive light. There was no mention of a small child hiding in a pile of corpses. No mention of the government coming in and annihilating unsuspecting townsfolk. No mention of the hundred years of deception in favor of capitalist gains. No word of how citizens tried to fight their way out into other islands only to be mowed down by a 'justified cause'. Trafalgar Law's nationality was unknown in the pirate world, and only Eustass 'Captain' Kidd was privy to information known by the man's closest companions. He doubted most of Trafalgar's crew knew where their captain hailed from. It crossed his mind, momentarily, why Penguin, Shachi, and the polar bear had been able to worm their way passed Law's iron clad walls. Did they know him longer? Perhaps they had helped him rebuild his life in wake of tragedy...
No. He said he joined the Donquixote pirates after he crossed the border...

The implications of such an association was shattering. It explained so much of the man's infamous cruelty, and, even if it was a learned behavior before joining the Dressrossan leader, it was still there. But all he had seen of the man was a broken child, desperate for comfort.

*Did he try to repay me for listening with sex?*

It was a chilling thought. Despite the sun baking him under its rays, a wash of cold rushed through his veins. He couldn't fathom the fissures in the man's psyche, all the gouges in his heart. How little did he care about himself to freely give himself to relative strangers in gratitude?

*But he has a great deal of pride.*

It was there, it was certainly there, but how much of it was pride in himself? Kidd had found his days consumed with thoughts of Trafalgar Law.

*What was important to him?*

*What are his hopes?*

*What consumes his thoughts?*
What plagues his dreams?

What makes him happy?

What drives him forward?

Revenge, surely, he had explained that much to him. So revenge on Donquixote Doflamingo? It wasn't revenge for the decimation of his people, but something else?

You can surmise for yourself was usefulness I provided.

His fists clenched reflexively as revulsion churned his empty stomach. He had witness for himself the silent fury Trafalgar had displayed in that cramped cell. He was a man who took revenge swiftly and without remorse. He was strong in both body and mind, and didn't give his enemies the satisfaction they sought in his reactions. Kidd wasn't sure he would have been able to be so calm in such a horribly invasive situation. He reacted far more distraught than Trafalgar, he had fought and screamed against his bonds. He had cried for a man he barely knew. It was his own brand of torture, his own shadows of his past. It was basic human decency Trafalgar apparently thought himself unworthy of.

He thought back to how adamant Trafalgar was of his fallacy. The man had thought he had faked his concern to the bitter end. As if it was impossible that someone outside of his crew could think of him as a human being. Trafalgar had cracked open the horror of his past and served Kidd his fried sorrows on a silver platter, but he had a hard time wrapping his head around the finer details. What he meant by 'product of tainted tap water' made no sense to him. 'A mutant for another's fancy', on the other hand, gave a more sinister connotation to the phrase.
Did someone poison him as a child to make him this way? But then he said he was born like that, right?

They had spoke in length about nothing of importance during that unsettling phone call. At first it had been him providing anecdotes about his adventures, but then they had exchanged interesting information.

He doesn't eat very much, or at least has limited preferences when it comes to meals. I wonder if he even eats more than twice a day...and then there was that thing about colors...that was pretty fucked up...and the hormones...

"Do you have...a favorite color?" He asked tentatively, unsure of where to go with the conversation once he had finished recounting their brief adventures. He would rather not talk about his escapades back in Blue, because he wouldn't know where to start.

Laughter abruptly burst forth from the small black and yellow snail, small arms wobbling in amusement. The corners of his mouth quirked upwards at the endearing display.

"What a childish question to ask Eustass-ya!" There was nothing but unadulterated joy in his voice, and it caused his heart to swell.

I'm glad his mind is off the abortion thing.
He had never wondered too hard about how a female's body worked or felt in comparison to his own. He touched on the topic once or twice in his childhood, only to shy away from thinking about his mother's profession. All he knew was that the thought of someone penetrating him was terrifying and gut-wrenching. How invasive...the thought made him squirm. Of course, they were different parts, so he would have no knowledge of how receiving pleasure in foreign areas would feel to him. He saw Trafalgar as a man, but he had a vagina. What had Trafalgar felt in that cell, on an anatomical level? Kidd had to stop his train of thought, his insides curling in revulsion. And he's pregnant to boot, I don't want to know how it feels to know there's a potential human growing inside you. It must be terrifying to him. Maybe even dehumanizing...He didn't sound like abortion was a moral dilemma for him, so I doubt he sees it as his child...but didn't that book say that a woman feels attachment to the child regardless? Maybe not, a lot of it sounded like bullshit...he did say most doctors were charlatans...

"Well, I guess it would be yellow...but it's losing its brilliance..."

"Oh?"

"But on the other hand, I didn't choose this color for my submarine out of fondness of the hue. It..." The sound of swallowing was audible over the transmission. Kidd felt dread welling up in his own throat.

"Have you ever heard of color psychology? Of the four psychological primary colors, it is the most emotional making it the strongest color, psychologically. The right amount with lift the spirits and self esteem and is the color of confidence and optimism."

"Huh, isn't it supposed to make people happy, too?"

"True, but it represents so much more."
"So it's a super color. Interesting. What about red?"

"Well, being the longest wavelength, red is one of most powerful colors. It has the property of appearing nearer than it is and therefore grabs our attention first. It is the most physical color, stimulating the heart rate and giving the impression that time is advancing faster than it is. It relates to the masculine principle and can activate the "fight or flight" instinct. It is stimulating and lively, very friendly. At the same time, it can influence defiance and aggressive."

"Really? So no negatives, huh?"

"I recall just having said that it influenced aggression and defiance."

"Yup."

"I see, well, at least you aren't surrounded by a color that designates irrationality, fear, emotional fragility, depression, anxiety, and suicide"

"...Are you making that up?" Kidd swallowed, hoping it wouldn't be as audible as Trafalgar's had been. The traits fit the man's character so perfectly it was unnerving and worrisome.

"Oh, how I wish I was, Eustass-ya. But my dark humor ends there, I'm afraid."

"..."
There was the sound of rustling fabric and then a crash that could only be the breaking of plates. For a moment, Kidd thought that Law might have passed out, before the swarthy doctor hastily replied.

"Sorry about that, a stack of folders fell."

"Hmm," Kidd sought for a way to lift the awkward atmosphere, "What about black, that's your second color, yeah?"

"Well, black is all colors, so the psychological implications of that are considerable. It creates protective barriers, as it absorbs all the energy coming towards you, and it enshrouds the personality. It is essentially the absent of light, since no wavelengths are reflected. For its positive aspects, it communicates absolute clarity, sophistication, security, emotional safety, glamour, and uncompromising excellence. It creates the perception of weight and seriousness. For its negative traits, it reflects coldness, heaviness, and oppression. Actually, did you know that it is a myth that black clothes are slimming? The truth is that black is the most recessive color, and therefore it is more a matter of not drawing attention to yourself, rather than making you look slimmer."

"That's interesting."

That was the understatement of the century. Once again, Trafalgar was revealing secrets about himself, probably without realizing it in his desperation for human contact. Emotional security, safety, seriousness... how Trafalgar wants others to perceive him? And yellow, all that stuff about emotional fragility, depression, irrationality, and suicide? Fucking hell.

"I'm sure you can see how both colors compliment me." Trafalgar let loose a humorless laugh, the den den's golden eyes never wavering. Kidd frowned, creases forming around his downturned mouth. He couldn't criticize the man on his obvious self-loathing, it would be hypocritical of him,
but neither could he let the topic lie.

"I think...it's natural, to want to cover up one's weaknesses."

"...Yes, I agree..."

"...So, uh..." Kidd rubbed at the back of his neck in a nervous manner, a cold sweat beading on the skin beneath his hairline. He hadn't been so nervous in a long while. It felt like he was walking on glass whenever they ran out of quips. To Kidd there was nothing more unnerving than running out of witting comebacks.

"So that thing about black making you look thinner is just a myth, huh? I should let Wire know he doesn't look at thin as his namesake, he's always afraid he looks like a tree."

"Ah, I think I might have spotted him when we were boarding at the docks then. A tall fellow with a mesh shirt and trident, yes?"

"That would be Wire, yeah."

"A very interesting choice of attire. While I admired the choice of boots I would have to pass on the headgear."

"Eh, to each his own. You couldn't ever pay me enough to try on those shorts."
"Mm, what a shame, I'm sure you've got great legs."

Kidd smirked, "Not as slim as yours, I'm afraid. You have legs for days."

"..."

I should not have said that.

Fuck.

"I mean, uh, you are masculine as fuck!...I shouldn't have said anything..."

"..."

"I am going to assume that was a compliment, Eustass-ya." Trafalgar's voice was thick with emotion, and Kidd wanted to punch himself in the face.

"..."
"Want to hear a secret, Eustass-ya?"

I don't want to hear any secrets with that tone of voice. You better not be on drugs again or Roger help me I'll get Killer to call his bird boyfriend to kick your ass in line.

"First of all, I should have prefaced this whole conversation saying that my den den is wired to block wiretapping. I should have really said that earlier, I apologize for the possible anxiety the idea might have brought you."

"Oh, yeah." It had completely slipped Kidd's mind that Marines could have been listening in on their conversations, and his stomach turned at the thought. The last thing Trafalgar needed was the whole government to be after him for anything other than piracy. If a Celestial Dragon was brought into play then the World Government would surely direct all their forces in pursuit of the lone submarine. Crafty as he was, Kidd wasn't sure Trafalgar would have a chance escaping the entire armada.

"To be honest, I went on hormones when I was fourteen. Sadly, being a Lorelei means my body predominately functions on estrogen. If I hadn't gone on testosterone, I would look much like Rei does. Oh, he has given me permission to bring up his lineage when appropriate."

The gears turned slowly in Kidd's brain as he sluggishly connected the dots. His mind conjured up a porcelain skinned boy with lime green hair, fuscia eyes, and slim wrists.

"My roommate? He was..."

"A Lorelei like me, yes. However, he prefers to not take hormones and is fine with how his body functions. I wish I could say the same."
"Unfortunately, no amount of testosterone could even alter the root of the problem, as you may recall. I managed to grow a scant amount of facial hair, my voice dropped, and I gained a great deal of muscle, but in the long run I ended up with the short end of the stick."

Kidd's face colored as he realized what the other meant by the "root of the problem". Even if it had been in such a deplorable context, Kidd had still seen Law's...parts.

"No matter how many months I waited, I still menstruated...still was able to, ah,..."

Thoughts drifted to Law's current situation. To the reason he had called in the first place.

Trafalgar is pregnant. That fucker actually got him pregnant. I can't imagine how bad he must feel, knowing that the bastard's kid inside him.

"I just realized I was neither able to give you a proper send off nor able to check your physical off the list."

It hadn't even occurred to him during those two days he spent wandering the submarine in search of something to do. Trafalgar had been sleeping day in and day out, with Penguin giving him a few updates to soothe his frayed nerves. He was still angry with the man for insinuating he leave Trafalgar alone. He hated being told what to do more than anything, and kept himself occupied in order not to murder Killer's boyfriend. In fact, during the first day he 'entertained' himself by giving his old pal Killer a call to 'see what he was up to'. Long story short, Kidd started on the wrong foot and the two ended up screaming at each other over terrified den den mushi until Killer had the
sense of grace to hang up. Needless to say, Kidd spent the entirely of the next day sulking in his room.

"I had forgotten about that too. Is it really so important?"

He didn't need to have Trafalgar fondle his junk or give him a prostate exam. Despite his rather hazardous occupation, he was only twenty three. He didn't plan on keeling over anytime soon.

"Oh, certainly. It's vital to nip your problems at the root before they burgeon any further. With our lifestyles it is critical to gauge our health to see where we stand. You would be astonished at how many medical issues can go unnoticed until it is too late to treat them."

He couldn't tell by the doctor's tone, but he couldn't help but wonder if Trafalgar was speaking from experience. If he was talking about Flevance, how much of that rage did he keep bottled up inside? There was no telling which motive Trafalgar had set sail to act on. He had so many reasons to seek revenge, Kidd didn't know where he would start if he was in the others shoes.

"Yeah well, I like to think of myself as having a long life ahead of me."

"Ironic considering your line of work and tendency to decimate small cities, but I digress."

"Very funny Trafalgar."

"Thank you, Eustass-ya. I am aware that I have a high level of wit, but to affirm my suspicions is just needless flattery on your part. You aren't winning any favors here."
Kidd wrinkled his nose as the sun was obscured by a mass of yellow curls.

"You've got some nerve to try tanning while we scour a deserted island for bread crumbs."

"Hello, Killer."

He dug the heels of his palms into the sand as he hoisted himself to feet. The sand caked into the seams of his pants, and scowled at the undisguised snickering as he smacked out the incriminating grains from the fabric. Clapping off the sand from his palms, Kidd surveyed his companion with a look of disdain.

"I see you've gone and found something to gorge yourself on. Funny how things work in your favor at the best of times."

His scowl deepened as Killer took another obscene bite from the shattered coconut in his hands. Sweet water and brown flakes dribbled down his grinning chin, cheeks swollen with mirth.

"Your boyfriend must think you're a riot."
Kidd lounged in his victory as the smile fell from his first mate's eyes, indignation and tension falling in their proper place. The two of them had been on shaky ground since he had returned to the ship. Killer had refused to give him a proper reason for his silence, and so Kidd had refused to let him wash his hair in his bathroom. At the very least he had allowed Killer to retrieve his hair products. He wasn't completely heartless.

Killer swallowed painfully, and wiped his scarred mouth with the back of his hand. He pointed at Kidd's abdomen and quirked a smirk.

"You're sunburned on your stomach again."

"Shit-!"

Killer laughed as he sauntered off down the shore, lanky legs prancing barefoot in the soft sand. Kidd sneered at the retreating mass of hair, wincing as he pressed a hand to the red tint on his belly. Much to his charring, a white handprint was left in its place. No matter how much sunscreen he applied, his alabaster skin was too sensitive for the sun. It wasn't as if he hoped to achieve a tan as deep as Trafalgar's, but a light beige would be nice.

"Catch!"

Kidd had little time to respond before a halved coconut was lobbed at his head, narrowly caught in his hands. Startled and disoriented, Kidd blinked at the bowl in his hands with mild awe. The bit marks around the rim spoke volumes, and he glared daggers at the figure a short distance away. Killer raised his hands above his head in an exaggerated wave, "Throw it back!"

Just like that all the animosity between them melted in the sun, and he found his cheeks straining with his smile. He pulled his arm back to aim a high shot at his first mate, watching as Killer
shifted his feet to catch it. Tossing the rind back and forth, albeit slick with juice, Kidd felt
overcome with nostalgia. How many times had he and Killer acted like children for the sake of it?
How many times had they lost themselves to the thrill of an aimless activity to purge themselves
from thinking too hard about their current situations?

"Ah-Killer you can't throw so far! I won't be able to catch it!" He whined, his eyes following the
object as it arced high above his head and out of his reach. Against the bright sky, the doll's head
was nothing more than a dark blur as it landed with a splash in a wide puddle of oil.

The air was particularly thick with smog, giving the town a hazy atmosphere choked with dust. The
two youths wore strips of cloth around their nose and mouths to guard against the hazardous
debris, the fabric already coated in a thin layer of sediment.

Kidd rolled up his shredded jeans to his knees so he could wade into the the opalescent liquid. He
scrunched up his nose as he stepped into the slimy pool, no objects nearby that were long enough
to retrieve the decapitated plastic cranium. Grasping the bobble his hands, he wrinkled his nose at
the trail of slime dripping from the eyes and mouth.

"Ew, yuck, don't throw that over here like that. Let's see if we can find something else..."

Killer trailed off as he searched around himself absently, his short hair tangling under his chin.
Kidd scratched at his nose, his skin flushed and sweaty beneath the makeshift gas mask. His
goggles were cracked in a way that impaired his depth perception, and he stumbled on his way out
of the puddle.

There wasn't much around that wouldn't cut their hands, and he wasn't about wash off the doll
head in the barrel filled with putrid rain water. Acid rain had become a common occurrence as of
late, and any foliage managing to thrive in the meager wasteland of their town had withered away. He tossed the plastic head behind him with a heavy sigh, and wiped his hands on his pants for good measure.

He heard Killer's voice coming from the nearby alley and trotted over to investigate.

"Hey Kil! Did you find any-!

Killer was standing over a corpse. There was no other way to describe it. Sprawled across the ground, hands curled at Killer's bare feet. The man couldn't have been over thirty, judging by the thick russet mane on his head and the bare slope of visible jawline. Killer stood hunched with a shard of shrapnel in his palm, blood dripping onto the cobblestones.

His friend stared at him with a blazing red eyes from between his matted bangs.

"Oh crap-Killer are you okay? Did he hurt you?" Kidd felt panic seize in his chest, his heart hammering against his ribcage hard enough to bruise.

Killer shook his head, the manic look gone from the single visible iris, and shot Kidd a weak smile.

"No. But he went for my wallet so I tagged him. I'm sorry. This is your territory right? I shouldn't have..." He turned his head away in shame, and Kidd fluttered his hands in haste.

"What?! Territory? Again?! I told you things don't work that way, if you need to defend yourself that's cool and shit. I don't care what you do, just don't get hurt."
Killer stared at the wall for a few moments, and Kidd kept his eyes anywhere but the corpse. His mother wouldn't want him to stare at macabre scenes if he could help it.

"Ah! I almost forgot! My mom wants me to bring you over from dinner if you make it! Can you make it?"

Killer shook his head and tossed the bloody shrapnel on the corpse at his feet, the metal rolling off the body and onto the stones with a tinkling roll.

"Sorry, but I have to keep watch. I've already been away too long."

Kidd smiled nervously and scratched a raised bug bite on his arm.

"Okay, maybe another time...Can you play just a little longer, though?" He asked with hope in his voice, praying he didn't come off as desperate or as lonely as he felt. Killer was his only friend, and their relationship was shaky at best. Killer fluctuated between an older boy and an untamed beast, ready to dart away at any given moment.

Shaking away his nerves, Kidd pointed to chunk of rubber discarded against a wall.

"We can play with that! Just for a while and then you can go back to work or whatever, yeah? You should relax more!"
Killer seemed to ponder his offer before giving a curt nod, and retrieved the wad. They returned to their positions by the trash heaps, and passed the ball between them.

They found enjoyment in the mindless game of catch and throw, Kidd relishing the amicable contact.

He could find happiness in just this.

Chapter End Notes

So i just read up on the color psychology of yellow and black. I freaked out when I saw it fit so well and it made me think more about the actual manga and if this was intentional or not. Scary how accurate it is, even before I came up with this story, holy shit.
"Hey Penpen."

Penguin smiled at crates of medical supplies and miscellaneous baskets at the sound of Killer's voice. The familiar baritone filled him with warmth, and he closed his eyes in satisfaction.

"Hello Killer...Have you crossed the horizon yet?"

He was standing in a supply room, concealed from prying eyes, clutching his den den to his chest as if he was afraid it would flee from him.

"We can't see the island anymore, so we'll be fine. The marines are always slow as shit to get ready."

His grin was strained, Law's predicament ever present in the back of his mind. Speaking with Killer was the greatest catharsis he would ever have, but even he could only do so much to soothe his angst.

"I'm sure you've lost them. Besides, they rue intruding upon our alliance."

"I tried to get him to reconsider the alliance- gave him a spiel on why Trafalgar could have been using him and whatever, but he was unmoving, as expected."
He was aware of a presence stalking down the hall, and recognized the aura as his boyfriend's captain. His body became rigid as he realized the man was not going to pass the room without seeing him. With a soft sigh he spoke up, remembering that Killer had already told him.

"I know, me too, but at the very least they've finally met one another. They seem to be on good terms at the moment, but of course I didn't ask what they thought of each other."

"That's an understatement. I was sure Kidd would declare war on him the moment they met. Forming an alliance was the last thing I expected."

"Is that right?" he chuckled softly. "Ye of little faith."

Eustass Kidd was spying on him now, gracelessly pressing himself against the wall to listen.

*Odd man...*

"I meant to ask, how's your captain? I assume he was lying when he said he got lost. Kidd sounded fine, but how's Trafalgar?"

Penguin swallowed thickly, his heart thudding painfully in his throat.
"Don't think about it."

"Well, Captain is...Captain had a rough time, and yours' didn't look much better, to be honest."

"Is Kidd hurt?"

Killer's loyalty and love for his captain was as endearing as always, but the inflection of his tone belied the seriousness of the situation.

No, but Law is. Irrevocably.

"No, I think he's fine, but Captain is...he's probably in a wreck right now, but I know he needs his space. I just...I knew going to this place was going to be a bad idea! I told him about the shit heads in that place, running the black market, but of course he already knew that. It wasn't like we had much choice, though, we had to stock up and this was the island the log pose chose...but I just-I hate this, Killer! I feel like a failure!"

His hushed whisper rose to rasping breaths as hot tears burns behind his eyelids. Killer was his greatest outlet, and he always knew the right things to say to calm him down. But this was more than just a simple meltdown. He had known something bad was going to happen soon. Ever since they left FaustMouth, no...ever since Law had treated the bar tender who just so happened to be a member of a gang which aided the Donquixote Pirate empire. While he hadn't recognized Law for the ties he held with the infamous man, Law hadn't taken any chances and replaced his antibiotics with cyanide tablets. Not to mention he had bugged his clothes with a small surveillance den den mushi.

"You know it's not your fault, Penguin. It's not my place to ask what happened, but whatever it was I'm sure it will heal with time. It's not your fault, you know that. No matter what happened, you
"I know it's not my fault, but I can't help it...and you know he feels like it's his fault, he always thinks that way. He takes everything onto himself so others don't have to, but he doesn't seem to realize we care about him! I can't tell you how many times he forces me out the door when I come to his cries at night, hiding his face so I don't see him cry. He wants people to think he's a heartless machine of a person, but all of us here know what nightmares are like."

"Oh, baby..."

Killer's voice broke his heart further, and he had entirely forgotten about his little eavesdropper.

"Let's switch topics, please. I'd rather not look like a mess when I have to go tend to Bepo."

"...Alright, Penpen. It was amazing seeing you this morning. I was so glad we got to spend time alone while the crew got their physicals. It really took a load off my shoulders not having to keep an eye on them for a while."

"...Yeah, this morning was nice...It was refreshing to see you after so long, it's been three weeks already...I thought I would die."

"It's bearable talking long distance, but seeing you person is always better. Thanks for sending one of your birds to cheer me up. I really appreciate it."

His cheeks strained with his smile.
"Thank you for taking such good care for Matthis, Killer. I only sent him because I thought you might like him, Freya was under the weather."

"He wasn't too bad, but he did take a shit in my hair on multiple occasions. I couldn't get him out, though, he seemed to think my hair was a nest."

Penguin laughed as the exasperation in his lover's voice, and stifled his laughter with his palm.

"You really are wonderful, you, ah-oh damn it, I should probably check on Bepo and see if he's fairing alright. I'll call you later today, alright?"

He inwardly swore when his eyes fell on the clock hanging in the dim. It was easy to lose track of time when speaking to Killer. Falling into a lull in which he had neither duties nor desires other than being with him.

"No worries. It will take time heal, but it'll work out in the end. I'm sure staying by Trafalgar's side will help him through this."

Penguin smiled sadly. He didn't think his captain would bounce back after any length of time. He was hyper-aware of Eustass' presence pressed outside the doorway, and wondered for the infinite time what the man had done during what had transpired.

*If he had a hand in it...*
"Thank you Killer, I'm sure it'll work out eventually."

"...You're lying again..."

"Yes."

"You can get through this Penguin, I know you can. Hang on, baby. I'm here for you whenever you need me, you know that right?"

"Uh-huh."

"I love you Penguin."

His heart never ceased to flutter at the kind words he never thought he would deserve, and felt a heat rise up his neck and nestle at the top of his ears.

"I love you too...have a good day, Killer."

"Same to you. Sleep well, and give me a call anytime you want. Bye, baby."
Killer hung up first, as always, and Penguin's shoulders sagged.

He fixed his hat, took a deep breath, and exited into the hallway, taking his leave. He felt Eusstass' eyes drilling into his back, and sensed his surprise.

*He's being incredibly conspicuous. Why is he acting so shocked...?*

He brushed the thoughts aside in favor of meditating.

Consoling Bepo was nearly as painful as soothing Law.

---

Despite it still being the early afternoon, Penguin had no intention of doing anything other than retiring to his room.

And all that entailed.

He shared his room with two others, and, although they were all of higher rank than their crewmates, they occupied the same living quarters. The two bunkbeds were spaced roughly four feet apart, and the rather narrow gap was draped in a dark green shag carpet. Unlike their crewmates, however, they had one of few room with a door. Other than that, their quarters were no different than any others'.

Penguin spun the latch behind him, securing the door in place. The room was how he had left it, with Bepo sitting on the edge of his bed with his face in his paws, and Shachi polishing his knives.
in the bunk above. Shachi was still wearing his shoes, and the ceiling bore scuff marks where he had kicked it in frustration.

Penguin's bottom bunk had been reserved for the infrequent Law, whose presence had become increasingly scarce. Even before his assault, Law had been on a downward spiral he thought he was hiding. While the majority of the Heart Pirates were unaware of Law's deeper trouble, the close trio had always been perceptive of the man's emotions.

With Law, the insidious mental deterioration showed in the minute details.

Law would scratch at his chest without realizing, until he drew curious eyes or blood under his nails.

He began to increasingly narrow his already selective meals, slowly moving to subsist only on heavily salted rice and scraps of fatty tuna.

He no longer smiled at the antics of his crew, and shied away from Bepo's concern with scathing remarks he would never normally direct towards the bear.

"We should just drown that bastard." Snarled Shachi, squeaking his boots against the ceiling again, the rubber leaving skid marks in his wake. Bepo didn't respond, but the fur on the back of his head bristled in agreement. Penguin simply sighed, shaking his head as he made his way across the room.

"If he was the cause then Law wouldn't have allowed him on the ship. You guys know that."
"Still!" The bed springs protested loudly as Shachi turned to peer down at him, flustered and bright-eyed.

"He's obviously had something to do with it! I mean, have you seen his crew?! His first mate looks like something out of a thriller novel!" Penguin curled his lips in warning, and Shachi laid back down to sulk. Between the two of them it was clear cut who would win. Despite the same background of freelance assassin work, Penguin still had the upper hand when it came to close combat. Shachi preferred using his throwing knives to take down his opponents, while Penguin favored pistols to the knife strapped to his upper thigh. He also had been in the profession since his early childhood, compared to the others' early teens. They balanced each other out with their personalities of passion and practicality, and while Penguin was no cold fish, he couldn't hold a candle to Shachi's blazing anger issues.

"No."

The muffled voice drew the pair's attention, Bepo lifted his weary face from padded paws.

"No," he repeated firmly, "He smells guilty but not in that way." "I think he watched it happen. I smelled sea stone on him as well as Law."

The rare use of the man's name let Penguin inside the male's grief for a moment. Let him into the silent fury roiling beneath thick white fur and black polyester. For all the closeness Penguin shared with Law, Bepo would forever be Law's first friend. They had known each other for ten years, compared to Penguin's eight and Shachi's seven. But despite their amounts of time with the man they utterly adored him. He knew them each down to the marrow of their bones, and they had earned his respect and allowed to view his own. This room held Trafalgar Law's closest companions, but it didn't change the bold truth.

Law trusted them enough to let them witness his horrors, but they weren't strong enough to rebuild him. They stitched him up as best as they could, helped fill his glass heart, but it wouldn't close the
cracks. Not completely.

It was Penguin's greatest fear that Law would never be whole again.

Penguin tried to steer the topic towards a more positive light.

"He's rooming with Noro and Rei, right Shachi?"

"Yup. But Rei called and said he went searching for food a while ago."

*I was nowhere near the cafeteria. It's going to take him a while to get there if he can't find the map.*

"Think he's lost?"

"Probably. I'm sure he wouldn't stoop so low as to ask for directions. Flame-headed bastard."

Another series of squeaking scuffs, the sharp whistle and thud of a knife thrown into a dart board.

"He wouldn't head for Law...would he?" Shachi whispered, his mood as volatile as the currents of the Grand Line.
Bepo's ears pricked in attention and his lips pulled back to reveal deadly incisors, dark eyes blown wide and obscuring his sclera. Fear swell in Penguin's breast at the sight, and Shachi twisted in his sheets in turn.

"Ah-I didn't mean it, Bepo! The idiot won't even find Law unless he goes through the engine room, and the dumbass is looking for food, remember? Aha- Sato said he was going to make sharkfin soup tonight! You love that right? Maybe he'll even serve that corn chowder you like, yeah? Why don't we go and ask him right now! C'mon, let's walk and clear that head of your's!" Shachi slipped off the top bunk and landed with a sharp grin, grabbing Bepo's hand and leading him out the door. The bear's ears were no longer lowered in aggression but perked in interest.

"Yeah," he mumbled, scratching his muzzle, "Maybe that'd be best."

Shachi winked at Penguin and spun the door behind them, leaving the capped male in the silence of their wake.

Penguin stared at the den den mushi sitting on the desk in the far corner of their room, his blood pressure dropping rapidly as the receiver continued to relay it's signal.

"Yes? Is there a problem with that? I was not aware you were in the dark about it."
Kidd was outside Law's door.

Penguin stuffed the pistol he had placed on the table in the loop of his waistband and took the den den mushi with him as he fled.

Papers shuffled in the background and Law's wast bin fell over in what was likely a scramble to stand or get away from the door.

*I don't even want to think how scared he is right now.*

The fact that Kidd had come to rant about Killer and Penguin's relationship didn't even register in his mind. All he could think of was whether he could subdue Kidd with iron bullets or if he would have to go back to his room and grab sea stone pellets. Either way, he was halfway there and would make it to the engine room in less than a minute if he continued to sprint. Their bedroom was distanced far enough from Law's room to be inconspicuous but a still be have a clear cut root at their Captain's quarters in case of emergency.

Emergencies were far too common.

Penguin's heart was pounding loudly in his ears, too loud to hear the foreign captain's soft words.

"Well, how about I listen to your's, then?"
None of the other crew members were in sight down the passage leading to the engine room. Everyone was either eating an early lunch or lounging in their rooms. There was no reason to be more alert than was needed, even on the Grand Line. For them, their travels consisted less of worrying about hazardous inhabitants and more about the seas’ fluctuating currents. The navigation station could handle the worst of it, while everyone switched out routinely and performed more mundane jobs such as checking inventory and making calls to informant parties.

"I'm...I'm not going to say I understand what your going through, because that's something only you know, but I'm here...to listen, I mean...I'm not to tell anyone about any of this...I've got morals...believe it or not...and, uh...do you...do you want to talk about it?"

Penguin's foot caught on the threshold of a doorframe and he sprawled to the floor, chin hitting the ground first. As he scrambled to his bearings and shook the ringing in his ears, he stayed silent as he listened quietly to the baffling words.

"Can I trust you?"

"Yeah, I won't breathe a word."

"...You won't laugh?"

"I won't laugh."

"...You won't leave?"
"I won't leave."

He didn't know how to feel, listening to a dialogue so unsuspected and idyllic. A part of him didn't believe his ears, he must have fallen down hard enough to jostle something important if he was hearing such nonsensical babbling.

But then Law began the story he had heard only once.

Once was enough.

Hastily, Penguin cut off the connection and sat back on his haunches.

He instinctively looked around for anyone within earshot, but there was not a soul to be seen. Law's past was sacred to him, and he would easily threaten or even torture a fellow crew member into silence if they did not comply in a convincing manner. The snail looked up at him expectedly, before closing its eyes and drifting to sleep. The pipes overhead rushed with water in response to a flushed toilet or an opened tap.

Once was enough.

To say he was surprised would be undermining the complexity of his feelings. Listening in on the drugged conversation between his superior and his lover's captain pulled at various strings in his
heart. He was overjoyed Law had found someone else who could give him comfort and listen to his worries. He was glad Killer's captain was as kind and generous as he had been told. He was jealous that it was a rival captain and not his own subordinates who had managed to wedge themselves into Law's toxic environment and managed to get the poor man to stand. Kidd was drawing Law in some unseen way, that only Penguin seemed to notice. Shachi and Bepo commented on how wonderful it was to have Law open up some more, that he had been able to find comfort in someone unrelated to their crew.

'Captain Kidd comforted him, I'm so glad.' Bepo would say, scrubbing his paws together in a habitual gesture of sincerity.

'I guess that flame-haired bastard wasn't such a bad guy after all.' Shachi said, only once, in a hushed grumble of acceptance.

But to the one who had listened to their conversations with a trained ear, all Penguin could think of was Something very strange is going on in Law's head.

He hadn't missed the way the man had choked up at Kidd's plea to listen.

"I'm...I'm not going to say I understand what your going through, because that's something only you know, but I'm here...to listen, I mean...I'm not to tell anyone about any of this...I've got morals...believe it or not...and, uh...do you...do you want to talk about it?"

It wasn't the fact that Law had cried at the words, that was to be expected, it was that Law started recounting his past to Kidd and then tried to have sex with him.

Even on drugs, Law had never offered to sleep with anyone. He had lost count of how many times the three of them had to take of the man when he was high and not once had he offered himself in.
exchange for comfort. He had said the same story to all of them, only once, and each time he had been high on his own concoction of chemicals and sorrow.

He never tried to kiss any of them or try to tear off their clothes for sex.

It also wasn't that the three of them weren't Law's type. The man didn't have a type. He hated sex, all the time no matter what state he was in. To the point where he had labeled himself as a sex-repulsed asexual* and left it at that.

Something about Kidd's words or Kidd's appearance had set Law off. He wasn't naive enough to think he had sensed a bond with the man strong enough to incite sexual desire. He also couldn't simply label it as compensational behavior. He was aware Law believed in reciprocation in sexual undertones, but he had never witness Law outright trading himself.

It was something to do with Kidd.

It had to be.

He wasn't sure he could agree with Bepo.

Weeks passed and Law shied from all social interaction entirely. Penguin noticed his room beginning to deteriorate in time with Law's body fat, the shallows beneath his eyes growing ever
darker. He stopped bathing, his hair growing matted and greasy, and he stayed in his room at all hours of the day. He never left his room for meals anymore, and hardly ate what was proffered. Penguin began fearing the worst when he caught the faint sounds of the man throwing up in the receiver of his surveillance den den mushi hidden in the recesses of Law's filth.

And it happened again.

And again.

And again.

Organs he no longer had* twisted in anxious dread as the symptoms aligned in Penguin's head like the tolling of a death knoll.

...Are you...pregnant? He had asked, wringing his hat in nervous hands.

No, I am not. Law had replied, his voice steady despite the tense atmosphere.

Penguin was sure he had been lying.

His confirmation came in a call a few days later, when it seemed Law could no longer stand the silence of his mind and took to a familiar captain to mollify his pain. This time Shachi was in the room when the call patched through the surveillance snail, and Penguin had to tackle the man to the ground to prevent him from throwing a fit. As Shachi cursed and thrashed beneath him, Penguin kept his ears honed into the hushed conversation, a chill seeping into his marrow.
"I'm pregnant and suicidal and not fine at all."

"...I don't exactly have a good answer for that, Eustass-ya, when I am a man living solely in the past. I am the worst person you could ask for advice, in anything unrelated to my field of work."

"I see, well, at least you aren't surrounded by a color that designates irrationality, fear, emotional fragility, depression, anxiety, and suicide"

These were not normal conversational topics, not even towards the trio. When the screaming beneath him stopped and soft weeping took its place, he was better able to hear Law's slip-ups.

"To be honest, I went on hormones when I was fourteen. Sadly, being a Lorelei means my body predominately functions on estrogen. If I hadn't gone on testosterone, I would look much like Rei does. Oh, he has given me permission to bring up his lineage when appropriate."

"No matter how many months I waited, I still menstruated...still was able to, ah,..."

No matter what Kidd saw happen to Law, no matter what similarities they shared, no matter their temporary alliance or misguided trust-Law was projecting onto Kidd in an unhealthy manner. He was saying things he would never say to anyone if he wasn't so fragile, and his state of mind was more fractured than before Little Orange. If this continued, if Kidd turned coat as he would no doubt do in the New World, Law would become truly irreparable.

Law would no doubt terminate the pregnancy, which would raise his health only slightly.
Something needed to be done about Law's physical health before any mental or emotional health could even be considered.

Law was going to die ahead of schedule if things continued this way.

Chapter End Notes

So there you have it folks, Law is projecting his image of Cora-san onto Kidd, and is in a way using the man in place of his foster father. Oh, if that isn't unhealthy enough, Law neither realizes what he's doing or recognizes the differences in the two men. So basically this means in a few chapters shit's gonna go down in the worst way, they both realize what's going on, and are gonna have to re-evaluate their strange 'friendship.'

Also, I am aware I said Penguin would call Law out on his shit in this chapter I found myself unable to make it fit. So it'll be next chapter, along with a phone call and surprising revelation from a certain red-headed kitty.

* Once again, speaking as one myself, this is not what this is. At all

** Yes, it totally means what you think :3
Chapter 14

Law's back hit the steel wall with a soft thud. If it weren't Penguin cornering him, terror would be unfurling in his chest rather than a slightly hysterical chortle bursting forth through his speech.

"Excuse me?"

His lashes fluttered in genuine bewilderment, eyebrows disappearing into his hairline at his friend's words. Penguin looked down at him along the bridge of his nose, emerald eyes glinting in the bright white light of the submarine.

"This has to stop."

Law blinked again. His arms were raised beside his head against the cold steel, as if he was being pinned by an unseen assailant. He dropped them quickly, disgust undulating in his throat.

"That!" Penguin pointed at his face and Law's eyes crossed unbidden, sudden ocular pain increasing his already severe headache. He couldn't even tell if it was due to dehydration, starvation, or sleep deprivation.

"You're going to put yourself into an early grave before you even complete your goal." He growled. Penguin's voice was harsh, leaning forward to put himself in an all-encompassing view.

It hadn't been even two weeks since he had induced the abortion, and the decline in his health had
only been exacerbated. He was well aware of the way his stomach had visibly caved in hunger, his decreased muscle tone, the dizziness and fatigue that plagued his every waking moment.

The nightmares that stalked the others.

The only reason he was walking the halls was because his handy supply of 'custom medication' had run out and he was desperate for a refill. So he had skulked from his room, dressed in a reversed shirt and baggy pants saturated in sweat, only to be cornered feet from his office by his irate first mate.

"I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself." His voice was steady but the words sounded flimsy to his own ears.

"I can see that."

Golden eyes narrowed dangerously.

"Don't patronize me."

"I'm not patronizing you. I'm merely saying, as your friend, that I cannot sit by as you waste away on self-loathing and tonic."

"I didn't ask for your help." His bitter voice rose with his temper, the dim flame rekindling with whatever strength he had left to spare for pettiness.
"I'm not offering. I'm in command when you are unfit for duty or otherwise detrimentally absent."

"Don't you dare." His hair bristled with fury, his tongue coming to poke between his teeth as he foamed with rage. He was met with flat eyes and a stoic expression, his anger ready to manifest into violence.

"Try me."

Law swung his fist and missed by a mile. Penguin's hair rustled slightly as he passed. His energy and breath left him with his anger, and he slumped onto his friend in defeat. He felt so defeated, so empty, standing suddenly didn't seem worth it.

"C'mon Law, let's get you into a shower, alright? Shachi's cleaning your room and Bepo's making you stew."

Law let himself be led by the hand towards the trio's bedroom, where they shared a large private bathroom. The tears wouldn't stop coming, and he was beginning to get light headed from walking so much. Penguin let him pause to vomit on the floor, keeping a hand on his shoulder as he doubled over with the effort. Nothing but drops of acid dripped from his parted jaws, but he still choked on the nausea as his stomach forced up things that weren't there.

When the spell passed, so did Law, his vision darkening quickly as his exhaustion caught up to him, his body sinking further to the floor. He lacked awareness, so different from drifting to sleep.
His consciousness returned in a bathtub, Penguin scrubbing his chest with a soapy washcloth, the feeling akin to being licked by a large dog. His friend's hat was off in a strange form of respect, and he paused when Law's bright eyes met his. Law was too tired to put up any form of a fight, and the ministrations were comforting, so he slipped back into a dreamless void.

When he woke up again, he was lying in the top bunk Penguin always kept empty for him. He couldn't sleep in beds where he felt someone could lean over him and trap him. Tucked beneath silken sheets procured especially for him, his head cushioned by a feather pillow, Law felt safe. His hair was pleasantly warm, recently dried after a thorough washing and conditioning, his skin rubbed with lotion that was neither sticky nor clammy. He was naked, from what he could tell, save for what felt like a pair of cotton panties when his thumb brushed his hip.

"What about dinner?"

He couldn't tell what time it was, in a submarine there is no concept of night and day. The lights were out and the world was dark, but he could tell there was someone in the room with him and did not feel threatened.

"Don't worry about that, Bepo's already put it in the fridge. Go back to sleep Law, I'll have Shachi bring you water once he's done."

Cloaked in darkness, he couldn't tell the difference in leaving his eyes open, and only knew he had fallen asleep once the colors began to burst behind his eyelids.

_Bright pink feathers..._

_A glass bowl filled with candy..._
Lavender sheets soaking in his blood...

A pink leopard collar...

A heavy bamboo staff whistling through the air...

A shattered hand...

Black feathers...

Flaming coat...

A hand large enough to crush his head...

A hand large enough to choke him...

Bright blue skies...
Golden tiles adorned in white spiraling patterns...

Long hardwood tables covered in decorous meals...

Thin wires around his neck...

His intestines slipping through his fingers...

A gelatinous creature splattered beneath him...

Reflective orange glasses on a bedside table...

Insidious vitiligo...

Burning buildings...

Gunshot...

Father’s grip leaving a bruise on his shoulder...
Mother sewing the same dress in two sizes...

Tiny hands...

Bright blue eyes...

Cradling something in his lap...

A bedtime story...

Something about boats...

Something about an island...

Something about living forever...

Something...

Something...
Something about dying young...

Someone was holding a cup to his lips and a hand cupped his head to coax him to sit up. The comforter slipped from his neck and pooled about his waist. Cold air prickled his torso, his nipples hardening in response. Gooseflesh rose on his arms as an elbow brushed the metal wall. He drank avariciously, appreciating how the cool liquid slipped down his throat without leaving a lingering taste. His tongue taste faintly of mint, his gums faintly swollen. His nails had been trims, he noted as he curled his legs in to turn over on his side. Rarely did he sleep in a bed that wasn't close to the wall, enjoying the comfort of having a wall at his back. He pulled up the comforter to separate his bare skin from steel, and lifted his knees to his chest to settle into the fetal position. Normally he slept with a body pillow, bending his neck and torso over the top like he was shielding a child, the pillow wedged between his legs, his arms encircling as if embracing a lover***.

Shachi left without a sound, or he slipped back into his mockery of a dream too soon to hear him leave. This time his dream was less of spinning snippets of his life and more of a linear storyline.

Someone was kissing his throat. It was just gentle presses of dry lips against his pulse, but it was enough to excite his heartbeat. Rough palms on his waist, tugging at the waistband of his jeans. His bare chest was pressed against another, enough to know his lover was much broader. He felt fear stirring in the pit of his stomach. It could have been arousal. He wasn't sure there was a difference anymore.

The faceless man nuzzled just underneath his jaw and his hands rose to tangle long fingers in his hair. The colors of a ripe sunset filled his vision as the man hummed against the warm skin under his lips and nipped at the hollow of his throat. A light skimming of teeth beneath his ear, lips moving to nibble at his earrings in a fawn-like manner. These soft gestures of affection were as foreign to him as the man who held him, his body tensing reflexively in anticipation of pain.

No pain came as the man continued, but the fear snowballed with each innocuous touch.
The man's hands slid down his back to rest above his pelvis, and terror made itself known in Law's eyes in the form of blurring tears. His pants remain untouched as the stranger began to knead knuckles into taut flesh. Strangled moans rose from his throat as he arced back into the bedsheets. When had there been a bed behind him? When had he been laying down?

His muscles spasmed in a cycle of pain and release, his shoulders sagging in pleasure at the massage. The noises leaving his mouth were not his own, a rising swirl of titillating mewls and protracted moans. As the tension left his overworked muscles, so did his dread. He was lost in a euphoric high, and ground his hips into the mattress in a wordless plea. As if acting on instinct, his legs wrapped around the stranger's waist, tugging their hips together. The man let out a small hiss by his ear, but its familiarity was lost with the feeling of heat between his legs.

The male's erection seared through his jeans, arousal blossoming in his core and snaking up his body. The thickness pulsing against his sex felt heavenly. He found himself in want of more heat, the fear buried by gene-born lust.

"I want it." He breathed, buried his face in the crook of the others neck, inhaling the scent of grease and metal.

"No you don't." Came the stranger, and Law's eyes flew open. He pulled back to look into the face of his paramount, at the painted smile and tousled blonde hair.

"Cora-san?"

Law awoke with a warm dampness between his legs and no recollection of the cause. His cheeks ignited with shame. It was still pitch dark, and there was still the soothing, silent presence of his second-in-command. The others weren't in the room, as far as he could tell, and the tempo of Penguin's breathing let him know the other was asleep. I better not have made any embarrassing noises...
The slick between his legs was beginning to trail across his thigh, and the last thing he wanted was to stain the sheets his friends had so lovingly bought for him. He peeling off the comforter and shivered at the frigid temperatures. Beneath the covers was a furnace just for him, a safe den of warmth and comfort, so he quickly slipped the sheets back in place and began to descend the latter. His state of dress, or lack thereof, made him hyper aware of his movements and the wet patch on his underwear. The slick smeared across the back of right thigh and caused anxiety to swim in his stomach. He wanted to cry as he padded softly into the bathroom.

There was a fresh change of clothes waiting for him on the toilet seat, his favorite lounging clothes of plush white cotton. He cleaned up with a washcloth, washing it thoroughly in the sink before drying himself with a terrycloth towel. He hung the washcloth over the arm of the sink to dry, and cut up the used panties with a pair of nose hair clippers before flushing the scraps down the toilet. He quickly dressed in the fresh clothes before sanitizing the scissors and returning them to their place in the mirror cabinet.

The soft cotton shorts and tank top were pleasant on his warm skin, but did little against the chill.

When he returned to the safety of the sheets he found them cold.

Law nudged the small bowl in front of him with his spoon, sucking his bottom lip. When he finally emerged from the dark, he found himself three days into the future. Penguin helped him into more appropriate clothing, and the jeans felt loose on his thighs. He had lost enough muscle to start burning fat, the contours of his cheeks becoming more defined.

His stomach was shrunken and feeble, but he gave into his friends coaxing towards the cafeteria.
The mess hall was empty, everyone either working or sleeping, but he still felt vulnerable sitting out in the open. Penguin and Shachi flanked him, their presences calming, but the vast room around them felt far too large.

Penguin was drinking a glass of rum which he desperately craved, but he owed it to his crew to recover the best he could. He had a plan, after all, and dying wasn't an element until much later-no matter how many times he forgot and searched for ways to end his life. He fingered a dark stain on the steel tabletop, and thought about Eustass Kidd. He had been so adamant that he keep his life, but for what purpose? What reason did he have to be so invested in him? Such kind words spoken to such an undeserving person like him, no matter how many times he received an answer it never made sense to him.

What do you want from me in return?

He had denied his advances, pushed him away and wrapped him in a blanket. He had held him while he slept. He had been concerned rather than aroused.

Eustass Kidd.

Strange man.

Next time I see you I'll try giving you something else.

Bepo appeared behind him but, before he could turn to greet him, his bowl was tugged away and an enormous stockpot was dropped in its place with such weight that the table creaked in protest. He gaped at the heavy silver pot before him and squawked his outrage with such indignation that his friends incited in raucous laughter.
"That's too much!"

He indulged them and indulged himself as he shoveled macerated mush into his mouth. It was a myriad of tastes and he couldn't tell if it was delicious or not, but the texture was enough to make him gag. For someone so malnourished, Bepo had definitely blend as many nutritious foods as he could. He wouldn't be surprised if egg had been melded into the concoction. Four spoonfuls was all he could ingest, and his friends made no comment on the size of his stomach.

He would have preferred rice or fish with a side of salt, but he held his tongue. He didn't deserve their kindness or their time, but they didn't care how he felt about their treatment.

For now, he would relent to being their patient.

His recovery was painfully slow, his waking moments as ephemeral as his stamina. At one point he was moved to a different room with a raised bed so he could be fed intravenously. His dreams were blank, his nightmares considerably vivid. More than once he had to be restrained to the bed as he convulsed in phantom agony, his voice rising in shrill screams and mockery of the human language. Bepo and Penguin were gone most of the day, their navigational and commanding duties pressing them for time, while Shachi remained as his vigilant caretaker.

When he was unable to sleep for fear of images from the past, Shachi would tell him bedtime stories from his own top bunk, his voice drifting pleasantly between them. They were stories he never heard before, only serving to remind him how bereft he was of a proper childhood. It was Lami who, on occasion, was taken to bed by their mother and read the bedtime stories every child knew, while Law would hole himself in the library and read collegiate textbooks until his eyes crossed.
Fingers carded gently through his hair in moments of blurry twilight, soothing whispers lulling him into the embrace of sleep. He was taken on walks around the back of the submarine, all personnel cleared beforehand, in which he was privy to the amount of muscle tone he'd lost. With every step he felt as if he was walking with a weighted vest. Many times he needed to walk with a rolling IV drip and took frequent rests. He was a shell of his former glory, but he saved his shame for a sunny day.

Eventually he was able to hold down a whole bowl of soup and, though he remained stoic, he was proud of his accomplishment. His health rose and plateaued during the next three weeks, in which he had plenty of time to think about nothing. His friends kept him as busy as they could when he was conscious. He had the uncanny ability to turn anything into a torrential downpour of negativity.

Between spoonfuls of rice and handfuls of vitamins, his thoughts drifted towards his red-haired ally.

"Perhaps he's keeping himself out of trouble? What with not needing our services..." Law muttered one day, Shachi buttoning the front of the black jumpsuit he rarely wore. It made him indistinguishable from his crewmen, which was precisely its function. It wouldn't do for one of his uninformed subordinates stumbling upon their captain in such a feeble state. Got to keep up good morale, after all.

Shachi paused, his fingernails clicking on the metal clasp.

"W-Well, actually..."
"Shachi." He warned.

"Did we have visitors aboard our ship without my knowledge?"

Shachi's hands fluttered nervously over the last two buttons, unsure how to proceed.

"U-uh I-"

Law could see the sweat beading on Shahi's bare forearms, and let out a soft chuckle, causing the other to freeze.

"Law! You laughed!"

The man broke out in a wide grin, and Law looked away, embarrassment crawling up his neck. Shachi’s joy was contagious, and he could practically feel the glitter in his eyes. A warmth swelled in his belly, and he smiled broadly.

It was his first real smile in over two months.
Waves lapped gently at the hull of the wine-colored galleon, the bow level on the placid sea. Salt crusted in arcs above the waterline. On the deck, safe from the ocean's clutches, Eustass Kidd sighed into the wind.

"That's the seventh time and the countless' time this week. So, what's her name~?"

Kidd didn't deign Blake with his expression, keeping his back to the muscular woman. Instead, he leaned further over the rail guard, his eyes darting to the ocean below. Though impossible, he sometimes pondered what it would be like to swim, just once. Freshwater lakes weren't common in the Blues, and he had never made it a priority to find housing by a community pool. He may not know how to swim but he didn't think it could be very hard. You just move your limbs about and try not to drown, right?

"I don't know what you're talking about." he lied, "And shouldn't you be preoccupied elsewhere? Like the helm, perhaps?"

When he turned to look at her she had a worn cigar clenched between her teeth. With her arms crossed in a way that showed off her large biceps, buzz cut hair, forever stoic expression, and trademark cigar-she looked a bit like someone he knew.

"Have I ever told you that you look like White Chase Smoker?"

She huffed smoke out her nostrils, deadpan expression never changing.

"Four times a week."
"Ah, and it's still a coincidence?"

"Purely."

"Splendid."

"So who's gonna steer the ship if you're up here dicking around with me?"

"Scooter's got it under control, besides-" she jerked a thumb over her shoulder, "I've got 400 beli going with Wire that you have a crush on someone and I bet you my best cigars I know who it is."

"No you don't."

"See, so there must be someone."

"Fuck you."

"Maybe in sixteen years, when you've found a way to get over yourself."
"That was a low blow."

"I can go lower if you want. So let's here it, am I 400 beli richer and out of my good smokes? Trafalgar Law."

"..."

"Looks like I've got some spending money for our next stop. Do you want me to drop off my Diamonds***?"

"I'll pass."

"So...?"

"So nothing. This conversation is over."

"I highly doubt it, you can't keep sighing like a lovesick sailor forever, Captain. Can't you call him, or something? Ask for a booty call? It's not hard."

Kidd squinted as if he could somehow pick out the meaning of the latter part by scrutinizing her flat expression. Surely she hadn't just admitted to calling in booty calls, had she? *No, fucking idiot, she mean't it's not hard to call him.*
"He's unavailable."

"How long can be unavailable for? You had to get checked out by some grunt in a jumpsuit when we went over. He can't be busy all the time."

"Clearly, he can."

"Whatever, fine. Just can you please call again tonight? Everyone's sick of you plodding around and huffing like a lovelorn schoolgirl."

"Noted. Can we move on from this subject, please? Want to play a round of cards?"

"Sure, got nothing better to do."

"You could do your job?"

"After I kick your ass at poker."
Kidd retired early that night, eager to call Law after all that prodding. He hadn't called in three weeks, though he yearned to. Still, he had kept his word to Killer's boyfriend.

He'd gotten a cold which moved into his chest, so he called Law.

"I'm sorry, Law's not available at the moment, but we can surface beside you and deal with you ourselves."

"...Is he still not feeling well?"

"..."

"..."

"Mister Eustass, I'm going make this as clear as I can. Law is in no position to try to make friends with anyone, let alone a rival Captain. Whether you're just being nice or have a genuine interest in Law, you need to understand that he's in a vulnerable state where his usual filters do not apply. Without inhibitions, Law's likely to slip up and say things he would never normally say, and do things he'd later regret doing. Please do not try to engage him for the next few weeks, though I would be pleased if you ceased contacting him all together."

"What the hell is your problem?"

"My 'problem', Mister Eustass, is that I have a responsibility to take care of him as both my captain and my friend, and I've known him much longer than the few chats you've shared. He's not in his
right mind and if you continue this you're simply taking advantage of his weakness."

"BULLSHIT! I'm not taking advantage of anything! And hell-he might not be mentally sound but he can sure as fuck make decisions for himself!"

"If you do not lower your voice to an appropriate volume I will hang up and you will die of pneumonia. Contract be damned."

"..."

"Are we clear?"

"Don't push your luck."

"I wouldn't dream of it, Mister Eustass. Now, tell me your coordinates and we can put this alliance to some use, shall we?"

Kidd couldn't help but ponder the possibilities that he might be manipulating Law in some way. No, I've tried my hardest and whatever assurance he gleans from me is in his own benefit. I've done nothing wrong.

Am I doing something wrong by being interested in him?
Am I interested in him?

Bruises beneath his eyes, soft hair, shared feelings for fathers, amber eyes, silver tongue, brilliant mind, tortured past, good heart...

Maybe I am just a little interested...

Is it wrong to ask him out?

Holy shit, what am I thinking- of course it’s a fucking bad idea! Being kind to him after a trauma like that and then using it to get him to date me? If that's not manipulation, I don’t know what is!

Great, now I'm even talking to myself. I've got to call him, at least to make sure he's alright.

Light tremors wracked his fingers as he punched in the number, his den den mushi coming to life on his beside table. He eased back onto his bedsheets, comforter drawn back to reveal the creamy yellow sheets beneath. His hair was still dripping from the shower, red strands plastered the sides of his forehead to stay out of his eyes. Water droplets dripped onto his bare torso, staining dark spots into dark blue fabric of his boxers.

Puru puru puru puru puru puru

"C'mon pick up this time, dammit!"
"M'hello." Law's voice was haggard from sleep.

"Shit, I'm sorry did I wake you up?" Kidd bounced his knee in a nervous jitter, his stomach fluttering with anxious butterflies. The guilt rose in his throat like a bad drink.

"Yes, but it's fine." Law's voice faded out as he turned away from the phone, "What fucking time is it?"

There was a pause before a faint groan patched through the receiver.

"Fucking missed dinner again... shit..."

There was a sharp rush of static as Law turned back to the snail.

"Sorry, who is this again? I'm not awake just yet."

"It's Eustass-yyyyaaaaa."
He dragged on the suffix with a grin.

"...Ahahaha!"

Kidd pulled back from the receiver and stared at the laughed den den mushi, little arms wobbling in glee. The butterflies in his stomach battered with explosive excitement, and his lips strained in a smile.

"You sound happy."

"Well, happy as I'll ever be."

"...Are you feeling better, at least?"

"Yes, actually. I'm doing much better. I've eaten enough to put Shachi to shame."

Kidd let out a bark of laughter, "That's good..."

"..."
The silence was uncomfortable, to say the least, and Kidd found himself desperate for words. Law beat him to the punch.

"I heard you took a little walk around our sub without my knowledge, Eustass-ya. Did you enjoy the hospitality?"

"If by hospitality you mean the scathing looks and hateful remarks behind my back? Yes, I had a wonderful time."

"Sounds fine to me, though I do apologize for my absence. I was a little under the weather, so to speak."

"I heard as much from Penguin. I still can't believe his name is fucking Penguin."

"Your first mate's name isn't the spitting image of conventional either."

"Say that to his face. He still won't fucking talk to me about his hookup with Penguin or why he wouldn't tell me."

"Time will loosen his tongue, I'm sure."

"I wouldn't be, it's been what-nearly a month and a half? He's not budging any time soon."
"At least your respecting his boundaries, right? If he doesn't want to tell you then he doesn't actually have to do so, you know."

"Ugh, you sound like him."

"So many compliments, Eustass-ya. Am I going to get flowers sometime soon? It gets ever so dreary down here."

Kidd swallowed and tried to play it cool, knowing Law would see through any lie he dished out.

"Very funny, anyway...do you know which island you're gonna hit next?"

"I'm not too sure. I'm letting Penguin and Bepo make all the decisions while I convalesce."

Shit, what happened Law...? I don't want to just ask but I'm fucking worried over here...

"Well, if we happen to hit the same island which-", Kidd peered over his shoulder at the chart tacked to the wall, "could happen in two more stops-only if you're interested, of course!" He winced at how desperate he sounded.

"...I'll see if we can't rendezvous sometime soon." Kidd could hear the smile in Law's voice, "Though my crew's gonna be strongly against it. They're not fond of you all since you were involved in my delay. Bepo and Shachi have lessened their animosity, but not much. Anyone other
"And Penguin?"

"Penguin wants to slit your throat."

"Ah. He conveyed as such several times during my visit."

"Then my condolences, Penguin doesn't let his prey escape."

"I'm not afraid of a flightless bird."

"You should be. Birds can be vicious."

There was too much vitriol in his voice, and Kidd was once again reminded who branded him.

"...But really, penguins just fall over and slip all the time. And then they smell like fish. I'm not gonna be scared of some tuna-smelling chicken."

"Actually, they prey on small schooling fish such as smelt, anchovies, and herring."
"Thanks, *Trivia-R-Us*, when's Game Night?"

"*Every Tuesday at five in the mess hall.*"

"Shit, you actually have that? You really are a bunch of fucking nerds."

They shared a laugh, before Law began to cough loudly into the receiver, resulting in bursts of static.

"You alright?"

"*I'm fine, just thirsty. I think I'm going to have to check out for the night, Eustass-ya, but I really appreciate that we had this conversation. It really made my day. Or night, rather.*"

Kidd nodded to the empty, running his finger along the ridge of the snail's shell.

"It's cool. I'll talk to you some other time, yeah?"

"*Yes, that sounds lovely. Have a goodnight, Eustass-ya.*"
"Likewise, Trafalgar."

Law hung up first, and Kidd set down the receiver with a soft click.

He bent over and cradled his face in his palms, his shoulder blades moving under taut muscles.

"Shit...I've got it bad..."

Chapter End Notes

*Fun fact, submarines are usually lit red just like airport control towers (at night), planetariums, and some movie theaters because it is easier for the eyes to adjust from red light to dark than from white light to darkness. This was so night vision would be 'enabled' when looking out the windows of a submarine. Of course, there are no windows on Law's submarine aside from the periscope and Law's bedroom window...Well there was no way I was going to write a story where the lighting was red all the time. That was not gonna happen. So please suspend your disbelief my friends.

** Law would totally wear bikini style underwear, not a tanga that would show his awesome booty cheeks and not thick banded hipsters or boyshorts because he can never find them with cute enough prints.

*** Not to be creepy, but this is how I've begun to sleep recently. It's probably due to being away from home and all the anxiety and fear college can bring someone.

**** Diamond Crowns are incredibly rare cigars that are hand-rolled by a famous family in the Dominican Republic. Very rare, very high-end, very expensive.
Law was a nervous wreck as he walked down the dock. His bag slid against his thigh, the contents of the brown satchel clinking with every few steps. The sun was hanging low in the sky, a fiery eye hovering over the crystalline waters of Crescent Cove. Those in his crew on rotation had already infiltrated the quaint seaside town. Cuboidal white architecture reigned supreme on the tropical coastline. Towering royal palms leaned into open windows, red macaws crowing to their mates as they located a roost for the night. The town was nestled in the crux of a walled cove, verdant mountain slopes enclosing the turquoise waters in the shape of its namesake. The rouge sky melded into a plum backdrop over the rainforest. As darkness encroached upon the villas and palatial condos, yellow lights blossomed in the frosted panes of louve windows and arched portholes.

The white cobbled street reminded Law of the lavish city on Little Orange, but less grandiose. It was chic, a paradise for honeymooning couples and wealthy retirees. The kind of place that was enjoyable to visit but too expensive to call home. The town reeked of romance, and the sight of a fountain adorned with cupids made him gag. It wasn't tawdry, but it was certainly too cozy for Law's taste.

He couldn't imagine Eustass Kidd, in his gaudy spiked coat and outrageous leopard pants, swaggering through while lovers hand fed each other lobster with their bare hands over glasses of cabernet sauvignon.

He had an inkling of where to find him- the opulent hotel observing from the hillside was enough to draw his attention. His boots clacked subtly on the cobbles as he ascended the slope and his black jeans creased at the buttocks. Law felt dangerous, sleek and lethal, but there was dread sliding through his veins like pink snakes.

His bag felt heavy on his shoulder.

Dressed in a new pair of black ankle boots and a matching silk button-down, Law looked like
Death coming to take His prize. His bag of souls ready to accommodate. His choice of satchel widely contrasted with his wardrobe, but it was the only one he would risk being chafed by his special delivery.

Palmettos wreathed the entrance to the grand hotel. A pair of glass doors lead into a lobby whose high-ceiling was hand painted in a fresco of nameless deities cavorting with unclothed maidens. The floor was a pattern of marble flecked with gold, the lights giving the appearance of a starry walkway. As Law strode over the exorbitant constellations, he craned his head to spot the conspicuous redhead.

Couples of various sexes whispered to their paramours with devious smiles. They made Law nervous with all their secrets, their gossip, and hastened his steps.

Beyond the lobby was another set of glass doors, which led onto the promenade. Out in the air again, he was startled by the sudden change in atmosphere. He quickly cupped his hand to shield his eyes from the glaring sun, the scent of the sea was overpowering here. The wind coming off the ocean battered his hair wildly, the temperature going from a pleasant warm to a penetrating chill. The insulation of his silk top was scant protection against the harsh ocean breeze. He could taste salt on his tongue and his eyes stung briefly.

"You're gonna miss the sunset if you don't hurry."

Law lowered his hand to squint. Silhouetted against a blazing backdrop of a dying sun along the stone rail, he was unmistakable. The sun lit the tips of his hair on fire, and his broad stature was missing the spikes of his bulky coat. Coming closer, the glare of the sun vanished and Eustass Kidd came into full view.

The words dried on Law's tongue, his bright eyes unable to part from the appealing vista.
Eustass Kidd's hair was let loose for the evening, red hair rustling about his face in the breeze. The bright strands brushed his shoulders as they moved, ghosting over a golden chain at his throat. He wore a silken dress shirt similar to his own, a deep burgundy that matched his vessel. Pressed black slacks ended in polished leather shoes, and the sun reflected along the heel.

Eustass Kidd fixed up good.

Law swallowed, and strode up to the balcony to lean on the railing. The mountain met the town beneath them, the hotel suspended to give a stunning view of the cove. They stood in silence for a long moment as the sun waned and winked beneath the horizon, the red of the sky fading into purples and blues.

It was a breathtaking sight, but Law's eyes were focusing on the male beside him. Leaning over the polished marble rail, hair fluttering in the wind, a serene painted smile on his face, Law registered just how gifted Kidd was in appearance. Against the purple sky, Law could see the clear topography of the man's proud aquiline nose jutting sharply over the gentle curves of his lips. His lashes were longer than he expected, and swept elegantly over the bright shine of his eyes.

"I almost didn't recognize you out of your usual getup. I was expecting you to wear those unfashionable yellow leopard prints."

Eustass dropped his head in a exasperated laugh, his shoulder blades moving beneath the silk of his shirt. He turned to him, and Law was once again striken with thirst for what to say.

"You sure know how to ruin the mood, don't you?"

"Pointing out an observation did not necessarily ruin the mood. I think it's lovely here. Especially now that those lurid pants are nowhere in sight."
Torches ringed the enormous pool on the deck, the fire flickering in copper eyes.

"I'd say you don't appreciate animal print, but that hat of yours and your usual jeans beg to differ."

"Spots are not necessarily an animal print."

"Your hat looks like you clubbed a baby seal to death and stuck it on your head."

"How morbid, but likely."

"I'm sure"

Amusement danced across their faces and Law was well aware of the allure this man possessed. He drew him in, a tantalizing equal in conversation and humor. The wind changed direction and Law caught a whiff of the man's cologne- a rich, heady scent that made him light-headed. The gift in his bag clinked in response, and Eustass' eyes were drawn to the satchel.

"That doesn't match at all, you know."

"I am aware. I'm not intending to keep it."
"Hmm. I came empty-handed but it looks like you packed party supplies. Anything for me?"

The look in his eyes was teasing, but Law nodded his head nevertheless.

"Yes, actually."

Law ignored the surprised on his face and pulled out the pair of golden bangles. Each were several inches in length, polished by hand but still weathered with age. Whatever hallmarks it bore had been erased by time. They were more bracers than bangles, but they were loose on Law's wrists. He had gained some weight during his weeks of recovery, but he was still months behind in muscle tone. The definition in his stomach and thighs were but faint lines now, the six-pack he had proudly sported atrophied in his idle period.

Eustass handled the gift gingerly, looking unsure as if he trusted they were his to keep. His lips were set in a firm line, his brows furrowing as he turned the heavy jewelry in his hands.

"I...why?" Came the perplexed response, and Law shrugged his shoulders.

"I felt as if I owed you at least a small material token of my gratitude after all you did for my sake. If you do not appreciate them, I'll take them back."

Eustass predictably shook his head, and rolled his sleeve to his elbows. Law kept silent as he slipped the bracers onto porcelain forearms, and the gold glinted sharply in the torchlight.
His toothy grin was contagious.

"They fit great! Where'd you find them?!!"

The shine in his eyes was honest like a child's, so open with emotions. He wore his heart bloody on his sleeves, unlike Law who wasn't even sure of its location.

"We looted the Cutthroat Pirates after we destroyed their ship and I thought you might enjoy them. I assume they were stolen from a burial site, there were bone shards mixed with their haul."

"Oh, speaking of which, you received that list of pirate ships we spotted, right? I handed it over to Penguin before he booted me off your sub."

"I did, and it is greatly appreciated. Although, you didn't have to...since you know who I'm..." Law looked after the receded sun, and missed the scant warmth it had brought. He told himself the light shivers along his spine were from the cold.

He hastily changed the topic.

"I almost didn't recognize you with your hair down."

Eustass scratched his head, and Law noticed that his bangs had been pinned to the sides with small bobby pins.
"Yeah, well..." He pinched a strand between his thumb and forefinger and stared at it with a cross expression. "I hate it this way, but my goggles broke and no one would lend me a headband."

Law nodded and wordlessly steered them to sit in pair of chair by the pool. Despite the lack of sunlight, it was lit an scintillating turquoise by the collection of luminescent marbles scattered across the bottom. Law hadn't swam in years, what with how the water caused his clothes to cling to his frame. He couldn't risk anyone outside his immediate circle knowing his secret.

It looked appealing, however, despite the temperature and how the wind caused it to mimic the tempestuous ocean.

"What about pulling it into a ponytail? Surely you could do so with something on hand."

Eustass eased himself into the wicker chair with a sigh, the material protesting his weight. The reflection from the pool danced across his features, and his eyes glowed in the blue light.

Law crossed a leg and reclined in so he could shield himself from the pool's glare and focus on the redhead. Law recognized the brand name shoes as similar to those he had seen in a certain blonde’s closet a decade before. He had learned at an early age that you could display class through more than just your heritage or dwelling. Eustass had put himself in a whole new perspective, it seemed he could be cultured as well.

"I get headaches easily, even some headbands are too tight. Luckily my first mate is obsessed with his hair and has a whole cabinet devoted it in my bathroom." Law raised a brow, quirking his lips, and Eustass laughed with a slow show of teeth.
"He shares my bathroom for the mirror. And it's the only place that can accommodate his products." Eustass waved his hand, "It takes him forever to dry it and always drips all over my floor. If only he'd listen to me when I tell him to clean it."

Eustass held out an arm and the bracer glared in the light.

"Thanks for this, by the way, but you really didn't have to." Law noticed the flush creeping into his hairline and looked away.

"It's a token of gratitude."

"I know, but I already said that you didn't need to do anything in return. I was just being empathetic. You can't pay people for their kindness."

Eustass bored holes into him, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, as if proximity helped make his point. All it did was make Law uncomfortable, but he resisted pressing into the chair. He was here to make nice. He didn't want Eustass to feel as if he didn't appreciate his efforts. He knew it was hard for him to understand other people's points of view when it came to his 'situation'. It didn't make it any easier.

"Anyway," Law started, in a tone that startled them both. The redhead sunk back in his chair and waited patiently for Law to continue, and he hated him for it.

"I think we should share a bottle of wine."
Law turned around in his seat and motioned at a well-dressed server who was waiting a large group of people in the distance. The deck was much larger than he had anticipated, set along the mountainside. The pool stretched with it, shaped like a snake as it curved around tables and potted plants. The deck was large enough that the two of them could have their privacy, but not enough that Law couldn't spot where it tapered off into the scoured stone of the mountain. It was well anchored, and Law wanted to commend the architect.

The server took his sweet time, stopping at every possible table. Once he ventured over to their more secluded area he paused for a moment, recognizing them or at least their occupation. He played with the napkin folded over his arm and gave them the least sincere smile possible.

"What can I do for you..." He eyed the letters on Law's knuckles and the gold bracers with fear in his eyes, "...gentlemen?"

Law, used to such treatment, uncrossed his leg and pulled out his wallet.

"Merlot, please."

The man skittered away with a deep bow and slipped the bills into his coat pocket. Eustass turned to him with glittering eyes and a wry smile and Law found himself reciprocating in spite of himself.

"What's so amusing, Eustass-ya?"

"You. It seems you enjoy top shelf."
"Did you assume otherwise?"

"Not at all. You're the most posh person I've ever met."

The conversation descended into laughter and anecdotes of their travels, their cheeks dusting pink as the night progressed. The moon smiled overhead in the shape of the bay, the stars gold filigree along the white wash of the Milky Way. The dining area vacated as the moon rose, Eustass and Law blissful in their private. They slipped into politics, the economic boom in North Blue due to the annual migration of sperm whales and the rise of small democracies in the West. They began to share makeup tips. Eustass showed Law how to heat eye pencils to create a gel formula and Law explained how he had learned to paint triangles under his eyes with concealer to hide the shadows, but had long run out of supplies. As their multiple bottles emptied, so did their filters, and Law leaned sideways in his chair as he laughed, oblivious that they had scooted their chairs together. Law's body was pleasantly warm, but the heat from Eustass' shoulder was utterly heavenly. His heat-starved body leached off the warmth with desperation, and Law relaxed into the red satin.

"Gettin' comfy?" Drawled the redhead, tipping his head onto Law's in an overly familiar gesture. Law just hummed in reply, satisfaction thrumming through his body. Law focused on the lap of the water as it slapped against the sides of the pool, spilling over onto smooth tiles. Eustass noticed his fixation and ruffled the dark locks, startling Law into leaning back into his own chair. His body missed the warmth.

"Sorry, wanna go swimming?"

"We're sloshed."

"On just a bottle each? Don't be absurd. It won't be so bad. C'mon."
Eustass hefted himself out of his chair, only to topple head first into the water. Law jumped from his chair in alarm, vision blackening for a moment as his blood pressure dropped. When he could see again Eustass was leaning on the side of the pool, looking up at him with a dopey grin, crimson hair plastered to his forehead. Law felt laughter bubbling in his throat and gave into the compulsion, doubling over in hysteria. Eustass made him feel like an honest to goodness child, the one he had never been but felt on rare occasions as an insatiable craving to play.

Disregarding how he would look when he emerged, Law jumped in with a shout. Those with any sense who were still dining had left, and couples who had wandered out to see the stars had retreated back indoors. Two grown men drunkenly splashing in the pool tended to ruin a romantic evening.

The water came up to their shoulders, but still Eustass seemed to be struggling.

"H-Hey-!" Law swallowed water in his attempt to hold up the taller male, looping his arms under the others'. Eustass struggled to stand as his shoes slipped on the glowing marbles.

"Swimming can't be this hard!" He sputtered, trembling like a wet cat, his bobby pins having come loose somewhere along the way.

They laughed and the stars glittered brightly overhead.

The dining hall was still open at four in the morning, although the staff was less than welcoming. Couples sat at tables of red tablecloths and white china, roses set in crystalline vases. The high ceiling was painted with yet another fresco, a field of corn set aflame beneath a rising sun, a
woman carrying a clay pot on her head as she walked towards her laboring husband.

"I'm honestly surprised no one's recognized us. I'm a little disappointed." Kidd muttered into his water glass, staring after their server as he moved to a different table. In the corner of his eye he could see Trafalgar picking at his appetizer of scallops, the grooves in his forehead growing as his mind wandered. He picked at the seared flesh with the tongs of his fork, peeling away tender strands and nibbling at them delicately. Kidd's own plate of cabbage rolls was sparkling clean, the redhead having sopped up the tomato juice with a dinner roll.

"I'm perfectly satisfied with maintaining autonomy for the foreseeable future. I'm not particularly interested in a repeat of last time."

Kidd's stomach dropped as the cabbage rolls decided to disagree with him. He chased down bile with his water, and motioned at the waiter for a refill. I never fucking think before I speak...shit...*He resorted to drumming his fingers nervously on his thigh, where his napkin creased over his lap. He had never been good with manners, and had Wire walk him through the steps of eating in a fine restaurant while Blaire lent him some books. He didn't think he'd ever been so embarrassed. He was sure he saw Blaine pocketing a few Beli from his misfortune.

"Tra-"

Before he could even say his name, Trafalgar had disappeared from his seat to grab the bag he had set beneath his chair. Kidd held his tongue as he retrieved a thin stack of paper and handed it over to him. Those golden eyes were penetrating, but it drifted to the back of his mind as he skimmed over the neat type.

He drew a sharp breath, and his hands began to tremble.

"This is..."
His eyes burned.

"I took it upon myself to gather what I could on your genealogy. You spoke about wanting to know your mother's roots, and this is what was available to me. This is only a list of your relatives, both living and deceased. They were mostly gypsies, a handful of blacksmiths, and a pair of reclusive monks. I took care to find only the superficial details, and did not pry into anything private."

Trafalgar spoke as if he was conducting a business transaction, rather than handing Kidd his childhood regrets in twelve-point font. The words before him blurred with tears, and he found himself unable to speak or think. All he knew was that he held in his hands the answer he had so desperately sought.

*What was your life before me, and was it any happier than the one we shared?*

"You're meal, sir."

The waiter's voice was filled with contempt, his presence jarring, and Trafalgar cleared his throat with narrowed eyes.

"Ah." The waiter clicked his heels, his tone unapologetic. "I will return at a later time."

Kidd shook his head, lowering the stack to the table, and raised his hand.
"No. No we're good. Thank you."

He felt Trafalgar’s eyes on him, but he remained silent. Kidd shook his head and cleared his throat of any sobs threatening to make themselves known. He was twenty-one years old. He could bottle up his emotions until they were appropriate.

They were served plates of sirloin steak, Kidd's rare while Trafalgar ordered his well-done. They ate in a distant silence, Kidd's mind elsewhere and Trafalgar politely keeping to himself.

Kidd thought of crimson hair tied back into a messy bun, his mother kneading dough with her bare hands as she tried to hold down a side job as a baker's assistant. She was fired in less than a month when her false name fell through the cracks. Nobody wanted a whore baking their bread. Her jewelry was tarnished and sentimental, mementos from a past buried with hands around her throat. He couldn't fathom why his mother hadn't terminated her pregnancy the moment she knew. A child wasn't good for business, he was only an added burden. He was the only reason she hadn't left the city. She spent her money as soon as it came. There was more than one mouth to feed, after all.

His steak was tasteless, every bite robotic and half chewed. If he ended up staring absently at Trafalgar's plate as he filtered through his memories, he didn't seem to mind. Trafalgar. This man had given him such a precious gift, and for what? Was this his way of trying to repay him for his kindness? Of course it is, he internally scoffed, the bracers too...He's trying so hard to repay me for something that didn't need reciprocation. First sex and now gold and priceless answers? I can't imagine thinking that way...equivalent exchange and nothing in-between...Is being selfless or decent such foreign concepts?

They were served complimentary plates of chocolate cake, which Trafalgar pushed away with a tight smile.

"I fucking love chocolate cake."
"By all means be my guest. I'm more of a fan of dark chocolate."

"You know..." Trafalgar drawled, tracing the pad of his finger around the rim of his glass, eyes meeting Kidd's own. "One might make the assumption that you have an obsession with sugar." He gestured to their dessert plates, Kidd scraping both clean.

Kidd grinned with black teeth, and Trafalgar turned away with a look of disgust. Kidd's laughter disturbed the few patrons still feeling peckish and the waiters pointed at them from afar in hushed tones. If they had matched their unusual appearances with that of their posters, the Marines had yet to arrive.

They bickered over which of them would pay the bill, and ended up going dutch. Kidd shoved in a tip, and Trafalgar glared daggers at his back all the way to the lobby.

"Did you book a room for the night or are you planning on heading back to your ship?" Trafalgar asked, motioning to the concierge asleep at his desk. Kidd shook his head and jerked a thumb at the entrance.

"Gonna head home, m'tired as fuck."

Trafalgar nodded in agreement, and Kidd scrutinized his face. The deep bruises beneath his eyes were still present, but his skin was free of the sallow glow he remembered. He hadn't missed the way Trafalgar's shirt plastered against him when they emerged from the pool. Before he had looked away out of courtesy, he had seen the outline of the man's ribs, and the way his abdomen looked less defined. His grip in the pool had seemed weak. It was obvious he had starved himself during the weeks they had been out of communication. Still, he was steady on his feet and his eyes held a healthy shine. His hair gleamed like a horse's mane, glinting in the overhead lights like a polished vase.
They left together in a comfortable silence and remained so as they descended the steep hill. Kidd’s genealogy was tucked safely in the brown satchel that bounced against his hip, and the gold bangles on his bare forearms made him feel like a king. Something had changed between them that night, Kidd could feel it. There was something in way he looked at Trafalgar now, in the way they fell in step as they walked in unison. Their arms brushed against each other in a comforting way, and their scents mingled. Trafalgar smelled like the seasoning on their fillets, a deeply rich oregano with hints of steak sauce and freshly ground peppercorn. He was pleasantly full, and his eyelids were heavy with sleep. He hadn’t felt so relaxed in weeks, as if the burden of not knowing if the other captain was alright had weighed down his very soul.

Kidd’s boat was a ghostly silhouette in the darkness, a silent giant in the dead of night. In a few hours the sun would creep above the horizon, the cove sheltered from the dawn by its towering guardians, allowing lovers to catch extra hours of precious sleep. He could spot Trafalgar’s garish submarine docked at the termination of the town, floating before a view of lush greenery. Trafalgar and his company preferred solitude, he had noticed. Whether or not it was simply due to the man’s target, Trafalgar kept to himself. Even so, he displayed himself in bold colors, flashing himself before his audience as if to taunt them.

Trafalgar began to walk stiffly as they met even ground, the soft slapping of the rising tide surrounding them in a peaceful lull. He’s walking weird...Kidd noted, letting Trafalgar drift apart as they continued down the dock. His shoulders were caved but his legs were stiff, his hands clenched into fists at his side. Red flags went off in his head, and Kidd cautiously wrapped his hand around the man’s bicep. Trafalgar immediately spun to face him, his eyes blown wide in fear. Kidd felt anxiety rising in his throat, and he reached out another hand to steady the lightly trembling male.

"Trafalgar...?" He kept his voice low as if he was speaking to a fawn, leading them to stop in the empty threshold of a fish market.

"Trafalgar what’s wrong?"

The man jerked away from him, scrubbing his arms as if Kidd’s touch burned him. Trafalgar's eyes
were anywhere but meeting his, darting between black water and cobbled streets. Twilight cast shadows along the bridge of his nose, stitching darkness along his cheekbones.

"I'm fine, let's just get going."

He sped off at a brisk pace, Kidd lengthening his stride to approach him. The fine hairs on the back of his neck rose as his nostrils were accosted by the unmistakable rank of fresh blood. The torches along the dock had been blown out long ago by the high winds, the slivered moon the only good source of light. Even so, it was bright enough that he could make out the dark patch blossoming on the seat of Trafalgar's black jeans.**

Chapter End Notes

*This is not Kidd's fault and it will become increasingly obvious that Kidd takes things too personally. He feels as if he has to do everything right no matter what, and if those close to him become distressed he feels as if he has failed them.

**Guess who's visiting?
Law hadn't felt so humiliated since he was a child.

His face burned as he lengthened his stride, the viscous liquid beginning to slide down the insides of his thighs. Eustass was hot on his heels, worried as ever, and Law wanted to kill him for seeing him in such a vile state. He could tolerate the forced voyerism of his assault, he could tolerate breaking down in his arms, but he could not, and would not, tolerate Eustass Kidd witnessing him menstruate through his slacks.

"Do you want to-"

He stiffly raised his hand in lieu of becoming violent.

Angry tears were blurring his vision, and he had to stop walking before he went off the dock in his haste to disappear. The cramps had started on the walk down the mountainside, but he had been desperately naive and hadn't even realized the cause until his underwear began to dampen. He had been artificially suppressing his menstruation for years, but in the wake of his latest sexual assault he had forgone all personal care. Not even his faithful trio knew he had found a way to medicate himself into a forced temporary menopause, but he had. Of course, it would only work on his own kind, otherwise he'd be revered across the globe as the doctor who had cured periods*.

He couldn't see his sub anymore through the onslaught of tears, and his shoulders rose around his ears as he curled in on himself. The redhead was saying things to him that he couldn't hear over his shame, and Law buried his hands in the material of his shirt.

*If I don't get a hold of myself I'll start crying, and I refuse to make a scene here.
The sky was still black, the stars out to play, but soon the early risers would make themselves known. He couldn't risk being caught bleeding all over the floor out in the open air of the dock. Eustass’ subordinates might creep out onto the deck or his own crew might sneak back before the sun rose. He likely had crew still loitering about the town, nestled in the beds of whores or passed out on a stoop.

He suddenly felt more vulnerable than before.

*What if they see me and think I'm injured? They'll come and investigate and...*

He was sobbing aloud before he knew it, and nothing could stop the aching in his lungs as his chest heaved with panic. The other captain descended around him in a moment, and for once Law wasn't terrified or angry. He tucked his face into the bare expanse of the others neck, and inhaled the musky cocktail of his cologne. It had faded during their moonlit swim, but the faint smell was enough to calm his nerves. A firm hand on his shoulder guided him in a tight circle.

"C'mon Law, my ship's closer and I promise everyone's in town. The only one on board is Heat because his leg's busted. No one will bother you."

The deep dulcet voice reverberated in the broad chest cradling his back, and he felt overcome with tiredness.

"...Fine..."
Law was hesitant to admit it, but he trusted Eustass. Not completely, but enough to consider him honest.

The ghosts of Eustass’ sails outlined the darkness, and Law couldn’t help but stare at the ship’s grand beauty as they walked down the dock. When he saw the gangplank had been lifted, his heart sank. He wasn’t looking forward to climbing the rope ladder in his condition. Eustass noticed it too, and groaned in frustration.

"Fucking Heat, being all pissy that we left him on board must’ve pulled it up. Godammit..."

Law moved to detach himself from his human wind-barrier but Eustass merely pulled him closer with a deep sigh that rattled against Law’s ear.

"Son of bitch, alright...just keep this under wraps, okay?"

Law was about to protest when the ground left his feet. He gripped Eustass tightly on reflex, the other's arm secured around his middle in a vice. He wasn't being levitated, rather Eustass was the one rising from the ground, and the redhead was his only handhold. When their feet landed firmly on the ground Law jerked himself away from the other in a slight panic.

"What the fuck?! What the actual fuck?!"

He found himself standing on the redwood deck of the man's ship. Fear had budded during the levitating stunt, never comfortable not being in control of his movements. Eustass pressed a finger to painted lips and gestured he keep moving.
"It's not that weird. I bet you have a few tricks up your selves when it comes to your powers."

Law's brows disappeared into his hairline and he shook his head with a smirk.

"Manipulating the magnetic fields of the planet to suspend yourself? I can only fathom how you discovered such a brilliant technique."

Eustass flipped him a middle finger with a grin as they made their way across the silent deck. Law figured the other was taking him to his room, which strangely enough didn't bother him.

"You can take a shower in my bathroom, I'll go find you some clothes that'll fit you and some...ahhh-" Eustass nervously scratched the back of his head, motioning down the stairwell leading from the deck to his supposed dwelling. Law raised a brow, bitting his lip in nervous amusement, anticipating the male's words but enjoying his struggle with articulating.

"Tampons? Eustass-ya, might you be looking for the word, 'tampon'?"] Law's grin was feral as the color of the man's hair permeated into his skin. Eustass looked away in embarrassment and Law laughed at his expense, descending the short stairwell and into the sparsely lit hallway. The narrow dead end was marked by a duo of steel lanterns framing a door to his right.

"You can go in! I'll go fetch your stuff and be right back!" Eustass called softly, his polished shoes visible from the foot of the landing. Before Law could protest, the man's footfalls began to retreat, and he was left in the shallow hallway with his thoughts.

*I highly doubt he knows what he's looking for...*
The doorknob was a tarnished gold, the metal warm in his clutch, and he took the moment to gauge his next step.

*I'm on Eustass' ship, about to walk into Eustass' room...nobody besides him knows I'm here, and I'm on my fucking period...Do I really trust him this much?*

...

The door opened on well-greased hinges, revealing a stunning bedroom of the likes which Law hadn't seen on a ship in his life.

"Shit, I may give him shit for his pants but *fuck* is this place beautiful!" He muttered lowly under his breath in astonishment, looking around the glowing room with unrestrained awe. The king sized bed to his right matched the couch opposite him, the bright red and gold embroidery glowing in the candlelit room. There was a redwood dresser by the couch, which left an odd reflection on the metal behind it which seemed to take up the whole back wall. There were candles by the beside and an ornate rug on the floor, and Law felt embarrassed for even stepping foot in such a parlor. His own room was a pig sty on the worst days, but it was once a pristine room without its own ecosystem. He could learn something from Eustass on how to keep his room so immaculate, but knew he would never be able to keep it up.

His room seemed to fester on its own.

There was only one other door in the room, which he presumed led to somewhere he could clean up. The seat of his pants were thoroughly soaked, his thighs looking like he had ridden on a saddle of blood. He though he could feel it trickling down his ankles, but he could have been imagining it.
The bathroom was no less exquisite, with walls of hammered bronze, unblemished mirror, and jagged limestone. The massive tub was hewn from the same stone, smoothed down to match the neatly tiled floor. The faucets on the tub were copper, and he spotted a shower head jutting out of the rough limestone right by an inconspicuous toilet and sink. Turning to his right he found a large cedar cabinet, but thought better of snooping through the man's things.

I don't want to overstay my welcome, and he did say Killer shared the bathroom with him so he could store his hair products. Maybe they're in there?

He stood on one foot to remove his boot, grimacing at the red lines staining his ankles. He had always had extraordinary balance, but pressed a palm against the cool mirror with a promise to clean it. His feet were accustomed to wearing heels, but new pairs of shoes were always a pain in the ass to break in. He massaged the balls of his feet with his knuckles before peeling off the bloody mess that were his pants. They came off sticky, his skin red and warm, and the only place he felt comfortable depositing them was inside the bathtub. Corking the drain, he turned the spigot and let the tub fill with cold water. The liquid met his pants and turned pink as the blood ran. He tossed his shoes in the water for good measure, even though he would likely have to replace them.

The second pair in how long?

He couldn't recall the date of his assault, the event seemingly like a distant memory. Just an illusion, for if he closed his eyes for a moment he could feel meaty fingers pressing bruises into his thighs.

He capped the faucet when the water successfully covered his slacks, and draped his shirt over the side. He tried to shy away from his reflection in the mirror, away from the dark blue panties now blossomed black. If he threw them in after his pants they would ruin the water content, so he turned to the open shower. It was an amazing design, and he wondered if Kidd had hired a professional architect when designing his abode. His crew might be bloodthirsty and manic, but his ship was just as elegant as it was imposing. Of course, it could've done without the giant skulls lining the deck.

When he turned on the shower, he was surprised at the rush on hot water. Law marveled at the
steam quickly billowing against the mirror, obscuring his vile visage. Hot water was a rarity on the open ocean, and usually cost an arm and a leg to provide. If Kidd was wasting such a precious commodity on him, he would certainly have to repay him accordingly.

He rubbed out the scarlet from his underwear with nervous fingers, ignoring the way the water turned red as he rolled down his elbows and onto the smooth tiles.

*If he doesn't corrugate the floor he'll fall.*

The water was heaven on his skin, and he gladly pilfered the bar of soap resting on the wall's imbedded shelf. There was a luffa sponge sitting on its own shelf, but he politely declined sharing the man's washcloth. It was enough that he was sharing his soap, his hot water, and his hospitality.

...I'm bathing in Eustass-ya's shower...I'm naked on his ship...in his bathroom...

...Like a slut after a one-night stand...**

He sharply turned off the water, his lungs damp with steam. There wasn't much he could do about the continuous flow between his legs, but at least he was devoid of sweat and dried blood. He was careful not to slip as he took a white towel from copper rungs against the wall, and rubbed the fabric along his cheek with a soft sigh. Law's eyelids fluttered closed as he repeatedly brushed the downy cloth against his cheek, marveling in its gentle texture.

*I should buy towels like these...they're comforting...*
All comfort was lost at the sharp knock at the bathroom door, and his room instinctively activated around him.

"I have what you need...uh, I'll just leave it on the floor here and go grab a few drinks from the mess hall. You can stay here if you want when you're done or wander about. It's fine by me."

Law didn't trust his voice to respond, and waited for the man's awkward presence to disappear from the room. He let out a breath he didn't know he was holding, and bit at his knuckles.

*I didn't even notice him enter the bedroom...if he was anyone else...*

Dwelling on such thoughts would debilitate him in normal circumstances, and now that he was off his medication his emotions were akin to fireworks. Anything could set them off, and he would burn out just as quickly.

He stained the towel bright crimson as he dried off, and dropped it in tub with added water that quickly diluted the pink solution. Everything sickened him at the moment, from the water his womb sucked at his insides to the way his nipples hardened in response the soft touch of the towel. He was sensitive by nature, but now such reactions hurt him physically as well as emotionally. Even if he shied from sex psychologically, his body craved it at all times without exception. The tenderest touches from his friends would ignite fire in his belly that took hours to will away, and he could count on one hand the exact number of times he had been able to control his arousal when he came across a man without a shirt.

The only reason he had yet to grow wet between the legs at the sight of Eustass' choice of attire was the immense coat he wore. But if his areola made it into Law's sight he was down for the count. There was no medicine he could make that could stop his body from its natural urge for intercourse, and it was only his force of will that kept him from spreading his legs for every half-dressed man in his vicinity.
Or any man at all, if he was honest with himself.

There were times in the dead of night that Law would find himself tugged awake by a sudden need to be filled. He had once purchased a dildo on impulse, and left it under Rei's pillow with a bitter taste in his mouth. He was thankful to have found the boy, but he loathed him as much as he pitied him. Rei was everything he was supposed to be: promiscuous, compliant, feminine. If he didn't consider Noro his Master, Law was sure he would be sleeping with everyone on the ship. Which wouldn't do, of course, since Law wished to keep their kind the furthest thing from everyone's mind.

Even if the boy was in a position to be his closest confidant, Law refrained from engaging in any prolonged interaction with him. He sickened him, made his self-loathing sky rocket, and made the small voice locked away in the back of his mind speak up.

Spread your legs...

It's so easy...

You know you want it, so why do you resist?

Look at the way he looks at his Master, don't you want that again?

"Yes, I long for those days again just as much as I wish they would wipe themselves from my memory." He spoke to himself lowly under his breath, sneaking a hand through the crack in the door he had made to retrieve whatever Eustass had brought him. The steam has dissipated into the vents on the ceiling, and the cold air crept through the gap in the door with a vengeance. He shut it
quickly, his eyes bright as gooseflesh broke out on his forearms and thighs, his nipples erect once more.

The forest green shirt in his hands was pure cotton, and even if he knew it would prolong his misery he shucked it on without preamble. In the fogged mirror, he couldn't see the way his nipples showed beneath the fabric, but he knew.

It was more than enough.

True to his word, Eustass had brought him a few tampons, with which he inserted immediately. He retrieved the soaked towel from the tub and wiped away the lines of crimson from his legs. Law let the heavy towel drop into the water with a small splash, frowning at the bloody trails he had left across the floor. He used power to detach the shower head, his room never falling since Eustass' appearance. After spraying the evidence safely down the drain and returning the appliance to its proper place, he tugged on the pants left for him. The same texture and color, he figured the clothes were from a matching set. Whoever the man had borrowed them from, they had the same build, even if the pants bared his ankles. He left the pair of underwear that had been left for him on the side of the tub with his shirt. Law wasn't comfortable wearing a woman's underwear, especially if she hadn't been asked. He could do without underwear, even if the tampon's string was hypersensitive against his thighs.

*Didn't Eustass-ya say the only woman on board was both his navigator and their 'doctor'? I should meet her one of these days, though it might be awkward now.*

He tucked the extra tampons in the pocket of his dress shirt, and left the bathroom behind. A pair of white bunny-eared slippers waited for him beside the couch, and Law smiled without reservation. Cute things had always drew his attention, whether stemmed from genetic predisposition towards child-like things or the personality he had developed. He knew the answer, but steered away from it, for the sake of his mental health.

*Lami...No, don't think of her. You don't deserve to think of her when you're like this.*
The slippers were slices of heaven on his sore feet, and he wiggled his toes to bounce the pink-lined ears. He giggled, and the sound was foreign to his ears. When had he last been happy? Not even an hour ago, right? Why couldn't he remember what it felt like to not be on his period? It was like when it came it wiped away his past, and the feeling of normalcy was far beyond his grasp. The cramps in his belly and the flux in his heart, these were the definitions he lived by. At least for the next five days.

A knock came to the door and Law surprised himself by remaining calm, letting his room flicker and die in favor of crossing his arms in an attempt to hide his unbidden arousal.

"Hey Law," Eustass was all smiles when he strolled in, and Law didn't miss the way his stomach filled with butterflies at his voice.

Since when had he fallen for this man?

And in what way?

"I got you some stuff for your cramps," He waved a hand and spoke so casually that Law was impressed. He held out a steaming mug that looked like tea, and Law took it without the thought that it could be laced with anything other than sugar.

Yes, he had fallen so hard.

"I didn't peg you for being such a feminist. At least not when it came matters such as these."
Eustass’ brows furrowed in a simian frown, prompting Law to elaborate.

He settled back on the couch instead, raising the mug to his lips with a secretive smile.

_Ginger..._

It put a warmth in his chest that made it toes curl in pleasure, a fever rushing up the back of neck. In addition to his artificial genetics as a Loreli, he was a Northerner. Not even that, but a Northerner from the North. Flevance and the territories around it experienced winter eight months of the years, and their bodies had evolved to leech warmth from any source available. He knew that when he shook someone's hand the rise in their brow stemmed from his frigid grip, and the reason he could withstand the extreme cold was due to his heritage.

It was as if he had been cursed by both the World Nobles and his parents, and he believed it.

"Won't your navigator be suspicious when she find you've stolen not only her tampons but her underwear?" Law smiled over the rim of his mug, watching with stormy eyes as Eustass reclined against the poster of his bed.

"Yeah, well..." The redhead scratched at his non-existant stubble and looked away. "Those things are pretty useful for clogging bullet holes, and we may have had bets in the past that weren't exactly...standard..." Eustass’ face slowly transformed into a blossoming red mess, and Law blinked before tipping his head back in laughter.

Eustass snorted indignantly, before chiming in with his own distinct timbre. Law peaked at the man's expression, holding the warm cup before his face to hide his growing blush. The other male was extraordinarily handsome when he laughed, flashing his sharp canines while his eyes were shut in glee. A healthy rouge extended from ear to ear, highlighting the freckles dotting his cheeks.
His hair was less voluminous since their dip, but no less vibrant. He hadn't seen such a color before, except perhaps in the gradient of a sunset.

Or would it be a sunrise?

Eustass started taking off his shoes, plucking them from the floor to return to the closet, and Law noticed the same crimson shade painting his toes. The man was fond of cosmetics, with enough proficiency to make Law slightly envious, and he had yet to see him without nail polish or lipstick. His eyes too, wore thick coal eyeliner sculpted into subtle wings. Where Law's dexterity and precision made him a near perfect surgeon, Eustass was an adept makeup artist. Law had never considered being male analogous to being decidedly masculine or bearing masculine traits, and had always admired beauty and those who wielded it.

The male seemed to have decided not to disrobe in front of Law, and instead moved back to the bed to gain a proper perch. With such rapt attention focused on him, Law found himself increasingly self-conscious. He leaned further back into the couch, the firm press against his back causing his heart to leap into his throat on reflex. Law had always feared being backed into a corner, pressed against something against his will with no escape, but this was not the case.

*Calm down Law, nothing's wrong, just play it cool...*

"So is the tea working?"

Eustass looked genuinely concerned, and Law was abashed once more with the others kindness.

"Oh, actually-" Law's eyes widened at the realization that he hadn't felt cramping for several minutes.
"That's amazing! It works so fast-where did you get this?!” Law raised his cup, but Eustass darted his eyes in what seemed to be embarrassment.

"Actually, I made that from a recipe my mom...left me." He looked down at his bed pointedly, as if it held answers, before he looked back at the door where the brown satchel hung from a copper rung.

"I never properly thanked you for that. I don't even know how I can."

...

A blush crept onto Law's face, and he drowned his words in the steaming tea. In an ideal world, Law might have said something along the lines of 'It's the least I could do for you after all you've done for me.' But this was reality, and in reality Law was no saint.

"Well, why don't we share some things about our past? Things that make us happy."

The silence was answer enough that he had crossed a line, and Law's power hummed in his veins in case he needed to defend himself.

"Hmm, a fair trade." Eustass nodded, rubbing above a gold bangle. "But nothing too personal, it's clear neither of us are in the mood to deal with that shit, yeah?"
Law's jaw couldn't work past his incredulity.

Eustass seemed to understand and clapped his hands.

"I guess I'll start then, Killer and I tended a field of tulips when we were kids. We had to do it outside of town because Oresmith was a polluted shithole with acid rain and smog so it was hard for plants to survive. It should have been impossible where we found it-"

Law's smile was soft and fond as Eustass animatedly spoke of cultivating a large field of red tulips. How he brought bouquets home for his mother and how she'd weave them into her hair. Law's couldn't help but feel a tad jealous at the way Eustass spoke so warmly of his mother, how his eyes softened and his voice grew thick with emotion.

How wonderful to feel so strongly of one's mother.

Though Cora-san had been enough for him, for however short a time.

The mug in his hands was drained and forgotten beside him, and Law's feet had tucked between the couch cushions for extra warmth. He found himself nodding off into the arm of the couch as Eustass' rich voice continued to recount joyous childhood memories of amateur gardening. Law had been conditioned to be on guard at all times, and falling asleep in another's presence hadn't happened since the naivety of his own childhood. Back when he had been innocent to the perversions of others. It took him a long time to feel safe around his own close trio, and if he had been healthier it would have taken him hours to sleep in their room when he had been convalescing.
He drifted off with a warmth in his belly that calmed his aching body, and with the knowledge that he was safe here.

If he had felt someone gingerly move him to the bed and tuck him in, fear did not make itself known long enough for him to have remembered.

Chapter End Notes

*I can't explain how much I need this person to exist right now. I'm actually going through my cycle right now, and planned to write this chapter in correspondence with it to feel more immersed in the literature.

** How sexist of you, Law. Shame on you.

Bonus for those who like to listen to music while reading, I feel like Daughter defines Law's life. I listened to Smoke on repeat for three hours writing this and cry like a baby every time I hear Candles. Never heard an artist who touched me so deeply. Even if I haven't experienced any of the sorrows, Daughter still hits me like a freight train. It's like nightmare smoke and the ghost of a hug.
Chapter 17

The tulips were burning and Killer was screaming, his voice rising above the flames as they ate his precious flower bed. This had been his home once, his territory to protect and defend. He'd sleep nestled in a hole he dug in the soft earth and would drink the dew from the petals at dawn. Kidd was laughing, stretched out on flower he'd destroyed. Killer was above him, screaming into his face, tear streaking rivers down his dirty face, red eyes burning brighter than the flames. Kidd was too ruined to care.

Everything would burn.

Everything would die.

He'd kill these flowers to send them to his mother.

The thick peat beneath him squelched as Killer lunged out to strike him with a rock. The skin at his temple fell away and blood torrented down his hairline and pooled in his ear. His grin was straining with the effort, his laughter choking with the smoke that rose around them. Bitter air filled his lunged and burned his esophagus. His eyes were undoubtedly bloodshot, angry red threads snaking about his eyes as they watered in pain.

Killer struck him again and the world began to spin. Somewhere in the distance he registered that Killer wasn't giving his it all. Scrawny as he was, the blonde could have caved his skull with the first blow.

But he hadn't.
Saliva and snot ran ugly down his face, his eyes were feverish, his eyebrows drawn. If Kidd was in his right mind, he would feel empathy for his friend, guilt for what he had done, perhaps registered that he had ruined their hard-won friendship in the act of lighting a single match.

He brought the stone down once more, and this time it struck Kidd’s breastbone with striking force. Whether his heart had caught up to his actions or if it was the desperate lungful of acrid smoke, Kidd’s throat closed with sorrow.

“She’s dead!” He shrieked, his voice a warbled mockery of its usual timbre. He bucked wildly against the boy straddling him, limbs twisting under the sudden onslaught of despair. Killer was silent above him, but he wouldn’t have been able to hear him over the crackle of the encroaching flames and the steady ooze of blood filling his ear.

He was sure he looked quite the mess to his former friend, even disregarding the split temple and the soot beginning to crease his skin. His clothes were dark caricatures of his hair, blood stiffening the thin fabric, tearing where it could no longer withstand the abuse. Several of his fingers were bent backwards, rigid with splintered bone. There was something slimy and lumpy in his left pocket, a mass of grey matter he can scooped out with his fingers. There was an eyeball in the other, the pupil not eye dilated against the rusty iris. If he squeezed it he knew it would be firm in his palm, and it would be surprisingly heavy.

His nose tickled with smoke or tears, and he gripped his filthy shirt and twisted it with a scream. The flower were choking him now, rising up and slipping beneath his clothes to strangle him slowly. Petals rained on his from above, tickling his nose and a sneeze began to rise in his throat.

"Achoo-!"

Kidd sneezed himself awake into a world of laughter. The sun was bright and he shielded his eyes from its gaze with a sleep addled arm, only to find delicate strips of something dancing across his face and falling from his hair.
"The fuck-?" Kidd mumbled, staring at the collection of bright pink petal collected in his palm. He blinked at them unseeing for a moment, his brain dragging his limbs out of the dream with the sluggishness that came from oversleeping.

"Did you have a nice nap, Captain?" Killer was a silhouette against the blinding sun. Kidd looked around from where he was sitting cross-legged against the central mast, glaring at the crew members standing over him with familiar pink flowers gathered in their arms. Killer waved them off with a snicker muffled beneath his mask, and Kidd looked down at himself to find his lap decorated with delicate blossoms. He picked up an intact flower by the stub of its stem, and the petals flaked away into the breeze like paper.

"Very funny. Where did you get flowers out here?"

Killer shrugged and pointed at the railing, and Kidd hoisted himself to feet to see what he could possibly mean. To his unbridled delight, they were no longer drifting along the salty seas of the Grand Line, but ghosting across a field of pink flowers. The crew was hauling up pails of petals and water, and Blaire was dunking mugs into the pails and, to his incredulity, knocking it back like it was rum.

"What the hell is going on." He breathed, and Killer laughed. Kidd craned his neck to stare at his first mate, but the other was bent over the railing. Killer hadn't spoken to him in days, and hadn't reached out to him since their little game of catch back on the beach nearly two months ago. Their relationship had strained over Killer's silence, and Kidd had turned back to his machinations to ease his frustration. He had lost the desire to know about Killer's tryst with Law's first mate. He turned his attention to Law and why the other would give him permission to call him by his first name. Over the weeks of Killer's silence, Law had kept a schedule of frequent calls to him. It helped Kidd pass the time during the lulls in travel over open water, when his tools wouldn't satisfy the itching in his blood and his crew had bled him dry in poker. Killer had always been the one he would run to during his periods of listless anxiety, but now he was as distant as the shore.

"I wouldn't protest if you called me 'Law', Eustass-ya."
"Y-You did before."

"That was then, Eustass-ya. I think we can both agree things have changed since that time."

He didn't dare ask what Law had meant, hadn't even had the courage to let the other call him Kidd. Law's phone calls became the light at the end of his day, and it scared him how much he was growing attached to the rival captain. He kept a lookout for Donquixote's many ships with a fervor that nearly dwarfed his eagerness to explore the Grand Line. Before he knew it he had become entangled in Law's story, whether or not the other man would allow it. He knew himself far too well to hope he could wipe away all that had happened and go back to scouring the Grand Line with an adventure's lust. When he grew passionate about something it was nearly impossible for him to break free until it waned away naturally.

He was interested in Law in a way that defied logic, and he almost feared that interest. If he crossed a line, pushed Law too far, pushed Law at all, he'd never forgive himself.

No, he would keep his romantic desire to himself, lest it slip into a different category altogether.

He wanted to protect Law in a way the other would kill him if he knew, wanted to keep him shielded from the world to the best of his ability. But to the rob the man of his independence would be a sin he'd never touch, he enjoyed and was awed by Law's unflappable control. Whether it was shock or not, Law's actions in the cell had left an impression on his mind. He'd never met anyone that strong of will- he was certain he couldn't do it. Law had been unflappable, until he was alone with his demons. Kidd related to his front of strength, though there was no way it didn't run beneath the surface. One could not survive such horrors on pretense alone.

"Yo, drink up."
A mug was shoved under his nose and pushed him out his reverie. Kidd glared at his first mate, instinctively drawing back from the flowered drink of sea and salt.

"You trying to kill me?!!"

Killer shook his head with what sounded like a stifled laugh, "Just try it, it's not salty I promise."

Despite what was going on between them, he knew Killer well enough to trust that he wouldn't do something so underhanded. He raised the mug to his lips and his eye blew wide. A warm wash of sweetest swept over his tongue, the petals mixing in his mouth in a pleasant caress of candied flower. It was a taste he had never been graced with before, and he despaired for the wasted time. His sweet tooth urging him on, he plundered the ambrosia with all his gusto.

"It's fucking sweet! But this is ocean water right?"

He didn't feel like he was losing all his energy, like he was sprawled out the floor in a near comatose state. There was no burn of salt on the way down, only the sweet aftertaste on his tongue and a few petals stuck to the roof of his mouth.

Killer simply shrugged.

At the very least the view was stunning, pink seas as far as he could squint. His crew seemed to be taking up buckets to stockpile the sweet drink, while some were trying and failing to weave flower crowns with the near stemless flowers.
Kidd went to take another sip before something occurred to him, "Did...Didn't anyone think this might be a problem? You know, like, that this could adverse effects down the line?"

Killer paused, head tilting to the side in thought, before shrugging again.

"Fantastic. Welp. I'm gonna go make that call then."

He passed the mug to his friend with a disgruntled snort, and slipped through the crowded deck and headed for his room.

Trafalgar's den den slept soundly on his bedside table, the offering of lettuce he had placed beside it nowhere to be seen. The small hat had been knocked off at some point, and looked like a hollowed upside-down ice cream scoop. Kidd grinned and closed the door softly behind him with a faint click. Depositing himself at the edge of his bed, he replaced the snail's hat and activated the connection. The snail perked up from its afternoon snooze, and began to chime.

The swell he had come to associate with anything Law began to rise in his chest, a wave of something similar to anxiety settling in his stomach.

He wanted to believe it was the sugar water.

Puru puru puru-
"Hello, may I ask who is speaking?"

He let out a breath he hadn't known he was holding, and grinned.

"This is a one-way communicator. Of course you know who's speaking."

The breathy laugh on the other end sent the butterflies scurrying for his throat. He swallowed them down for fear of what might come up.

"It's only common courtesy, Eustass-ya. I would think you'd know such things."

"Well, I'm not the same articulate motherfucker who drinks top shelf."

"Touche. I suppose not all of us can educate ourselves above the pretenses of society. Jokes aside, may I inquire as to why you called? Is this a social or a business call? If it is the former I must insist on a later time as I'm needed in the theater in six minutes."

"Theater? When did you get into acting?"

There was a pause Kidd was highly uncomfortable with, in which he feared he had crossed some invisible line into the heavy stuff.
"Operating theater, Eustass-ya."

"Oh that's right, you're a surgeon and a doctor, I forgot."

"The correct terminology would be 'and a physician'."

"Isn't usually one or the other? I mean, don't you have to go to school for like ten years just to specialize in one field?"

"Typically you would be correct, but I am a genius who happens to be a medical prodigy. It's just one of my many facets, I suppose..."

"You really are amazing Law."

Kidd's eyes widened and he nearly dropped the receiver in his shock. He hadn't meant to say that, hadn't meant to let his admiration for the other man show. Not unless he had to, unless the situation called for it. He turned away and tried to keep his breathing even so the snail wouldn't emulate his emotions for Law.

"...Thank you, I guess. Anyway, I really have to go if this isn't an emergency. I'll call you tonight when I'm available."

Kidd's cheeks grew hot and he knew he couldn't turn around. They talked frequently, far too much for being simple business partners. He didn't want to assume anything, but he knew how he felt.
He just couldn't let Law know.

"Actually we're sailing in this sea of pink flowers, not even joking. Everyone's pulling up buckets of the stuff and instead of sea water it's sugary. Killer made me drink some. Do you know anything about it? Blaire said she doesn't have anything like this on the map so I figure it's some crazy Grand Line thing again."

"Hmm...Well for safety measures I wouldn't go drinking any more of that until I research it some. Your crew shouldn't drink any more either."

"Alright."

"Don't worry, I recall a few details about that particular phenomenon, and none of it deadly. Just to be on the safe side please heed my warning, though."

"Of course. Good luck in surgery."

Law laughed and the flush rose to his ears, "Thank you. I will speak with you later with ample information."

"Goodbye Law."
"Goodbye Eustass-ya."

The receiver droned a steady hum after the call ended, and Kidd let the cold mouthpiece slide down into the crook of his shoulder.

...

"Fuck-

-me."

Law breathed, running his fingers through his short hair. His stomach was twisted up in knots, and he was too jittersy to be going into a surgery. The truth was that he had no such commitment. There was sunlight in his stomach, searing his insides and filling his lungs with a smoke that closed his airways. The truth was that he just couldn't speak to the other man at the moment, his fear wouldn't allow it.

He wasn't blind or deaf, he could hear the eagerness and warmth in Kidd's voice whenever they spoke, and while at first he had chalked it up to his desperate imagination, he was now certain that Eustass Kidd was interested in him. Whether or not it was in a romantic or sexual sense, though it certainly made a difference, he was trapped in his fear like a bird in a cage. He was beginning to make connections in his mind between his late foster father and the redheaded mechanic, and it terrified him in a way he hadn't felt in thirteen years. Reels of film spooled behind his eyes, snippets of his bereft childhood leaving him queasy and chilled. While he was aware he found men of similar in appearance to Corazon more desirable than others, he didn't have enough sanity to come to terms with the why behind it. His belly stirred for every man, his body aching to be filled by the nearest male. These were clear, obvious constants in his life.
And if he sometimes passed a blonde man smoking, witnessed a man being particularly clumsy, or glanced a painted smile and felt his underwear soak through with an intensity that caused his knees to nearly buckle? Well, that would just be piled away in the hefty storage unit labeled 'Uncomfortable Territory'.

But even if his libido had Cora-san as its primary target, it still didn't phase him as much as Eustass Kidd had.

After he had gotten past believing him to be the average lustful male, after he had gotten over his dip into insanity and his long recovery, only after all that did he realize what he felt for the other male that was so unique to all the others.

He felt comfortable with him.

And not even in the way he felt comfortable with Penguin, Shachi, and Bepo. No, he felt comfortable with Eustass-ya in the same way he had felt being around Cora-san.

He felt like he was home, that he was safe.

That he was happy.

Even on the best days he was never truly happy in the company of his crew. He had never told his friends about how he couldn't let his vengeance and hatred go, even for a moment. But with Eustass it was different.
With Eustass he was finding it frighteningly easy to forget his trauma, his plans, and even Him.

Yes, when he was talking with Eustass he felt like a different person in a different world. With Eustass he didn't have any obligations, all he had to do was enjoy the others presence.

*Just like Cora-san.*

And hadn't that been a slippery slope into something twisted?

*If I continue to partake in Eustass-ya's company...will it be the same?*

Was it already the same?

Nightmares where he was on the verge of coitus had become more prevalent, where he woke in the morning with damp underwear and a thin layer of sweat coating his body.

And wasn't Eustass Kidd remarkably similar to Cora-san?

His replies, his kindness, his stunning copper eyes, his penchant for makeup - however mild in comparison.
It was frightening.

It terrified him how many sexual dreams he had concerning the redheaded male, only for him to morph into Cora-san.

Was he projecting?

He was sure of it now.

But he couldn't tear himself away from the man who drew him in so swiftly, who held him close and spoke to him when he was in pain.

When he was with him, when he thought about him, the two of them never overlapped.

It was only in his dreams that the truth came spilling out.

He'd hold on to this spark between them, though.

Because it was all he could do.
He wouldn't dare burn the flowers set before him.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Kidd felt as if he was being burned alive by the glares of the Heart Pirates. Every time he visited the submarined, for business or personal reasons, they seemed to have increased their hatred for him. He sincerely doubted they knew Law's true reason for entering the Grand Line, let alone his anatomical "identity". Still, their love for their captain was as intense as it was disturbing, and he could swear wisps of smoke were rising from his coat were their eyes had seared him.

Law had asked him to come over so they could speak about the impending destruction of their alliance. The very thought of it sent his stomach into turmoil, the butterflies rising in his throat and batting at his teeth. More than once he had to stop and vomit into trashcans when no one was looking. They were nearing Sabaody Archipelago, the last (surface) island before the end of the Grand Line's first half.

*Sabaody Archipelago.*

*Ah, there's that sour taste.*

The number of Human Auction Houses there were astounding, the pleasant atmosphere masking the vile transactions going on not-so-behind the scenes.

Was Law going to act with abandon on the island as Trafalgar Law, the Surgeon of Death?

Would his skin prickle as Celestial Dragons flocked through the streets with their pretentious attitudes?
What if Donquixote himself stumbled upon him?

What would he do then?

He wasn’t sure what Law’s plan was in taking down the feared Shichibukai, but he had to have faith that Law would prevail.

The alternatives were all too sinister to contemplate.

His own attraction to Law was becoming increasingly worrisome, and he had woken up many nights with an unfortunate situation plastering his boxers to his thighs. While the dream escaped him, it was obvious who his unseen paramour had been.

It disgusted him.

He’d had at least three panic attacks since his last encounter with Law face-to-face, and that had been when Law had unwittingly started his period and required assistance. His heart squeezed painfully in his chest at the thought of that night and Law’s heartbreaking reaction when he woke up in Kidd’s bed. He had slept on the couch with no fuss, the item stolen for both its beauty and its comfort, and he pretended to be sleeping with Law awoke with a strangled gasp. His eyes hidden beneath the squint of his lashes, Kidd had witness Law’s terrified face, the way he desperately gripped the sheets at his sides. He had watched his face go from terrified to relieved in a matter of seconds, and then watched as he burst into stifled sobs.

Had he woken up in the fear that the stranger’s bed was Donquixote’s?
Kidd refused to go there.

"Welcome, I assume you found the trip here pleasant and simple?" Law greeted him from the doorframe of what looked to be a small lounge. The butterflies returned full force, excitedly spinning about his stomach in a celebratory dance, his fist crumpling the small map Law had made him.

The lounge was incredibly cramped, the walls lined in a continuous black leather couch that gleamed in the bright white lights. Law flanked him and closed the door behind them with a spin of the latch, and Kidd made a bee-line for the swollen sofa. It crinkled beneath him the way only leather could, and he remembered to take off his coat so as not to damage the delicate material. He let out a sigh of pleasure and rested his arms on the headrest as he leaned back, propping up his feet on the elegant glass coffee table.

Law sat opposite him, his leg crossing over the other and his hands entwined in his lap. He face was serious, and Kidd was reminded why they were there. Law had the uncanny ability to strip him of his past, to root him in the present and just enjoy the others company.

"As I hope you're aware, there are seven islands left on each of our routes before we arrive at Sabaody Archipelago, none of which are within the proximity to meet. Of course, we can continue to communicate with our den den mushi."

"I wasn't aware." His voice was strangled, and Law seemed to drift far away as his thoughts consumed him.

This was the last time he would see and interact with Law face-to-face. This was the last time he would see the rare smiles that were hard won, the way the corner of his eyes would crinkle with laughter? The way his hair would gloss in the sunlight? No, he would probably witness the last
He respected the other as an adversary, and looked forward to the competition, but at the same time he would miss their amicable talks. He would miss the trust that had grown between the weeds. He was honored with the vulnernability Law had shown him, tested him with, and Kidd wanted to do the same. He wanted to tell Law the truth about the tulip bed, wanted to tell him about his mother and why he sometimes cried himself to sleep.

"Eustass-ya? I can see you're distraught."

Law voice cut through his turmoil, and he suddenly felt exposed with his chest bared. Going shirtless had never bothered him, but now that he had realized he had an interest in Law beyond the bounds of friendship or adversary, he felt self conscious in a thrilling way that was foreign to him. He slipped on his coat as nonchalantly as possible, his neck flushing but his face remaining a unsuspecting color.

"I'm going to miss the way you look when I catch you off guard with quips." He grinned, relishing the way Law blinked at him owlishly before bursting into a sharp laughter that rang through the small space like bells. Kidd laughed himself, watching the way the corners of Law's eyes wrinkled with laughter.

"To be completely honest, returning to rivals upon arrival in the New World doesn't sit as well with me as I had originally planned. I hadn't the faintest notion that we would become...friends...no matter how outlandish the circumstances. I expect you to respond maturely, obviously, as we are far too old to throw tantrums over something as inane and inevitable as the passage of time."

Law's eyes were the same molten gold that haunted his waking hours and graced the hallways of his dreams, but there was a flint in them that burned him. He could see the walls coming down between them, the partitions closing in Law's heart and undoing all the progress they had worked so hard to achieve. He opened his mouth to say something, anything-just anything to shorten the gap that was growing between them, but Law beat him to the punch.
"If you don't mind me using you to vent my personal...issues...once more, I would like to vent just on more problem to you. Or rather, I would like to divulge some information that will alleviate the burden on my shoulders. After Saboady I will certainly be a wreck, and I will no prolong our alliance to gain any sort of comfort. I pride myself on my ability to drawn boundaries in the sand, Eustass-ya. And while I appreciate what we've shared more than you can possibly fathom, I will not allow whatever and formed between us to hinder either of our goals."

Kidd remained silent, only because there was nothing he could say in response.

"Lorelei are not...naturally born. Ah-" Law looked to the side and recrossed his legs, shoving his hands between his thighs to hide their shaking.

"La-"

"Celestial Dragons have a committee they form every few years to create new generations of Lorelei. W-We are specially maid, tailored, through a serum that targets and alters the human fetus. They find countries or cities on the verge of impending collapse and target the drinking water of particular families with a gravid female. Gravid means pregnant, just so you know."

Law wasn't looking at him anymore, boring holes into his lap and letting his hair cover his expression. Kidd watched his back begin to tremble.

"It is undetectable and harmless to anyone else who drinks it. Flevance was the perfect candidate for production, and they chose a handful of families across the country to lessen any suspicion. When the chaos and turmoil breaks out across the country as it collapses, the Celestial Dragons send in 'harvesters' to kill the family and take the child out under the cover of war. The Royal Family knew, of course, but then again the Royal Family was killed after fleeing the country. This is not public knowledge."
"It manipulates the developing embryo so that it is born with female genitalia but is otherwise male. This is so the child is tailored to the universal desires of the Celestial Dragons. The families are chosen based on genetic background and which couple would produce the most attractive offspring."

"Of course the overwhelming estrogen in a male body creates hormone imbalances and causes them to develop mammary glands and deposit fat in the waist and hips. However, Lorelei don't adhere to this."

"Lorelei are born with extraordinary healing abilities to allow for the Celestial Dragons certain desires. Coupled with an unusually high sensitivity and general anatomical and biological abnormalities, Lorelei aren't humans. In fact, they are more related to dogs in that they..."

At this point Law caved in on himself, his body trembling so violently that he was beginning to slip off the leather couch. Kidd reacted instinctively, rushing forward and sitting beside him to steady him. The reaction was immediate, Law throwing himself at Kidd and burying his face into Kidd's shoulder. He wrapped his arms around him protectively, burying his own nose into Law's dark tresses. He smelled of strong coffee and black licorice, and the trembling strands tickled his face as Law continued to tremble.

"I'm just a dog!" Law wailed, his voice muffled in the thick fur. Kidd shushed him in return, rubbing wide circles into Law's back. He didn't have any words to offer to him, he didn't even know what to think. When Law had said he was a product of tainted tap water he hadn't thought he was being literal. And what a disgusting practice...did things like that still go on?

Law's words frightened him, and he wasn't sure what to say.

Law pulled back and looked up at Kidd, close enough to each other that Kidd could see the flecks
of dark brown in the molten gold of Law's eyes. Their proximity warmed Kidd's upper neck, and he pulled back slightly.

"I hate Him, and yet I love Him. It's terrible, but I can't help it...it's in my blood..." Law's voice broke and Kidd despaired at the tears carving fresh tracks along the swarthy cheeks. Kidd thumbed beneath his red-rimmed eyes, making sure he didn't get lost in them and do something he would regret.

He knew he was, and couldn't fathom how Law could still love the man who ruined him. There was Stockholm Syndrome, but Law said it was in his blood, did he mean that it was in his nature to love his abuser? He wanted to ask, but he wouldn't.

"I'm gonna kill Him, I will! It'll kill me to do it, but I will!" Law was gripping his collar now, eyes wild and veins standing out in his neck. Kidd felt his own eyes begin to water, and he stroked Law's hair.

He wanted to tell Law to live, wanted to tell him he wasn't a dog.

He wanted to tell him that loved him.

He held his tongue.

Law closed his eyes and swallowed painfully, letting his head drop back to Kidd's chest. His body seemed to sag bonelessly against him, the weight against his chest still light enough to be worrisome. He had gained enough muscle to be back to where he was, but, even when they first met, Law had seemed strangely thin. There was an emaciated pronunciation to his spine and ribs, even though he had enough muscle to wrestle down men twice his size.
Law shook with dry laughter against him.

"I'm going to miss this." Law whispered, turning his face so that his cheek rested above Kidd's heart. The atmosphere was entirely surreal, but it was a comfortable feeling.

"In Sabaody I want us to act naturally as enemies...but until then we can continue to speak to each other. I value you as my friend, but you understand, right? You understand we can't let this continue. We're drifting into something I can't handle."

Kidd's grip around Law's waist went slack, and he nodded numbly into Law's hair.

"Yeah, I understand."

Twelve days had passed and with them four islands, and Law was growing relentlessly more worried. His hair fell out in the shower and his arms broke out in hives. He was getting closer and closer to the start of His territory, and his body was trembling as much in anticipation as it was in fear.

His Master was getting closer.
Go to Him.

Let Him claim you.

He'll keep you safe.

Law shook his head of the intrusive thoughts, his subconscious intruding on his daily life. He was becoming increasingly aroused, as if his body could tell it was getting closer to its Master.

Law curled up in his bed, staring at the steel wall inches from his nose. His room was illuminated faintly by the yellow light of his fading lamp. He was swaddled in the dark colors of his duvet, his room cold and surprisingly dry. The carpet had been torn up and replaced with wooden tiles, his desks scraped and repainted. There was a chart on the wall detailing when he had to sweep his floors, and there were two tall garbage cans by the door so he wouldn't forget. A dehumidifying bucket sat in the corner, the moisture in the air collecting in the plastic bag inside*.

There were several lavender scented candles sitting in a cluster on his desk, and there were almonds set beside them. Law had made several dents in the bowl before brushing his teeth and retiring to bed, and yet sleep eluded him. His room in no way reflected his mental state anymore, his mind just as tangled and damaged as it was when his bedroom had been steeped in mold and rotting garbage. Shachi and Bepo were on rotation to take him to dining hall for meals, and Penguin routinely took him to social gathering nights to boost everyone's moods. While all the help was certainly making improvements, he was still a cluster of nerves.

The receiver on Kidd's den den mushi was taken off the hook, the snail sleeping peacefully despite the regular calls its owner was making. After the second island Law could no longer continue their ruse of friendship, and severed all ties.
He was curled in a tight ball, his legs and arms wrapped around the body pillow that had weathered him through the roughest nights. His mouth tasted of mint and his nose was pressed into the lavender smell of his duvet. The soothing scent was Penguin's idea, and he thanked the man for his wisdom. He took another deep breath, the smell wafting over his senses like a calm wave.

Law was exhausted, but his bloodshot eyes remained parted. Guilt roiled in his stomach, and his chest felt cold even beneath his thick blankets. He slept in his favorite white shorts and t-shirt, the matching slippers and pullover seated on his desk chair. His loins were stirring, a heat in his belly rising to color his ears. He let out a low, pained whine, tightening his arms around the pillow.

He couldn't have his hands wandering.

At times like these when he was forced to battle his raging libido, he relied on the timetables. Mathematics could entertain him for hours, and countless nights he had recited prime factors to his bedroom wall. Penguin had confiscated his drugs unless he was treating a patient, and even then he was supervised by a surveillance den den mushi. His first mate's actions would be treasonous to some, a definite friendship breaker, but Law knew the other meant well. That, and he wasn't sure he would make it to his destination otherwise.

While Kidd and his friends had soothed his aching heart after his assault, Law's wounds ran deep. He would never be in the clear, never be able to live without wanting to die. His goal was all that drove him, was both the reason he woke up in the morning and the reason he cried himself to sleep.

With his drugs went his sleeping pills, and now he was only left with forcing himself to sleep. He let his eyes slide shut, numbers revolving in his brain, his arms slowly loosening their death grip on the pillow as he inhaled lavender detergent.

His mind drifted, sporadic thoughts and images flashing across his mind as he succumbed to sleep.
Law was lying in a field of bright red tulips. The sky was a rosy color flecked with whips of dark clouds. It looked like the sun had just set. It was peaceful, the sound of rustling flower stems rustling in his ears. The ground beneath him was plush and damp, the back of his hoodie and jeans soaked through with moisture. Law was content watching the sky with vibrant flowers framing his vision. He was squeezed between the flowers so as not to crush them, and his hands were tangled in the soft soil.

He was happy, peaceful even...

Until something brushed his hand. Law jumped at the contact, and would retract his arm if his whole body was cemented to the grass. Panic flitted across his face, fear bubbling in his throat. He couldn't turn his head to see what was playing with his hand, but when he felt fingers thread through his own and give a reassuring squeeze he quieted his weak whimpers. He felt like a child again, feeble and frightened at every movement. The hand was warm in his own, and with no further movement he soon calmed down. The hand wasn't much larger, but they had thicker fingers and a heavy, rough palm. He could feel the callouses pressing into his smooth skin.

He stared up at the clouds with Kidd and laughed.

Chapter End Notes

*DampRid*
Chapter Notes

I have a surprise for all of you next chapter, which may be a blessing or a curse. Let me know in the comments below what you've enjoyed of this story so far, since this arc is tying up quickly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"There's a familiar face."

Law closed his his eyes for a moment to compose himself as Kidd rattled off his name and bounty. He knew the man's speech on the vile nature of Celestial Dragons was for his own ears, and the smirk on his face was less forced than he would have expected. For a moment he felt like he had a partner in his beliefs, that they were both staring down at the same vile act and scoffing at its petty nature. The feeling passed as soon as it had come, and Law felt the chasm between them once more. He turned and flash Kidd his middle finger, the other commenting on his lack of manners with surprising acting skills. Inside Law was breaking, a part of him screaming at his behavior and wanting to greet the other with a smile and a hug while the victorious side was made of steel.

This is the last stop, after this I won't have to see or interact with him outside of battles, and if I play my cards right I can avoid him completely.

It's not like I'm going for the same goal, after all.

I'll be dead before I'm twenty-seven.

They returned their eyes to the preparing auction until a group arrived that stole their attention completely. The Straw Hat crew was gathered restlessly in a circle arguing to themselves. Kidd commented something about their captain and his famed idiocy but Law was drowning in his
He hadn't come to the Human Action House for fun, this was business, and such matters he knew how to deal with professionally. But after the stunt back on Little Orange he had trouble remaining inwardly calm in such a claustrophobic cesspit. He was normally able to ignore the plights of others, but now he found himself worrying for what his actions might be upon the start of the auction.

And why was Kidd here? It wasn't like this was a good place for a pirate to be. He could be dining on exquisite food or fighting some green upstart out of the view of public. Hell, he could be riding on a ferris wheel if fucking wanted to, but to be at a Human Action House, one of dozens on the island, the same one as Law?

He didn't need his coddling.

Rage bubbled underneath his fears, but he smothered it all with curiosity as the auctioneer dragged out its first product.

Law could feel the Celestial Dragons in the auditorium, the skin on his bare arms risen with gooseflesh. The men of the family were obscenely obese with grotesque faces, while the women were skeletal slips of human beings.

If he could call them such.

Their eyes glinted like vulture's as the first product was brought forth, the poor man's worth being brought up in what he could provide his employers.
And then another Celestial Dragon entered the room, and Law desperately resisted turning around. As the audience gasped and whispered about the heavy-set monster waddling through the door, Law's toes curled in his boots. He detested people walking behind him, he could never lower his guard for fear of assault, but now there was a Celestial Dragons mere meters from his bench, and he couldn't turn around for risk of losing face. Thankfully Shachi sensed his discomfort and side-stepped to stand directly behind him. His shielding presence allowed him to drop his shoulders in relief, the tension fading from his body.

Another slave was brought out, a burly captain with a sickly look to his bearded face. The crowd gasped and screamed as blood rolled down his chin, admiration blooming in Law's chest.

"He bit his tongue off." One of the Straw Hats said, and Law wanted to nodded with him as he praised his actions. It was better for the man to die here than live a miserable life as a slave.

Death was far more pleasant.

Law would know.

The man was dragged off the stage with the pretense of a nosebleed and the auctioneer being flitting about in excitement, announcing a 'special item'. The crowd stirred with apprehension, but Law could already tell what it would be. The mermaid was brought out encased in an enormous fish bowl, and the Straw Hats started screaming the mermaid's name. It was clear it was their friend, but Law couldn't be bothered. It was hopeless to fret over a lost soul, and with the Celestial Dragons here it was clear who would buy her.

Sure enough, the ugly Celestial Dragon who had arrived late shouted out 500 million beli. Law's stomach roiled and he closed his eyes to swallow his fear. Even if it wasn't his Owner, the Celestial Dragons still terrified and enraged him. It was a cocktail of emotions he would never be able to erase, terror he would never be able to mollify.
"It's like the world in miniature. What a farce, let's get out of here." Kidd's voice hooked him out of his ocean, his head breaking the surface with a gasp of fresh air. He couldn't help turning to watch him leave, his longing replacing his fear. He didn't know why Kidd was leaving, but he wanted to reach out and beg him to stay. He had been fine before he arrived, but when Kidd came to check up on him he had lost the ability to walk by himself. He needed him to be strong, and it was a chilling realization*

When did I lose my independence in exchange for falling in love?

Suddenly someone began screaming, and even Kidd paused at the doorway to listen to the incoming noise. The door exploded in a gust of dust and splintered wood. Benches were crushed and smoke occluded Kidd from his view, sparking terror in his throat. Irrational, he knew, but he couldn't help it.

He was too attached.

Monkey D. Luffy began yelling at the mermaid as well as his crew, and Law spotted a multi-armed fishman rushing down the steps. The world seemed to slow down as he watched the octopus take the stairs two at a time, his ears ringing with words that struck him hard.

"It's a Fishman! How disgustingly!"

"Yuck! Look at it's arms and the color of its skin, disgusting!"
"I'm scared! I'm so scared! Don't come any closer!"

"Go back to the sea you monster!"

"Get away!"

A gunshot rang out and the Fishman hit the floor in a spray of blood, and Law looked away. The cords in his neck were standing out, his jaw clenched and eyes on fire.

He hoped people would mistake his trembling for anger.

Kidd was a blurry figure in his periphery, Shachi still acting as his sentry. He wanted to speak to him, to hold his hand, to hide behind him, but he knew he needed to find himself. To find the strength he had possessed before the redhead had arrived. Yes, he needed to go back to being Trafalgar Law, the Surgeon of Death.

The Celestial Dragon danced over the Fishman's shivering body, chanting things that turned Law's blood to ice.

"I hit him! I finished off that Fishman!"

"I caught him so he's free, right?"
"Take hime away! I got a Fishman slave for free!"

The infamous Straw Hat captain walked over to the Fishman and began to console him, speaking in a volume Law couldn't detect. He glared daggers at the Celestial Dragon, and then did something Law wasn't able to understand.

_Monkey D. Luffy punched the Celestial Dragon._

Law's eyes grew incongruously manic, his mouth widening in a smile he could hardly control, and his palms itched to wrap themselves around the bloodied Celestial Dragon's throat. To join in this forbidden fray. Marines would be coming, warships and weapons at the ready, but that mattered not when Monkey D. Luffy had just _punched a Celestial Dragon._

Enis Lobby and now this? This man, this boy, was changing history one fight at a time.

But that was no surprise.

Not with the initial D. in his name.

Didn't Law have one of those too?

What did that mean for him?
The auditorium exploded in panic, people rushing for the door as guards swarmed the Straw Hats. Kidd was equally enraptured with the scene, as the Celestial Dragons fluttered about in fear.

"Call a marine admiral and his battleship!" The father screamed, and Law recrossed his legs with a heavy sigh. Monkey D. Luffy had certainly put a dent in his plans. Law wanted to scour the auction house for documents as it was clearly owned by Doflamingo, but now it would be nothing but rubble by the end of the day. It wasn't as if there weren't others on the island, but it certainly would be harder to accomplish if the island was on lockdown.

The Straw Hat's green-haired swordsman sliced the top off the mermaid's fish bowl, her frightened voice finally reaching Law through her species' ability to amplify their voices through water. He winced and turned away, ashamed of his reaction. There was little time to dwell on it as more flying fish crashed through the roof. It was turning into a mad house, a long-nosed man landing on the patriarch, and Luffy was getting closer to where Law was sitting.

He watched in amusement as Luffy yelled and pointed at the mermaid who was trying to pull herself up by the rim of the bowl.

"We're getting out of here as soon as we can get that bomb thing off her neck! There are battleships and an admiral on way!"

Law grinned and straightened up in his seat, ready to enter into the fray.

"Oh, the marines are already here, Mr. Straw Hat."
Luffy turned to him with a blank stare, reminding him to use small words.

"Who the heck are you...and what's with that bear?"

And try not to laugh.

"If it's the marines you're worried about, they've been here since the auction started...they're surrounding the entire auction house. After all, marine headquarters do have a post right here on this archipelago. I don't know who it is they're after...but I doubt they expected anybody to start attacking the Celestial Dragons."

While he was speaking, he noticed the bubble-headed daughter aiming her gun at the young mermaid. He didn't have time to react before a rush of familiar energy struck him in the chest. His vision swam for a moment, his breath catching in his throat, but he was still able to see, and hear, the giant who ripped a hole in the stage's screen.

Law feigned nonchalance as the auditorium reeled from Silvers Rayleigh's burst of Conqueror's Hakki. Most the remaining audience had been render unconscious from the attack, even Shachi looked a little green. While he was outwardly calm, inside his mind was still struggling to comprehend what had transpired. His mouth moved on its own, responding to the situation with false ease.

Monkey D. Luffy punched a Celestial Dragon.

Silvers Rayleigh removed the girl's collar with Haki, and it was obvious from their reaction that the Straw Hats were amateurs in the world of power. If they didn't even know what Hakki was, there was no way they would survive the New World.
Pity, he had been looking forward to seeing their strange captain try to fight the Yonko with his fists.

"And if you took that blast without any trouble...I guess you're not just amateurs, either."

Silvers Rayleigh was speaking at them now, and Law bit back a malicious smile.

*Me, an amateur?*

"To think we'd run into a man like him...in a place like this..." Law mused, and Kidd finished his sentence in way that made his heart flutter.

"'Dark King' Silvers Rayleigh! Ain't no mistaking him...what's a legend like him doing here...?"

As the legend himself and the Straw Hats worried over the now bandaged Fishman, Law snuck a look at Kidd.

Heat was mumbling a warning about the marines surrounding them, but Kidd didn't look like he had heard him at all.

Because he was staring at Law.
The older male turned away immediately, his jaw locking. Apparently this wasn't the reaction he was looking for, as Law could hear his disgruntled scoff.

"Looks like we're involved in this whether we like it or not...they're acting as though we're his accomplices."

"Hey, I got to see first hand that Straw Hat Luffy's just as crazy as the rumors say. I'm not exactly complaining...but I sure ain't sticking around to fight it out with an admiral! Well, the longer we stick around, the more of 'em we'll have to get through. We'll be heading on ahead, if you don't mind. Oh, and while we're at it, we'll do you guys a favor! We'll take out the guys hanging out front, so don't you worry your little selves."

Law spun in his seat with a vicious sneer, watching Kidd retreat with a flippant wave, Killer sparing a final glance at Penguin before following his captain down the entrance hall. Law could barely restrain his rage and blatant shock. He hoped Kidd was acting, because for him to be so dismissive and rude to him was entirely uncalled for.

*I suppose he finally understood our alliance is moot.*

...
to activate his room. The swathe of marines in front of them were disorganized and misinformed, cannons aimed their way with the fuses already lit.

"I thought I told the two of you to stay back, huh?"

Kidd's arms were crossed in a mimic of Luffy, though Law had to say Kidd was the more intimidating. He couldn't stop the fury boiling beneath his skin, but at the very least he could hide it as he spoke and surveyed their prey.

"If you try to order me about one more time, I'll take you out first, Eustass-ya."

The Northern suffix was a sour taste on his tongue, the use of it with Kidd's name almost a pet name at this point.

"Mortars, fire!"

The cannons fired at them, and Law watched as Luffy stomach swelled like a boil, bouncing off the cannon ball back at the marines like it weighed nothing. It was bizzare, but he had seen stranger.

*He* was stranger.

The marines were taking their time charging at him, long enough that he could enjoy the sight of Kidd finally using his powers to fight in his presence.
"Repel."

The single word seemed to command the oncoming cannon ball to slow to a stop before rocketing towards the marines twice as fast.

Law summoned his room and played around with the marines, severing their limbs and replacing heads with cannon balls using shambles. The distraught marine screamed in his hand as his body burned, his captain finally realizing mortars wouldn't work on fruit users.

"We have to hang on until admiral Kizaru arrives!" A marine shouted, and Law internally cursed his luck.

"You really think you can hold our for that long?" He mused instead, tossing the still screaming marine's head back to his comrades. He grinned at their despair and confusion, delighting in the way they panicked under his spells. He was destroying their lives, painlessly dismembering them while eternally disabling them. If there was one guilty pleasure he would never regret, it was tormenting marines.

"Just take it easy, it will be over soon."

And it would, as soon as they left his room their nerves would reconnect and his amalgamation would fall apart. They would go from babbling in terror to lying slack jawed on the ground, their eyes glazing over and their tongues lolling from their parted mouths.

He liked to stay and watch it happen.
Kidd enjoyed his share of slaughter, he didn't have the highest bounty amongst the Supernovas for acting with restraint. He had leveled towns, massacred innocent bystanders, and tortured rookie crews. Of course, it wasn't as if he meant to do these things, it was often one inciting incident that snowball into reckless violence, but Law didn't know that.

It was difficult for him to relate the sweet, patient man who held him in his most vulnerable moments, to the bloody reputation he held. He would doubt the claims entirely if he didn't have proof. He had connections all over the Grand Line and even more in the Blues.

But he wouldn't trust any of them with the task he had given to Kidd.

At least, he wouldn't have told them the reason behind it.

Law watched as the marine's weapons rose from the ground and magnetized towards Kidd, quickly manifesting into an enormous metal arm. He flashed a wicked grin and bore down on the foot soldiers.

Soon enough the marines had been all but flattened, smoke rising from their charred corpses and evicerated remains.

"That takes care of their formation." Kidd snarked, and Law resisted shaking his head. With marines, it was rare for the foot soldiers to have any proper order or strategy. Most of the times their captain were lazy or corrupt, and all novice soldiers are frightened of fighting. Most new recruits fired above their targets heads, after all**.
The marines balked for a moment before charging at them again, this time all at once.

"Here they come." Kidd whistled, "Looks like they don't even have a plan anymore. From here on out, it's just a straight-up brawl! See you later Straw Hat! I'm glad I met you here...The next time I see you, I won't be so easy!"

Luffy just grinned abashedly, adjusting his hat with a rubber hand.

"Hmmm, but...I'm the one who's gonna find One Piece!"

Law saw Kidd's neck twitch, his hands curling into unconscious fists, and though Law thought he would attack Luffy right out, Kidd just stared darkly at the boy with hatred in his eyes. The marine's frustrated captain swung out at him, only to be parried effortlessly by Killer. He cleaved the man with an elegant back flip.

"Hey, Kidd! What're you standing around for!?"

A noxious curl began to form in Kidd's upper lip.

"Hey, Killer! On the course we took...saying something like that would just get you laughed at. Though I killed everyone who laughed at me! But from here on out...those without the guts to say that won't survive! Let's meet up in the 'New World'."

They rushed into the marines with flames and blades at the ready, and Law quickly lost interest. It seems he had a naval admirer of his own now, the blade glinting in the sun as it came bearing
down. He smirked and simply spun on his heel, a white blur taking his place. Bepo could take care of small fry, at least until he recruited the imprisoned captain Jean Bart. He had been keeping an eye on him all throughout the auction, verifying the similarities until there could be no mistake. The infamous captain who had made it halfway across the New World before being crushed underfoot by Big Mom was standing here, shackled before him.

He released him and was pledged his loyalty, and Law was pleased.

At the very least he could get one good thing out of coming here.

The Heart Pirates sprinted in the direction the Kidd Pirates had left, with their new crew mate in tow. Law loved the feeling that came with freeing a slave and bringing them into his crew, it always felt like he had added another member to his cause. He had more people to fall back on now, even though he wouldn't dare.

Jean Bart smashed the log they had run across, effectively delaying the marine's advance. Shachi's voice drew his attention, and he followed his pointing.

"It's Eustass, and...wait, that's-!"

Law skidded to a halt, his boots dragging across the moist grass.

"What the hell is a shichibukai doing here?!"

He reached back for his sword, wrapping his fingers around the broad tang.
"Trafalgar Law..." Intoned the giant, and Law was instantly alerted that something was wrong. He knew Bartholomew Kuma for what he was, a spy of the Revolutionaries, bargaining with Dr. Vegapunk who would eventually turn him into a robot.

It meant that Bartholomew Kuma was dead.

"So you know my name do you..."

_Filthy replica._

His response was a high intensity energy beam from his mouth, the blast of which would have incinerated him had he not his devil fruit to shield him and his crew.

"We're right by marine headquarters and Mariejois, so it shouldn't be surprising, no matter who we run into..!"

"The marines are closing in from behind!"

Kidd's lips drew back in a snarl, his twin arms of magnetized weapons menacing in their size.

"So it's all a god damn coincidence he's here, huh?! Trafalgar, you're in the way!"
Law blinked, stunned, before his fury consumed him.

"You wanna get wasted? I thought I told you not to give me orders. Sure have come cross a load of unexpected big shots today, and I sure as hell don't want to meet an admiral after all this..." He raised his hand and a ring began to rotate out from his body, encircling both of the pirate crews and going further, picking up speed and disappearing from sight, the light blue dome rising high about the trees.

"So we'll be taking out leave, Bartholomew Kuma!"

He licked his lips and tasted blood that wasn't his own.

"Shambles!"

Kidd tumbled into Killer with a violent lurch of his stomach, and he wasn't sure which way was up or down.

"Fuck!" He pressed a hand to his mouth to prevent his lunch from spilling to the floor, but many of his crew mates were not as lucky. At the very least Killer's stomach didn't seem to mind, or else Kidd didn't even want to think how he would vomit in a mask with holes.
When he managed to get his bearings, when the world ceased to spin, he saw the all-too smug look on Law's face as he reclined against a wall.

"You sure are a smarmy bastard," Law said with a smirk, cocking his to the side. His expression was feral, his eyes narrowed but playful, and it caused Kidd's loins to stir. He adjusted his coat to hide any possible sight of his erection, guilt and self-loathing simmering just beneath the surface. There was no need to pretend in front their crew, no need to put on a shameful display when everyone knew they were on friendly terms. Of course they would fight, sling curses at each other, but to put up a front of hatred in the presence of their crews were unwarranted.

"We should lay low for now, my crew's already heading to our sub to submerge off the coast. I'd leave your ship where it is, they'll leave it alone as long as they don't see you on it."

Kidd saw that they weren't at the docks, like he would have expected, but a secluded alleyway. The only members of his crew who had left the ship with him were Killer, Heat, and Wire.

"Shit." He muttered, fishing out his den den mushi and placing a call to Blaire.

"I could send my sub around to pick them up if you prefer. It's would be wise to have the least number of bodies on land, after all. With an admiral like Kizaru running around, it's better if you don't push your luck."

Kidd nodded numbly, "I'd appreciate that, yeah." The call patched through and he took his time explaining the situation, holding the receiver away from his ear when the navigator decided to loudly chew him out.
He could feel everyone's eyes on him through the call, his arms breaking out in gooseflesh. The only ones who weren't smirking at him were Killer and Penguin, who had covertly slipped out the alleyway to do Roger's know what. His relationship with Killer had smoothed over, the other's omittance of his relationship and the feelings of betrayal it had induced buried beneath days of lounging about. He could grouse about it later, preferably when they were in the New World, and if not it would simply become a pothole in their relationship they would just continue to avoid.

When the call was over and the ringing in his ear had dissipated, he saw that the rest of their crew members had scattered to the wind.

Law grinned at him pointedly, and Kidd swallowed the lump of awkwardness in his throat.

"Why don't we grab a drink, Eustass-ya? I think a little chat is in order, unless it is too much of a bother for your little self."

Chapter End Notes

*Law is not healthy.

**This has been proved true about any recruited soldier and is a big problem in militaries across the globe.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

WARNINGS:

1. Drunken oral sex (dub-con/non-con)

Law looked into the bottom of his beer mug and hadn't the faintest clue to where his drink had gone.

A heavy blushed adorned his cheeks, spreading across the bridge of his nose and up to his ears. His eyes were glazed with alcohol, his lips coated in a gossamer of saliva and bitter drink. He darted out a pink tongue to collect the last drops from the rim of the mug, and pulled back with a broad grin plagued with perfect teeth. A thin, high-pitched, giggle streamed from his mouth, the corners of his eyes wrinkling as he laughed at an unspoken joke.

Kidd swallowed thickly, eyes darting down at his own half-drained mug and away from the alluring spectacle, wondering if he couldn't somehow rewind time.

When he agreed to join Law on a pub crawl in order to get chewed out for his earlier behavior, he hadn't expected it to be an actual pub crawl. By the fifth drink he watched the swarthy older male slip from intoxicated to downright drunk in a matter of seconds. If he was a scientist or a doctor, he might have been fascinated at the sudden change, but instead he was simply wedged into an awkward situation.

He was literally trapped between a rock and a hard place, if the hard on in his trousers was anything to go by. He was tipsy himself, and had no intention of crossing the line when they were on a island of ravenous marines and Celestial Dragons out for pirate blood. Why Law, the highly pragmatic Law, would allow himself to lower his guard so thoroughly in a public setting only meant that something was terribly wrong with him.
Kidd set his mug down with a heavy sigh, waving at the bartender for the receipt. If he let this go on any further, he would have to start a bar fight to keep wandering hands from Law's now vulnerable person. He was hyperaware of the eyes slowly stripping Law in his seat, the way the air was growing thick with a heady musk of lust and booze. With Law's strange genetics, he wouldn't be surprised if he was emitting some sort of pheromone into the air. Even if his morals were all there and his head was still screwed into place, Kidd couldn't deny the erection in his trousers. Law was attractive at an alarming level, in a nearly inhuman way. His hair looked like spun silk, his eyes were too bright and focused for his state, his lips too plump, his teeth too perfect, his body undeniably masculine and yet he had the waist of a woman. His whole body structure was odd, he finalized, from the visible knobs of his spin and ribs coupled with thick musculature and a woman's flexibility.

A man stood up from the back and began to approach the counter, and Kidd knew instinctively that he wasn't planning to ask the bartender for another drink.

Slapping a set of miscellaneous notes on the counter, he pried Law's empty mug from his hand and gripped his upper arm to pull him off his stool. Law ceased his lingual ministrations to the glass, whining when it left his fingers in favor of the countertop.

"I wasn't done~"

His whine seemed to ignite something in the crowd of lechers, shifting them into a tense stance. Any one of them seemed moments away from springing out of their streets to rut Law against the counter. Kidd sent the oncoming pervert a deadly glare, stopping him in his tracks, before yanking Law out of the bar without heed to his feeble protests.

Night had fallen upon the archipelago, the Hustle Muscle Mangrove illuminated in a strange bioluminescence. Law was heavy on his shoulder, a human limpet as he began to clumsily grope him through his clothes. The air was thick with darkness in the alleyway, and Kidd guided Law away from the pub's back door with a hand around his waist and the other firmly locked around the other's wandering hand. For the other, Kidd was simply going to have to settle for being felt up under his coat by frozen fingers.
The streets of Sabaody were cobbled, but they were evenly spaced and their edges filled in with cement to prevent any _noble_ pedestrian from taking a nasty spill. He had no doubt the mortar was added after such an event, and had been done swiftly but with plenty of fanfare.

Roger knew how much the Celestial Dragons loved their theatrics.

He tightened his grip around Law in a protective yet angered motion.

The brawl from that afternoon had calmed down, but he could still see the holes burned into the towering trunks in the distance and the severed wreck of a steeple.

There was little berating done as they drank, glossing over the fact he had blatantly _followed_ Law to the auction house. He couldn't think of a word to sugarcoat it, it was a possessive gesture. While he may have tried to be protective, despite all the reasons he shouldn't, it was still done with the fear that Law might be taken away from him. Not hurt, not maimed, but taken away from _him_. Kidd had never been in love before, but he knew he was now. He wanted to shield Law from the world even though he could take care of himself, because he _loved him_ and wanted to spare him the pain the world would bring. He wanted to do it to show him he was loved, and that it was an act of love.

But how many _"acts of love"_ had Law already been put through, each one claiming to be in his best interest?

No, Kidd didn't know what was best for Law, he only knew what he wanted to do for him. It should be enough, but it wasn't. His insides raged with this dilemma, with his inability to distinguish between altruism and selfish demonstrations of affection. Anything he did could be misconstrued, anything he said could warp Law into doing something he normally wouldn't. It was frightening, this monstrous love welling inside him, vying for importance with the very reason he was on the Grand Line. It was eclipsing his purpose here, this feeling born from six months of
trauma and bonding over shared fears. His relationship with Killer hadn't even developed this fast, and certainly not this far.

How far would this feeling go, and would he be able to contain it?

Law's hand traced intimate patterns on his flesh, running over the taut muscles of his stomach and along the quivering lines of his jugular. Even if his feet were unsteady and his balance shoddy, every touch seemed expertly planned and delivered with the potent intent to stimulate him. Those icy fingers lit sparks under his skin and churned arousal in his belly, and he couldn't let go of his other hand to stop him. Or was it that he wasn't willing to stop him? He could be making excuses, he didn't know, all he knew was that his head was light and fuzzy and his erection was burning a hole in his trousers.

No, Law, stop this.

No, don't stop.

Dammit...

They had made it out into the empty shopping district, window panes reflecting their compromising image back to him, their moisture coated surfaces reminding him of the shop window of his childhood home.

The sound of a music box clattering to the floor, the slick sound of rutting, the low grunts of a deranged man.
Kidd released Law's hand and the male crumpled to the ground without his support. Law stared up at him with adoration on his flushed cheeks. His neck was bared like it was on he first night he had to deal with an intoxicated Trafalgar Law, only now it was just alcohol running through his system. The effects seemed to be the same, except that he was far less articulate and highly seductive. Compared with his clumsy flirtation attempts that night, Law was practically making bedroom eyes at him. Kidd averted his eyes and crouched to rest his head between his legs as he tried to regulate his breathing. His erection was beginning to get painful, and he palmed his eyes in favor of elsewhere. He took a shaky breath and straightened himself, leaning down to hoist Law off the ground.

"C'mon Law." He murmured, letting him lean on him and slide his hands beneath his clothes, but this time there was only ice running across his skin and revulsion settling in the pit of his stomach. Their ships were too far, and he wouldn't risk Law's reputation by exposing him to his crew. Plus there were the other Supernovas to consider. These would be their adversaries, their enemies and their closest companions. They would know each others struggles and fight the good fight for the ultimate prize. He would never let Law lose their respect simply because they were both intoxicated. No, he would find them a place to spend the night away from judging eyes.

It wasn't hard to find a low-star hotel, visually similar to the motel they had camped out in on Little Orange. The receptionist didn't seem to recognize them, merely handing Kidd a set of keys with a knowing smirk that only fueled his remorse. He had to lift Law onto his shoulder to get them up the stairs, making sure to take off his jacket so he wouldn't impale him on his epaulettes.

"So forward~"

His passenger giggled, and snuck a hand down the waistband of Kidd's pants, palming the fabric of his boxers. The touch sent a jolt down his spine and he let out a choked gasp as he stumbled forward, Law swinging off his shoulder with the momentum and tumbling against the wall. The sparks jittering under his skin were enough to heighten his sensitivity, and he doubled over in a fit of trembling and labored breathing. There was no way these reactions were normal, he was by no means a 'quick-shooter' or even easily aroused. He looked at Law through his hanging hair, the male staring back at him with a dazed expression, his body propped unevenly against the wall. His legs were spread out on the floor, one knee bent and slowly inching to the side to part them further. Kidd had to look away and shoved his knuckles in his mouth. He straightened up and was hit with a spell of dizziness, black clouding his vision for a moment.
When it cleared he found Law clinging to his boots with a sort of delusional reverence, rubbing his cheek against the scuffed leather with closed eyes and a fond smile. Kidd hissed, breathing self-control into his lungs, exhaling terror.

"Law, we're going to a room now and you are going to go sleep. By yourself."

Law opened his eyes at that, frowning, but kept his face pressed to his shoe. The expression was fleeting, vexing smirk and half-lidded eyes back to working their magic while he danced his fingers up Kidd's calf.

"Don't be like that baby~"

Those dexterous digits slipped beneath the elastic of his trousers once more, this time caressing his calf. He cupped the back of his leg, and the coolness of his palm simmered upon his skin. Kidd swallowed, and dislodged his grip with a step back. Law's face thunked onto the floor, and he pouted with a plump jut of his bottom lip. Kidd wanted to take it in his teeth, worry the flesh until it grew bruised and swollen. He violently shook his head. He was being sucked into the amber pools of Law's eyes, into a melting pot of sensual bliss. How easy it would be to give in, to scoop Law into his arms and splay him out on a worn mattress. He could slip his hands under Law's shirt and drag his rough palms up his chest to scrape over his nipples. Law would be pliant under his touch, arch beneath him with small mewls as he licked and tugged at those pink nubs, rolling them in his mouth and between his teeth. He could pull off Law's pants or have him do it for him, watching with glossy eyes as jeans slid down caramel thighs, the taut muscles of his legs flexing and swimming beneath smooth skin. The underwear would be a turn off, something cutesy and patterned, but a swift tug would fix that. Law's legs would lock around his waist then, pulling him forward to rub their exposed bodies together in a rhythmic dance, but no, Law's parts were different. Instead he would take him in with a hitched breath and a stifled cry, and oh, how Law's flesh would part for him then, taking him deliciously deep, tightly constricting-

Kidd fought for air with a explosive gasp, his lungs drowning in deprivation as he swung back into reality.
Law was licking his erection.

His back was pressed up against the wall and Law was running his tongue up the length of his scalding shaft. He sucked in a breath, his pupils blowing wide at the sight, any breath he had regained quickly leaving him. Law's eyes were half mast, his tongue long and languid as it dragged from his balls to the head. He swirled it about the swollen tip before dipping down to suckle at his balls, his nose nudging at the base as he took one into his mouth, rolling it about with his tongue. It left Law's mouth and he felt saliva run further down, skating across his perineum. His balls tightened for a moment, tugging up in a spasm when the older man engulfed his length in a single swallow, sliding down to the root without hesitation. The thought that there should be a gag reflex there swam in Kidd's jumbled mind, his brain still unable to comprehend what was happening.

There was no way Law's face was pressed into his crotch, his nose creating hot puffs of air against the fine strands of crimson at the base. Law's eyes were nearly rolled into his head, glinting gold in the yellow light of the hallway. The walls of his throat were a heavenly, squeezing heat, and when Law swallowed Kidd's head hit the wall. His hands trembled into Law's dark locks, the hair softer than he could have ever dreamed, slipping through his fingers like water. Law swallowed again and Kidd's mouth fell open, a line of drool running down his chin, his mind drifting further away as he edged closer to the brink of orgasm. The mouth around his length had yet to move, Law lips still pressed firmly to Kidd's belly, the throat still fluttering wildly as its owner swallowed again. A slick tongue slipped down between his balls, swiping a broad stripe across their constricted surface, and Kidd's mouth parted wider in a silent exclamation. He had never felt such pleasure, not even his most experienced lovers had managed to elicit such sensations shooting through his body like lightening. He couldn't even buck his hips, his whole body rumbling in a single tremor, paralyzed as Law drained him.

His balls tightened and rose even further, his back going rigid and eyes rolling back and he finally peaked and crescendoed down Law's welcoming throat. Law made a sound of approval, the sound sending shock waves into Kidd's core. He doubled over with a raw gasp, curling his fingers into the liquid strands of black. The muscles in his back tensed and burned as the fire in his belly drained into Law's. Relief crashed over him in waves of pleasure, Law still sucking him at the root. How he hadn't pulled back for air was a question Kidd couldn't even formulate in his frazzled mind. He was falling apart, the trembling turning into wracking shakes that jingled the chain at his hip. Law seemed to brace his hands on his thighs to steady him, pulling back soundlessly. His cheeks hollowed further as he slid down the softening member, tipping his head back to gaze into Kidd's eyes. Inches apart, Kidd registered the viscous mixture of saliva and cum that dribbled from his lips when he popped off his length. An obscene drag of a bright pink tongue across his lips drew the leftovers into his mouth, the tongue disappearing into the sinful cavern.
Kidd swallowed in tandem with Law, the taste decidedly different, and slid his hands atop Law's to force himself upright. He was moving on autopilot, still lost in the fog of the best afterglow he'd ever experienced. Yes, he had never experienced anything like this sensation of bliss and exhaustion, this mixture of emptiness and satisfaction. It was as if he'd sold his soul for ambrosia, had his moments in heaven in exchange for his mortality.

Would he drop dead now?

It certainly felt like it.

He couldn't support his weight, sliding bonelessly down the wall with his soft member weakly dribbling against the fabric of his pants. Law had split them at the seams to access his prize, and it seemed he was not yet done claiming his meal. Law licked at his dry hands with rapt focus, intent on lapping every molecule of Kidd's scent off his skin. It was like presenting a starving dog a bowl of the finest sirloin and watching them scarf it down without even bothering to savor its taste.

As if the meat was its lifeblood.

"Eustass-ya~"

Law sang his name as he withdrew his fingers from his lips, saliva threading between. Kidd swallowed thickly as Law crawled towards him like an animal, his head swaying back and forth. He draped himself on Kidd, burying his face in the crook of his shoulder, and this time the dampness of his breath was soothing. Kidd felt sated in a way he couldn't explain, his limbs feeling disconnected from his body and his penis utterly numb.
"Play with me..." Came a sleepy mumble in his ear, Law's voice breaking off in a small yawn that scraped teeth and tongue against Kidd's throat. Law's teeth audibly clicked together, wet sounds as he rearranged his tongue, and then silence. He wouldn't dare lift a hand to see if he had passed out, there was no life in his muscles and his head was beginning to nod forward in a request for rest.

But he couldn't leave Law in the hallway like this, let alone his own half-clothed self. For all he knew, a Supernova could be staying in their very hotel, although he couldn't muster up the brain power to remember this. Grunting and willing his body to move, Kidd sauntered to his feet with Law cradled gently in his arms, his body light enough to carry in one hand.

How frightening.

He stumbled down the hallway, leaving his coat on the floor and his member hanging limp from his shredded trousers.

They could deal with reality in the morning.

For now, sleep.

Law awoke to the sound of his brain cells dying.

The heavy pounding behind his eyelids extended to his vision when he opened them, the room too
bright and shivering with the force of his heartbeat. He felt like he had whiplash, his limbs heavy and solid. Law couldn't lift his head for the ache in his neck, and he closed his eyes when the lights became too much to bear. He had a vague idea of where he was, on the archipelago he visited only in his nightmares, and the taste on his tongue was telling of his activities. The taste alone was enough to cause him to salivate violently, and he swallowed desperately. It'd been too long since he'd swallowed a cock, too long since he pressed his nose into the musky scent of another male's pubic hair and drank his favorite treat. There was a reason why salty foods were his favorite. Self loathing was just the aftertaste, and at the moment he couldn't bring himself to regret what he couldn't remember. All he knew was that his vile desires were sated and silent, that his tongue tasted heavenly and that he was wrapped in a warm blanket.

No, he felt the fabric with his fingers, it was a coat, and a familiar one. Disappointment chilled him deeply, only to convert into a raging furnace at the prospect of having finally done something dirty with Eustass Kidd. Having sex with someone he cared about, whether he wanted it or not, was a new and exciting feeling. He was serene, happy even, and it brought tears that didn't burn.

"Law?"

The voice sounded much weaker than he had ever heard, reminiscent of the anxious call in that jail cell. But that was long ago and far away, and the bed beneath him was soft and forgiving.

"Law?"

Stronger this time, but still overlaying a worry so endearing that Law didn't know how to cope with it. He decided to remain where he was, even if his limbs would not move him otherwise. Kidd's blurry form shielding him from the sunlight drifting through the curtain-less window, and Law managed to open his eyes amidst the tears.

"Eustass-ya," His voice was raw and croaking, his throat throbbing in painful pleasure.
He was a mess.

So was Eustass.

There were dark circles under his eyes and his headband was gone, vibrant scarlet cascading down a face creased with anxiety. He wasn't wearing a shirt, and the expanse of alabaster muscle was appealing to his foggy mind.

"Water..."

It was painful to listen to his own rasping words. He wouldn't normally want to wash away the heavenly taste so soon, but his throat was leaning away from pleasurable with every shuddering breath. Kidd disappeared from his realm of vision, and he closed his eyes and slipped into a short sleep. It seemed like seconds later that the lip of a cup was pressed to his mouth, waking him up and pouring cooling liquid down his parched throat. He coughed once when a few drops slid down the wrong pipe, but accepted the cup greedily, leaning in to tipped cup to guzzle more. The cup left and a napkin returns, gently removing the excess droplets from his lips in a single swipe. Sleep was beckoning him once more, but this time he struggled to remain conscious. His mind was returning to him, albeit slowly and with much effort, and he registered the guilt etched into Kidd's sharp features and felt it himself.

What had he done to sadden Kidd so?

"Eus-"

His words slurred as his eyes rolled back into his head with bone deep exhaustion, Law floundering against the current but to no avail.
"I'm so, so sorry Law. I shouldn't have let this happen, I'm sorry."
Luffy was shown screaming in anguish over his brother's corpse, and Law couldn't look away.

It captivated him, utterly and truly, this scene with which he was so familiar. The same scene with different actors which he witnessed over and over again in the throes of a nightmare. The bond was different but the feelings were the same, and when the transmission cut Law ordered his crew to set sail for Marineford without thinking.

"Mister Straw Hat may one day become an enemy of mine, but even enemy relationships are still relationships! It'll be too lame if he ends up dying here! I'm going to make sure he escapes! Entrust him to me for the time being!"

Law took a deep breath, purpose flooding his entire being at the rush of euphoria that came with knowing what he could provide for others.

"I'M A DOCTOR!"

Yes, he was a doctor, this was what he had chosen, what his mind had chosen even if his body was a slave to a different path. He had taken this future with his own two hands and held tightly, he wanted to be remembered for the patients he saved and the medical miracles he performed. For all his hatred for his parents, all his disdain and self-pity, Law found a medical career most fitting to his heart. Whatever remained of it, whatever he was still managing to hide beneath a frigid exterior, was saturated with love for others. It was a selective love, he had lost the ability to give of it freely, but when he cared for someone he poured out everything he had left.

They didn't have much time, and he rushed the clown carrying Luffy and what appeared to be
"Captain!" Shachi screamed from beneath him, "A marine ship is cutting around from the coast."

Law had no time to react before their ship jolted violently in the sea of ice as Blackbeard unleashed a devastating earthquake upon the icy plane. As if in reply, a blast of light struck the ice in a tremendous explosion of sound and shards.

"Just leave him behiiiiiiind~ Straw Hat Luffy, you knooow~!"

Kizaru's noxious melodic timbre sent shivers throughout Law's body, and his exclamation was genuine when he saw the man moving closer. He didn't want to get into a battle with an admiral, not now, not ever.

It wasn't part of the plan.

Then again, neither was Luffy.

And neither was Kidd.

The clown tossed the injured pirate and shichibukai towards him, and he quickly secured them in a room and shambled them into the submarine. If they had a deck built in, he would have had Jean Bart catch them instead of swapping them out for a pair of much needed supply crates**.
"WE'RE DIVING!"

Law didn't have to duck down to hear his crew mates screaming about how badly the two were injured, how Luffy was near death. Kizaru was closing in on them, and Law's hand was growing slick on the hatch as he watched the marines and pirates continue to brawl despite the battle having ended. Even dead, Whitebeard's words were still echoing in everyone's minds. A blinding light sparked in the desolation, and Law flinched back from the oncoming attack. Then some marine started screaming, yelling at everyone to stop, and Law just couldn't be bothered with such dramatics. It was bad enough Portages D. Ace and Whiteboard were dead, they didn't need to add anymore casualties to the pirate's cause***.

He swung the hatch shut as the boy was still screaming, noting that Akainu was getting ready to deliver the hysterical marine a fatal blow. Taking advantage of the distraction, they dove back through the hole in the ice they had forcefully created. Their ship was built for speed, and so when Law heard Penguin relaying over the communicators of Aokiji's Ice Age he wasn't worried in the slightest. Instead he was focused on Luffy, leaving Jinbe to the care of his crew. It was only fitting that he operate on his rival, and only his Devil Fruit would be able to deal with such a monstrous wound. Teleporting to the operating theater where the boy was being prepped for surgery, Law leaned Kikoku on the wall and took a deep breath.

This was his neutral ground, the place he felt the most comfortable. He snapped on a pair of blue surgical gloves and donned a white gauze mask. He would be doing this operation on his own, because he needed space when using his room, Luffy was draped in a white sheet, a square cut to showcase the massive hole in his chest. Law clicked his tongue and activated his room, eyes boring into the other's bloody wound. It was clear from the angle that it had pierced the boy through the front, and wasn't deep enough to have injured his spine. Blood welled in the cavernous hole like a chalice, a steady pulse of liquid on the surface indicating the leakage of his heart.

It was impossible that this boy was still alive.

*It must be his Devil Fruit, perhaps being made of rubber is somehow congealing the blood. Or maybe the blood vessels themselves are elastic enough to...* He forced all his attention back into reality, and quickly went to work.
Hours upon hours went by, in which the boy had flatlined three times and suffered two blood clots in his right arm. Sweat was beading on Law's forehead, gooseflesh standing out prominently on his forearms. There was little he could do about the visceral scarring he would have in his chest cavity, but if he was truly made of rubber there might be no need. As he secured the final suture, snapping the thread with his teeth with a sound of finality, Law felt as if he had stepped into the New World and directly into his grave. Here he had come, dragging his crew to save a boy on impulse, an impulse so raw and personal he felt like he would drown in the memories, and he had done it all based on futile sentimentality.

He wasn't after the One Piece like Kidd, wasn't after glory or fortune or whatever it was that lay at the end of this sisyphean trek. All he wanted was revenge, closure, a peace of mind only death would bring. Law wouldn't get it saving this reckless boy whose brain cells couldn't even fill a thumbtack. His brother hadn't been Cora-san, his grief hadn't been Law's, and yet he was warping history on the operating table, filling a hole in his heart he hadn't known was there. There was static in his veins when he looked at the heart monitor and found it stable, carbon dioxide in his lungs when he removed his mask and snapped off his gloves. There was blood staining the front of his shirt, the fabric stiff and coarse against his skin. Something dark and insidious was curling in his stomach, digging its claws into his flesh to root itself there.

Law's eyes were brimming with determination when he left the operating theater, his hands shaking but his resolve firm.

He had no doubt his course was true.

The fever-bright enthusiasm that had gripped his crew was infectious, and Kidd's grin was
straining at the seams. His ship was already coated by Rayleigh, all the swords sharpened and guns reloaded with plenty of ammunition to spare, and Whitebeard had confirmed the existence of One Piece with his dying breaths.

Even if he was fully invested, it was thrilling to know his suspicions were confirmed. He had gotten closer to his goal, he could feel it, and there was nothing that could dampen his mood.

Not even the sight of Law appearing not a half-mile away.

Their ship was built like a marine's ice breaker, and they had no problem surging forward into the sturdy mass of ice encircling the island. They had intended to join the fray, aligning themselves with Whitebeard wasn't a reputation breaker. No good pirate disliked the Whitebeard Pirates, they symbolized what everyone wanted but was content with idolizing from afar.

Family was a painful thing, after all.

Law's submarine broke the surface of the ice in a single surfacing thrust, the long machine easing out the water through the hole and balancing there like a half-submerged teeter-totter. When Law himself opened the hatch and expressed the desire to heal Straw Hat, Kidd hadn't felt anything but shock. He had truly not expected the man to arrive on scene at all, last time he had checked the man was still sleeping soundly in a secured hotel room far from the dock. But that was yesterday, and here he was, shambling Straw Hat and the fishman shichibukai into his submarine and slipping away as abruptly as he had arrived.

If the hole wasn't still present, Kidd would have thought he imagined the whole ordeal. Of course, when Aokiji unleashed Ice Age he quickly reversed the ship with his Devil Fruit, giving himself no time to come to terms with what had transpired.
The last he had seen of him, Law was sleeping off a massive hangover, nestled safely beneath the weight of his coat. While not as impressive, he had other coats he could wear, and Law needed the comfort the heavy coat would bring. Its weight was part of why Kidd favored it over the others, the thick fur squeezing his shoulders and back like a reassuring hug. It eased his anxiety almost as well as the clonazapam, and though he had gladly lent it to Law he was beginning to regret it.

He couldn't bear to stay and witness the man's reaction to what he had shamefully allowed to transpire. No words could fix what he did, and his heart wouldn't be able to take Law's frightened gaze directed at him. Even if Law had seemed enthusiastically eager to suck his dick, it didn't mean it wasn't rape. Not only was Law incredibly intoxicated, but Kidd hadn't wanted it in the first place.

So didn't that mean that he had been raped?

He tried not to think about it that way, he didn't want to think about it at all. Ever since they went walking through that shopping district, Kidd's anxiety was growing stronger. His mother's death was squirming in his brain, his force of will the only thing keeping him from tumbling into another panic attack.

He had never gone so long without a spiral of anxiety and depression nipping at his heels, and it was unsettling. His self-doubts were always a second shadow, but Law had cleared his conscious and inserted himself in its place. He had not-so-slowly been consumed by Trafalgar Law, and he hadn't even put up a fight. Was this what love was? Something insidious and volatile that melted into his bones like sap and hardened there? Love was swallowing him whole, and he hadn't a clue if he wanted to escape or nestle safely in its belly. Law had saved him from his terrors, but could the same be said for Law?

What had he possibly done to help Law when he has simply taken advantage of him?

When he had taken one last look at the body cocooned in his coat, it had felt like a goodbye. Finally he had gotten it through his thick skull that he and Law were to go separate paths. Whether they would meet as enemies in the New World was a indistinct possibility, and Kidd still didn't
understand what Law's goals were.

He told himself this, but he knew in his heart where Law's path would end.

Luffy convulsed violently on the operating table, the heart monitor screaming in volume with his vocal cords.

"ACE! WHERE'S ACE?!"

Even semi-unconscious he was still able to thrash free from Law's precautionary restraints.

"ACE!"

Law let out a long suffering sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose from his position in the threshold. He was exhausted from the six-hour surgery, and his eyes burned and blurred in protest. *The boy's not even awake and he's still causing so much of a racket...* Outwardly, Law was annoyed by the raucous, and inside he was no different. Every ounce of pity had been drained upon his decision to uptake the ridiculous quest to save the boy, and now he was running on fumes. The peace he had garnered from a hot shower and fresh pair of clothes had been obliterated upon his return, and he was resentful for it.

Luffy bucked once more on the steel slab, fingers scrambling for purchase as he managed to right himself. He looked like a demon hellbent on revenge, his hair matted with sweat and blood and his eyes rolled in their sockets, the whites infested with swollen red veins.
Luffy lunged forward and Law activated his room in turn, and the rubber boy easily fractured into neat slices. The boy's torso collided with him from the momentum, and a single hand gripped his collar with enough strength to hoist the boy's face to Law's neck.

"WHY DIDN'T YOU SAVE HIM TOO?!"

Foam ejected onto Law's skin like spittle, the boy's salivary glands overloaded in his rage as if he were experiencing an epileptic seizure. Perhaps it was, because his body fell slack a moment later, Law instinctively holding up the boy's torso before he ruptured his stitches. Law's eyes were unfocused as his mind was sucked away, his knees buckling as he faded into the past.

Law buried his fingers in the snow, the biting cold burning the sensitive digits. The tears pouring down his face tasted saccharine from running through the gash along the bridge of his nose, broken in his desperate escape from the locked chest, and his forehead split from his scramble over the tall rim. They would heal soon enough, but the wounds to Cora-san's abdomen wouldn't.

And not because Cora-san was human.

But because he was dead.

The white patches had already faded from his skin, but he still hurt like he was dressed in bruises. Everything was painful, from the inability to breath through his nose to the way his fingers grew
hot as they dug deeper into the crimson snow. It fell so quickly on this island, draping Cora-san in some type of natural veil as if God was respecting his life.

But there was no way that God was real, a life as terrible as his would not exist if He did****.

He’d run as fast as he could through the snow after he escaped from the chest at the docks, and still he had been too late, too inexperienced to save the one person he had left to love. He had stood beside Cora-san as he took his last wheezing breath, and that had been hours ago.

Even though the body beneath his hands had grown cold and lifeless, even though his eyes were now frozen shut, Law couldn't bring himself to leave. Perhaps he was still in shock, even though he knew well that he had finally lost everything. He continued to brush off the powdered snow and peel off the red cakes of ice that had plastered to alabaster skin.

Doflamingo and his family had left the island, and now Law was all alone on the bleak robin-shaped island of frost and death.

His white patches were gone, but he still couldn't understand how his powers worked. He had to drop the pale dome that had initially preserved Cora-san’s body, but it had quickly become too much for him. It was as if he was being drained of his physical strength by using some sort of mental powers to use his Devil Fruit. That was how they worked, right? He didn't know, how could he?

He had gone to medical school at the tender age of six, and was officially more intelligent than his father by the time he was nine. He was an abnormal genius, even by genius standards, and with his lineage he was even more of a outlier to humanity. His medical knowledge hadn't been enough to save Cora-san when he could have finally been of use to him, finally been able to pay off his debt****. As if to add insult to injury, not even his Devil Fruit, which had been able to heal his incurable illness, had been enough to save Cora-san.
Nothing he ever did was enough.

"Why..." Law's voice was broken and worn with bloody screams and aching lungs, carried away by the whistling wind. He lifted his hands and stared at the red cracks in his palms, his fingers swollen with deep hues of blue.

"Why are you so worthless?"

It was hard to close his hands, but he did so anyway, fluid bursting from his blushed knuckles like ripe fruit. The liquid was pink and watery, running down his hands and dripping languidly onto the snow, forming small dots of ice. His fruit seemed to react to the painless self-inflicted injury, the pale bubble appearing around him once more, his hands slowly mending themselves. The edema seemed to vanish like magic, the color returning to his fingers as his strength slipped away. Black spotted his vision for moment, and he felt his bowels grow thin with nausea.

Even though exhaustion was flooding his system reminiscent of a sugar crash, indignation and fury bubbled through the thickening drowsiness.

"IF YOU'RE SO AMAZING WHY DIDN'T YOU SAVE HIM TOO!?"

He dug his nails into the thin fabric of his pants, into the bruised flesh of his knees. As the skin parted beneath his nail beds he could feel the flesh humming with the urge to heal. All his Devil Fruit seemed to do was exaggerate his abnormalities, bringing to light the fact that he could heal with considerable speed on his own. It was his blood that was the problem, his blood that couldn't be mended by the most advanced genetic manipulation techniques in the world. He was the product of billions of Belli worth of genetic engineering and yet he was pathetic enough to succumb to a disease that wiped out his entire village. His entire country had fallen into chaos and he alone squirmed out from beneath its corpse alive.
The thought of hiding amidst corpses brought up bile in his throat, but he'd already thrown up everything in his shriveled stomach.

He clenched his eyes shut, gritting his teeth until his jaw audibly creaked.

No, don't think about that...

When he opened his eyes he was met with the same depressing scene, his caregiver still lying prone and silent. The snow was falling harder, the translucent bubble never staying up for long. He knew he was being immature, clinging to the last shred of hope that Cora-san would spring to life again, but he couldn't help it. Cora-san was the only parental figure who ever showed him kindness, the only man who didn't try and use him for his manufactured purpose.

He treated him like a human.

Fresh tears boiled down his cheeks, stiffening there into frost and despair. There was nothing he could do for Cora-san, even if the other man had given everything to save his life. He was a lost cause, born to be a slave until his death, but Cora-san had seen past the harmful vitiligo.

But despite the man's best efforts, despite all the love Law felt for him, he couldn't help but feel a shred of hatred for him.

He should be the one who lay decomposing on the permafrost.
He should be dead.

If he was dead, he wouldn't have to suffer his past anymore.

It would be better if he was dead, surely.

Because in death no one could touch him.

Law hissed in pain at the burn that spread across his cheek like ice, and glared at Shachi whose hand was still raised. The other man shrugged, hoisting the disembodied boy onto the cot stationed on the other side of the room. It was a bed made for patients who couldn't be moved after surgery, but sometimes Law used it to take naps after a procedure. It was too firm and the sheets were too scratchy for his sensitive skin, but sleep reached him there.

With Luffy taken care of and the submarine setting course for Amazon Lily, there was nothing left for him to do but rest his weary bones. He had no reason to be tired, not with how long he slept the morning before, but perhaps it was the very reason that all he could think about was the release sleep would bring. If he returned to his room he knew Kidd's coat would be there on his bed, spread out in a welcoming gesture. He could sink into it, press his nose into the thick fur and inhale the musk of the man's scent, the traces of machine oil and sweat that would make his toes curl. No one would know, no one but his closest friends, and it wasn't like they could be kept in the dark if he tried.

Kidd's huge coat wasn't easy to sneak on the ship, after all.
He left Shachi to tend to Luffy and made a subtle scramble to his room.

With the lock latched securely behind him, all pretenses could be dropped, and he flung himself onto his bed and buried his face into the heavy coat. It smelled exactly as he remembered it smelling that morning, felt just as lovely against his bare skin as it had done throughout the night, and for once he felt no shame as he kicked off his pants and threw his shirt onto the spotless wood floor. He was tempted to remove his panties, tempted to slip his finger between his legs as he inhaled Kidd's scent like a drug, but thought better of it. He had spent every waking moment resisting such urges every single day, it wasn't hard to do so now.

With Kidd's coat at hand there was no need for him to slip under his bedsheets, and he didn't even need to tuck up his legs to cover his feet. The length and breadth of the garment was enough to remind him of their size difference, and he rolled to the side until he was bundled up tightly in Kidd's smell and heat. He tucked his chin to his chest and curled slowly into the fetal position, covered from head to toe in blissful heat. Shame was the furtherest thing from his mind, and it felt heavenly to indulge himself for once.

Just this once, he could pretend he had given in to his desires.

Although, with his actions the previous night, it was hardly pretending.

Law's mind was hazy and his thoughts erratic, but he knew what he wanted and it was enough. There was a heady scent in the air, one that caused his salivary glands to erupt with moisture and drool to cascade down the side of his mouth. He couldn't help it, it was his favorite scent, the one meal he craved like no other. He buried his face into the seat of the crotch presented before him, eyes rolling back as he inhaled deeply, his lips stretched back in manic glee. This was heaven, surely, how else could such a treat be presented before him with such little effort?
He made swift work of the occluding garment with brute strength, rending the material in half with his bare hands. The boxers he could slide down easily, and when he did the scent just grew stronger, the slick between his legs sliding further down his thigh. His underwear was thoroughly soaked now, salivating with the thought of this massive cock cramming inside. And what a cram it would be, these eight inches of thick stiffness that weighed heavy in his hands. He couldn't meet his thumb and index finger around its girth, and he clenched instinctively in anticipation.

This man was not his Master, but he would do for now. His Master had no problem with sharing him, and Law reveled in the opportunity at hand. He nosed deeper into the man's fiery thatch, pressing his lips tenderly along the side of a prominent vein. He wanted to do nothing more than to nuzzle his face against the thick cock and saturate himself in the warm musky smell.

So he did just that.

When Law awoke it was without realizing he had fallen asleep. The shame had returned, and the slick staining his underwear was seeping into the precious fur.

Cheeks flushed, he took it to the laundromat.

Chapter End Notes

*This deviates from the manga in which they do so beforehand, and the transmission cut long before Ace's death and was restarted just beforehand. From this point on a new arc has begun in which it will begin to deviate more and more from the manga. Don't worry, I will stay as true to canon as possible, and deviate as much as I already have.*
** Keep in mind that Law's submarine is drastically different in form from the manga and anime counterpart, there is no deck to stand on and they do not have a mast. It's a very long submarine, to be honest it looks a lot like a breadstick from Olive Garden's. :D Just look up Trafalgar Class submarine, which is what it is based on.

***From this point on please keep a tab open with the manga to note the differences from here on out. Law didn't wait for Shanks to come and save the day, which means Luffy's hat has yet to be returned to him, and he didn't get to see the war officially end. Don't worry, Luffy will get his hat back someway or another, it's like a boomerang. Law also didn't have his little chat with Ivankov.

****Just want to make it clear that Law is an atheist throughout this story and that will not change. Kidd is ambivalent on the topic of a deity, but holds onto the hope that there is an afterlife so he can see his mother again. Law believes in neither souls nor an afterlife, as I do, but this irrelevant to his character. My views on life did not influence how I portrayed Law, as I just see him as the type of person who was forced into this mindset in contrast to my development of these convictions after being a practicing Christian for all of my life. I chose this after weighing all the facts, but Law was forced into it after being thrown under the bus so many times that he lost hope. I just wanted to make this clear. Oh, I'm also completely accepting and ambivalent towards any religion, and don't force my beliefs down anyone's throat. In fact, I don't mention them at all. I just wanted to let you all know so that you know that Law's perspective, in at least some sense, in backed by personal experience and research. I want this to be a fact-based, educated, and politically correct fan fiction while dabbling in obvious fantasy.

*****Sound familiar? There's a reason for that...I wonder how he tried to repay Corasan for his kindness...
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Warnings:

1. Transphobic Language
2. Child Abuse
3. Physical Abuse
4. Domestic Abuse
5. Undertone of Unhealthily Possessive Relationships

Just to clear things up for those who are still confused, whenever I write a scene in italics it is a flashback (whether they are dreaming about it or not) the only dream that has actually been a fictitious dream was the one where Law and Kidd were lying in the flower bed. Also, they cannot share dreams and the pink ocean that Kidd and his crew drank were simply another snippet of their shenanigans on the Grand Line, it has no importance to the story other than to carry the plot.

Also, I'm sure you've noticed that many scenes are now taking place in a bedroom or as one is falling asleep, this is intentional.

In addition, it is apparent that Law and Kidd's actions and thoughts are inconsistent which is also intentional. Just like real people, they don't always do what they say or think to themselves. Not everyone keeps their personal commitments...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"We still have unfinished business in Paradise, the New World can wait."

If his goal was the same as the other Supernovas, there would be no time to spare, but Law's path was entirely different, hidden under the guise of simple piracy. Only Kidd knew where he was headed, even if he had never outright announced his destination. Did Kidd know Law was running headlong into his own death? He hoped so, it would be nice to be treated so kindly when one could easily default to pity. Kidd had pitied him, but in a sweet, gentle way that he hadn't minded.

He shook the thoughts from his head, rooting himself in the present.
They had returned to Sabaody after dropping Straw Hat Luffy on Amazon Lily, with surprisingly few complications. Jinbe had promised to keep an eye on the boy to make sure his wounds didn't reopen, and the women of Amazon Lily had sworn the same.

Finally he was unhindered from his painful alliance with Eustass Kidd, one whose professional benefits were less than zero. Despite the number of times he had been woken in the middle of the night for a breakdown of the crews the rival ship had plundered, Donquixote’s lackeys were not among them.

*What a waste of medical supplies.*

With the path cleared before him, Law could move onto the next stage in his plan without hesitation.

He cleared his throat and left the navigation room, letting Bepo and Penguin deal with planning their route. His trio was aware of his plans, there was no need to get more involved than needed. Law tried to be as hands off as possible when it came to his crew, precisely for the reason that he cared for them. He was a weak man wearing a facade of strength, and his crew was filled with broken individuals. They would know their own kind if he lingered too long in their presence.

His room was still sparkling clean, the candles on his desk replaced with lavender inscence. Since introduced to the soothing properties, Law had stockpiled the essential oils on the shelves once crammed with vials of his home-brewed drug. His bedroom had become a sort of therapy room, filled with self-help products and relaxing aromas. There was chart on the wall he used to track his hydration and caloric intake, a sheet where he checked off his cleaning duties. They helped him stay on track and keep his life in order, courtesy of the support and care of his closest friends.

He collapsed onto his bed without bothering to undress.
His flashback of Cora-san's death had drained any progress he'd been making. The checkboxes for the day had remained unmarked, and he had hidden his untouched dishes when his friends had turned their backs. With the way things were going, he'd end up with a mold infested room and death staining his fingers within the week.

He blinked slowly, the steel wall inches from his nose, and twisted to drag Kidd's coat from its rumpled mess on the floor. His scents were still there, and it was easy to bury himself into the fur and forget his troubles.

He was running away again and he couldn't care less.

Fat tears rolled down his cheeks as his father ignored his pleas.

"WHY THE FUCK WERE WE GIVEN A FREAK LIKE YOU?!"

A boot collided with his chest and the wind was knocked out of him as he was careened into the wall, black spots dancing in his vision as he fought for air and failed. His right leg was broken just below the knee, his lip was split to a disfiguring degree, and he couldn't see out of his right eye from all the blood. The ringing in his ears was deafening, but he could make out his father's warping features as he continued to rage. He knew what he was saying even if he couldn't hear him, the script never seemed to change.

His father picked up one of his mother's prized china plates and brought it down on his skull. The
world went dark for a moment, then white, then red. Blood covering his eyes completely, Law began to panic. It was far more terrifying when he couldn't see his father's blows coming, and his loss of hearing only compounded his terror.

"PAPA PLEASE I-!"

He was gripped by his hair and lifted off the ground, and he screamed and thrashed despite the debilitating pain shooting through his scalp. His ears were beginning to clear, his father's hoarse yelling taking on meaning.

"DON'T 'PAPA PLEASE' ME YOU GOD DAMNED TRANNY!"

Law whimpered in his father's hold, his hair giving sickening creaking sounds before snapping, the boy dropping to the ground while his father held a clump of bloody hair. He was unable to move from his crumpled position, his mind running his father's words on a loop.

No, no, God loves me-Sister Stacy says God loves everyone!

He loves me papa!

He loves me!

Why don't you love me Papa?
What did I do wrong?

I'm sorry, please love me Papa!

*He couldn't voice any of these thoughts, and even if he did they wouldn't have been of any use. His father had already wandered away while he cried pitifully on the floor, throwing back a bottle of whiskey as he tottered unevenly into the living room.*

*He rubbed away the blood from his eyes with the back of his hand, but still it burned to open them.*

*He was well aware that crying wouldn't do anything. No one would come for him. No one would console him.*

*He sniffled and pulled himself from the floor, heaviness infecting his limbs. He was tired and everything hurt, but he couldn't stay where he was. If he stayed in one place then his father would surely come back. When he was like this he tended to suffer from short-term memory loss, and would return to beat him without the memory of having already done so. Even when he looked at the blood and the tears, all he would see was his clumsy freak of a son.*

*He wasn't even his son.*

*Or his daughter.*
He was just an 'it' to him.

Law swallowed and tasted copper on his tongue, as if he had swished coins around in his mouth. He made sure to wipe away the blood stains with the hem of his shirt before he crawled to his room. The space beneath his bed was the perfect size for him, his father couldn't reach him if he squeezed against the wall. When he was drunk his father couldn't lift the heavy furniture. He always made sure to dust underneath here for these moments, and there was a small stack of books he could squint to the read in the darkness.

His temples throbbed and his vision was still rendered obsolete, so he settle for a nap amongst the scant dust bunnies and the scent of his blood.

"I thought we'd settled this."

Copper eyes rolled in their sockets as their owner turned onto his stomach, huffing a strand of hair out his eyes. A frown marred his face as he stared down his first mate from his gangly sprawl across his couch.

Today was a lazy day, in which they were neither able to move onto Fishman Island nor return to Sabaody Archipelago. Frankly, they were biding time until the Marines stopped patrolling the area. Their submarines reminded him of someone, but they were much smaller and blended in with their environment. Normally Kidd wouldn't bat an eye at the threat of the navy, but there were Admirals amongst the throng. Whiteboard's death and Ace's execution, coupled with the vast number of escaped prisoners, had turned Paradise into a restless Hell.

It didn't help that Whitebeard had essentially revived the lust of piracy, fueling the fires that burned down towns and incinerated pride. Kidd himself was alight with enthusiasm, but Killer was there to
balance out his volatility. They had decided to take refuge in an enormous cave on an abandoned island. It had been a tight fit, their masts scraping against the ceiling and the metal-plated hull screeching along the walls, but it had been worth it.

They could still hear explosions in the distance, and see the sky flux between hues of red and blue.

Luckily one his subordinates, Emilio Winters, was also a fruit user, with the power to create mirages. Hiding their bulk in the stony alcove, Emilio's powers rendered them invisible to the naked eye.

Now all that was left was to wait out the literal storm, biding their time until the submarines ceased their wandering. Kidd's powers gave him the advantage over the metal vehicles, and he could sense their presence. While he knew he could crush them all easily like tin cans and be on his way, he was handicapped by the fact that he couldn't tell what presence was a Marine submarine and what was...

He didn't even want to think of making that mistake.

So here he was lounging on his bed, bare feet tucked up like a preteen girl as he glared at his friend who was taking up all the space on his couch. It was like a mockery of a slumber party, except they weren't enthused to be in each others company.

"Fuck off Kil, all you've done is put distance between us. It's not like it's going to go away by itself. You haven't even told me to bug off because its none of my business. You've literally said nothing this entire time. How can you expect it to just fade away? Here I thought you were the rational one."

Kidd huffed and checked his nails, they'd almost finished drying.
Killer looked away, his blonde locks tucked behind his ears in an uncharacteristic display of his face. His mask sat beside him in a rare demonstration of trust. Killer was marred with burns licking along the sides of his cheeks and across the bridge of his nose. It wasn't disfiguring, not exactly, and Killer was hardly distraught over his appearance despite his unhealthy love for his hair.

Every time Kidd looked at those burns he was reminded of his stupidity and lack of self control.

Now was no different, but he took the opportunity to scour the others features. It was rare Killer showed him his facial features, and he tried to burn the image into his memory like so many times before. High cheekbones, thin face, carmine eyes, a gentle curl of his upper lip as he expressed his disgust.

He looked away again, and Kidd reached out furtively.

"Look, I understand you're a private person." Killer twitched and twisted further in his seat so his face was pressed into the upholstery.

"And I get that it's none of my business. I get that now. But can you at least tell me why you're so quiet about it? Like I said, you won't even tell me to shut my mouth or to lay off on the questions! Tell me to stop and I will!"

Killer turned to him, his face squished against the couch. He blinked slowly, red eyes glinting in the bright light of the various lanterns fixed to the walls. He let out a heavy sigh and pushed himself up into a sitting position, rubbing at the bright red flush of his cheek.
"Shut up."

It was the first words Killer had spoken to him all week, and they stunned him into silence. His pulse quickened, eager to hear anything the man had to say. Even if he had understood that Killer's reasons for privacy were well beyond his privileges, his curiosity was still one of his largest flaws. His impulsivity and emotional outbursts got the best of him, his anxiety and OCD crippling his mental state until he vented and restarted the vicious cycle.

"I don't owe you shit."

Kidd frowned. Killer's eyes narrowed, his lips curled back in a threatening snarl that Kidd was used to hearing rather than seeing. Despite the utter revolution Killer had gone through during his adolescence, there were still glimmers of that feral child he had befriended in his youth. From the way the man sometimes perched on railings like a predatory bird, to how he tended to hoard seemingly miscellaneous objects in his bedroom.

...

"Is..." Kidd's eyes widened in realization, "Is it a territorial thing?"

Killer's expression swiftly shifted from stunned to mocking.

"Fucking took you long enough."

He looked away, scratching at his neck aggressively, leaving red lines to bloom in the wake. Kidd
swallowed, *fuck...I should have noticed...and I shouldn't have asked in the first place...*

Killer stared at the wall resolutely, lips turned down in a permanent scowl as the silence drifted between them. The moments melted into minutes, flames flickering illusory shadows on the paneled wood.

"I'm not proud of it..."

Killer whispered, keeping his eyes trained on anywhere but Kidd.

"I hate who I am and how I was raised...it's basically in my genetics now..."

Kidd held his breath, not daring to move or speak.

"After you started raiding the library and found out about One Piece, I wanted to accompany you wherever your goals led you. I suppose it was some form of pity, at least in part, but I wanted to be there for you from then on."

Killer flashed sharp teeth in a humorless laugh, his eyes holding large pools of standing water.

"But what could I do? I was barely human. It was a miracle you got me to wear clothes. I wanted, so desperately, to be your equal as a human. I begged you to teach me how to read. I studied to act socially acceptable, when I knew the characters I began to read to amass knowledge to help you. It was difficult, separating myself from all I had ever known, retraining myself to behave like a human being. By the time we were teenagers and brought Oresmith to the ground I was able to
blend in, but there was things I could never completely shake off. Behaviors I tried so *fucking* hard to destroy just wouldn't go away."

Killer swallowed again, rivulets of tears collecting under his chin, his voice strangled with emotion.

"Kidd I can't-...I *love* Penguin. I've never felt so strongly for a person in my life. I feel like I'm two people, and the other half of me is outside of myself, and I have to protect that side from the whole world. It's painful as fuck but it's amazing. Have...have you ever felt like that?"

The blonde looked so pitiful, curled in on himself in a fearful display of insecurity so unlike him. His eyes were filled with trust and hope, and Kidd's throat was raw in response. He thought of Law's rare smiles and the way the corners of his eyes would wrinkle when he laughed. He remembered how frail his body had seemed against his, the contradictory strength of the muscles beneath his hands yet the sharp protrusions of his spine. The way his flexed his fingers out of habit and how his voice sounded over the phone, addled with sleep or the lack thereof.

His sandpaper tongue grated across his palate as he swallowed, "Yeah, I've felt like that before."

He *still* felt that way, desperate to hear the little hat-wearing snail ring in the dead of night. He wanted to feel Law's warmth against his side, the frigid chill of his fingers brushing across the back of his hand. The weeks before they'd reached Sabaody, when Law had cut off all contact, Kidd thought he was suffering symptoms of withdrawal. Sleep wouldn't come to him, and food looked unpleasantly composed. It was as if the world had been drained of its magic, not even the oddities of the Grand Line had lifted his mood. It was all he could do to simply follow the man to the Auction House, it took every ounce of willpower he possessed to mold his words and actions into callous mockeries of his true feelings. His heart had been hammered in his chest, his ribcage threatening to buckle under the force of his excitement. And then Law saved their skins and took him on a pub crawl, and he was so happy to see him that he hadn't bothered to ask why Law had cut all ties. Why Law was drinking himself to death in the first place. No, he knew why. It was just too painful to admit it.
"But as much as I love him, as much as I respect his agency, I covet him. It's terrifying and inappropriate, but it's like it's my nature. I tear out my hair over watching him talk to someone else, literally-in clumps!"

He brandished his hands to emphasize his point.

"I even...I even wanted to kill you when I found out you'd spoken to him. It's horrible Kidd, I'm horrible, I know, but it's like it's my instincts rather than some learned behavior..."

Killer buried his face into his knees, toes curling as he folded over himself.

"I'm sorry Kidd...I'm so sorry..."

Kidd blinked away tears.

"Me too Kil, me too."

Kidd stared at the snail as he contemplated the disaster that was his judgement.
"Yes, Eustass-ya? I assumed you called me for a reason."

Kidd let his head fall back as he glared piteously at the ceiling.

"If you don't respond I'm going to hang up. There is no reason you should have called your enemy in the first place."

Something dark twisted in his chest at those words. Painful and insidious, he wondered how long it had been there.

"Dammit Law, don't fucking hang up you prick! My enemy my ass, we're not even after the same thing!"

"..."

"..."

"Hold your tongue you careless beast."

Kidd swallowed at the malice there, lips set in a firm line.
"Dammit Law..."

"..."

"Look, I know it's important to you that you put distance between us, but it doesn't change what happened...it..."

The darkness in his belly bloomed into fluttering insects, batting at his ribcage and choking his lungs.

"...It doesn't change how I feel about you."

It wasn't the best of confessions, but it would have to do. The hairs on the nape of his neck pricked at the silence on the line.

He couldn't fathom what Law was thinking, he could only hope it wouldn't make things worse.

Law pressed his lips to the inside of his wrist, pretending it was the slope of Kidd's neck. The veins were smaller than the pulsing cords of the younger's jugular, but the heartbeat was steady through his skin.
"I don't regret what I did." He whispered, letting his hand fall with his gaze. "Although I know it wasn't the right thing to do. Intoxication or biology was no excuse for my behavior, my sincerest apologies, Kidd-ya."

He didn't know if the sharp intake of breath was from the use of his first name, or his change of topic.

Kidd's feeling were already apparent to him, including his own feelings towards the redhead.

And his feelings were twisted, tainted and overlapped with the memory of someone long gone. Someone who he hadn't even been able to love purely.

Kidd's confession was long overdue, and yet he'd dreaded its arrival. It was part of the complex reasons he had tried to separate himself from him. But Kidd's phone call had proved it a sisyphian task. Kidd's den den mushi had remained on his desk despite his internal struggle to release it. A part of him had hoped he call him, even if it was just to command the return of his coat. The garment had become his security blanket. It would be impossible to part with it now.

"I am aware what I did was a form of rape, and apologies won't fix what I did. But still, I don't regret it at all. It's a little funny...and hypocritical..."

Law flashed his teeth against the darkness, running his tongue over the dry skin of his lower lip.

"My feelings for you are extremely complicated Kidd-ya, and I'm not entirely sure I can reciprocate in kind."
"I'm afraid I'm using you as a replacement for the man who saved me from Doffy's labyrinth. I've never been in love that didn't stem from my hormones, Kidd-ya, and I don't know how to differentiate the two. I don't want to take advantage of your kindness..."

"...Law, it's okay Law-"

"It's not! It's not okay! I want! I want to love you! I already feel for you differently! I wanted you to-

Law suckled his lip, blood vessels breaking under his teeth.

"I wanted you to be my Master. I wanted to belong to you because you'd be kind to me. You wouldn't take advantage of me. Even if I was drunk on lust I was happy you didn't take it further, and yet I was elated I got so far."

Law's voice was tight and he curled tightly around the younger's coat, burying his nose in the russet fur.

"Just give me time." He whispered, the receiver pressed to mute Kidd's call. He couldn't bear hearing his response.

"I'll try, Kidd-ya, I'll try. But you know I'm not going to live much longer anyhow."
Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment below detailing your reactions or comments on the plot and/or my writing style!
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Just want to preface that in this universe none of the boys developed strange mountain necks after the time skip. They are disgusting and terrifying anatomical monstrosities and we shall not speak of them further.

Warnings:

1. Panic Attack (Nightmare)

2. Topic of Pedophilia

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Law's submarine slid soundlessly into the to dock on the snowy island, Kidd thought it was another trick of the Grand Line. The ocean had taken his desires for a spin before, haunting illuminations of a man half an ocean away.

It was only when Law chucked a snowball at him from the ice-locked shoreline did the malice in his expression melt into glee. His crew members were all fast asleep except for Blaire on lookout in the safety of the crow's nest, but he was sure he would have acted the same even if he'd been surrounded.

Law shambled himself onto the deck, stumbling a bit in what was clearly a new pair of heeled boots. Kidd first thought was that he'd gained weight, his biceps neatly filling out the dark fabric of the feather-collared shirt. Law lunged towards him, giving little chance to see his face, and he graciously scooped him into his arms. His shared his warmth in the frigid atmosphere, feeling the flutter of Law's heartbeat against his own. The cold restricted his sense of smell, but he was sure his hair smelled clean. He had a fresh air about him, and when he peaked down to eye the human limpet attached to him he spotted a lack of circle beneath his eyes. Law's body felt sturdy against him, though it was still as slender and flexible as before. He could tell he'd been eating well, even if his mind was struggling to comprehend the other's presence.

"You really came to meet me in the New World..."
He hand't meant to speak aloud, voicing the fear that had kept him up on even the calmest of nights. Law grinned against his neck, and gooseflesh broke out along Kidd's forearms.

"Ye of little faith."

After seven months of infrequent phone calls and hundreds of miles of separation, burying his face into Kidd's neck felt like coming home. His skin was coated in a thin layer of sweat and oil grease, explaining the permanent scent of his coat.

It seemed he'd replaced it, the new coat less form-fitting and more fluffy. His fingers disappeared into the fur when he shifted to grip Kidd's arms. Kidd's laugh shook his chest and ghosted over his cheek, and Law was seized with the urge to kiss him. He thought better of it. This man was so perfect, so kind, so gentle to him, and yet he wanted nothing in return. It baffled him, dredged up memories of a man who claimed the same till the very end.

But Kidd wasn't Cora-san.

"Shit, Law. You're eyes got better! Look at that! You did it!"

His unabashedly glorious grin was contagious, and tears sprung to Law's eyes at the praise. Admiration blossomed in his heart and his skin flushed in embarrassment. He knew the other would bring up the absence of bruises beneath his eyes, everyone seemed to be doing so lately. It had been terribly difficult to maintain a sleep schedule, and many nights had to be spent in Penguin's top bunk. When the nightmares came knocking Bepo administered a measured amount of sleeping tablets. He took a higher dose of antidepressants and the bedroom curtains were removed. He was served only foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as tuna and salmon, as well as spinach and avocados that contained high levels of folic acid. He created an exercise schedule, using their onboard gym when no one was around. He finally went back to doing more than just cardio with bouts of 'strength training' on the field. He replenished his stores of testosterone, and he and penguin dosed together before they shacked up to read medical journals together. Shachi lent
him fantasy books to read when he felt despondent, and when that didn't work he helped in the kitchen. Distracting himself from his negative thoughts became the most effective way to avoid wallowing in tragedy, and he took up a new hobby of cooking. It'd never been a skill he'd bother to learn, but now that he realized his infatuation with one redheaded moron he'd become obsessed with finding ways to make him happy.

Despite having cut all contact with the man for the past seven months to get his thoughts, feelings, and issues in order, he continued to go over their past conversations in his mind whenever he could. He learned to cook cabbage rolls, Kidd's favorite, as well as many simple meals he could make whenever he felt peckish. He went about learning household life skills he'd never gotten around to learning, despite having to raise himself in Flevance. When he wanted food he could easily slip out to the market and buy a pre-made meal, and if the house looked a little messy he could call a maid and pay her to stay quiet. He'd been born a rich medical prodigy who doubled as a medical oddity.

"You've gained a lot a muscle, Kidd-ya."

Law stepped back and forced himself to uncurl his fingers from the man's considerable biceps. His mouth watered at the sight, the man's open vest not distracting from the delectable sight of washboard abs. He'd changed his wardrobe considerably, a belted war kilt replacing his blue scarf and his golden gauntlets nowhere to be seen. Law frowned but held his tongue, he could inquire about it another time.

"You've changed as well, your hat looks twice as stupid as before."

He unconsciously tugged down the thick bill of his hat as he smirked, "And yet your hideous pants remain the same."

"Touche."
Law broke out into a broad grin, bouncing on the balls of his feet as nervous energy rushed through him. Kidd laughed and Law couldn't restrain him, leaping into those welcoming arms and locking his arms and legs around the man's thick stature in an eager bear hug.

Their crews intermingled with a silent understanding, and Kidd was understandably bewildered at the nonchalance between them.

"It was obvious like six weeks into your alliance." Answered Wire, towering over a gaggle of smitten Heart Pirates while Heat fumed from the sidelines as his boyfriend was swarmed.

Kidd huffed, turning away from the mixture of boiler suits and shredded leather. He had more important things to do than despair at his lack of tact.

Like snuggle next to Law with a cup of cocoa.

His bedroom isolated the pair from the frosty island breeze, the wood insulating the warmth Kidd exuded like a living furnace. Despite the heated atmosphere, Law was chilled from his seat next to him on the couch. Kidd's coat discarded, leaving the bare flesh of his upper arm to ghost along the man's sleeved shoulder. He'd missed Law's incapability to produce heat, the slender lengths of his fingers, his swarthy skin tone. He entertained himself with blowing at the collection of feathers bunched at Law's collar, watching them bounce and sway under his breath. It was only when he noticed the fierce gooseflesh spreading across Law's bare neck did he cease, cheeks blooming with embarrassment.
"So uh, what have you been doing for so long? You just arrived last month yeah? Half a year loitering in Paradise, hah?" Kidd coughed into his mug, shifting to conceal his growing erection. He couldn't help being attracted to Law, both emotionally and physically. While he was fine with the former, the latter riddled him with guilt.

After Killer's sad confession, the two of them weighed in on their state of romantic affairs. He learned the tell-tale signs of being in love, from the rapid increase in heart rate to the sudden awareness of minuscule quirks. Like the way Law had slipped a hand between his thighs and angled his body away from him in a display of what Kidd had come to recognize as nervousness.

"...I needed to become a Shichibukai..."

The tension swiftly rose between them and Law took a poignant sip before continuing.

"This way I can access territories off-limits to both pirates and marines. It took a crate of a hundred pirate hearts to do it, too. I'm surprised you didn't hear this, it should be in all the papers."

"Just because I saw it in the paper doesn't mean it holds the same weight as you actually saying it."

"..."

"..."
"I'm sorry. Did I offend you?"

"Pfft. Like you'd offend me by taking advantage of a broken system. Just because I think Shichibukais are a bunch of washed up pirates who rolled over for the government doesn't mean I don't understand why you did it."

"...

"Fuck, now I'm sorry. Didn't mean it like that."

"No, you're right. But at least I can be a dog of a different kind."

"Law, don't..."

"Nevermind, Kidd-ya. It's not my ideal situation. I've already had two meetings where I had to stand next to Him and swore my allegiance to the bastards who shot my family."

Kidd's spine snapped up straight, and he quickly set his mug onto the floor before he shattered it in the sudden surge of anger flooding through him. When he heard the rumors of Law's descent into the clutches of the World Government, he'd thought nothing of it. When the papers started piling up in front his door, his worried crew mates hovering around him like starving puppies, he'd swallowed it with a grain of salt. Law had sent his snail by way of carrier gull, and he had no way of verifying the 'truth'. He'd hoped it was a lie, because one Donquixote Doflamingo stood among the Shichibukai, and he couldn't bear to think of Law even being on the same island with the monster.
But Law's plan was to kill him, wasn't it? To get revenge and somehow reclaim a part of himself in the process? Kidd had no doubt that Law wanted to kill Doflamingo with his bare hands. How he was to go about that goal? Kidd didn't want to know, he worried enough without the details to back up his hysteria.

He swallowed, "Was it difficult navigating through Fishman Island? I heard there's a mess going on there right now."

Law flinched, and Kidd's blood chilled.

"I went through Mariejois, actually."

His voice was quiet, barely a whisper.

He bent forward so he curled over his mug, the protective display familiar.

"Doffy apparently pulled some strings after the last meeting, it's always on Mariejois, did you know? Gave me special clearance...saw him watching us pass through the gates."

Kidd stood, unable to keep still any longer. Kneeling before the shivering man, he gently pried the mug from clammy fingers and cupped the back of his head to guide it to rest on his chest.
"You're okay now, Law. You're not there anymore. It's just you and me here, yeah? He can't see you here."

He felt tears wetting his skin, and Law let out an ugly sob before he slipped bonelessly from the couch and into Kidd's lap. Arms wound tightly around Kidd's neck, cradling his face into the crook of his shoulder. He shushed him, rocking back and forth, rubbing soothing circles into his back. With the couch providing a protective wall at his back, Law was secured safely in a world smelling of peppermint cocoa and gasoline.

"We couldn't dive," Law whimpered, "It was too shallow. And I made everyone leave the navigation room and took us through myself. I didn't want them to see him. Bepo wouldn't take us through, but it would save us time so I did it anyway. When I look through the periscope he grinned at me. He knew, of course he fucking knew..."

He took a shuddering breath, and Kidd didn't know who took it first.

"I had to stand next to him in the Shichibukai meeting...he smelled like lavender...he hasn't changed at all...I almost...I-I..."

He broke off, whimpering wordlessly into Kidd's collarbone. All he could was hold him as he wept, squeezing him tightly but never too much, always providing enough slack for Law to escape.

Law stayed put.
Kidd rubbed the bedsheets between his fingers and needlessly wondered if they were soft enough. He could hear the squeaks of the faucet as turned off the shower, and Kidd swallowed thickly and kept his hands above the sheets. The biggest problem with being attracted to Trafalgar Law was being *attracted* to Trafalgar Law. He'd never rubbed one out, of course, but he'd woken up enough time with damp trousers and sweaty skin to feel measurably guilty. On some level he felt he could understand Law's emotions, the tiniest bit, when it came to biology overriding one's mind.

"I don't mind sharing a bed with you."

*Kidd hovered at the door, one hand on the knob, shock easily discernible on his face.*

"Pardon?"

*Law laughed with a grin full of white teeth, and Kidd felt himself fall a little more in love.*

"It's fine. I trust you. Besides, it's not like I couldn't take you apart with this."

*His room flickered dangerously at his fingertips, and his smile was lopsided.*

"My crew would start rumors if I came back tonight."

"Wouldn't they start more if you came back in the morning?"
Law's smile faded, and Kidd bit his tongue.

"I suppose. But they'll talk either way, really. I didn't get this far by being sensitive to the comments of others."

He disappeared into the bathroom, the click of the lock striking a finality into their conversation.

He was sure Law would play it off like nothing had happened. He knew he would. They'd been away from each other for too long to mess it up now.

Kidd wore his usually sleepwear, knowing Law would be able to tell if he dressed too conservatively. It was already going to being incredibly awkward, he didn't need Law to get pissed at him to boot. This didn't stop him from making a pillow wall between them to ameliorate Law's well-founded anxieties as well as his own. He was sure he'd get a stiiffy in the night, he might even have a wet dream. He shuddered to think of Law's reaction, and wore two pairs of briefs under his sweat pants for good measure.

"You have a very nice bathroom, Kidd-ya. I think I forgot to compliment your taste the last time I visited."

The sight of Law rubbing his hair with a damp towel, bare chested and clad in a pair of Killer's sweatpants sent sweet jolts of arousal down his navel. He praised the thickness of his comforter.

"Thanks, took a while to design but was easier to construct than I thought."
"Oh, you made it yourself?"

"My crew and I, we built the ship together."

"Well I can certainly see your touches on the outside. Do you actively control those panels on the sides?"

"No, that would be too draining. But it'd be cool if my powers worked that way. They kind of do, with some things. I can sense metal without thinking about it, but if I try to control anything for too long it becomes too much."

"I understand. My own are similar, but I believe I have less stamina when using them. It was easy to blackout during a surgery before I timed my abilities."

"Oh, when was that? I mean, how long have you been a fruit user?"

He cursed his frail memory, Law's long-winded confession springing to mind as soon as he closed his mouth.

"I was thirteen, and you?"
"Um, I don't know, actually. I was really young so I don't remember. I don't know how it feels to not be in tune with metal."

"That's very interesting. Did you never go swimming in the ocean? Or were you land-locked?"

"Land-locked. Plus it was too arid to find a river-fed lake, either."

"Hmm, scoot over. Oh, a pillow wall. How resourceful."

Law's wry smirk as he climbed into bed only worsened his erection. He wondered if Law could tell, if he could somehow smell his arousal, if it was a Lorelei thing. He immediately hated himself.

Law slipped under the covers and burrowed himself into the sheets until his nose was covered. Curled up facing him, Law looked like a content cat. He sighed and opened his eyes, long lashes curling faint shadows across high cheek bones. Kidd's back rested against the headboard, but seeing Law's comfortable form let him ease into the bed beside him.

Law smiled, enhancing his feline features, "It's like a slumber party, Eustass-ya. I've never had a slumber party."

"I think I had one once. It was in a tulip field, and it rained on us. I think it was acid-rain."

"Sounds unpleasant."
"Not really, Oresmith was full of pollutants already. It was a miracle a flowerbed could grow outside of town."

"Oresmith?"

He didn't like the recognition in Law's voice, and his arousal melted into cold fear.

"If memory serves me right, that place was decimated over a decade ago. Was that your doing, perhaps?"

His golden eyes already held the answer, but Kidd still needed to put the nail in the coffin himself.

"Yes, I flattened that town."

"May I ask why?"

"No."

"Fair enough."
He shut his eyes again, a hand winding around one of the plush pillow of the barrier and pulling it to his chest. Seeing Law hugging his pillow was doing things to him, and he seared the image into his brain with every ounce of his concentration. With his cheek squished against a pillow and another clutched in dark arms was too cute, his eyes closed and mouth quirked into the faintest smile.

His foul mood drifted at the sight, and he waved a hand to lower the snuffs. The room bathed in darkness, and Kidd rolled onto his back, fingers interlacing below his sternum. He preferred to sleep this way, without a pillow to cushion his head and the covers raised exactly three inches below his hands. The covers twisted up and over the barrier to form Law's little cave, and he smiled at the mental image. He could hear the soft sounds of his breathing, and they soothed him as much as they aroused him.

Soon his erection faded with his consciousness, lulled to sleep by the sounds of familiar company.

When Kidd opened his eyes to darkness, he wasn't sure what had woken him.

It wasn't until he felt sharp movement beside him did he realize the cause. He sat up quickly, his eyes adjusting slowly to the darkness, and he began to see Law's shaking outline. He looked like he might be awake, sitting up in bed like Kidd, but he was babbling under his breath. Frantic muttering with fluctuating intonations.

And then Law began to scream.
"DON'T!" He cried, clutching his hair and shaking his head back and forth, tears scattering onto Kidd's cheek. Thrashing violently as if to dislodge an attacker.

"Law!"

He was afraid to touch him like this, afraid to fuel the nightmare.

"NO! DON'T TOUCH ME!" His voice sounded small and high-pitched, like a child's. Kidd's stomach tied itself in knots.

"NO! STOP! DOFFY, PLEASE! DON'T TOUCH ME! I DON'T LIKE THIS!"

It had never been concretely laid out for him. Always thinly veiled under evasive language, insinuations Kidd could conveniently ignore. Even after explaining his strange desperation to be by the man's side, his belief that he was the man's 'dog', that Donquixote was his 'master'. He wanted to think that maybe he'd just kept Law like a creepy trophy, maybe 'saving' him for later, he never wanted to think of 'what usefulness he could have provided' at ten years old. It was forbidden territory of his mind, a dark abyss of 'what ifs' and terrifying spirals of imagination.

It was now undeniable that the man had raped him as a child.

He called him 'Doffy'. The pet-name hadn't ever sat well with him. It revealed an intimacy with his rapist that terrified him. Stockholm Syndrome, traumatic bonding, the fact was that Law had been raised by a man who raped him. Who treated him like an object. Who made him to be an object.
He reached out against his better judgement and Law recoiled, squealing. Scrambling back too far, he tumbled off the bed with an ugly clatter. Kidd swore and quickly lit a candle and rushed to Law's side.

Pressed between the bed and the wall, Law huddled in the corner of the small gap, hands gripping his hair like a lifeline.

"I don't like it..."

His voice was softer now, still small and child-like. He started to sob, curling his toes as he pressed further into the corner, wrapping his arms around himself and burying his face in his knees.

"It hurts...it hurts...it hurts..."

Tears blurred Kidd's eyes.

"Oh, Law, please don't cry, it's okay. You're safe."

He swallowed, realizing the man couldn't hear him over his delusions.

"Law?"
He tried again, louder.

"Law do you know where you are?"

Law began to whine in response, a keening noise as he rocked in the corner. Kidd inched closer, squeezing his bulk into the shadowed gap. He left the candle behind him, tendrils of shadows lapping at Law's bare feet.

"LAW!" He barked, and the other stilled. He spoke again, softer and less threatening.

"Law did I ever tell you my mother had the prettiest singing voice? She used to sing me this song whenever I was scared or upset. It's a really pretty lullaby*, I think you'll like it."

"Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night

Sailed off in a wooden shoe —

Sailed on a river of crystal light,

Into a sea of dew.

"Where are you going, and what do you wish?"
The old moon asked the three.

"We have come to fish for the herring fish

That live in this beautiful sea;

Nets of silver and gold have we!"

Said Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.

The old moon laughed and sang a song,

As they rocked in the wooden shoe,

And the wind that sped them all night long

Ruffled the waves of dew.

The little stars were the herring fish

That lived in that beautiful sea —

"Now cast your nets wherever you wish —
Never afraid are we;  

So cried the stars to the fishermen three:  

Wynken, Blynken, and Nod."

Throughout the hushed song Law slowly unfurled, and now stared at Kidd with glassy eyes silently draining tears. Law's face blank and disconcerting, Kidd tapered off, only to have him let out a pitiful whimper.

"Finish it..."

Kidd swallowed his emotions, knowing the young voice would haunt him forever.

"All night long their nets they threw  

To the stars in the twinkling foam —

Then down from the skies came the wooden shoe,  

Bringing the fishermen home;
'Twas all so pretty a sail it seemed as if it could not be,

And some folks thought 'twas a dream they'd dreamed

Of sailing that beautiful sea —

But I shall name you the fishermen three:

Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.

Wynken and Blynken are two little eyes,

And Nod is a little head,

And the wooden shoe that sailed the skies

Is a wee one's trundle-bed.

So shut your eyes while mother sings

Of wonderful sights that be,

And you shall see the beautiful things
As you rock in the misty sea,

Where the old shoe rocked the fishermen three: Wynken, Blynken, and Nod."

"...

"...

"Thank you...

"You're welcome."

Chapter End Notes

* "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod" is a popular poem for children written by American writer and poet Eugene Field and published on March 9, 1889. The original title was Dutch Lullaby. The poem is a fantasy bed-time story about three children sailing and fishing amongst the stars from a boat which is a wooden shoe. The little fishermen symbolize a sleepy child's blinking eyes and nodding head. (Taken from Wikipedia) (My grandma used to read me the story at bedtime when I was little)
"315 million Beli Bounty..."

The words echoed behind him, startling Kidd considerably. He had separated from his crew as they explored the vast island country of Borazu. The town he walked in was presumably deserted, the copper tiles of the country homes cracked by invading flora. A heavy mist coated the ground, fog rolling in from the mountains which loomed above the evergreen village. Overgrown grass and bushels of yellow flowers graced his path, dew slicking his steps.

Out in the countryside, it was unlikely there would be anyone to cross his path, let alone someone who knew of him. He took a breath and glanced over his shoulder with a grunt of acknowledgement, eyes scanning the foggy outline of the buildings on either side but spotting nothing. The path behind him was blanketed in white fog which grew thicker by the hour and lowered his visibility to near zero.

"Eustass 'Captain' Kidd, that's you, isn't it?"

The voice was familiar, a deep mocking sound that crept through his ears and snaked through his memories.
"You've taken quite a liking to my pet..."

Realization washed over him like a cold shower, and he turned stiffly, wide eyes peering unseeing into the mist. His breathing picked up with his heart rate, his pupils dilating as his mind flooded with the memory of Law screaming into the darkness.

"He's quite an unfaithful dog, wouldn't you agree?"

From the east this time, and Kidd let his head be jerked in that direction, still unable to truly comprehend who stalked him. This was Law's 'Master', his abuser, the man who took apart his sanity and kept half the pieces. Anger welded inside him, boiling his frozen blood, cold sweat dripping down his nape, winding a path between his shoulder blades. Kidd couldn't stop the shaking of his hands, the tensing of his muscles and the craning of his neck as he searched for a glimpse of pink.

"I think he's taken a like to you, too."

The voice breathed against the back of his neck, and he stumbled forward with wild eyes looking back at the towering shadow. Donquixote Doflamingo stood at an imposing ten feet tall, his feathered coat increasing his width by nearly three fold.

Law's monster was only a few feet away, and Kidd was too paralyzed by fear to do anything but stare.
The fury was there, rippling beneath the surface, but his preservation instincts sounded warning bells in his head. This man outclassed him more than an Admiral, and no amount of fancy tricks and brash actions would change that. He would get stronger, but someone this powerful was someone he didn't want to face at this moment.

But he wanted to kill him.

Law's anguished face and solemn tears cemented themselves into his vision, imprinting on his heart and overriding his reason.

If he went down fighting this man for Law's sake, he would have no regrets.

Doflamingo cocked his head and frowned slightly, an utterly terrifying gesture. His gaze concealed by reflected neon shades.

"Am I wrong? You are him, aren't you? Law's little playmate?"

Kidd grit his teeth, jaw straining with the effort. Doflamingo grinned, his wide smile exposing sharp canines.

"Nice to meet you, Eustass Kidd."
Law got the call as he came out of surgery.

One of his crewmates had tumbled off a ledge and shattered his legs, and the sudden onset of blood clots in both thighs had called for his intervention. He wiped the sweat off his brow and snapped his bloodied gloves into the waste bin as he left the operating theater. The day had been phenomenally busy, running into two volatile pirate crews who had proved their mettle in battle. He'd managed to kill the first captain with a swipe of his sword, but the second had proved resilient and escaped his grasp. They'd not come through unscathed, and his previous surgery was the last of many. Late in the afternoon, slick with perspiration and his eyes crossed with effort, he was in desperate need of a long nap.

His ears were ringing, but he was still able to hear the faint tone of a den den mushi. It wasn't Kidd's, the returned snail was sleeping soundly on his bedside table on the other end of the submarine.

"Yes, this is Penguin."

Law grunted and made to exit down the hall with the intent to take a scalding shower.

"HE'S WHAT?!"

Law jumped in surprise, his nodachi knocking from his arms and clattering against the wall. When he turned to Penguin he found the other's face laced with panic.

"Killer where are you?! We can circumvent the next warm current and turn back!"
For Penguin, who was normally so secretive about his tryst with the 'enemy's' first mate, to openly scream his lover's name in the company of others, something must be gravely wrong. Law ignored the questioning looks and murmurs of the nurses and crossed the room in long strides. His mind didn't want to understand the situation, but in his heart he knew who he was.

Penguin hung up after a few affirming sounds, and caught Law's eyes. He sucked his lower lip, pocketing the blonde den den mushi with trembling hands.

"Law, it's..."

His insides congealed into a frozen mass, the breath in his lungs leaking into the cold air of the submarine.

"Law, it's Kidd."

Law's vision tunneled on the sight that greeted him in the operating theater. There was more crimson to the man than just his stunning hair, viscous fluid staining the left side of his body. Blood dribbled weakly from the carnage that remained of his left arm. A tourniquet had been secured to prevent an arterial bleed out, but it had been too late. His already pale skin was almost a shade lighter than the white sheets on the cot in the corner. Law stood there, silently staring down at the man he had come to love, only for an eternal moment before he locked his emotions away.
He kept his eyes trained on Kidd, at the way his chest barely rose and fell, blue veins that spidered brightly under paper skin.

He didn't bother to wear gloves, activating his room and quickly attaching Kidd to the necessary monitors. As his heart rate was measured and his breathing evened out under anesthesia, Law went to work on his arm. There was nothing left below the elbow, the bone of his humerus protruding from vibrant flesh. It was a clean cut, surgical precision, but to close the wound he would have to cut back the bone at least two inches to compensate for the jagged shards of his humerus. Smoothing down the bone and sealing off the blood vessels and nerves, Law set to work shaping the muscles so Kidd could have a prosthesis attached if he so desired.

No, he wasn't working on Kidd, this was a stranger.

A stranger.

A stranger.

Law completed the stitching and dressing of the stump with mechanical motions before moving to the congealed mess on the man's neck and face. He wasn't sure if the eye had been damaged in the attack, but as he cleaned the blood and debris from the lacerations with saline solution, he found that this was not the case. Nevertheless, the scarring would be extensive, and there would be signs of atrophy and muscle damage if he didn't work faster. The slices to the man's jugular were deep and bubbling, but miraculously missed any major arteries or respiratory organs.

Once he'd cleaned and patched his injuries, Law stepped back and allowed himself a glimpse at reality. The object of his affections lay on the table, his pallid skin febrile and his eyelashes
fluttering as his body mass struggled to overcome the anesthesia. He swore under his breath and upped the dosage of morphine to keep him pain-free as well as knocked out. As much as he wanted to hear Kidd's voice, his reassurance, his laughter, he desperately craved the silence.

If Kidd woke up he'd have to deal with the fact he'd lost an arm, and Law wasn't able to carry him through that. Consoling wasn't his strong suit, at least in the way that didn't include sex.

He could 'console' someone just fine.

He used his powers to teleport the man onto the cot, and tucked him in with the care and diligence of a fretful mother. Law removed the cracked goggles and smoothed the man's hair with a sad smile.

He settled down on the floor and rested his head on the mattress. Kidd's measured breathing and rosy flush to his cheeks roiled gooseflesh across the back of his neck. He applied a cool compress to Kidd's sweaty forehead, and released a low exhale. Exhaustion was creeping along the edges of his vision, but worry and fear kept him awake. Kidd would sleep enough for the both of them. Yes, Kidd would be fine, but still he intwined his fingers with the limp digits. His palm was rough against his own, his fingers slightly thicker, nails better trimmed and painted a chipping crimson. Law hummed, must've chipped during his fight...he wouldn't let them whittle like this...Tears pricked at the corners of his eyes, and he brought up a hand to stifle his choking sobs. He gripped Kidd's hand tighter, willing him to wake, to tell him what had happened and to promise he'd never leave him.

He almost left me.

Law's chest was a tightening birdcage, his heart flapping wildly against the bars as he hiccuped cries of despair. Kidd had been hurt, maimed, eviscerated, and Law hadn't know. He wouldn't have been there if Kidd had died, if the slices to his jugular were a few centimeters to the right, if the tourniquet on his arm hadn't been applied in time.
He squeezed his eyes shut and slipped his hand from Kidd's, only to have those chilly fingers curl tightly around him. He jolted to his feet, checking Kidd's vitals and staring at the man's face, desperate to see even a glimpse of those beautiful copper eyes. Kidd's face scrunched up in discomfort, and it seemed like ages before he squinted back at Law, grunting in confusion.

"Shh," Law threaded his free hand through crimson strands and cooed at him softly, a part of him hoping he fell back asleep. Instead the man appeared to recognize his voice, and willed himself into consciousness.

Law sighed in amused defeat, only Kidd could force his way out of a medically-induced coma.

"L-Law?"

His voice was weak and small, so unlike the strong man he'd come to know. Law reaffirmed him with a gentle squeeze of his hand.

"Yeah, I'm here Kidd-ya."

Kidd smiled in relief, the creases in his brow smoothing out in a raw display of affection. Law's throat went tight at the innocent sight, and he leaned over and a kiss to a sweaty cheek. He licked the salt off his lips and frowned.

"You fucking scared the living hell out of me."
He lightly flicked the other's nose, a playful smile blooming when the other wrinkled his face in discomfort.

If he could just keep the atmosphere silly, they could stave the weight of the situation for a while longer.

He was equipped to deal with this reality.

"Yeah, well..." Kidd's voice was thick with gravel and blood, and his swallow was audibly painful.

"I don't get into fights like that without getting a little scared myself."

His smile was cheeky but it didn't detract from Law's budding horror. This was their safe ground, their status quo, their strong facade. If Kidd stripped off the mask now, if they reverted to who they truly were, individuals with bloody hearts, then Law wouldn't be able to deal with it. He didn't know how to be empathetic without introducing sex somewhere in the mix, and as selfish as it was, he needed Kidd to be strong for him.

"Y-Yes, um..." Law trailed off and looked at his shirt.

It was covered in Kidd's blood.

"I-I..."
Tears blurred his vision and closed off his airways, and the world suddenly became two sizes too small. His vision was tunneling, his breathing shallow, and in the dim remnants of his mind he was vaguely aware that he was succumbing to a panic attack. They were infrequent, absurdly so, but when they came he couldn't stop them.

"Law!"

His face was pressed into a calloused palm, and he mouthed his sorrow across the rough skin. Kidd's scent pervaded his senses, a comforting musk of metal and sweat. The masculine scent overpowered his panic, and he slowly managed to slow his breathing to match the heartbeat pulsing against his cheek. He sunk to his knees and curled over Kidd's form, his tears kissing trails down the feverish skin. Kidd's sweet cooing filled his ears, and he let himself to lulled into a sense of calm by letting his head drop to Kidd's chest.

His skin smelled of antiseptic, of sweat and blood and something _other_, something sweeter than his cologne and more potent. As he let his ear rest over Kidd's steady heartbeat, the man's remaining hand holding his head in a comforting grip, he mulled the scent over his tongue and olfactory nerves. It was on the tip of awareness, it was so familiar, and Law let his eyes wander over the bandages that spanned the man's upper chest and neck, covering the deep paper-thin slices that had cleaved through his flesh like sinking a knife into tofu.

_This is lavender..._

All at once his blood turned to slush, his body's temperature plummeting along with his breathing. His heart beat stuttered for a moment, black spots darting across his vision and his grip on Kidd's hand creaked with the effort. He lifted his head slowly and stared unseeing into Kidd's eyes.

"You...who did you fight?"
Kidd swallowed at Law's expression, his eyes wide and face vacant, his voice monotone. *He knows...* There was nothing he could say to console the other, nothing to dispel his well-founded fears. It would be better if he just came out and said it, so he did.

"Doflamingo."

There was no use in sugarcoating his words, but by Law's draining pallor it was clear he should have been more delicate. But he was still groggy, his body aching and burning in ways and places he didn't know existed. His left arm in particular was blazing hot, his fingers feeling as if they'd been snapped and flayed like crab legs. He didn't want to look at the damage, at the wreck his arm must be. His left eye was dark, covered in gauze, but he couldn't worry about it when Law was near vibrating with how hard he shook. The palm on his chest was clammy, and when Law peeled it away he left an imprint of sweat.

"No..." Law's whisper utterly broke his heart, the single syllable voiced with so much pain he couldn't bear it. He would never be able to fully comprehend the sheer volume of Law's despair, but looking into his eyes he was given a good taste. The center of his eyes blown wide and dark, leaving but a thin ring of gold.

"La-"

"No no no no no no-" Law broke off into a depreciating mantra, sliding off the bed and stumbling into the operating theater on stiff legs. Kidd struggled to lift his head or arms, but found himself stunned by the dizziness that accompanied the surge in blood pressure.
Law's hands shook as he patted the bloodied table awkwardly and without purpose, head rolling back and forth as he continued to chant. He skirted into the adjoining bathroom, swinging the steel door haphazardly behind him, all while Kidd fumbled for control over his muscles. He managed to wedge his right hand under him and used his legs to curl himself into a sitting position. The simple act flared agony along his left side, his temples pulsing and eyes bulging under the strain of his bulk. His abdominals felt like jelly, and it took him far too much time to kick his legs over the side of the bed. He took a moment to catch his breath, blinking his eye against the heat waves of his vision. Kidd shook his head, only worsening his headache, and flexed his right hand weakly in his lap. His left arm was still burning, the fingers throbbing violently, but he felt his fingers wiggle after some effort. He looked at his hand, and froze.

He didn't have a hand.

With clammy, trembling, fingers he ghosted over the bandaged stump of his left arm. He gulped and found he couldn't, his Adam's apple bobbing uselessly in his throat.

His head shot up at the sudden clattering behind the bathroom door. Glass tinkled and the distinct sound of pill bottles hitting the floor met his hears. He pushed his fear and loathing aside in favor of pushing himself off the bed. His legs seemed to be the only part of his body that wasn't on fire, although his shin splints were coming back in full force. He crossed the operating theater in single-minded focus, his body lurching to the side when his balance was thrown off by his missing arm.

"Law! Open the door!"

Dread was coiling in his shredded throat as the clattering increased, as if Law was having a seizure. He couldn't hear the other's voice, and the doorknob slipped beneath sweaty palms. When he finally got the door open, he was greeted with a sight from his nightmares.

Law was sitting on the floor, chugging a bottle of pills like it was candy. Empty bottles and broken mirror shards surrounded him, lacerations slowly closing on his forearm, tears spilling from his
mouth as ground tablets frothed at the corners of his mouth. Law locked eyes with him and broke
down further, dropping the half-empty bottle and swallowing the congealed white mass. Kidd
knocked him down with his body, unable to lower himself gracefully to the floor. Law's head hit
the tile floor with an ominous crack, and he wheezed and convulsed beneath Kidd's weight.

"Shit, shit, shit-!" Kidd croaked, eyes glazing with unshed tears and throat closing sporadically as
he watched begin to seize beneath him.

"H-HELP!"

His voice was broken and lacked the booming ring it would have normally possessed. He recalled
Law claiming the rooms of his submarine were sound proof.

"FUCK!"

He propped Law under the sink with a single hand, biting his knuckle and drawing blood when he
saw that the man was breathing but uncurious. Whether or not he had given him a concussion was
a point of contention, and the slits to his wrists dribbled blood onto the dirty bathroom floor. They
would heal, Law's body might be made in a way that combat the concussion, so the fact he had just
downed almost six bottles of unmarked pills and was now foaming at the mouth and convulsing
was the primary issue.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God-Law ah-"

He couldn't leave him to go find help, not like this, and his body was barely responding to him
anyway. He swallowed his tears and grit his teeth, looping his arm around Law and pulling him to
his body, scooting so he pressed against his back.
"Okay Law, you gotta puke. You can't fucking die on me, you can't!"

*I can't lose anymore loved ones.*

Sweat beaded on his forehead as he crawled them over to the toilet, and was met with a wave of nausea from the exertion of lifting the toilet seat. Balling his fist and placing it just beneath the man's sternum and began the Heimlich maneuver. *Technically this is supposed to force the lungs to contract so he can breath, but maybe it'll upset his stomach and make his throw up.* He prayed to unseen forces that Law would wake up, and sure enough the man suddenly lurch forward and vomited loudly into the porcelain bowl. Law's back rippled with the effort, the muscles beneath Kidd's palm testing and contracting as his dispelled the toxins from his body. Sure that Law would be able to grip the bowl without toppling forward, Kidd hauled himself to his feet by the edge of the bathtub.

His blood pressure plummeted and black splotches doted his vision, but he blinked the dizziness away. He need to find help, then he could collapse. He tottered out of the operating theater and into the hallway, and yelled hoarsely for help while he leaned on the door. As soon as he spotted a familiar cassette-hatted figure rushing towards him, he let himself slide to the floor. Pressing his forehead against the cold steel of the threshold, he let himself exhale into oblivion.

Chapter End Notes

I want to address some concerns about the number of chapters of this fic according to my previous promise of over a hundred chapters. Due to my college life ending and moving on to graduate school, I am unable to continue writing for as long as I wanted. Therefore I condensed it in half so it ends at 50 chapters. This works better because I exclude story arcs of other characters such as the Straw Hat crew and there on. I wanted this story to focus on the relationship between Trafalgar and Eustass, and so if I had gone with my original plan it would be watered down and would lack the impact I wanted to make. In order to make it up to you all, I will later on include in a note on the final chapter about what it was originally going to be like.
Law drew the brush down Kidd's nail, spreading the crimson lacquer across the surface. He hummed a nameless song to himself, a content smile gracing his face and his eyes half mast. He hadn't felt so at peace in a long while, and reveled in the comfortable silence between them. The only sounds permeating the quiet are the faint sounds of the nail brush and their steady breathing. Kidd's bedroom was pleasantly warm, with a gentle breeze wafting under the door and tickling his bare feet.

Kidd sat on the floor with his legs spread out and tucked under Law's, his own bare feet resting under Law's elbow. His tank top gave the other a full view of the bandaged stump of his left arm, and Law pointedly ignored it. Thankfully Kidd was on enough painkiller and had spent several days on bedrest that a little exertion wouldn't cause him much discomfort. His hair had grown during his convalescence, so he pulled it back in a short ponytail for the meantime. Law thought he looked quite fetching with all the bare skin and exposed face, but kept these observations to himself. He still had his pride as a man, after all.

He settled for cuddling next to the man whenever the opportunity aroused, and when that wasn't an option, he made sure their bodies were touching as much as possible. Even now the contact of their knees locked together set a fire in his groin that would never truly die down, the parting of his legs calming him as much as it aroused him. Even so, he was in a peaceful state of mind, drawing the clear top coat over the fast-drying polish he had specially ordered for Kidd. He felt safe in the proximity of this man, owned by him, loved by him. It was a distinctly alien feeling, so unlike how he felt when in His presence, yet analogous to the instincts coursing through him. He felt like this man was his Master, that he would eagerly die in his stead, that he would lay down his pride to spare his. Yet he remained in control of his mental faculties, and was still able to deny himself the pleasure he sought. Eustass Kidd was a good man, he knew this well, and wouldn't take kindly to his whorish desires.
"Thanks for doing this, looks like this'll be the norm from here on out."

Kidd smiled fondly at him, his eyes soft and glistening the low light of the candles. Law blushed to his ears and averted his eyes, biting his lips like a nervous virgin. He felt raw before this man, like a lamb begging to be butchered, and it was delightful to be in the presence of this red-blooded male who meant him no harm.

"It's nothing. But it would have been fun to see you try and attempt this on your own."

"With what? My toes? I'm not flexible, Law."

"With all that muscle, how could you?"

"You're well-built and still flexible as hell."

"Yes, well, I've got biology on my side."

"La-"

"Nevermind, was that the last of it?"
He peered over his thigh to peek at Kidd's painted toes and smirked, swatting the bare sole of his foot with his open palm. Kidd yelped and scooted back, and Law giggled at his pout.

"I've been meaning to ask you, what's in that trunk?"

He gestured at the corner of a steel chest of moderate size squatting beneath the bed frame amongst piles of books and looseleaf paper. Blood rushed from Kidd's face in way that reminded him too much of that day on his operating table, and he quickly reached out to squeeze the man's calf, drawing his attention.

"It's alright. You don't need to answer."

Kidd's swallow was audible, but he still managed a weak smile.

"Actually, I want to show you what's inside."

Kidd ran his fingers reverently along the chest's contents, skimming dried letters and squares of yellowed lace. His mother's belongings were few and of inconsequential monetary value, and yet they were his prized possessions. The majority of the trunk's visible contents were letters he'd never read, in envelopes never opened. The return addresses were deliberately smudged away by his mother, the edges of the envelopes bent and twisted as if she had wrung them in her hands. Perhaps they were from someone with whom she had an affair, thus needing to remove the addresses for propriety's sake. Maybe they were from a relative she both loved and despised, and she scratched their name away in a fit of rage. Kidd would never know, and he never planned on knowing. They would remained sealed until the day he died.
The rest of the trunk was composed of his mother's handkerchiefs. There are four in total, each one a slightly darker eggshell color than the last. The initials \textit{CE} were embroidered in the same light blue, and he tumbled the letters lovingly. There used to be clothes crammed with all the rest, with the panicked haste of a child who was being kicked out of house and home on the pretense of being an orphan. It was all he could bring with him, just a few dresses, skirts, and faded blouses he managed to pack into the medium-sized case, before he was shoved out the door by the finicky landlord. All the jewelry and makeup and literally anything else was likely destroyed or sold. The only other object he managed to nick off her vanity was her tube of lipstick. Thankfully all of his own belongings were forever safe in his trash-heap of a shelter, but his mother's existence was utterly erased with a simple eviction notice.

Now the clothes were neatly pressed and arranged in his wardrobe, safe from prying eyes. The moth balls lining the bottom of the closet were more to protect his mother's clothing than his own, and he dared not fiddle with the fabrics lest they somehow fall to ruin in his hands.

"This belonged to my mother." Kidd said reverently, taking out a handkerchief and handing it gingerly to the older male. Law took it with surgeon's hands, balancing it on his fingertips like a delicate spiderweb, marveling at it's intricacy.

"\textit{CE}', her name, I presume?"

"Yeah, Catalina Eustass."

"...It's a very nice name, Kidd-ya."

Kidd nodded and Law returned the napkin which he placed back into the trunk and locked it shut.
"I wear her lipstick."

It was a blunt statement, but heartfelt nonetheless, and he prayed Law caught the meaning behind it. Law didn't remotely look surprised, his face remaining open and kind.

Before he realized it, he had returned with the bronze capsule in hand, sitting before Law with no real direction.

"Um, I might as well practice, right?" He grinned sheepishly, tucking his feet to sit cross-legged.

He assumed he brought it out for the same reason he'd dragged out his mother's chest, in order to vent his torturous memories. While Law had divulged his past and hopefully gained some form of consolation though his kindness, and Kidd had certainly become calmer for his company, Kidd had yet to let loose in the same manner. He yearned to reveal the night he first met his father, the same meeting in which he witnessed his mother's death and desecration.

In which he committed his first brutalization of another human being.

He wanted to tell Law of his mother's gentle temperament and infinite patience, of how she encouraged him to take up engineering and entertained his idea of one day rescuing them from their polluted town. He wanted to regale the other with stories of his adventures with Killer, of their fated meeting and how he'd nearly dissolved their friendship with a single lit match. Of his momentary loss of sanity and the despondent years of his adolescence. Of the nights he'd huddle in his metal fortress and cry himself to sleep, and of the days he and Killer educate themselves in order to better their lives. Of the odd jobs they took to sustain themselves, of Killer's robberies and assassinations and his own blacksmithing and sharp shooting. Of the grueling hours he trained his powers, his environment rife with magnetic materials.

Of the day he finally brought the wretched town to the brickwork, slaughtering an entire populace festering with malice and blackened hearts. The day he and Killer left the ground zero and took off to gather a crew, their wings aching to spread over the high seas.
Instead, he used his teeth to pry off the cap and spat it into his lap.

"Here, let me twist it." Law muttered, gently turning the tube until the bright vermillion peaked over the plastic base, exposing itself to the warm air. For some reason his mind wandered to phallic imagery, and gooseflesh broke across his forearm and calves. Law's fingers were incredibly slender, deftly spinning the lipstick tube with quick swipes of his thumb. His frigid skin brushed along Kidd's palm, and it burned him.

"There we go," Law pat his head condescendingly, his lips stretched into a smirk, and at the sight of humor in his eyes Kidd couldn't help but feel ashamed. The tent his pants kindly went ignored, but he knew Law was aware of it. His physical attraction to Law was palpable between them. He sometimes wondered if his lust for him scared Law, if being with him caused him distress. It would kill him if the answer was yes. The last thing he wanted to be was the embodiment of Law's abuse.

"Try putting it on me, first." He supplied, "That way you can see how it would look if you applied it in a mirror."

"That makes no sense, it's still me who's gonna wear it."

"Maybe I just wanna try your lipstick, ever think about that?"

Warmth filled his cheeks as he stared incredulously at Law's pouting lips. Realization dawned on him at the sight of the other's flushed cheeks. Oh, it'd be an indirect kiss, wouldn't it...
He guided the lipstick across Law's lips, spreading a wash of crimson along the plump skin. Law's eyes fell half-mast, and Kidd's heart leapt into his throat. Law was too sensual of a person, it was hardly fair. Even if he wasn't doing it on purpose, which Kidd sincerely doubted, his eyes could drag a man to a blissful death. His hand shook as his arousal grew, the tent in his pants now painfully obvious. The trembling caused his hand to skid off Law's lips and smear a sharp line across his cheek.

_Drool and blood dripped languidly out of his mother mouth, ruby red lipstick smeared around her bruised lips like a spreading rash._

His twitching fingers dropped the lipstick, his eyes glazing as he disassociated into the violent past.

_Her front teeth were knocked in, hanging down her throat by thin cords of nerves attached at the empty sockets. Her nose looked like it had been sheered off, until he realized it had been flattened to her face by a blunt blow. Blood crusted her cheeks and mouth, glistening in the yellow light._

"How are you going to do this to yourself if you can't even keep a steady hand on someone else?" Law snorted, rolling his eyes.

_Her eyes were rolled into the back of her skull, her sclera flecked with blood. Her shirt was missing, chest bare and covered in gouges from long nails desperately searching for air._

_Her chest wasn't moving._

"Kidd-ya? What's wrong - you're shaking Kidd-ya - what's wrong?"
Her arms were limp, one hanging off the side of the bed, her own flesh gathered under her nails. Her breasts looked like someone had tried to bite them off, with teeth marks littered about swollen nipples. The purple skirt was gathered about her waist, exposing bruises, bite marks, and faded scars. Her underwear was hanging off a foot twisted the wrong way. From where Kidd was standing he could clearly see how the man's penis was buried inside his mother, semen smeared across bed sheets that had been so carefully spared from such abuse.

"Kidd-ya! Snap out of it! Ah-! Killer-ya! Killer-ya help! Killer-ya -!"

The man straddling her was young, with a musculature that showed beneath leather clothes. Large hands were still wrapped around his mother's throat, lightly shaking with the effort. He was a man Kidd had never seen before, with dark skin and shaggy blonde hair. Finally the stranger acknowledged Kidd's entrance, and craned his neck to look at him. His hands didn't move from his mother's crushed throat.

The music box clattered from Kidd's numb fingers, the loud noise drowned out by the roaring in his ears.

"Dammit, Kidd, snap out of it!"

They had the same eyes.

Killer's stinging slap across his cheek yanked him from the past, and he was keenly aware of his ears ringing in the aftermath. His vision adjusting to the present, he saw Law's pallid face and lips rubbed raw. His eyes were glistening and his mouth was flushed, and Kidd thought he looked like an angel. Killer slapped him again and his head jerked to the side roughly, whiplash crescendoing pain along the muscles of his neck. He hissed in pain and rubbed the screaming tendons, glaring at Killer.
"I was fine asshole, you didn't need to do it again."

"Well you were saying stupid shit and I don't need to hear you guys flirting with each other."

Killer put a hand on his shoulder and gave a reassuring squeeze.

"You alright?"

Kidd looked away and nodded, sweat trickling down his back. He tasted bile on the back of his tongue and swallowed his feelings. *Just a relapse, I'll be fine. It doesn't have to escalate into anything anymore. I have Law now.*

The man was still staring at him with drawn brows, and ignored Killer as he excused himself from the room. There was a vulnerability to Law's expression that didn't sit well with him.

"Do you-" Law started, gesturing aimlessly with his hands before sitting next to him on the floor, "Do you want to talk about it?"

His hands were shaking and his eyes were darting about his person, and Kidd realized that Law didn't know how to comfort someone.

"Yeah, I'll live." He gave his boyfriend a cheeky grin, and Law's frown dipped further.
"That's not funny."

"I didn't think so..."

Law didn't have to ask to spent the night.

While Kidd convalesced it was important to Law that he was there every step of the way. He put his plan on hold in favor of doctoring Kidd's wounds and checking for any complications that might arise when he wasn't present. Law had gotten used to sharing a bed with his boyfriend.

'Boyfriend'

The word gave him goosebumps, a tingling feeling in his hands and fluttering in his stomach. He presumed the name for the feeling would be giddiness, and it was a foreign as it was welcome. Laying beside Kidd and watching him as he slept filled with a peace he had never known. He'd pet his hair as his soft breathing emptied into the dark room. They always stood so some part of their bodies were touching, be a hand brushing against a thigh or arms bumping together. They sat so their knees were sandwiched to each other. They shared their body temperatures until the skin between them was a lukewarm, Law greedily sapping Kidd's heat while his boyfriend used him to cool off.

While Law was well-suited to play the part of Kidd's caretaker, he was unable to extend this
genetic predisposition to emotional comfort. Today's panic attack highlighted his weakness. He didn't know what caused it, though he was sure he had to do with Kidd's mother, and he was at a lost on how to deal with it. All he could do was call for someone more apt to handle an emotional breakdown. Such a field of distress was Kidd's area of expertise. All he could do was tend to the man's physical ailments while Kidd had bolstered him during his most delicate moments.

Kidd's skill of bolstering his emotional distress was a far more desirable trait than his own medical expertise.

Now, watching Kidd whimper quietly in the throws of sleep, he wished they could switch positions. For all his facade of strength, Law should be laying here shaking into his pillow, not Kidd. The man was too strong to show such vulnerability, it was unbecoming of him.

It made Law uncomfortable, and yet stirred a primal instinct to calm him down. He despised the urge's origin, the lines of his genetic that predisposed him to stereotypical motherly instincts. He wanted to cradle Kidd in his arms and pet his hair, whisper sweet nothing into his ear while he fucked himself on his cock.

Every kind, motherly gesture in his body was somehow tainted with sex, and even if he wanted to enact those stereotypical comforts, he couldn't separate them from his biological desire for sex. If he did have a child, he highly doubted there would be the same issue, because Kidd was a grown man who showed a clear interest in him. He pointedly ignored the man's arousal whenever they brushed too close together or when Law made a particularly flirty comment, just as he hoped the man did for the sickeningly sweet scent of his own arousal that flooded his nostrils at the worst moments.

Kidd whined again, and Law stared at the stump of his arm as it flexed and trembled.

*Is his wound hurting from the low pressure of the storm...?*
Every now and then lightning would spark behind the thick metal shield over the window, illuminating the room through the thin slivers between the steel and the wall. Kidd was curled on his side, his legs jerking in the throes of what was clearly a nightmare, the muscles in his back on full display through the wet plaster of his shirt. He'd started to wear them to bed, despite Law's advising against any unnecessary strains. Maybe he was ashamed of the bandages.

There was a typhoon raging outside, the ship lightly rocking the swell of the storm. They were docked in a cave in order to escape the violent turbulence of the waves, and yet they couldn't avoid the piercing thunder. Law winced at the vicious noise, so used to his sound-proofed submarine.

"Kidd-ya? Kidd-ya wake up, you're having a nightmare."

Kidd shuddered but remained asleep, and Law swallowed. Stating the obvious, yeah that'll wake him up...What do I do?

He reached out and brushed Kidd's back, his trapezius fluttering under his fingertips as Kidd's snorted awake with a choked shout. Law drew back, instantly fearful, worried he had harmed rather than helped as Kidd sat up with considerable difficulty, silver-dollar eyes and leaning heavily on his one arm. He looked around the room with panicked breathing before turning clumsily to Law, nearly losing his balance and having to grip the headboard to keep himself righted.

"Um," Law fiddled with the hem of shirt, hyper-aware that Kidd was without one. "You were having a nightmare and I..." He couldn't hold his gaze and kept them leveled on the shadowed divot of his navel.

Kidd wilted in relief, "Thanks I-" He ran his hand through his hair, tightening his abdominals to keep him upright. The tensing of those delicious muscles made his mouth water, and Law audibly swallowed.
"I really needed that."

Law darted his eyes back to Kidd's face, where they belonged, and curled his toes as he fought for words.

"Do you..." It was harder than he thought, tongue twisting behind his teeth to find the right thing to say.

_Do you want to fuck?_

_Do you want me to blow you?_

_Do you want me to leave?_

_Do you want me at all?_

"Do you want to talk about it?"

He tried to go back to how Cora-san once spoke to him, when he was holed up in the bathroom or vomiting in an alleyway. Soft and cautious, like approaching a deer, Law kept his voice low while maintaining his distance. Not that it mattered, the pillow wall they once had stockpiled between them was now stacked neatly on the couch. Even so, Kidd never so much as brushed his toes against his thigh in the middle of the night.
Kidd paused and shook his head.

"Not really, it's not..." Law saw him waving his stump up and down as if gesticulating. Kidd noticed and immediately stopped, growing quiet.

"I didn't even realize it was gone, at first."

Adrenaline pickled along Law's jaw and across his forearms. The shock of it was unbelievably painful, and it took his breath away.

"I was just so angry, so angry...I just wanted to kill him. I didn't register anything else. I didn't even care that we'd destroyed the town or that he'd sliced off a chuck of my hair..."

He dropped his gaze, and Law's gut constricted.

"I think I can understand...at least a vague idea...of how he can be so frightening...he wouldn't stop smiling...and he said such awful things, Law...such awful things..."

If Law's body temperature was naturally low, it was now on the verge of forming ice crystals in the compartments of his watering eyes. Frost made the muscles of his neck stiffen as he spoke, his throat filled with snowballs as he tried to get the words out.
"What sort of things did he say?"

"..."

"What sort of things did he tell you, Eustass-ya?"

"Law I don't-"

"WHAT DID HE SAY?!"

Kidd stared at him owlishly as Law panted heavily into the darkness, his heart hammering wildly in his chest. The silence between them was deafening in the wake of his shouting, and Law couldn't deal with the situation any longer.

Law kicked his legs off the bed and shuffled in the dark for his coat and shoes. Anything else he'd leave behind, he didn't have time to dawdle with the stifling awkwardness choking them both. He ignored Kidd's calls and bolted out the door, fishing for his den den mushi in his pocket.

Puru puru puru-

"Law?"
"Penguin, we're leaving."

"W-What? So soon? Is Kidd going to be-"

"He'll be fine as long as he doesn't lift anything. Make a call to Killer and let him know we are departing. Let the submarine drift to the bottom while we prepare the engines."

"Law what's-"

He hung up and activated his room, crossing the bow with wide steps, the sound of clumsy feet ascending the stairwell haunting him. In a moment he was in his bedroom, staring unseeing at the coat draped across his bed.

He bit his lip and let the tears fall.

Chapter End Notes

Shachi and Killer both like to slap their captains to get them to focus, lol.
The eastern half of Punk Hazard reminded Law of his homeland. The snowdrifts carved frosted hills into the unforgiving wasteland, porcelain flakes fluttering from gray clouds with unassuming delicacy. At any moment the winds could pick up and toss a man off his feet, those fragile snowflakes culminating over him until he was a stiffened corpse.

Law drew back his upper lip in a grimace, stopping to dust his arms of the powdered snow before continuing the long trek to the main hanger. It was a distance he walked every day, but each day the landscape transformed into an alien topography. He tucked his nose into the high collar of his fur-lined trench coat. It was thirty-degrees below freezing, but to the Northerner it was hardly noticeable. He trudged through the snow with slick heeled boots, the hems of his jeans soaking through and plastering to his skin. The frosting fabric felt good on his skin, waking him up better than the nonexistent coffee inside the facilities.

He forced open the hanger's heavy door with the hilt of his sword, slipping inside and away from the bitter chill. His breath still came out in puffs in the darkness, but there was a mugginess to the air that wouldn't last long outside.

A flick of the light switches revealed a golden-lit warehouse sparsely filled with medical supplies. A crude operating theater was crammed into one corner, a bare bulb swinging listlessly overhead. Law sighed, glancing at the few other doors and windows, each sealed with thick resin.

"Monet, I asked you not come here when I'm not around."
The sound of rustling feathers and a sharp giggle drew his gaze upwards, to where the green harpy was barely visible in the shadows of the rafters and boiler pipes.

"And I declined, didn't I?"

She laughed, the sound redolent of Doffy's.

"Yes," he sighed, thumping the rim of his cap, "I suppose you did. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Not for me, no, but there are several things I wish to ask you...in private."

He didn't like the way she spoke, the lilt of her speech or way she gesticulated with her feet. Her talons scraped violently across steel beams, and he winced at the piercing noise. She was too much of a bird of prey for him to be comfortable around her, let alone that she was Doffy's beloved subordinate.

"Let's not be long then, several of the children are coming in for treatment shortly, and it wouldn't be wise to leave them out in the cold."

"They'll be fine."
Her voice was different, lacking the playful tone it so often held. He could make out the shining gold of her eyes in the faint light.

"Is this something you wouldn't want Caesar to hear? How coy, I thought you two were such good partners."

"Enough idle talk."

*Cold,* her voice was cold.

Cold like the spread of his winter homeland.

Cold like his mother's eyes.

"You're a Lorelei, correct?"

He swallowed. There was no point in denying it. She already knew, the only question was how. Doffy had always kept his origins a secret from everyone but his right hand man. It was an unspoken law that he would never tell another soul.

"Sneaking into files against Doffy's wishes? I never thought you would stoop to such insubordination."
She cocked her head in an avian gesture, never blinking.

He didn't know if she could.

"As if such sensitive information would be foolishly written down."

"Then may I ask how you acquired such knowledge?"

"I can smell you."

A tremor traveled through his spin to his frozen ankles, the child having nothing to do with the cold. He pressed his thighs together with heat rising to his face, fear momentarily flickering across his eyes before his stoic mask fell into place.

"What a keen sense of smell, I suppose your looks aren't just for show, then."

Her pupils narrowed into slits, talons raking slowly across the rafter.

"Don't patronize me."
He could taste the malice on her breath, and gripped his nodachi tighter from its perch on his shoulder.

"Well, what would you have me say, Monet? I'm not going to be so foolish as to deny it. What are you after?"

"Answers."

"Pray tell?"

He was growing impatient amidst his trepidation. He didn't want the children coming in and hearing such vulgarity. Never mind the lost illusion of the benevolent harpy. He knew what it was like to have one's dreams crushed in favor for the harsh reality.

"Why do you hide what you are?"

Law couldn't prevent the incredulous laughter that escaped his lips, the echo reverberating in the large warehouse.

"I'd think that would be obvious."

"I don't understand."
"You don't...understand..."

Monet's demeanor changed, shifting her weight back and forth, the metal silent under her light weight.

It was possible she was messing with him, but her nervous behavior was entirely uncharacteristic of the naturally confident woman. A sick feeling coiled in the pit of his stomach, the thought that she had a conscious or at least a semblance of emotions not sitting well. If she got in his way he would kill her, for her allegiance to Doffy and her unimaginable cruelty to the trusting children. His resolve hardened.

"No," She snapped, eyes blazing, "I don't understand how you shamelessly hide your true nature. Don't you have any pride for what you are?"

*Holy shit, she's serious...*

"Of course I don't have pride being what I am. It's disgusting, what the hell kind of game are you playing at?"

Monet opened her wings with a rain of feathers, the sound of her taking flight inciting a primal surge of fear throughout his system. She drifted to the floor and stood at her full height, towering over him. He made a point not to look at the size of her talons.

"I'm not playing a *game*. You shouldn't hide what you are, it's disgraceful."
Her voice was flat as she glared down at him, when all he could was stare owlishly in response.

"This is ridiculous," He breathed out in a laugh, "Lorelei are different than harpies, giants, or mermaids. We aren't supposed to be this way, we're man-made. We're sex toys." If she wasn't with Doffy he would have kept his mouth shut. These weren't words to be spoken aloud, unless in the company of those who already meant him harm.

He pushed away the memory of the red-haired exception.

Monet cocked her head.

"And? Disregarding one's heritage is a veritable sin, and yet you insist on presenting yourself as a biological male. It's...confusing..."

Law saw red, gripping Kikoku until his joints creaked.

All his life he'd had to play the part of an unassuming man, because that's who he was. What lay between his legs was a foreign landscape, an uneven puzzle piece to his otherwise masculine body. It wouldn't be that way if he hadn't sacrificed time and effort to look the way he felt, but even then he felt like he was cheating himself of something natural. Maybe he was convinced that he had to have a penis to be a man, and he wasn't disgusted by his vagina at all.

Maybe it's what he'd grown up to believe.
But it didn't matter. He wasn't going to live long enough to have a life shattering self-discovery and suddenly rationalize his dysphoria away. The dysphoria was real, at least it had been-back before he started testosterone and couldn't look at himself in the mirror. Now all that was left was the glaringly obvious, the divot between his legs and the mark that branded him.

Maybe it was always just the mark.

He unsheathed his sword and Monet took a step back, expression never wavering.

"Leave, please." He spat the pleasantry with the blade to her neck as a polite suggestion.

She looked at the blade and smirked.

"At least you aren't a pussy."

She left the warehouse with a calm gait, leaving Law to drown in the wake of her words.

As the door slid shut behind her, Law toddled to his crude operating theater. Leaning over the ceramic sink, he emptied the contents of his stomach. His fingers cramped as he gripped the basin's lip, tears misting his vision as his muscles recoiled.

At least you aren't a pussy.
He gagged on bile, his knees shaking as he continue to retch nothing but air. He couldn't breathe past the acrid taste on his tongue, and the tears traced burning lines down his flushed cheeks.

*Get a hold of yourself, you won't get anywhere with this attitude!*

"Mister Law?"

The small voice shattered his delusions in an instant, and he quickly stood and cleaned his face. Taking a deep breath, he turned and smiled.

"Good morning Satsuki! Were you able to stay warm last night?"

Law busied his fingers with stitching the shallow gash to the girl's ankle, letting himself be immersed in the child's voice.

"-and yesterday, ah-yesterday I saw these rabbits! They were huge!~ Like, *this* big! Kabuki was able to catch one to eat, but I made him let it go. I mean, it would probably taste better than what they serve in the mess hall, but it was just too cute! Like a pet! Mister Law, do you have any pets?"
He looked up at the girl's excited face from his crouched position, and gently smiled, eyes bleeding with warmth.

"No, but I have a friend who owns many birds."

"Really?! Back home there's lots of birds that come to drink from the fountain in our garden, but I've never had one as a pet. We have a dog, though! Her name's Kali! When I get to go back home, the first thing I'm going to do is play with her! She'll be so big by now...I wonder if she'll remember me..."

The little girl twirled an auburn pigtail in worry, and Law patted her knee.

"Don't worry, I bet she's thinking of you right now, just like you are."

"Really!?"

"Of course, animals can sense when their loved ones are sad."

"That's so cool! I can't wait until I tell Mattie!"

The girl continued to ramble, Law smiling and nodding whenever appropriate. Despite his standoffish demeanor, children had always been his soft spot. He couldn't stand to see a child crying or in pain, and just watching them brightened his day. Even now, the small child reminded him of Lami, of the golden days in which he would read her bedtime stories and sing her lullabies while their parents were busy at work. In the beginning, she fit in the crook of his arm, with tiny
hands that could scarcely wrap around his thumb. He fell in love with her instantly, the instinct to nurture stirring in his chest, and gave her all the attention he could. When his mother took the rare nights off from the lab, she would spirit Lami away to dote on her in the way she never did for him.

"Thanks Mister Law! Bye-bye!"

He bid the young girl farewell with a curt wave, quelling the urge to allow her to remain in the warehouse. Caesar Clown was an unforgivingly callous man, and wouldn't tolerate any 'favoritism' of his 'subjects'. At the very least, Law knew this was not meant to be cruel, as the man displayed overt symptoms of lacking empathy. Without such faculties and the inability to determine whether his actions were morally wrong, Law couldn't fault the man for his cold-cut attitude when it came to his experiments. He had no problem, however, despising him for his egotistical hubris.

That he willingly worked for Doffy was just an added bonus.

Monet took pleasure in deceiving the children, though Law couldn't determine whether it was her instincts as a predator or her personal enjoyment of the suffering of others.

*You shouldn't hide what you are, it's disgraceful.*

She was obviously projecting her pride, but it didn't make it any less harmful to his psyche. He leaned over the sink once more, pressing his palm against his forehead as he regulated his breathing.

*Everything's fine.*
You've come so far.

Keep it together.

He stood there for several minutes, breathing into the silence. When the next child came, he dealt with them as efficiently as possible. He didn't have the mental fortitude to dote on them individually, and tried his best to stay professional and politely withdrawn. Most of the injuries could be neatly sutured close, with the use of forceps to remove any foreign material. The children often scraped themselves on the rocky cliffs where they took refuge from the snow, and Law was thankful none of them had seriously injured themselves that day. Last week he'd had to treat four cases of pneumonia and two cases of frostbite, one of whom suffered severed edema to his hands.

Not a single child had died on his watch, and he was proud of his work.

He handed a plastic bag of food to his final patient of the day and bid him farewell. Once the door had been securely latched, Law let himself retire to his 'office', nothing more than a spare desk covered in stacks of paperwork. His missed the tight space of his office, the vastness of the warehouse left him eternally on edge. There was nowhere for him to hide if he was cornered, and he didn't feel safe unless he was in a small space with a wall at his back. He'd had to move the table away from the wall so he could squeeze his chair to fit against the wall, enabling him to have a wall behind him. It brought him little comfort. The echoes of his papers shuffling and the rattling of the windows in the arctic breeze drove him mad.

He spent the next couple of hours filling out forms and studying charts of data on Caesar's work. Doffy's insidious strings had reached out across the Grand Line and infected the global market. With the production of SMILEs, Doffy would become the most powerful man on the planet. He would ruin more lives than he already had, and if Law allowed them to enter the economy, he would never be able to stop them. It was good fortune that Caesar was easily swayed by praise, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to get so close to SAD production. He'd already snuck a glance at Caesar's original copy of the Lineage Factor data sheet, and committed it to memory. Having hyperthymesia had its perks, though its disadvantages vastly outweighed the meager gains. He could recall every moment his life in lurid detail, and his abnormal memory plague his waking moments with the sensations and images of his expansive history of sexual assault. It made
Working with documents and sensitive information extremely easy, but the vivid flashbacks wore him down. With his condition, he only needed a single mental snapshot of the image to laminate it to his memory. Law closed his eyes and brought the paper to the forefront of his mind, visualizing the document before him.

Vegapunk was certainly a genius, but his discovery of the genetic structure of living creatures was not exactly his own. Many great scientists had come forth with the discovery of the double-helix structure of nucleic acids, but all had been disregarded as nonsense, their existence defamed and ridiculed. Vegapunk's word was scientific law, and it wasn't the first time he had claimed a 'monumental discovery' and left the true pioneer to rot in obscurity.

Law had heard his father speak of a woman he once knew who claimed to have found such a genetic marker, a way to trace one's lineage and discern heritable traits. At the time, Law had been too young to truly understand how it would affect him later on. How it applied to him. Law was a true genetic outlier, the only species with a verified triple-helix DNA strand. His mother and father's traits, and the ones given to him through genetic engineering. It was hard to pinpoint which strand had led to his abnormal level of intelligence, but he liked to think it was a combination of all three. His father was the most renowned physician in Flevance, while his mother had been one of the most efficient surgeons. Together they had founded a chain of hospitals around the country, pioneering in the most advance medical technology. All of their efforts were wasted in the fall, and Law couldn't help but feel it was deserved. They weren't fit to have children, to give life even though they had saved so much of it. But still, so many more lives could have been saved, and continue to be saved, if their hospitals and techniques hadn't been burned to ash. If their chief physicians hadn't been filled with holes, the terminally ill given an abrupt ultimatum from the end of a rifle.

He traced over Caesar's handwritten notes he scrambled in the corners of Vegapunk's neat cursive, the man's work debauched with vindictive scribbles and x's. He'd already taken advantage of the man's chemical ingredients, spoiling the lot. He'd leave soon, he just had to slip the Marines an anonymous tip about abused children, and then he was on to the next phase of his plan. In the two years he had spent convalescing and climbing his way to the shackles of Shichibukai, Law hadn't wasted any time. Since his escape from Doffy's talons he had enacted his revenge. From disestablishing the man's cartels in the Blues to bringing down factory after factory, Law was the man's veritable archenemy. He'd brought the man's market value down to the barest bones, and turned the prolific assortment of crews who bore his flag and scattered their ashes. There was a reason he had enlisted the help of Kidd's notorious bloodlust. With a man so eager to fight, who sought out pirate crews like a fox to a hare, it would have been foolish to let the opportunity pass. His extensive reports were the final nail in the coffin of Doffy's network of pirate crews. All that was left was his investment in the production of SMILEs, which Law had finally taken care of, his own pirate crew, and his reign of the country of Dressrosa.
Doffy had taken everything in the world from Law, it was only natural that he return the favor.

His informants were vast and limitless, his network nearly double what Doffy's had been. It hadn't been as hard to do as he once thought. Freeing slaves and treating patients had garnered him a wealth of support from around the globe. They took his orders and passed on the loyalty to others.

Kindness, in the end, had proved to be his strongest weapon.

Of course Doffy still had friends in high places, but his capillaries of followers had been decimated. He could command the masses, but they did not share his beliefs.

But Law was not perfect, not intellectually, and he learned from the mistakes of others without reservation. He kept his core followers close at hand, and defected from Doffy's tactic of burgeoning fleets. Law skirted through the man's clutches in a single craft, nestled safely beneath the waves.

He opened his eyes, stepping out of his mental workshop.

All that was left was Dressrosa, his crew would fall with Doffy at the foot of his throne.

And mine.

He flexed his fingers and stood with a shaking sigh, moving away from his desk and crossing the
warehouse to wash his face again. Despite his staggering recovery at the hands of his loving crew, he couldn't shake the weariness that haunted him. Kidd's shocked expression was burned into his retinas, his vocal cords forever burning at his lack of control.

"WHAT DID HE SAY?!"

He shouldn't have asked, there wasn't a need.

He knew what Doflamingo had told Kidd.

The man was a braggart, after all.

He splashed cold on his face, scrubbing at his cheeks and slapping them to return the blood flow.

"Law, you will return tonight."

...

The temperature of the water was nothing against the frost eating him from the inside.

No.
He trembled as he turned around, water dripping down his neck and beneath his coat, a sharp shiver down his chest.

Vergo was here, and it wasn't a cruel hallucination brought on by stress.

Nothing could mimic the feeling of being clotheslined by the man's bamboo staff, of the rupturing of intestines and pancreas by sheer brute force.

He registered the taste of copper of his tongue before he slipped away, vision tunneling away from the sight of the door ajar, flurries of snow beckoning back to the hell that had never let him go.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Holidays~ *evil cackling over a copy of Franz Kafka's Collected Works*

Just to clarify, Law is a transman with dysphoria that extends to all but his genitals. Now that he's muscular and physically 'masculine', his dysphoria is gone and he is at peace with his body (as far as not being disgusted by his reflection). He's convinced he still has it and that he hates his vagina, but in actuality what he's disgusted by is Doflamingo's mark of him (designating him as property/an object). Law actually wants everything a biological woman can give, and not just because it's in his genetics. He wants a family, but thinks he's asexual (but he's actually demisexual, and asexual only because of his trauma*). His genetics as a Lorelei obviously dictate a lot of his body's desires (sex with random men, sex literally all the time, being submissive, caring for children) but in the case of the very last one, this is Law's own mental desire as well. He can't distinguish between the two, however, so considers most of his personality traits as 'fake', due to his confusion.

* Asexuality can stem from trauma, it can also be natural (I'm the latter), and is not a phase (though in the case of trauma it can sometimes be overcome, but at what cost to the person's psyche, you know?)
** You cannot tell me that Law spent X amount of time on Punkhazard, waiting for the right time to slice up the production factory of SAD? He's way too fucking intelligent to waste so much time, especially when the fate and wellbeing of children were involved.
Attention!

The next five chapters deal with Law's capture by Doflamingo, and the ensuing world of hurt that entails.

There will be *rape, copious violence, and injuries in sensitive places.*

In this world, **Luffy never joins forces with Law** (and can't save him or even cares), all for the simple fact that he didn't save his hat. Silly, to be sure, but Luffy doesn't care for a man who saved his life but not his purpose. **Therefore, the plot skews completely from the manga and anime.**

For the next five chapters every warning on this earth will be in place, so be warned and be prepared. You obviously don't have to read it, please **be good to yourselves** and **know your triggers**!

**The chapter will be up in one week**, so I'll see you lovelies then~.
Chapter Notes

Warnings!

1. Rape (Graphic rape in the present and mentions of childhood sexual abuse)

2. Genital mutilation (due to Doflamingo's size, and it's a description of it, not the actual act)

3. Emotional/Mental Manipulation

4. General Doflamingo Warnings

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Law had waited in terror for hours, bound with seastone to a post of the bed that held countless twisted memories. When Doflamingo finally deigned him with his presence, he had cried all the self-pitying tears he could manage. He didn't care that his face was puffy and red from crying, that when he looked up at the towering figure his eyes were glassy and filled with weakness. All his cards had been thrown out the window, a new hand dealt his way.

And his hand was filled with jokers.

"Let's get things started, shall we?"

The man undid his shackles with a simple flick of his hand, hisrazored strings slicing shallow lines across his arms in a silent warning. He complied without hesitation, knowing he had lost. It wasn't until Doflamingo's hand wrapped around his middle, his waist engulfed by the enormous palm, that Law lost the bravado he'd garnered. His fingers dug into Law's back, and he seized up as he was pinned to the man's lap. Lying on his stomach, the residue of seastone still hindering his movements, he could do nothing but tremble as Doflamingo hooked his finger into his belt and pulled down his jeans and underwear in a swift motion, bearing his backside and sex to the cold air.
"You've been a bad boy, Law."

Law whimpered, fear creeping through his veins.

"And bad boys need to be punished."

A hand cracked down on his ass, Law's mind reeling as he realized the nature of his punishment. Spanked, like a small child, Law was sent tumbling into despair at the spidering familiarity of days gone by. It felt like just yesterday Doflamingo bent him over his knee and took a switch to his rear, ignoring Law's pained cries as streaks of angry red blossomed on his tender skin.

One arm was pinned against Doflamingo's pelvis, the blazing heat of his skin searing marks into his flesh. He dug his nails into the camouflage fabric, trying to leverage himself off the older man's thigh. The large hand that pinned him from the small of his back was an anchor. There was no way to escape the crushing force to his lower back, no way to escape the humiliating punishment and pain. The air chilled his damp sex, and with every hit Law prayed it wouldn't end, if only to prolong the inevitable.

"You know, most people would be ashamed to be in your position right now."

Law jerked as the large palm struck him again, angry tears building pressure behind his eyes.

"Of course!"

He heard him lick his lips, running his fingers teasingly over his quivering sex. The lightest touch
broke out gooseflesh along the arch of his back, a coil of arousal tightening in his abdomen.

He wanted to be fucked.

"That's right, you *should* feel ashamed."

He cracked his hand over Law's rear, this time coaxing a cry from his lips. His rear burned in pain as much as his chest burned with shame. Humiliation flooded him like a crippling disease, eating away at his resolve. At the very least, Doflamingo hadn't taken the belt to him, knowing he wore the metal plates with his ass in mind. Law lost count after twelve, the man's immense strength jarring his organs with every strike.

He began to sob as his body truly betrayed him. He couldn't help but liken the slap of skin to that of a different kind, growing wetter with each hit. There wasn't anything he could do to stop it, couldn't help the fire growing in his belly, the slick trailing down his thigh, the aching emptiness and the need to be filled.

"Maybe we should get your red-haired playmate to come and watch us? Would you like that?"

Law convulsed with fear, fingers stilling in their scramble.

"How do you know about Kidd-ya?"

His voice shook with the rhetorical question. He already knew they had met, that Doflamingo had hunted down his boyfriend with teeth bared. Stolen what could never be returned.
"There's nothing I don't know about you...I keep tabs on all my toys, and you are my favorite one." 

He wanted to slit his throat to escape his terror.

"Oh, Law, it's been so long," Doflamingo breathed, curling over and nestling his face into the back of Law's neck. He couldn't restrain a pitiful cry of fear, the small wail drawing a laugh from his captor.

"Not long enough," Law spat through a wave of tears, voice cracking. Doflamingo purred, raising Law's chin with a finger.

"I've been waiting for so long, Law. I've wanted to bury myself in your sweet cunt, fill you with my seed and listen to you scream in pain." He whispered the horrifying words as he pressed innocent kisses along his shoulder. Law whimpered, ducking his neck instinctively as his heart shriveled.

He ran his fingers down Law's spine in a delicate brush of his fingertips. It didn't last long, with an obscenely long tongue soon taking their place, dragging slowly over the knobs of his vertebrae. Law shuddered in revulsion, their size difference making itself known to the forefront of his scrambled mind. He struggled reflexively, but the hand on his waist pinned him firmly to his lap.

As the saliva was left to dry in the drafty air, Law whined into Doflamingo's pants. He bit his lower lip, his teeth snagging at the corner of his mouth, the taste of copper filling his mouth. He wanted to die, he wanted to be fucked, he wanted to bury himself alive.
"I think you're enjoying this punishment, aren't you?"

His fingertips skimmed over his moistened sex, and he bit back a cry, unable to control the twitching muscles or the dripping slick. Doflamingo's laugh drowned him as he heard him loosen his belt. He curled his fists and grit his teeth, preparing himself for the flaying of delicate flesh.

"You're a masochist who enjoys everything I do to you."

"You're wrong!"

"Hmm? Well then, try to prove me wrong!"

Instead of the whistle of metal plates, his skin opening into a torturous flower, Law was lifted off Doflamingo's lap and tossed into onto a feather bed. Fear coated his tongue as he was hit with terrible memories, his trembling body sucked into the plush duvet. Doflamingo's shadow crept over him, crawling on his hands and knees until Law was covered in darkness. He couldn't move, couldn't even look away.

Those eyes that were always hidden by orange reflective shades were piercing and filled with a savage lust that only made him more aroused. The clouded eye stared at him with a lifeless sheen, just as striking as the blue eye, dark with desire. Law felt himself being stripped to the bone, peeling back flesh with his gaze alone, burying into his gut and turning him inside out. A blush rose from his chest and crept along his neck, his breathing picking up as he fought the will to dip his hand between his aching thighs.

How strange it was, to be in so much terror and yet yearn for this man.
An enormous hand reached out to stroke his cheek, the thick digit caressing along the curve of his jaw and coming to rest on the jut of his lower lip. Law's eyelids fell as love swelled and battled against his fear and hatred, his mind struggling to remember why a part of him was so afraid.

* A glass bowl filled with candy... 

* Lavender sheets soaking in his blood...

* A pink leopard collar...

He jerked from the soft touch, a chill sweeping through him as if he had been dunked into the lake near his Flevanch home. Doflamingo frowned, and Law thought it was more frightening than when he smiled.

"You don't want me to be gentle?"

He cocked his head, and Law averted his eyes.

"Who would you want it to be, *hmm*?"

He kept his tongue still, thinking of Kidd's smile and the way he closed his eyes when he laughed. His hair always reminded him of a cluster of tulips, the crimson silk swayed as he shook with jovial laughter.
"Law, who is the one who has been so gentle to you?"

"...

Doflamingo's hand closed around his mouth, the entirety of his palm wrapping around his jaw and covering his nose. His fingers closed over the back of his head, his skull at the mercy of the giant's wrath. Doflamingo's grip tightened, and Law shed fresh tears as his lower jaw audibly creaked with the strain. His lungs fought for oxygen, chest spasming feverishly, and yet he kept his hands at his side, keeping his body still. He knew how Doflamingo's game worked, even though he always lost.

A snake favors struggling prey.

The blonde sneered, releasing his grip and leaving Law gasping for breath.

"Have it your way."

Law shrieked, a single sound of terror fleeing his raw throat as his clothes were torn from his body. Bared to his owner, Law was flooded with shame and the pinpricks of arousal. He could see Doflamingo's erection straining through the thin fabric of his pants, and Law swallowed in both anticipation and utter horror. He remember the times he'd been forced to take such a grotesque enlargement of human anatomy, remember the way delicate tissue easily rent apart, organs rupturing as they were pulverized by violent thrusts. He remember the feeling of his lungs collapsing, the sound of Doflamingo's laughter ringing in his ears as his eyes rolled back and death reached for his soul.
But of course his body was meant for such abuse, giving the regenerative capabilities that one would think him immortal, and yet it was all for the perverse torture of whoever happened to own him. He'd been too young, too small back then, but he doubted he would get through the act unscathed. He nearly voided his bladder when Doflamingo unfastened the single white button that held together his trousers, his massive erection red and ugly, jutting out like a spear. Law swallowed the saliva that threatened to drown him, voicing his fear in the pitiful whines that he couldn't hear over the hammering of his heart.

Doflamingo closed in around him, and Law tried to believe it was just a nightmare

"Killer! Do you know where my gun is?!"

Kidd was in the process of shucking on his trousers, fingers trembling so hard he struggled to pull the elastic over his knees. His heartbeat thrummed so loudly in his ears he wasn't able to hear the blonde's response and he'd put on his pants backwards, but he didn't care.

Law was in trouble, and he might be too late to do anything about it.

*Purupuru-

"Hello? Law, hello?!"
Kidd couldn't restrain the hope in his voice, the months of silence eating away at him until he was desperate and lonely.

"No, it's Penguin. Listen, I think Law's in danger, Mr. Eustass."

He swallowed the snowball lodged in his throat, and it went down painfully.

"...What do you mean?"

He motioned to Killer to stay in the room, his wet hair dripping carelessly onto the sofa as he reclined with an exasperated sigh.

"He's not called me in over thirty-six hours, and I fear the worst."

Kidd could hear the diving tone resonating amidst the static.

"Aren't you with him?"

"He's on Punk Hazard, furthering his goals, but he's in dangerous company so he sends me a transmission alert every six hours via a console in his pocket. But it's been thirty-six hours and there was a sighting of Vergo's vessel in the area."
"Who's Vergo?"

"Doesn't matter. I'm almost certain Donquixote has Law."

And there it was, the words that haunted his dreams, fueled his training, induced his most potent panic attacks.

Doflamingo had Law, and he hadn't been there to stop him.

But he might be able to save him.

__________________________

Law lay in a sprawled tangle of limbs, glazed eyes staring unseeing at the ceiling. A trail of blood had dried on his chin, his teeth stained red and his cheeks flecked with product of their coitus. The holes in his intestines had healed, the pain faded to a dull ache, but his mind had not, and could not recover. As soon as they had begun, Law was falling into a void of pain, lust, and resignation. He had given up, letting go any hope of rescue.

"I'll always love you, Law...you'll always have a home here."

"..."
Doflamingo leaned in and ghosted his lips across Law's ear, breathing sinful syllables that coaxed him from what sanity remained.

"Who do you belong to, Law?"

Law let his eyes fall closed, breathing in the heady scent of lavender, that all-encompassing fragrance that lulled him into darkness.

...  

"I belong to Master."

...  

"Good boy..."

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry this chapter is so short but it really fucking hurt to write it and I cut out huge chunks of it because it was too violent and graphic and just implied what happened in those scenes, sorry :(. 
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Warnings:

1. Graphic Sex with Doffy
2. Implied nonconsensual sex
3. Emotional/Mental manipulation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kidd's jaw hung in disbelief, his eyes darting between their faces and coming up with too few differences.

"Holy shit, and you called me egotistical."

"Stow it, you wanted an informant."

"Yeah, I didn't mean your marine fuckbuddy."

He watched as Smoker and Blaire made the same scowl, teeth bared as they bit down on their cigars. The only real difference was Smoker had two.

"I still can't believe this is real, I mean, I never thought you'd sleep with anyone in a million years, yet alone someone who looks exactly like you. Is this incest? I'd rather it be incest than coincidence, to be honest. This is too fucking weird."
Smoker grunted, averting his gaze, but Kidd caught the faint blush highlighting the tips of his ears. Blaire had strut out of her cabin, dragging the marine behind him without care that he was still pulling on his pants. He'd been joking when he said Blaire only ever got laid when they were in port. Clearly that wasn't the case, and she sometimes snuck the bastard marine onto their ship when he wasn't looking. Normally he'd been rightfully pissed, more so about a marine being stowed without his knowledge than Blaire breaking his golden rule of one night stands. Even so, it wasn't as if Smoker was a hooker. He hoped he was just Blaire's booty call, because the thought of her dating someone who looked like her twin was making him queasy. Thankfully there were no gentle looks to one another, and in fact they seemed indifferent to each other's existence. Maybe it was a power trip for them, being able to fuck someone who look like themselves. He didn't know, and he didn't care, not even about having his sworn enemy on board. All he wanted was to find Law, everything else could rest on the back burner.

"So what do you know about Donquixote's whereabouts?"

Smoker rolled his cigar between his teeth, eliciting the crunch of tobacco pulp. Kidd's OCD roiled under his skin, fingers itching to grab the man's jaw and hold it still. He kept his hands jammed safely in his pockets, Law's health at stake.

"Normally I'd keep quiet about Shichibukai, they do work for us, after all, but Donquixote's a creepy fuck who doesn't know the meaning of personal space or common decency so I'll let it slide. He's in Dressrosa right now, hasn't left the mainland in a few weeks. He's probably in that castle of his, doesn't have much reason to leave it with his lackeys doing his dirty work. If that's help enough for whatever you want, I'm gonna go back to sleep."

Kidd stared after the man who sauntered away as if the ship was his, noting for this first time the unsteady limp that plagued his legs. Kidd's eye twitched, noting Blaire's satisfied smirk, and decided he'd never again go through Blaire's drawers or look in the box under her bed on a dare, no matter the risk of his pride.

"Blaire! You heard your boy toy, let's get going."
Law, I'll come and get you, no matter what.

So please, please be safe. You deserve to be safe.

Law whined into the sheets, his fingers twitched beside his head as he came down from his
orgasm. He couldn't see past the tears, and his tongue was thick and dry in his mouth from panting
all night. Doffy hadn't let him rest, not for a second, and when he wasn't teasing him or fucking him
into the mattress, he left him a vibrator for company, drinking a cup of tea and watching his
plaything writhe on the bed.

Law had lost track of time and space, and many times his consciousness had slipped away and left
him a catatonic mess. His throat was raw from screaming. His sanity was fleeting and unforgiving,
coherent thoughts whipping through his mind and tearing away whatever blissful lust his body
used to keep him pliant.

It had been two days since Doffy took him into his bed, but he didn't know this. To Law, he was
lost in world without time, in a hell without reprieve. He wanted peace, he wanted to die, he wanted
the pleasure to continue forever. The lines between rape and servitude had blurred into the depths
of pleasure, and he had lost the will to fight. Doffy was his Master, and even though he knew what
was happening was painful and unwilling, it wasn't completely true. He loved every second of his
torture, loved every eclipsing touch of Doffy's palm, and every strike and tearing of his flesh made
his blood sing. His Master was his everything, and everything was glorious.

His canted his hips, mewling as air tickled his emptiness, beckoning his Master to be him. He
complied with little fanfare, sliding home into his pliant body, this time going torturously slow and
stopping at his most guarded entrance. His body resisted the intrusion before his belly distended
with a pained gasp, the man's cock sliding almost effortlessly into his womb and stilling there. His
Master marked his shoulder with his sharp teeth, sucking a bruise that would be the size of his fist when the blood settled. He went slow, mindful of the millimeter thickness of his choice of breeding hole.

When his Master went slow there was little pain, his endorphins flooding his senses moments after penetration, leaving him to orgasm again and again. They drove any solid thoughts from his head, his tongue lolling to the side of his mouth, his jaws parted and drooling into the bedsheets. His eyes rolled back as his nose chaffed against the stiff stains of saliva turning moist with new release. His uterus spasmed around the massive intrusion, his cervix stretched to its limits around the throbbing girth.

It wasn't natural, Law wasn't natural, but it was a Lorelei's coveted secret pleasure. A Lorelei's womb belonged to his Master, a home for his children and a warm hole in which to breed. His cervix was a doorway to which only his Master held the key, and when his body parted for him and allowed him into the sacred organ, the Lorelei's body thrummed with the unique uterine orgasm that belonged solely to their kind. As if a third type of orgasm was a gift to quell their eternal sorrow.

It was enough for Law.

When his Master emptied his seed inside his womb, his abdomen ballooned with the quantity of sperm, His Master slid out as soon as he finished and Law's cervix rebounded shut, as if it hadn't been stretched to its seams. His Master's cum was a steady weeping from his parted thighs, dribbling from the closed gate.

Law's body went lax, lying unresponsive on his stomach, his face pressed sideways into the damp of his drool. Law's opening spasmed weakly, still orgasming but too far gone to feel anymore pleasure.

Lost in the clutches of sleep, Law dreamed his stomach was round with children, but when he looked down all he saw was a flood of white.
When Law came to his senses, he was caked in a thick layer of sweat and seed. Saliva had dried on his face, and when he lifted himself from the bed his skin peeled from the sheets. His wasn't upset, not really, but he registered how filthy he was, and how much his body ached. The bruises had faded overnight into a pale yellow that looked like patches of jaundice. The word 'patches' turned his stomach, and he slid from the bed without feeling the cold tiles beneath his feet. His body was numb, his legs covered in such thick crust that it flaked off in translucent cakes as he waddled to the adjoining bathroom. The seastone shackle on his leg was gone, replaced with the unwavering loyalty of a Lorelei bonded to his Master in body and soul.

His Master allowed such luxury as the free range of his quarters, a luxury Law didn't share with anyone else. The bathroom was enormous, befitting his Master's stature, and the tub was almost a pool. He turned the porcelain knob and steam billowed from the spigot as milky green liquid spewed forth. Natural spring water, rich with minerals pulled from deep underground. He should clean himself of cum and sweat beforehand, no use ruining such precious water, but he was tired. He collapsed into the water, great founts of clouded, foul-smelling water splashing over the sides of the marble tub and spilling out over the alabaster tiles.

He fell asleep with his cheek pressed to the cold marble, letting the bitter water do its work as he slept.

Law's nap was dreamless and restful, the mineral water soaking into his joints and seeping into his body and cleansing him as best it could. When he finally woke it was on fresh bedsheets, his body warm and clean. He dipped out again as his Master gently stroked his hair. The time for punishment had ended, and now Law was given all of his Master's love, and in return he served him well.

Another day passed, in which Law was unaware of the passage of time.
Law wouldn't let himself believe what he saw.

He worried his lower lip so hard he bit straight through, blood spilling down his chin and the spreading across his tongue like wildfire. He no longer felt the bruises on his knees forming from his position kneeling on the tiled floor of his Master's bedroom.

Master

Doffy

Wrong

Kidd

Awareness flooded him like arousal, tears of shame pricking at the corners of his eyes, and he hastily closed his legs and covered his parts.

"K-Kidd-ya."
Eustass Kidd stood in the doorway, copper eyes swallowed by his pupils as he stared at Law with a growing, unnerving grin.

"When he told me you were a shameless slut for cock, I didn't think it was true, but now..."

He gave an appraising look at Law's thoroughly debauched body, at the cum drying on his face and the broad hickeys on his chest and thighs. Law whined and curled in on himself, thick tears carving through the filth on his cheeks.

"D-Don't look, don't l-look at me..."

He missed the way Kidd's grin broadened as he approached, focusing on the floor as he willed himself to sink through and into the bowels of the earth.

"I mean, I should've figured when you threw yourself at me in Sabaody. Speaking of which, I'd love to have a repeat of that mouth on my dick. Of course..."

He grab Law's hair and forced his head back, and Law's pupils dilated at the sight and smell of Kidd's dick jutting before his face.

"If you don't cooperate, I'll just force you."

Law sobbed.
He didn't see the way Doffy's fingers moved, the faint glimmer of countless strings dancing in the morning light.

Chapter End Notes

Short and 'sweet'
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

Warnings:

1. Violence during rape
2. Forced oral sex
3. Non-consensual drug use

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kidd ground his teeth, his nails slicing half-moons into his palms. He couldn't think clearly, couldn't even walk in a straight line, it was as if he was drunk on fury. Law had been taken to Dressrosa, and while he stood on the bow of his ship, glaring at the horizon, Law was suffering. He tried not to think of what he was being subjected to, tried to hope that Law had been in a dungeon for the past three days and was being left alone. But he knew, knew in his heart, that this was not the case. Doflamingo had his 'property' now, and he wasn't the kind of person to show mercy.

"He's so cute when he cries. And when he cums his cheeks turns such a rosy pink. Do you want to know the kind of face he makes? Should I describe it to you?"

Kidd panted, chest arcing off the floor as he struggled to stand. His left side wasn't responding, but he couldn't think of the semantics, of the possible life threatening injuries he sustained. He was livid, everything else was white noise.

"He opens his mouth like a baby bird, closes his eyes, and he keens so beautifully it would make angels weep."

"Y-You son of a-"
"And then of course he starts sobbing, and if it isn't the most precious sound? He's a delicacy, Eustass Kidd, never meant for the likes of you. He belongs to me, and you would do well to remember that."

He swallowed, his raw throat grating in the salty breeze. He couldn't look away from the barren horizon, waiting to see the faint outline of the perilous country in which Law was being tortured.

He stood there, unblinking, and waited.

Law's head rocked as he was pounded into the sheets, Vergo's grip on his hips breaking skin. His right cheek was swollen and his broken teeth clattered in his closed mouth, slicing into his tongue. Vergo wasn't like his Master, who enjoyed pet play and humiliating punishments. Vergo enjoyed inflicting pain. Got off on it. He liked the way Law's blood beaded under his fingernails, the way his teeth gave way beneath his fist. In a way, Law was more terrified of Vergo than his Master, disregarding his feverish and unnatural love for the latter.

He cried silent tears, his face frozen in an apathetic mask because any movement would disturb his slowly healing injuries. Vergo didn't like to fuck quiet whores, and thrust into Law with renewed vigor. He opened his mouth to moan and ended up choking on fragments of enamel, blood easing them down. It was enough for Vergo to see his teeth and tongue painted a bright scarlet, his eyes bulging and throat bobbing as he struggled to keep his airways clear. He slowed his pace. It was still brutal, to the point where Law knew his cervix would be bruised for hours, his insides chaffed raw- an almost impossible feat. At the very least his body knew when to drug him with its natural opiates, and an orgasm rippled through him just as the pain neared unbearable. The agony chased away, Law let his eyes fall closed and relaxed the muscles in his neck. Letting the bed bear the weight of his head, basking in the aftershocks of his orgasm, Law felt the land of sleep calling him.
No, someone was actually saying his name, and when he opened his eyes and saw red hair and a gentle smile, he couldn't stop the tears. The kind expression morphed into one of vicious lust, the pain returning along with the memories.

"If you don't cooperate, I'll just force you."

Law swallowed, his adam's apple bobbing once, twice, his compulsive swallowing melding into indistinguishable sobs, his windpipe bent awkwardly from how his head was pulled back. Law had little time to prepare himself before Kidd's fingers were in his mouth, prying open his jaws, and his cock was stuffed down his throat. Caught off guard, his muscles spasmed to remove the intrusion, and coughed weakly around the foul-smelling member. He couldn't recall if Kidd had smelled and tasted so acrid, bitter on his tongue and in his lungs. He couldn't remember if Kidd's hands had been this rough when he had carded his fingers through his hair on those warm nights together.

Did his fingernails dig into his scalp and draw blood?

Did the fur of his pelvis feel so coarse against his cheeks on Sabaody?

No, this act wasn't the same.

Or was it?

Even if Kidd refused to admit it, Law had taken advantage of him.

Maybe it was only right that Kidd do the same.
Soon Kidd ceased the forceful jerk of his head, grating his length painfully in his throat. He replaced tearing of his hair with the sharp thrusts of his hips, and Law could only stare ahead with wide glassy eyes as Kidd fucked his throat raw. There was no pleasure to be gained, Kidd was aiming at the wrong place, and Law's mind was too warped with pain of different kinds to thoroughly process anything rationally.

Kidd was here and he was violent, his infamous reputation as the 'Red Death' showing itself as the iron truth. He probably did this to countless women, stealing them from their beds and splitting them with his cock. He probably took babies from their mother's breasts and crushed their skulls in his hands, jammed his thumbs in their father's eyes and ripped their jaws off. Law knew his grandiose muscles weren't for show, he'd even seen him in action from a distance, and felt them ripple beneath his palm in the throws of an unpleasant dream.

And hadn't Law always been the same?

He may not have raped whores and slaughtered babies, but he had killed. He had tortured. They weren't innocent people, but he was far from innocent himself. He couldn't claim he took no pleasure in their suffering, hadn't loved the way they broke apart under his skillful touch. Their deaths were beautiful, he made their suffering beautiful, watched them crumble into nothing, reveled in their despair.

So he took what his lover gave without complaint.

Let him slam him to the floor hard enough to crack his skull, blood pooling beneath his head and stars sent dancing before his eyes. He let him rake his nails across his chest, slicing open his nipples and beading blood along intricate lines. Let him impale himself into Law, splitting flesh and drawing blood. It was agonizing, Kidd didn't wait for him to adjust, rutting into him with all his strength. Something inside him hemorrhaged almost instantly, giving out under the fierce thrusting.
It hurt.

It hurt so much.

Looking into Kidd's twisted face hurt so much.

Law let out a ragged gasp as if breaking the surface of the ocean, his belly swelling with Vergo's seed as he released inside. The vision of Kidd was gone, replaced by the unwavering certainty that he was slipping into insanity. He had already lost so much time, fading in and out of reality, hours dripping through his fingers, lost to the breeze drifting in through Master's open window.

His emotions had left him, leaving him with nothing but apathy and silence. He couldn't remember the last time he ate, couldn't remember the last time he drank water. His body wasn't allowed to truly sleep, but his mind drifted away whenever it could.

"Wasn't that nice of Vergo to treat you so sweetly?"

His Master's shadow eclipsed him like the shadow of a mountain over a town. He couldn't escape it, he didn't want to. The faint impulses to escape had fled when Kidd entered the room and took him like an animal. He had punished him, gifted him, taken something from him he could never return. Law didn't know if he wanted them back.

Those gentle days.
Filled with unease.

In the comfort of Kidd's embrace, he'd always suspected things would turn sour. Always ready to be betrayed. He waited for Kidd to take him up on his offers, to take sex as payment for being so kind to him. Law tried to give him so many things to quell the desire to repay him: his body, gold, his mother's lineage- and even though Kidd accepted his final gift, his insistence on keeping him at arm's length nearly killed him. Lounging in the safety of Kidd's bedroom, pressing himself as close as possible, sending warm smiles at each other, Law couldn't stave the aching need in his loins. He wanted to give himself to Kidd, and take the other in return. All the way, just the two of them, to do what his body needed. To supply his nature with a purpose. He was created to serve a Master with everything he had at his disposal, but Kidd refused to give him what he wanted.

And Kidd had taken from him instead, and though Law had finally gotten what he desired, it wasn't the same.

It wasn't what he needed.

And now he was lost, unsure of himself and what he wanted.

And somehow, it didn't matter.

Because Law was lost in his mind, trapped by the tethers of his past. Slave to the nightmares his shattered mind spun to torture him.

And he willingly submitted.
Law let himself be molded into the sheets, his body breaking and swelling and reforming, and all the while Law was heavily disassociated. He spoke words without meaning, cried out without memory, and lived without living.

When he regained control of his mind, it was only for the briefest of moments before he was injected in the upper thigh with an opaque drug. Law slipped into oblivion, and did not resurface.

Penguin barked orders at the bridge crew, his palms sweaty and chest tight. Every second they wasted was one more that Law suffered. With Law gone he was in full command, but all he could do was frantically fuss about. He was unable to retain a cool head, knowing what Law was going through.

Law was his first best friend, and he was Law's second. They'd met when Penguin's name was still Robyn. When he still served as an assassin under the tutelage of his parents. He'd adored his job, and been exceptional at it. Everyone in the Blues knew of the Avian Assassin, of the multiple guises he went under in order to take out his targets. He'd been trained to be a sniper without parallel, and one day he was able to surpass his parents. He'd killed them at the age of 14, and was finally able to pursue the life he desired. He was able to go on missions without having to masquerade in ball gown, able to chop off his long hair and renounce his title as a femme fatale.

When he met Law, the other took him for a man, and when he walked in on him adjusted his binder, he still referred to him as 'he'. It was a blessing that he did, because Penguin would have killed him for it. Soon enough Law introduce him to the world of hormone therapy, and by the time he was sixteen Law had performed his double mastectomy. He filled out his baggy clothes with layers of muscles, and when he looked in the mirror he no longer had the urge to shatter his reflection.
They bonded over their negative sexual experiences, Penguin having slept with more targets than he could remember. When Law revealed his true self, Penguin had felt only adoration for the other. Only an incredibly brave person could continue to exist with such a heavy burden.

Law had helped him realize his true self, and in return he only expected his loyalty. So he would do his part and rescue his friend, even if he knew it was hopeless.

There was likely nothing left to rescue.

"Captain, it seems we have a welcome party."

He leveled the bearded man with a hard stare, searching his dark sunglasses for a glint of movement.

"Eustass 'Captain' Kidd...I hope you provide me with a bit of a challenge."

He uncrossed his arms and retrieved the bamboo staff from the holster on his back. He cracked his neck and strummed his fingers. He tipped his head and let his glasses slide down the bridge of his nose, allowing a glimpse of cruel brown eyes. His lips curled in a small smile.

" Fucking that whore has me quite refreshed."

Chapter End Notes
Broken fragments of broken lives. Next chapter will be back at the usual 4.5K.
Chapter 30

Kidd drifted into awareness with a faint aching in his limbs that blossomed into starlit agony. White flames of pain scorched his chest and waist, his muscles unable to tense. *Seastone, I'm bound with seastone. But why, did Killer take me down?* He drifted between realities, his mind fabricating stories that seemed concrete, only to slip away. *No, we were going to save Law...LAW! What happened? We docked and...*

Vergo, they'd docked at one of Dressrosa's ports and been met with a welcome party baring fangs. Vergo had insinuated the unforgivable, and Kidd had nearly blacked out with rage. The other man turned dark with Haki, and Kidd's victory was sealed. It didn't matter how strong the man was, whether he could best an Admiral or held the highest bounty. If he used Armament Haki, Kidd was the guaranteed victor. If he wasn't in such a hurry he would have savored his death, crushed his body inch by inch and relish his screams. But there was no time to waste on sadistic luxuries, and with a clench of his fist Vergo expired in a gooey crunch as his Armament Haki collapsed inwards. His brain matter frothed from his eyes, his organs exploding from his mouth. The two minions flanking him froze in horror, and he brushed them aside and let his crew care of the foot soldiers. His crew was under strict orders to leave as soon as possible, and Penguin agreed to spot their exit. He wouldn't risk their decimation for the sake of his hapless romance.

It took every ounce of persuasive communication skills to convince both crews to essentially abandon their captains.

"I have a plan."
"I can get us out of here and met up with you guys without a hitch. Give me twenty-four hours and if I'm not back by then...Killer, you know what to do."

Of course it took more than just words, thus his efficient dispatch of what he now knew to be Doflamingo Donquixote's right hand. After that it was a haze of shouting and blood, watching his ship flicker out of existence as Emilio used his Devil Fruit and the Heart Pirates aided in jettisoning them to safety. He plowed ahead, far enough that he knew he seemed victorious to the retreating ships, but as soon as he rounded a limestone building, he knew he'd been bested.

One of Vergo's subordinates had shot him with a poison dart, and even though he plucked the barbed needle from his bicep, the effects were taking their toll. The world had begun to blend together, trees melting into the cobbled streets, the scents of a fish market entwining with the potent reek of the sewage running beneath his feet. The miasma of colors and smells brought him to his knees, and he managed to take a staggering breath before his consciousness faded away.

And now I'm here, wherever here is...

"Law, you're such a good boy..."

His skin marbled with gooseflesh, eyes stinging with tears as the world came in.

Wet, they were wet sounds, the sounds of a tongue, the sounds...oh the sounds...

Through misattribution of arousal, coupled with the undeniable whimpers from Law, his pants tightened. He flushed with shame, his sweat cold, finally realizing the situation. He was bound with seastone, his hand cuffed to his left thigh, a thick rope braided between his teeth. The coarse fibers tore into his cheeks, every brush of his tongue lacerating the tender muscle. As his eyes adjusted he realized he was in a closet, light streaming in through the slats on the folding doors. He
could see faint glimmers of pink, streaks of shadow, but he couldn't form outlines of whoever was putting on a show.

But he knew, he knew and he couldn't save Law.

He squeezed his eyes shut, tears burning tracts down his pained face. He'd prayed so hard that Law was untouched, left to stew in his anger and never in shame. But here Law was clearly in the midst of assault, how much damage had Dolflamingo inflicted on Law's psyche over the past few days?

"We have a guest Law, would you like to see him? I'm sure he'd love to see you. So obedient and wet. Too bad he can't touch you."

There was a long whine, filled with desperation and longing.

Kidd held his breath, nostrils flaring as the scent of sex assaulted his senses.

"Don't fret darling, I'll let you have what you want in a moment. Just hold on, baby doll..."

Kidd's stomach rolled with acute nausea, and he hunched over in an attempt to stave it off. The last thing he wanted was to choke to death on his own puke. He panted, saliva rolling down his chin. The sudden light blinded him, and he jerked to the side, blinking away tears as he adjusted to the brightness.

It took all his willpower to remain conscious, his skin taking on an ashen pallor.
Doflamingo grinned broadly, pearlescent canines flashing as he backed away from the open closet.

"Lookie there Law, it's your adorable boyfriend."

Kidd's eyes bulged like boiled eggs, nose running as he hyperventilated against his bindings.

Law was naked, save for a pink leopard collar whose matching leash was held in his 'Master's' hand. His eyes were glazed and unfocused, his lips puffy and parted. Sweat shone on dark skin, rife with painful-looking suck marks and deep bloody bites. Law's upper body was blanketed in a rosy flush, his pebbled nipples swollen, a pair of golden D's dangling from the delicate buds linked by a short length of chain. His sideburns and goatee had been shaved away, making him look years younger, and the jolly roger on his chest was redone with a thick line running diagonally through its face.

The Donquixote jolly roger.

Law nuzzled his face against Doflamingo's thigh, wrapping his arms around the man's leg. He mouthed a bite into the orange fabric, eyes crinkling with an upward quirk of his lips. His eyes were half-lidded, but unseeing, and it was then that he noticed the tourniquet lying nearby. Kidd clenched his teeth, a futile attempt in sawing through the braided rope that only resulted in chafing his mouth.

"He's cute isn't he? My little pet. Of course, it's a shame he ruined his figure. Testosterone is really the only thing that would ruin him permanently, you know? You can't return the voice to its feminine pitch after deepening it. And these muscles, and that facial hair." He curled his lip in disgust, "At least the tattoos are mildly attractive. With a little tweaking I can make those work in my favor."
He trailed a thick finger along the prominent knobs of Law's spine, eliciting a mewl and a shiver. Kidd grunted, shaking his shoulders and flexing his hand.

"Don't struggle Captain Kidd. You're lucky he fancied you. Not many people can say they held a Lorelei's love. Of course, you got more than that, didn't you? You even got to enjoy his lovely mouth."

Doflamingo depressed Law's tongue with his index finger, sliding it into the recess of his mouth. Law choked and moaned, arching his back and grinding his knees into the tile. Dark smears of bruises rose around his knees. Law twisted his body, craning his neck and taking the man's finger down further, exposing the raw opening between his thighs. Kidd squeezed his eyes shut until white sparks danced behind his eyelids.

"How rude. He's displaying himself for you, giving you a private show, and you won't even watch? We'll have to remedy that, won't we Law?."

Kidd felt the ridge of his right ear split with a painless burn, his head arching back and the muscles around his eyes twitching without command. The pain followed the red tributaries down his neck. His eyes watered.

"Better. I'm sure you'll be more willing once we let you in on the fun. But foreplay's essential for an enjoyable evening, don't you think?"

Doflamingo could make him watch, but he couldn't make him see. His tears blurred whatever lewd display the man concocted for him. Law's dark skin and Doflamingo's lurid coat contrasted sharply in his cloudy vision.
"Shame. Guess there's nothing to do but leave you to it."

Law's deep brown hue was lost to the darkness, Doflamingo enclosing him once more in the relative safety of the closet. Barring him from the atrocious scene, he both tormented and eased his fears. The wet sounds returned, accompanied by the simplest language Kidd had ever heard come out of Law's mouth. For a moment, he feared they'd somehow lobotomized him, taken away his mind to make him pliant. But he had seen the tourniquet, the faint puckered mark on his thigh. They'd given him a drug to make him incoherent, probably an aphrodisiac.

*Probably, but you know what he is...*

Kidd let out a gasping sob as his brain betrayed him, his anxiety rearing up and spiraling his thoughts in an endless litany.

*He's a Lorelei, a sex slave, he said it himself, he's like a dog in heat...*

*Oh gods, I can't think like that, he's human!*

*But he's not, he's not human, not really.*

*He doesn't deserve this, he can't control himself!*

*I'm just jealous, I know I am.*
The fucking noises! I can't deal with this!

He breathed harshly through his nose, braying against the frayed rope until his chest grew tight and dizziness overtook him. In an act of great cowardice, Kidd forced himself to faint, overloading his brain with carbon dioxide through hyperventilation.

Law didn't sound like he minded his absence.

His body burned pleasantly, eyes rolling back as he reached another shattering orgasm. His walls spasmed around his Master's fingers, a keen slipping from swollen lips. Self-awareness was nearly a foreign concept, his mind stuttering like an ancient machine around the most basic of facts. He knew his Master was here, and his Master was hungry. He readily delivered, letting his hair be stroked as he lapped at a pool of cum creasing between the tiles.

"Good boy Law, I have a reward for your hard work."

He mewled and nuzzled Master's hand at the praise, a peacockish urge to preen welling inside him. Anything Master gave him would be received with utter joy, and nothing he did for Master was done with a sense of duty. He loved his Master, reveled in his touch.

"Do you remember Mister Eustass? He's here to play with you. Would you like that?"
Law wet his lips. His Master no longer proffered marbles of candy from the bedside dish, but their sweet taste lingered.

His Master chuckled at his earnestness, and pat his head. Law arched up to chase the pressure, but his Master drew away quickly. His Master pressed a chase kiss to Law's temple, wiggling his fingers in the direction of the closet.

The accordion doors slid open, revealing a prone figure curled in the corner. Law whined and nosed his Master's fingers in worry, receiving another pat in response.

"Don't worry, our little guest is just sleeping. I'm sure he wouldn't want to miss your playdate, so why don't you go ahead and wake him up."

With another flick of his fingers, the shackles and ropes disentangled from the redhead. Waiting for a nod of permission, Law crawled over to his companion. Words were difficult for Law to string together, tamping down his tongue and leaving him vaguely disappointed in himself.

He pawed at Kidd's clothing, shaking him until his head lolled back and forth. Law frowned, and looked to his Master for reassurance.

"Why don't you start playing? He might just be pretending to sleep."

Law nodded, and hooked his arms around Kidd's thighs. He dragged him from the closet, offering a consoling whimper as the redhead flopped backwards and cracked his head on the floor. Fear
blossomed in his chest, fingers growing cold and weak.

He had hurt Master's guest!

Law made deft work of the fastenings on the man's pants, pulling down his zipper and parting his fly. Kidd's fingers twitched as he tugged down his underwear, and the desperation and determination to please quickened his breathing. He pulled out the limp member and gave the head a languid stroke of his tongue. The taste was familiar, the weight satisfying, and he gave the shaft a few tugs until it thickened. Law licked his lips and took him into his mouth, swallowing until it bumped the back of his pallet. Loosening his throat, he took him further, nose burrowing into the soft red hair at its base. The fur was smooth against his lips, unlike last time, but the detail fled as lust pervaded his senses.

As soon as he was hard and dripping, he pulled off with a smile. He seemed to be waking up, groaning and shaking his head. He tried to sit up, so Law leaned over and pressed a finger to his lips.

Law spread his fingers and pushed on Kidd's chest to push himself backwards, and his jaw dropped as he leaned back onto his cock. His body parted without a hint of resistance, Kidd's cock sliding home. His slit flush against Kidd's balls, Law could feel the man's heart beating inside him. His whole body thrummed from the man's pulse, his loins achingly full. He let out a shaky breath, gasping desperately to cool down the burning pleasure inside him.

He was on fire.

He was dying.

He was in heaven and was never coming down.
He rocked on the cock and the redhead hissed like a boiling kettle, jerking up into him with sharp staccato thrusts that had him seeing stars. Was he bigger than usual? He felt thicker than he'd remembered, his length pressing into his cervix and stretching his vagina in a pleasant burn.

The pressure at his cervix was neither painful nor intermittent, it seemed like his cock was long enough reach his second entrance without having to thrust. It was a dick unlike those he had taken before, unlike his Master's that speared him through and stretched him until he burst, or Vergo's considerably smaller, thinner cock that stabbed into him like a knife, never truly landing a hit on his cervix unless he bent one of Law's legs over his head and took him from the side. Both were painful, bringing their own pleasures, but this cock was a steady presence inside him, pressing on every part of him without demanding too much. Even his thrusts could not compare, each one soft and without pattern, as if he didn't want to fuck him.

Absurd, what a brainless thought, one that could bring him serious hurt if vocalized. The last time the redhead had taken him he had shown him what he could do, giving him a warning if he slipped up along the line. This was a test, and Law just had to measure up to his expectations if he wanted to forgo such a punishment. He couldn't even remember why the man had taken him, couldn't recall the relationship to his Master, and his name was merely a wisp of a memory on the tip of his tongue.

Law bounced on his cock, crying out and writhing as he picked up the pace. The man refused to touch him, it seemed, his hand clenched by his side. At least he stayed pressed to the floor, letting Law service him to his heart's content. A deep flush worked from Law's navel to his neck, sweat spreading like a fine mist along his back as he worked himself on the thick shaft. Kidd's face was creased and covered in sweat and tears, blotches standing out on the otherwise pale skin. He worked himself through another orgasm, stalling in his movements long enough to swallow his saliva and finger the piercings stabbed through tender nipples. He bore his Master's brand, both on his skin and through it, and it filled him with pride.

Though his eyes were unfocused he could feel his Master staring at him, whispering his praises. Kidd's hips stuttered, and Law clamped his walls firmly around the throbbing cock, bringing the redhead to completion. He crooned at the feeling of thick heat flooding his insides, and his eyelids fluttered as another orgasm ripped through him. He rocked on the softening member for good measure, milking the last spurts of seed from the sensitive organ. His heart had been conditioned by now, but each repetitive rush of pleasure always managed to take his breath away and leave him
deliriously light-headed.

Law vaguely registered the brush of a hand on his thigh, and peered down through thick lashes at his partner. His broad chest was stuttering with short breaths, his throat catching on sobs as they broke from his raw lips, bitten and bleeding. He was crying, sobbing like a child, but there was a worry in his eyes that wasn't directed at himself. He stroked Law's thigh gently, the callouses on his hand were not unpleasant.

"L-Law..."

The voice was too vulnerable to belong to the same man that had laughed as he raped him into the floor.

Rape?

Hadn't it been deserved?

Deserved for what?

It was his duty to please.

His duty?
What was his name again?

What was he doing here?

What time was it?

It was warm.

He felt good.

Nothing was wrong.

His mind released its brief grip on reality again, his partial sanity lost in the undercurrent of hormones and potent drugs.

"Law."

The man spoke again, his voice stronger and more familiar, and Law looked at him again, his mind struggling to string thoughts together. He lifted his palm and pawed at Law's waist. The redhead's eyebrows drew together, his mouth working as if he couldn't muster the strength to speak.
"You okay?"

... The gears in his head shed their rust like a summer tree's leaves, fall sweeping through the cogs of his mind. He was suddenly hyperaware of the time he was missing, of the pain coating him like a second skin.

There was broken glass in his joints and sweat and blood stung the slowly healing bite marks. Every hickie felt like he'd been jabbed deep into his muscles until he bruises, and the pain in knees was beyond description. His nipples stung and felt uncomfortably heavy with their golden decorations.

His body was sticky, saliva drying on his back and thighs, and his eyelashes clumped together with semen. His mouth and tongue were coated in the bitter substance, and his eyes felt hot and dry.

Kidd's length was limp inside him, but inside him all the same. And Kidd's hair was matted in drying blood, his own eyes bloodshot and face streaked with tears and snot. He was ugly crying, there was no other name for it, and the heart he'd forgotten he'd had was shattering like a gong made of glass. He swallowed and his tongue peeled off the roof of his mouth.

... "No."
Chapter Notes

Warnings For This Chapter:

1. Forced sex
2. Promise of genital mutilation (doesn't actually happen)
3. Forced masturbation

Law made a small sound in the back of his throat, staring down at Kidd with a disturbingly apathetic expression. The tears on his face glistened in the sunlight, highlighting the deathly shadows beneath his eyes. Kidd felt an untimely indignation at the sight of the deep hollows Law had worked so hard on erasing. Though he had sobbed and struggled throughout the act, Kidd still felt as if the world was trailing behind him. Shock, his mind unhelpfully supplied, I must be in shock. It was no surprise, white pain stabbed through the back of his head, and his neck and ears were wet with blood. He tasted carbon dioxide on his tongue, and he registered the blissful warmth around his oversensitive member.

Law blinked dumbly, and slowly removed his hands from their hold in Kidd's abdomen. As he pulled away his nails slid out of their bloodied grooves in his skin, the sticky flesh of Law's palms peeling deafeningly in the relative silence. Kidd's heartbeat was still thrumming loudly in his ears, and he ached all over, but his concern for Law and the detached look on his face took precedence. He parted his lips to reassure him, to say anything at all to assuage Law's fears. That he'd get them both out of there no matter what, even if he hadn't the faintest idea how to even remove the seastone still weighing him down.

The sound of clapping stole his voice.

"Bravo Eustass Kidd, it looks-"

Doflamingo stopped when Law's face contorted in what looked like pain.
"No~" He whined, "No stopping!"

Law collapsed forward, propping himself on his elbows on either side of Kidd's head, the metal tassels on his nipples digging into Kidd's chest.

"La-agh!"

Kidd choked off in a hoarse shout as Law began to move, keeping himself plastered to him as he pistoned his hips. The overstimulation made the pleasurable sensations of heat and spasming muscles unbearable. His mind wavered and melted into grey jelly, unable to focus on anything other than the pain as he waited out his refractory period. It only took another fifteen seconds for his dick to harden, but the agony seemed to last an eternity. As soon as his body primed for sex, the pleasure began to trickle back into his nervous system. The textures of Law's insides were indescribable, the ridges and bumps of his vagina rubbed incessantly around his dick as it tried to strangle him, like the firmest possible handshake. He was so unbelievably wet, the viscosity of his natural lubrication and their mixed cum creating a moist vacuum. Law was a raging inferno, like the warmth spreading throughout one's body after drinking a steaming cup of hot chocolate during a snowstorm.

He hadn't lasted very long the first time, even though he was notorious among the few lovers he'd had as having excellent stamina. But Law was special, it wasn't just the mind-shattering feeling, but the very fact that he was doing it with Trafalgar Law. That he was inside the most intimate place of the love of his life. That they were sharing each other's pleasure in being with each other, in the sacred trust of being allowed in such a place. The build up of his orgasm approached like a fast moving train. He cried out as he ejaculated into Law, having sometime surging up his hand to grasp at Law's ass, digging his nails into the supple flesh.

He could feel himself filling Law, his hips jerking weakly as he spurted the last drops of his essence deep into his womb. As he came down from his high, gasping oxygen into his lungs, reality fell into place. He hadn't been allowed inside Law, there was nothing erotic about being forced to have sex with each other. Blending something so tender and intimate with a vile lack of
consent left a sour taste of bile on his tongue. Law peeled himself off, their chests tacky with sweat and other substances. He hovered his face over Kidd's, letting him see the clarity in his eyes, the sorrow and silent plea for forgiveness.


Ah-he did this on purpose...

Law's brief moment of sanity, his broken reply, it had been a tidal of realization.

Law was back for good.

But of course, it wasn't that simple. With their rapt observer, it could never be so simple.

Law's tongue darted out and lapped at Kidd's cheek. The wet strokes of the warm organ sent deadly shivers down the seam of his spine. Kidd whimpered and closed his eyes, fresh tears mingling with the drying saliva. Doflamingo laughed in the background, full of malice, and Kidd thanks the gods that he hadn't noticed Law's change in behavior.

But it hadn't changed, not at all, because Law was pretending.

Kidd bit the inside of his cheek, gnawing at the bruised flesh. If they ever slept together, he'd never dreamed it would be like this. Even if Law hadn't been conscious the first time, Kidd had. He could excuse that, write it off as another person, but now. Now their first time together had really been under duress, the pleasure tainted with the bitter truth that neither of them wanted it. He pulled his train of thought from Law's feelings on the matter, he couldn't step into that dark abyss. He needed to be strong, keep his wits about him, he'd promised himself he'd get them out of there. He wouldn't let his anxiety get the better of him.
"Now come here Law, your Master's getting lonely."

Like he's calling a dog.

He didn't want Law to go, but restrained himself from groping after him, knowing he would be brushed aside. Law trailed his fingers across the roads of Kidd's stomach, eyes catching his for a single moment before Law slipped away. Kidd kept his eyes averted as he turned, grit his teeth at the sensation and sound of his soft member sliding out of Law's swollen entrance. Semen dribbled onto Kidd's thigh as he crawled away, the sound of bruised knees hitting the floor twisting his insides. Propriety dictated where he could look, but he knew he couldn't leave Law alone, couldn't play the part of broken lover without following his heart. He tensed his abdominals to curl into a sitting position, his lower back screaming in protest. His penis hung limply onto the floor, the sensitive head burning on the cold tiles. Kidd huffed out a whine and craned his neck to look at the offending scene, the muscles in his neck straining audibly.

Doflamingo sat on a plush leather ottoman, cooing softly at Law and petting his hair as he draped himself obediently over his knee. Law burrowed his cheek into the fabric of his pants, fingers clinging weakly. Doflamingo's large hand trailed down his spine and settled at his hip, curling there as he moved to hoist the man effortlessly on his lap. Kidd thought he looked like a demented father cradling his child on his lap during a thunderstorm, whispering comforting words into their ear and chasing the shadows away. But this was not a familial display of love, and Kidd was hard pressed to call it such.

Law licked the man's fingers as he slipped a hand into the man's pants, pulling out the most terrifyingly enormous penis Kidd had ever seen. His mouth dried as his throat closed up with renewed sobbing, realizing just how much Law had been through. He'd had to take that inside him. He'd said something about that, somewhere along the way, about how his body was regenerative only for his owner's kinks. But surely this was stretching it too far, taking something like that would skewer Law all the way up to his diaphragm. That would be enough to kill him, right? Bile rose on his tongue once more, and this time he couldn't hold it down. He managed to twist to the side before he emptied his stomach, choking and gagging on the sour taste.

Doflamingo clicked his tongue, "Clearly you were never taught how to be a proper guest. Back in
He wiggled his fingers and Kidd writhed in horror as he was dragged by the skin of his back, as if hooks had dug into his flesh. His voice was lost to him as he looked at Law desperately, but received no comfort.

As the doors of the closet enclosed him in darkness, he prayed Law was still just acting.

"Now, be a good boy Law and wait on the bed for me. I'll have a servant clean this mess up promptly."

Doflamingo stood and Law slide boneless to the floor, nodding meekly and butting his head against the man's calf for good measure. His Master bent down and pat his head affectionately, tears pricking his eyes as his heart swelled with fabricated adoration. Maybe it was real love. Law wouldn't know, he was a surgeon and a medical physician, not a psychiatrist. He had no idea how much his psyche had been corrupted by the man during his tender childhood. He was aware that abuse could warp the mind, but he dared not look into it. It would do nothing to assuage his fears, only temper his self-deprecation.

He ducked his head under the edge of the comforter and crawled into the bed, the darkness of the sheets a small mercy. His body was utterly filthy, Kidd's cum sliding down the inside of his thighs, and he humped the sheets in a small act of rebellion, smudging filth into the priceless silk. Of course, Doflamingo was watching him, and he knew what it looked like, so he wriggled to the top of the bed and poked out his head, pressing his face into the pillows, and snaking his hand between his legs. Law bit his lip, tears wetting his lashes as he hesitated only moment before slipping his fingers into his tender vagina. He'd never touched himself before, at least not to his present memory, although he knew the action was familiar to his body.
His insides felt slippery and oddly textured, and there was still a stretch despite how many times he'd been penetrated. Law couldn't hold back his gasps and cries of ecstasy and he swirled his thumb about his clitoris, his toes curling and thighs spasming uncontrollably. He pulled out his fingers and rubbed at his clit with cupped hands, his back arching and legs stiffening as he lost control of his movements. His heels dug into the sheets and his head fell back, mouth parting in strangled gasps as he rubbed himself violently to completion. His orgasm rose in waves, his fingers plunging into his slick opening and pumping furiously, his walls throbbing and swelling around them.

He couldn't bring himself to care that the sheets had slipped off his body, that he was arched off the sheets in sharp bridge, or that his legs were spread in full view of the closet. He knew Kidd could hear him, could maybe even see him through the white slats of the doors. He didn't care, couldn't care. He'd never known what it felt like to masturbate, how a clitoral orgasm felt. He knew what other orgasms felt like: vaginal, g-spot, cervical, and the unique uterine orgasm, and they were each distinctly different from each other. This was nothing like the others, touching his clit felt like touching the bundle of raw nerves that it was. From his studies he knew that the clitoris had 8,000 sensitive nerve endings, double that of the glans of the penis. A clitoral orgasm could cause from three to sixteen contractions, including pelvic contractions. He couldn't remember what the others entailed, but he counted each pulse of his sex organ, each gentle wave of pleasure as his body dripped his fluids onto the lavender bed.

One

Two

Three

Four

Five
The strong contractions fell away, leaving his sex to twitch weakly in the aftermath. He felt thoroughly spent, and collapsed against the mattress, the sweat on his back gluing him to the sheets. Law panted, struggling to catch his breath, his body warm and pliant in the afterglow.

"Very good baby doll, I'll be joining you shortly. Be a good boy and rest up while I'm gone."

With that Doflamingo left, presumably to find someone to clean up Kidd's vomit. Law watched him go with lazy eyes, willing strength into his jellied muscles. When the door closed, he started counting to twenty, breathing slowly through his nose, trying to get his heartbeat under control. He could hear Kidd making a fuss in the closet, no doubt fighting against the sea stone shackle. Law rolled over, propping himself on his elbows, and slid off the bed. When he stood the world swayed, and he clung to the bed post, gritting his teeth in shame.

"Law?"
Kidd sounded so vulnerable, so full of concern for his wellbeing, that Law couldn't hold his tongue any longer.

"I'm here Kidd-ya. I'm here."

He was filled with the need to comfort, the need to coddle, so sudden and overwhelming that it brought him to his knees. He gasped out in pain, his bruised knees grating against the cement tributaries between the tiles. Kidd called out in alarm, the sounds of struggle renewed, and Law smiled despite the agony. Crawling on his swollen knees, he cooed softly in the hopes of soothing the man's worries. It was hopeless, he knew it well, but he didn't care. Doflamingo was gone for however long and all he wanted was to be near Kidd, no matter the consequences. In his fog-addled mind he knew that when Doflamingo returned Kidd would pay the price. Law pawed at the brackets of the closet doors, fingers catching and slipping into the darkness between.

"And what might you be doing, hmm?"

His skin broke into gooseflesh, tears of frustration coating his vision, and he craned his neck to look at his Master lingering in the doorframe, flanked by an uncomfortable servant. His slight adam's apple bobbed as he let out a desperate whine, his expression flat except for his drawn brows and teary eyes. Doflamingo, for all his shrewd cunning and frightening intelligence, for all that he had trumped Law and caught him unawares, Law knew he had finally entered a chink in his armor. Though it was fuzzy and melded together, Law knew he'd been under Doflamingo's hand for at least three days. He knew he'd been taken by both him and Vergo, left to writhe on the bed at the mercy of a merciless toy. He'd been broken, physically and mentally, by both drugs and mental exhaustion. He was still broken, his sanity a thin line, and he knew that if he managed to ever escape he would forever be fractured. All his progress had been for nothing.

But for now he had managed to fool Doflamingo into believing nothing had changed. And it shouldn't have, almost hadn't, if not for Kidd's pointed concern. He might revert back any second,
but for now he could make decisions.

And he decided to keep the status quo.

"Empty~Want~!"

He whined, pitifully shaking the closet doors, Kidd growing deathly silent.

Doflamingo chuckled, waving dismissively at the servant to quickly clean up, swaggering over and patting his head.

"Let him rest, I'll fill you later all you want. Speaking of rest..." His eyes flashed with the promise of punishment.

"You've been a bad boy Law, and bad boys need to be punished."

Law squealed as he was scooped into Doffy's arms and carried to the ottoman. His heart pounded loudly in his ears, his heart hammering against his ribcage hard enough to bruise. He let out needy whines to mask his fear, despising the sound of his own voice. He was past the point of humiliation, the need to survive casting away his pride. Law was splayed out over Dolfamingo's lap like a lounging cat, and the giggle that left his lips was hysterical with terror.

Law heard the metal clinking of his belt unbuckling, and Law let out small mewl of horror. The metal platings of the chain-like belt would tear through his flesh, ripping open his most sensitive areas. In his primal terror he felt his bladder go, spreading warmth down his front as he desecrated
his Master's pants. The fact that he soiled the man's pants only worsened his panic.

Doflamingo was quiet, the sounds of his belt sliding from the loops in his pants stilling for a moment. Law's breath was short, panicked, and he couldn't tell if Kidd was making any noise under his own.

"It seems I will have to be harsher than I intended. Honestly, I thought we were past all this."

Doflamingo shook his head in disappointment, his expression soft, if only for a moment, before shooting a glare at the dawdling servant. Law maintained his gaze on the wall, waiting for the sounds of the door closing, signaling the servant's hasty retreat. He willed them back, to give him more time to prepare for the inevitable.

The metal platings that made up his belt came free from their loops, and Law knew the man was holding a single razor sharp rectangle of metal in his massive hand. The plating would be held deftly between his thumb and forefinger, a crude parody of Law's own hand as he prepared to make an incision into a patient. But they would be sleeping soundly, safe from the pain under the reliable blanket of anesthesia. Law would have nothing.

He raked the blade across Law's inner thigh, arcing upward towards his sex but stopping just before he reached the sensitive mound.

Law screamed.

Blood rushed hot down his legs. He could feel the flesh gaping, the deep gash tucking into the layer of subcutaneous fat. Kidd let out what sounded like a moan, the closet doors rattling. Doflamingo laughed, saying something about Kidd's reaction, but Law was too full of terror and pain to understand him. He knew he would show no mercy the next time, the blade would slice at
his most tender area, cut into him and split him open like a flower. Give the man more holes to fuck. Tears coursed down his face, his lip splitting as he dug his canines in to stifle his cries. His nose ran and his bladder spasmed weakly as he reached the end of his rope. His sanity was slipping, allowing him an escape from the trauma that would no doubt unfold. There was no stopping it.

There was a vicious bellow from the closet, and suddenly the doors were splintered on Doflamingo's bed, and the wire hangers were floating and contorting above a bloodstained and wild-eyed Kidd. He looked like a devil, his hair loose and writhing his face like a lion's mane. Doflamingo stilled at the sight, and Law realized there might never be another chance to enact his revenge.

He used what seemed like the last dredges of his strength to prop himself up a bit, hooking his knees to keep him on the precarious perch of his Master's lap. He was too exhausted to lift his head to see Doflamingo's face, and trailed his trembling fingers across the man's bare chest, brushing the thin fabric of his open shirt. He could feel the steady heartbeat beneath the withered pads of his fingers, the reverberations of the massive muscle pumping life through the man's body. Giving life to the man who took so much life away from others. Law grit his teeth and breathed through his nose.

"Mes."

Law's gripped the window into the man's chest, and and yanked, his torso twisting as he flung the massive block towards the closet. It thudded against the tiles, Doflamingo's thigh muscles convulsing as unimaginable pain coursed through him. Law twirled gracelessly onto the floor, his head spinning and stomach churning with nausea.

Kidd held out his arm, beckoning him to him, and Law scuttled so fast across the tiles that he didn't notice when one of his kneecaps split open. Law slumped into Kidd's clutch, burying his face into the crook of his shoulder. He felt irrationally safe in Kidd's embrace, as if his mere bodily contact could stave away the terror at his back. He heard Doflamingo screaming, a booming, blood-curdling sound of utter terror that stirred absolutely nothing in Law. He was disassociating, he knew that dimly in the edges of his awareness, a sudden separation of his mind from body.
"Hold tight Law."

Kidd's voice was calm and measured, and Law dug his fingers into the translucent block containing his purpose in life.

There was a tremendous sucking sensation and the most intense wave of nausea struck him with such intensity that his vision blacked out for a moment. When he managed to shake his head of the feeling of his brains being scrambled, his eyes cleared to the reveal Kidd's bedroom.
Chapter Notes

No major warnings in this chapter, except for gore.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Kidd hyperventilated as his lungs fought to oxygenate his failing heart. The organ pulsed in erratic patterns, every squeeze of blood shooting ice through his arteries. He was sure he was dying, you died from cardiac arrhythmia, right? The only one of them who knew was catatonic in his lap, staring blankly at the large cube with the equally frantic heart. Kidd blinked hard, sparks erupting behind his eyelids. He forced his breathing to slow. He wasn't dying. He would get through this. He couldn't just leave Law like this.

He watched him with ferocious intensity, willing his eyes to focus on the man's battered features. As his vision cleared, so did his mind, and with it came the realization that Doflamingo could still easily get to them as long as he was alive. Fury, black and foul, welled inside him. He clenched his fist, straining his muscles as he forced himself not to take Law's revenge. This was the man's reason for being, his raison d'être*. He'd be damned to steal it away.

Law coughed weakly, and Kidd's eyes sharped, cupping the man's face and letting his thumb scrub at the tears crusting his cheek.

"Law? Law can you hear me?"

Law's blank eyes followed him sluggishly, rolling until they fell on his well-earned prize. A spark lit within the amber depths, and Kidd was rapt with awe as Law reached out with a shuddering arm, pointing at the frosted cube with apathetic focus. Law tapped his index finger to the cube's rim, and it silently disintegrated. The massive heart thudded to the floor in a wet splatter and spray of blood. Kidd couldn't breath as the organ continued to pulse rhythmically without a body to oxygenate. Blood gushed out with each contraction of the red muscle, which Kidd found morbidly interesting.
Is that what my heart looks like?

Why the fuck is it still beating?**

He watched Law's face in the growing uncomfortable silence, but it did not change, Law's eyes locked on the continually pulsing heart. Whole minutes passed before the organ pulsed weakly twice before stilling. The scent of blood soaking into wood coated the air, the amount of blood that the heart had dispelled across his floor enough to fill a tall bucket, the puddle spreading out to slip beneath the couch. Kidd swallowed thickly, pulling his arm tightly around Law's waist, struggling to stand.

It took a while, but he managed it, slowly dragging his deadened limbs to pull the two of them to their feet. Law's arms dangled from his sides, leaning his weight into Kidd's bulk, only the redhead's arm keeping him upright.

"Okay Law, we're going to walk over here for a moment and then you can get nice and clean, alright?"

He didn't expect an answer, gently coaxing Law's feet to move in the direction of his nightstand. His den den mushi had been watching them with concerned eyes, slithering back and forth in worry. Kidd gathered Law to his chest as he sat on the bed, quickly picking up the receiver. Killer answered immediately.

"Kidd!? What the fuck? Are you here? How are you here?!"

There was a faint commotion outside the door, and Law bristled against him.
"No, don't come in here Kil. I mean it. Things aren't great, but we'll manage. Listen, get us as far away from Dressrosa as possible. Doflamingo's crew won't be after us for a long time, if ever, but keep a look out. Tell Penguin his captain will be fine, but to give us some privacy for the next twenty-four hours. I talk to you later. Oh, and ask him for a set of Law's clothes."

He didn't wait for a response, setting down the receiver and shuffling them both into the bathroom. Law's body temperature was rising, his cheeks standing out in a wicked flush, his eyes gaining an unhealthy gloss. The best thing for both of them was a shower, a nice long shower with plenty of soap and scrubbing.

He made sure to keep his back to the mirrors, lest Law see his bedraggled appearance. With a flick of his hand the shower head came to life, spurting jets of cold water onto the smooth limestone flooring. Kidd didn't bother to take off his pants or shoes, taking no time to kneel the two of them under the spray. The icy water took his breath away, spreading gooseflesh across his skin like a prickled rash.

Kidd settled back on his haunches and let Law settle in his lap. His pants quickly saturated and plastered against his thighs, the limestone slipping beneath the soles of his boots.

"Okay Law, let's get you clean, okay? Now, um, can you hear me? Law?"

Kidd flatted his palm over Law's navel, feeling the muscles tense beneath the pads of his fingers. Law gave a small nod, relaxing into Kidd's chest.

"Do you want to remove those?"
He gestured vaguely at the golden adornments linking Law's abused nipples. Law nodded again, and reached up.

Only to grip the chain beneath his nipple and pull.

The metal barbell tore through Law's nipple, leaving a bifurcation of sensitive flesh. Kidd swore and wrapped his arm around Law's waist protectively. The blood spread and diluted under the spray, crimson streams webbing down Law's stomach like bloody tears.

"Fuck! Fuck! Don't do- are you okay?! Does it hurt? Of course it fucking hurts what am I-shit!"

Kidd let out a sigh of frustration, running his hand through his hair, the tresses curling around his fingers like gorgon snakes. Law's hair plastered to his dark forehead like serifs of ink, golden eyes open and staring under the gelid torrent. Drops of water slid through the blood and created pink tributaries down Law's abdomen and spiraled down the drain. Law remained motionless as Kidd dabbed at his split nipple with an available face cloth until the bleeding waned into a puckering of granulation tissue. He abnegated from speaking, letting his powers spin the stud of the other piercing, thumbing out the barbell and catching the adjoining chain.

He felt the acute lack of Law's presence, and ached for the comfortable banter shared over bottles of wine as they sat beside a luminous pool. He longed for the past that came to him slowly, as fog rolls into port, of their gentle touches and shy smiles. Law had become his ballast, the nexus of all that he was.

And what had he possibly ever done for Law?
He squeezed out the face cloth and grabbed a bar of tea tree soap, and began to cautiously wipe down Law's arms. He scrubbed lightly at the thick layer of sweat and semen, pausing when Law let out a small noise of pleasure and let his head fall back onto Kidd's shoulder.

"Thank you."

Kidd could understand how good getting out all the grim and reek would feel after being forced to stew in it.

"It's no problem, Law."

He gave a last swipe of the cloth to his underarms before asking for permission to clean Law's back. Law nodded and leaned forward, giving Kidd a small gap to sweep across well-defined shoulder blades and down the knobs of a delicate spine.

He let Law clean the rest of himself once he was able to vocalize, taking the opportunity to grab another cloth and clean himself. The inflammation in his bicep from the tranquilizer had started to fade, the skin around the puncture still florid and sore. His hairline was encrusted in dried blood, his ear swollen and screaming. He kept his eyes averted as he cleaned away the cakes of semen on his stomach, the mirrored cuts splayed across his abdomen were deep and stung as he flushed them with soap. They didn't look deep enough to need stitches, but his ear definitely would need one or two. He had no idea what wound hid beneath his hair, but unlike his ear, it hadn't stopped bleeding. He prodded around his scalp for any tenderness, but his very skull seemed to throb.

"I'll bandage it."

Law's voiced echoed in the closed space, and Kidd forgot his modesty and looked at him. He flushed and turned away, his brain pounding in its socket.
"Okay."

The awkward tension rose around them like cloying steam, making it hard to breathe. The sound of Law's knees popping as he stood erased the silence, and Kidd quickly scrambled to grab him a towel. His shoes skidded on the floor, hyper aware of how cold he was. His fingers were trembling and his jaw was wired shut by the force of minute shivering. He draped the terry cloth around Law's shoulders, rubbing warmth into his stiff arms. Law dipped his head and gave a shy smile, love blooming in Kidd's heart.

Kidd offered to towel dry his hair to which Law politely declined. He tore up an extra towel and let Law bandage his head after prodding about his scalp for the wound. Law's skin was still febrile but his eyes were less glazed. Kidd allowed him to work, monitoring the way his hands shook and how his fingers fumbled and hitched on the improvised dressing.

"There's a small laceration here, head injuries bleed profusely no matter the size."

Kidd gave a perfunctory nod, taking ahold of Law's quivering hands.

"Why don't we get you into a pair of warm clothes? You look tired."

Law's gaze slid off him and at his reflection, his lips downturning into a hard scowl. He said nothing, and Kidd took it as a bad sign. He ushered Law out of the bathroom and found a set of cotton night clothes waiting for them on the bed. There were two steaming plates on a tray. There were buttered green beans and a full slab of grilled salmon flanked by broiled potatoes.
Law's stomach growled and he beelined for the bed, and Kidd made for the couch. He scooped up the discarded heart with his towel, the white cloth quickly stained dark red. He deposited it in the bathtub, running the tap to rinse it out. Law ignored him as he returned with cleaning supplies, scarfing down his first real meal in three days while Kidd sopped and scrubbed the floor in soaked pants and boots. The blood refused to lift out of the woodwork until he brought out Killer's bottle of white vinegar***, and the reek obediently dissolved with copious amounts of lemon juice****. He pulled the antique rug over the residual marks, and returned the cleaning bottles to the bathroom. He turned off the spigot and dried his hair with a dry towel, and then bundled the heart and placed it inside the empty wicker laundry basket.

When he returned he found that Law had scraped both plates clean. He didn't mind, his appetite was gone. Law had left the tray on the couch and was slipping into his own clothes. Kidd grabbed his pajamas from his wardrobe and snuck back into the bathroom, unnerved by Law's disregard. He took stock of himself in the mirror, combing through his damp hair with a bristle-hair brush, prodding at the burn marks around his ankles and wrist. His stump was inflamed along the crease of his scar, and he had to work his arm behind his back to pluck out a sliver of drawstring pants irritated the nail marks along his pelvis, and he was conflicted on wearing a shirt. He pulled it on, tugging at the collar to loosen it out. His muscles hadn't filled out when he'd bought it, and now it clung to his skin and rode up his stomach.

Law was curled under the sheets, clutching an overstuffed pillow with the sheets pulled around his head like a veil. Kidd smiled, waving out all the candles except the one on his nightstand. The couch had several decorative pillows, none of them comfy, but he was too tired to be picky.

"Lie with me."

Law's voice was ladened with sleep and raspy vocal cords. Kidd couldn't bring himself to deny him.

He tucked under the covers and doused the final candle, cloaking the room in pitch. Against his better judgment he curled around Law, spooning him and letting his warmth seep into the clammy body. Law took his hand and pulled it over him, tucking it under his shirt to rest over his flat abdomen. The skin felt suspiciously warm, but not unhealthy, Law's fingers a familiar icy prison.
"Doflamingo and Vergo were too violent, caused me to regenerate too much to let it take."

Law threaded his fingers through Kidd's, and he understood.

Sickness bubbled in his throat, he buried his nose in Law's moist hair and said nothing. He stayed there for the rest of the night, listening to Law's deep breathing and pressing his hand to his stomach. He watched over Law's form and did not sleep.

He leaned into Kidd's expert touch, moaning in appreciation at the firm patterns being traced into his scalp. Nails scraped through silken hair, frothy with mint shampoo. Law's body leched the warmth of the bath like a panacea, his sore muscles and aching parts relaxed in the bubbly sweet-smelling water. Somehow he knew that Doffy's heart had been in this bath, maybe Kidd dumped it there before finding another place to store it. He knew he wouldn't dispose of it until Law said so. Sitting there in the fragrant water, stewing in the last essence of the man who changed his life, Law was feeling nostalgic.

"I had 2 years and 3 months left to live, according to my father's charts."

Kidd's fingers stilled, but he said nothing. Law felt his eyes on him, and found them comforting.

"I wanted to kill as many people as I could in that time. I was furious with everything that breathed, and wanted to destroy the world. I wasn't the first kid who came to Doffy's headquarters, but I was the first who arrived wearing a necklace of grenades."
There was a small intake of air that poked at the bleeding hole where his heart used to be. He lifted his hand out of the water, droplets snaking down his arm. A slippery, wet hand took his own, and he gave a small squeeze of reassurance, and continued.

"I was waiting for an audience with Doffy when Cora-san came in. He was as tall as Doffy, wearing a black coat of the same make and a ridiculous shirt covered in hearts. He was a clown from the start, tripping over himself and acting like an utter fool. But he was violent, kicking Buffalo and Baby 5, the only kids who'd stuck around, across the room like it was nothing. Apparently it was, nobody seemed to care, not even the was Doffy's younger brother and was a high ranking executive in his crew, but he was such a clown I couldn't imagine anyone taking orders from him. True enough, he was mute."

Law snorted, tracing a heart in the soap suds.

"Cora-san grabbed my head and threw me out a four-story window. Granted, I don't think he meant to actually toss me out the window, but I never asked. The fall should have killed me, nearly did, but as I lay there in pile of sharp refuse I could only think that I didn't want to die yet. I was still just a child, no matter my intelligence, and my emotions couldn't handle the sort of reality of almost bleeding to death in garbage. I vowed to kill Cora-san, and so I returned to Doffy's Keep with abandon. Naturally they were surprised, but stranger things have happened in the world. After that, I milled about for a week, doing hard manual labor and running errands for them in dangerous neighborhoods. It wasn't too difficult, nobody dared mess with a kid wearing bombs, after all."

"Doffy vouched for me when the crew realized my disease, asked how I escaped. I told him the truth, that I had smuggled myself over the border buried under a mass of corpses. He asked what I hated so much, and I told him that I no longer believed in anything. It was true, I had lost all fear of death- as much fear a child of ten can comprehend, and promised to take revenge on Cora-san. In a way I guess I was furious with him for taking away my right to chose my own death. Actually, that ended up becoming a mantra in that place."

He frowned, his fingers ceased to draw, and he closed his eyes as Kidd began to rinse his hair. It
was his fourth bath in forty-eight hours, and if he wasn't napping he was sitting under the shower head, scratching at his skin until Kidd held him to his chest and let him cry. His emotions were all over the place, stunted, as if they were broken. Kidd had never left his side, never strayed too long for him to fully self-destruct, but it was only a matter of time. He was lost, his purpose in life was gone in an instant. He had no dreams to fulfill, no long kept desire. It was over, all that was left was to step into his grave.

It had been the goal all along, to go down with his ship, so to speak. His faithful friends knew it, and every few hours they would cause a racket outside Kidd's bedroom door. Bepo's roaring and Penguin and Shachi scrambling against whoever held the door. It never opened, a knock told him to shamble food or drink over. The two of them had created their own universe revolving around the bathroom, dunking themselves under the cold spray and holding each other in silence. It was like a baptism, or a solemn penance. They could pretend they were a family, a small trio locked in a safety net.

But the air was tainted here.

Kidd knew it, knew that Law was draining into an empty shell. Nothing could stop it, no amount of nursing could bring him back. Every hour was an hour gone, and Law couldn't feel much of anything anymore. It wasn't hard to tell his story, not when it was coming to an end.

Chapter End Notes

The next seven or eight chapters will be set in the past, going through Law's terrible childhood. Warning will be heavily tagged at the beginning of each chapter, but it's going to be pretty much disgusting in exactly the ways you expect. Don't worry, I will explain how Kidd got them out of there.

* French for 'reason to live'

** Most muscles contract via electrical impulses from the brain. Then obviously they would cease to function if they were disconnected from the brain. However, the heart follows a pattern different than most muscles in the body. The beating of the heart itself is not regulated by the brain, but actually within the heart itself. The only function of the brain is tell the heart how fast it needs to beat. Nerve cells within the heart continue firing for an extended period of time, promoting the process of beating.
For this reason, a heart that is removed from the body doesn't stop beating instantly. As long as it has enough ATP to provide energy and exposure to oxygen, it can beat without any regulation from a brain. (taken from because I didn't have time to write out the explanation from my textbook)

***Distilled apple cider or white vinegar can be used as a natural remedy to make your hair silky smooth (Do not try without researching first!)

****Lemon juice is an A+++ remedy to killing the bacteria that makes your armpits smell. It can also be used to thicken your hair. Killer and Kidd probably share the bottle for both purposes.
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

Warnings for this Chapter:

1. Physical abuse

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The library was vast and infinite, but Law couldn't linger much longer. He had only been a member of the Donquixote Pirates for a short while, and he was already walking on thin ice. Two weeks ago he'd made good on his promise to kill the executive Corazon. He'd stabbed the man while he'd been distracted by the evening paper, but was unable to finish the job as Buffalo had seen him. It was pathetically easy to bribe the obese child, and he'd fled, uneasy about the boy's trustworthiness, only to be cornered and captured by Jora and Machvise, who dragged him to Doflamingo. He expected death, a reprieve from his terminal fate. Instead, he was given a large grin and made an official member of the crew.

Of course, it might have had something to do with the man's mood, now that he was a king.

Doflamingo had usurped King Riku of Dressrosa, assuming the title his ancestors had once bore. The Royal Palace was as opulent as it was open, grand arches and vaulted ceilings, decadent patios and large indoor pools. Half of the castle lacked walls, allowing the gardens surrounding it to perfume throughout the great halls.

He'd reminded the man he only had a few years to live.

"That depends on your luck, though! We specialize in underground business...Devil Fruit trading...sometimes these powers go way beyond the imagination! Who knows? You might be able to find a cure!"
The man's words had sparked a feeble ember of hope. If there was any chance to for his survival, it would have to come from the Devil. He no longer believes in miracles, in God or the power of 'faith', but he'd seen Hell with his own eyes.

The Devil was real, and maybe He could save him.

The Royal Library had an entire section devoted to Devil Fruit research, but it had been absconded elsewhere, the shelves left bare and bent under the weight of previous tenets. Law made do with what he could scrounge from other sections, marked passages in thick tomes and stashed them on a shelf he could refer to whenever he had the chance.

Despite his age he was expected to go on raids and attack enemies far larger and stronger than a scrawny ten-year-old invalid. He'd taken a nasty beating, breaking a couple ribs and puncturing a lung. He was dragged from the scene by Jora, who'd fretted over his body and sobbed hysterically over him as if he were her child. Everyone thought he was going to die there, coughing up blood and gasping like a drying fish. As his body began to slowly heal itself, he'd panicked, terrified they would learn his secret. They would know he wasn't a real boy, that he was a freak deserving of death. But Jora just held him in her arms, blabbering in a way he would have hated it he wasn't in so much pain, and he slept and healed for next few hours. And now he was here, in the library, skimming through old volumes of medical journals for any glimpse of what he was.

He'd always been able to heal himself faster than others. His father's beatings never left anything more than bruises by the time his mother arrived home, and his father was always too drunk to ever remember he'd made him bleed. Broken bones took a few hours to mend, a split chin no more than ten minutes. It frighten him, this strange power of his, and he knew in his heart if his parents or any other adult found out that he would be whisked away and studied. He had enough of being scrutinized by his family as a medical oddity.

When he was younger his mother would jot notes as she'd bathe him, poke at his privates and shine a light inside. One time she'd brought out a speculum and he'd screamed so loud she had to slap him before the neighbors became curious.
For the first few years of his life, he'd been raised as a girl. He was dressed in pink clothing and cute dresses, his birth certificate stated he was female and no one was the wiser. During those years, his parents had treated him with all the adoration a parent should give their child, but he had been too young to form any memories of love. He only had the testament of neighbors; all the photos had been burned. It was only when he was five, when his father brought home the full file on his genetics, that his world had gone to shit. They tested him dozens of times, but each time it came up the same.

X Y

If the rest of his genetic code wasn't so abhorrent, his parents would have simply labeled him as intersex, and left it at that. His only saving grace was that most of his genetic code was indecipherable, thus keeping his proficient healing a secret.

"Trafalgar! You're being summoned by Vergo-sama to the courtyard! Don't keep him waiting!"

Jora's voice always drove him mad, and he closed the journal with unnecessary force.

"Coming!"

He did not want to see whatever it was the man needed. There was something about Vergo that frightened him.

He went anyway, if only to be seen as reliable by Dofalmingo.
The man was waiting for him in the courtyard, bamboo staff in hand. His broad stature created a thick pillar of shadow that dwarfed Law. He was reminded of his father, this man who stood so tall, so stern and imposing. His white coat only heightened the similarity, and Law was dwarfed by sudden terror. It is the uncanny insight of an abused child to know when they are in trouble, and Law was no exception. He scurried back but was caught in the stomach by a swung staff, and the air left his lungs. Sprawling on the pavement he wheezed and reeled, saliva pooling from his parted jaws as he struggled to breathe.

Vergo toed him onto his back, and Law heard the gurgling and sloshing of his ruptured intestines. The pain crept upon him slowly, climbing to a blinding agony that had his body seizing in a fetal curl. The front of his trousers darkened with blood from a punctured bladder, the muscles of his rectum relaxing and streaming filth down his legs. He couldn't see past the utter torture of his innards struggling to piece themselves together, the fear all-consuming. He had never been dealt such a fatal wound, never in all his years of domestic abuse. For the first time since his breakdown after Flevance's destruction, he feared death. He thought death had become his friend, his out when his disease fully blossomed. It was his saving grace, the ultimate punishment he sought to inflict upon as many people that he could. As he lay there, twitching and gasping for a hint of reprieve, death crept at the corners of his vision and he was filled with terror.

He didn't want to die, didn't want to face the destruction of his psyche or the retribution for his bloodlust. He wasn't ready to fade away, and his body seemed to agree, the pain slipping away in agonizing increments. He wasn't sure how long he writhed, begging a nameless god for numbness, or how long Vergo had loomed over him like an immovable mountain. In his unraveling mind, he thought Vergo might be death itself coming to collect its toll, sharpened scythe in hand. As his brain relearned how to process audio, he caught bits of Vergo's speech, filtered through the cotton tamped into his ears.

"I thought so. You shouldn't have survived the wounds of the fall or that raid, I had my suspicions after Doffy gave you special treatment."

Law couldn't remember any special treatment having been given at any time in his life, let alone within the last couple weeks. His awareness began to sharpen, and the vicious stench of his excrement assaulted him so strongly that he was wracked by full tremors, shaking his head futilely to dispel the scent and horrific texture sliding against his thighs.
Vergo took a step forward and planted his boot squarely on Law's crotch with enough pressure for the seams of his pants to slice into his skin. Law let out a guttural moan as he tried to prop himself up to escape, but his arms shook too much to hold his weight, and he found himself cowed to his elbows, tender flesh biting into the ground. Vergo ground his boot and Law hissed and tried to weakly kick at the man's shin.

"Won't even fake it?"

It Law a handful of agonizing moments before the remaining pallor drained from his skin. If he were a proper boy, he'd be screaming. Vergo's boot would have to dig upwards to elicit the equivalent response, and yet all he felt was a caging pressure that bordered on breaking his pelvis. It was painful, yes, but in an increasing ache, opposed to the shattering pain he would be feeling with other parts.

His secret was out for all to see.

Vergo lifted his shoe, only to bring it down on Law's swollen abdomen. Blood squirted out of him from both ends, his hyperventilation coupled with the added trauma shifting him back into shock as his lungs tried to subvert the build-up of acids in his blood. He coughed and blood splattered down onto his face and coated his neck. Vergo stomped on his legs and Law heard them break like brittle twigs. Pain was leaving him along with the ability to conduct body heat, his warmth draining out of him along with his coherent thoughts.

And like that, Law's consciousness peeled away, pulling him down into a fathomless depths of which he prayed he would never arise.
Alas, warmth coaxed him to the surface, his body pleasantly receiving him with the throb of sore muscles. He felt as if embers were smoldering in his gut, and his pelvis felt like one giant bruise. The sheets around him were the smoothest he'd ever felt, slipping around his weakly wriggling body like folds of water. His head was fogged with sleep, the lull of lavender soaking into his skin.

"Ah, you're awake. Did you sleep well?"

Doflamingo's voice wiped away any trace of drowsiness, and Law bolted upright in a bed as large as his bedroom. The room was surprisingly bereft of decorations, the bed the only ornate work of art in sight. Each banister held its own ecosystem of fauna and flora, carved of soft, dark wood. The sheets matched the ceiling, painted a soothing periwinkle that went well with the white accordion closet parallel to the bed. From his poor vantage in the middle of the massive bed, he thought he could spy golden tiles with spiraling white filigree. Doflamingo was lounging in a leather armchair beside him, his long legs crossed elegantly over a similar ottoman. The tips of his shoes caught the sunlight shafting through the open arch of the window, the dusted clay wall a pale yellow. Law thought it was a poor choice of color.

"I'm...alright..."

Law's voice was graved and dry, and it hurt to swallow. He spotted a glass of water on the nightstand and crawled to the edge of the bed, noting that his jointed felt packed with shrapnel. When he reached for the drink the hem of his sleeve rolled up to reveal the white splotches he'd become unwilling familiar with, standing out sharply against the dark of his skin. He thought he looked as tacky as the wall.

There was a cut glass bowl full of circular candy twisted in translucent purple wrapping. He admired it as he drank, his throat bobbing with every painful swallow. Each candy looked to be a dark purple with a single pink swirl, he thought they looked covered in glitter.

"Well, you took quite a beating, I'm glad to see you up and about."
Law looked at Doflamingo under long lashes, and set down the empty glass. His suit was an elegant mauve with a salmon tie, his corn silk hair combed back above stylish shades. His fingers were long and encased in dark gloves, draped over the cover a nondescript novel.

Law couldn't help but think he was handsome.

...

Law jerked his hand back, retreating back to his nest of covers, stomach unsettled. He was ten years old and had only ever thought of people as threatening, inviting, or infested with cooties*. He had never thought anyone was beautiful, or handsome.

"Y-yes..."

He kept his eyes on his lap, and he realized he wasn't wearing his old clothes. Instead he was dressed in a pair of black pajamas, each button a glossy stone.

"D-Did you dress me?"

He voice was small and fearful, resignation flooding him as he waited to be thrown from the room or shot. There was no way Doflamingo would allow such a freak to be apart of his crew, especially when he had no strength to bring to the table.
He snapped the book closed and uncrossed his legs, leaning forward with a gentle smile.

"And washed you and set your legs. You're quite lucky to be alive."

Doflamingo crossed the room to the closet and opened it, gesturing at a bloodstained outfit in a plastic sleeve.

"I saved your clothes if they held some sentimental value, however I am afraid they are beyond saving. The stains would not come out after the wash and there are several holes that could not be patched."

"It's...okay..."

Law was still wary, searching for a hint of disgust or thinly veiled contempt and finding none.

Doflamingo grinned, flashing perfectly aligned teeth.

"Your hat was mostly untouched, though if you want I'll procure you a new one."

Doflamingo was watching him patiently, shutting the closet door with a fluid hand gesture. Law knew the other possessed Devil Fruit powers, but he wasn't sure if it was telekinesis or something more specific. His feelings of insecurity were compounded by the presence of the imposing figure. Doflamingo towered as high as the bedposts, the vaulted ceiling granting him a wide berth. Law couldn't fathom being so tall when the world was tailored for smaller beings.
"Thank you, young master."

The words were practiced, enunciated and underlined. This was a man he yearned to impress, the manner his parents had tried to instill in him welled to the surface. Doflamingo chuckled, a deep, sonorous sound that filled Law's limbs with warmth.

Doflamingo proffered a sphere of candy, the sun desaturating his colors as it shone at his back.

"Please, call me Doffy."

Chapter End Notes

*He may be a genius and have witnessed the massacre of his entire nation, but he's still a ten-year-old boy and I am convinced he would have been the one boy to be constantly disgusted by girls. Also young Doffy was fucking gorgeous.

Obviously Law's backstory in my story is very different from the canon equivalent, but it needs to be noted that Vergo was never around when Cora was, not really. He was pretending to be a Marine during that time, covertly sabotaging things and the like. In my story its different, with Vergo being a presence known to all, but doesn't interact with anyone besides Doffy unless its necessary. Law stepped off the ladder and dusted his pants.
A year passed and the Amber Lead Syndrome began to take its toll. The patches on his skin were analogous to hyper-sensitive bruises, every brush against a wall sparked white pain behind his eyes. Days rolled together as Law struggled to keep up with the intense training from the executives, but even as he grew stronger he felt himself becoming more fragile. He fine-tuned his muscles to dodge punches, but at night he curled over the toilet bowl and vomited his meager dinner. There was nothing to be done but move forward.

If he wasn't training his body he was training his mind, bent over books in the Royal Library, leafing though thick journals searching for a cure for death. When he went on missions he found himself slowly become an asset, rather than a liability. He watched as Baby 5 ate a Devil Fruit and became a living weapon, as she joined the ranks of those 'useful' to Doffy. Even though the man told him he was welcome in his midst, that he had a place with them, that he was proud of Law's accomplishments, he couldn't shake the feeling that he was disappointing the man in some way.

And it was something he couldn't stand.

It welled in his chest and bubbled into his throat, pouring out his mouth as vicious slurs and retorts, bristling in anger when all he really wanted to do was find a way to remove the guillotine from his neck. If he did that, if only he last longer than his father's predictions then maybe he would find a way to make Doffy praise him for something truly worthy of the king's praise. He completed small missions, ferried messages and offered medical knowledge to the on-site physician though it was never appreciated.
But in what way had he benefited Doffy?

Despite his growing restlessness, he took comfort in Vergo's persistent absence. He hadn't the slightest idea what kept him occupied, but he was satisfied as long as it wasn't him. The man had only added to his repertoire of nightmare fuel, not a night went by without screams echoing into a nearby pillow. The lack of sleep was draining him, and he frequently collapsed from exhaustion and pain. The resident doctor still prescribed him analgesics with thinly veiled apprehension, but the insidious vitiligo was unrelenting.

Another agonizing facet of his life was Corazon, who, despite being Doffy's brother, proved to be intolerably clumsy. Countless times he found himself slapping out flames in a feather coat and snatchting away hot drinks before he took a sip. In return Corazon was relatively personable. After his failed attempt on his life and his subsequent induction Corazon had ceased to be violent towards him.

Jora, on the other hand, seemed to gravitate towards humiliating him.

At the first chance available she'd whisk him to her room and dress him in abhorrently feminine clothing. He suspected she knew he wasn't truly male, but cast his suspicions when Buffalo was dragged in screaming to join his torture. Every time he looked in the mirror and saw his old self, the coddled, dolled-up fabrication, his stomach twisted in a vice. In his room he burned each priceless set of silks and ribbons, gripping at his trousers and letting himself cry in the privacy of his room.

Vergo was gone, but he left Law a souvenir.

An inkling that what he was could somehow be explained.
He was torn between searching the library for any information on a Devil Fruit that could cure him, and the truth of his congenital 'affliction'. After much deliberation and plenty of avoiding his reflection as he stepped out of the bath, he decided it would be worthless to search for the truth if he would just die anyway. It wasn't as if his chances to finding out his genetic truth would be fruitful, considering his parents had dedicated themselves to searching for a 'cure' before Lami's conception.

The announcement of his younger sister's arrival was bittersweet. To others it was a joyous occasion in which a family welcome its newest member, but for Law it was the day he was finally torn from the family photos. He'd been replaced in his parent's minds, because they hadn't held him in their hearts for years.

Law shook his past from his thoughts.

Seated in his bed he poured over a weathered novel, skimming the gilt-edge pages with bloodshot eyes. He was curled onto his side, one hand digging into his belly with single-minded determination. He'd been having stomach pains for the past few days, fluctuating in intensity but always unpleasant. It didn't hurt as much to tuck his knees up, and if he ran and trained his body the pain almost went away entirely. It frightened him, something nagging in the corner of his skull that it wasn't part of his disease.

He was reading a work of fiction, for once, about a young woman who, as the eldest of three sisters, is resigned to never being successful. Toiling in her family's hat shop, she is turned into a old woman by the Witch of the Waste, and now was venturing out into her namesake in order to find her. He wasn't far in, only about a fifth of the way through, when his cramps began to worsen. Screwing his eyes shut, he let the book drop and pressed his face into his pillow.

*If I die before father's deadline, he'll have won.*

It was his mantra, his way of getting through the painful white bruises and sickening nausea that came and went. He rolled onto his back and pulled his knees to his chest wrapping his arms around
his knees. The pain subsided, and he rocked side to side, staring at the ceiling with watering eyes.

Eons passed before he uncurled himself, letting his limbs stretch out to their fullest. His joints were stiff and he'd been suffering a constant headache for three days. He could recall his father's notes as if they were in his own hands, and his sudden ailments did not align with the progression of his disease. The cramps returned, a gnawing suction sensation in his lower abdomen, and he felt something release from an area he loathed to acknowledge.

His eyes widened in horror, body temperature plummeting. He rose to his elbows and lifted the hem of his trousers with trembling fingers. A dark patch was slowly growing in the crotch of his boxers, black and metallic-smelling. All at once his strength left him, and his head hit the pillow as his vision tunneled into darkness.

Deft strokes of a damp cloth against his thighs drew him to consciousness. Law's vision cleared slowly, his body too weak to protest, but the fear inside him was strong, and came off his still form in waves.

"Shh, it's alright darling. Go back to sleep if you can, I'll bring you a hot water bottle and some painkillers in a moment."

Jora's falsetto voice pierced his fog of terror, and his muscles relaxed in her presence. He was resigned to the fact that his secret was out, uncaring, in fact. There were other things to occupy his worry now, as if there weren't enough. His stomach cramps, which he now recognized as contractions of his uterus, kept him from sleeping away his troubles. He focused on the ceiling once more, wondering how he would conceal his gender whilst he bled across the floor. At least his pain tolerance was higher than others, and wearing a permeant scowl helped to hide his discomfort.
Jora exited the room, leaving the towel pressed against his parts to stem the flow. He felt decidedly female, lying prostrate on his bed with his legs bare and sex exposed, dysphoria tearing through him like a physical blow. The tears came unbidden, and Jora said nothing when she returned, only nodding her head sagely and holding out a pair of objects to him.

"Tampon or pad, darling, your pick. Though I must say, it is easier to move with the former, and your undergarments don't exactly permit the latter."

He swallowed thickly, staring at the white stick in abject terror. He didn't think anything like that could fit inside him*, and it certainly wouldn't be comfortable.

But if he didn't then everyone would know.

He took the tampon and held it before him, staring it dumbly. Jora nodded to the bathroom, and began to explain him how to insert it with a variety of hand gestures that left him speechless. He kept his eyes on his hands, making sure he positioned it correctly without actually looking at what he was doing. He placed it wrong several times, each time he sobbed harder with frustration and self-loathing, struggling to keep his hand steady.

When he came out Jora was gone and a fresh pair of underwear lay on the recently stripped bed, alongside a note scrawled in tight cursive.

*Your secret's safe with me!

He'd never felt so unsafe.
Law never thought he would be shuffling around with a sweater tied around his waist. Every movement sparked the fear that he would sudden gush blood down his legs, and he frequently made trips to the bathroom to check himself. He refused to carry tampons with him, and slunk to Jora every few hours for a new one. She stayed true to her word, for the moment, and discretely slipped them to him without creating drama. It made him feel human, as if his identity was being accepted.

Until he found dresses on his bed accompanied by a familiar note.

*Now you don't have to wear those silly boy clothes! It's so nice to have another girl around!*

He threw up into the toilet until his stomach could produce nothing more than strings of bile. Betrayal was thick in his chest, and he took pleasure in throwing the offending garments into the fireplace. When he showed up the next day wearing his normal clothing and caught Jora's eye, he gave her the finger. She looked positively scandalized, doubly so when he blackmailed her with images of her tryst with the much younger Señor Pink.

She left him after that, and used his correct pronouns.

It didn't stop her from being cruel, however, and she summarily left him to his own devices whenever he menstruated. Soon the whole castle was abuzz on how the toilet paper was disappearing, and Law was forced to venture to a store and steal the rest of his short-life's worth of tampons. It was also there that he discovered the joys of panties.
He was skeptical at first, the sight of purple paisley underwear in the clearly female clothing section, but after feeling the silken texture he quickly changed his mind. He stored it under his mattress, and only wore it when he went to sleep. Law found himself unable to care that he wore feminine underwear, not when it was so comfortable.

The weeks passed and Vergo began to make sporadic visits. Each time Law met him in the hallway Vergo would kick him in the gut and carry on as if nothing was wrong. His direct attacks to his abdomen seemed to trigger the lead in his bloodstream. The white patches on his stomach grew by an inch within three weeks, the growth so staggering that he requested a day off.

Doflamingo joined him to raise his spirits**.

Chapter End Notes

Law faints frequently.

*Cliched and decidedly creepy line, but as someone with a vagina and a menstrual cycle I must say that it's the first thing that crosses a teen's mind when faced with the options of a tampon or pad.

**It means everything you're thinking.
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

This is the last chapter. Honestly I feel that the characters should be let go, they've grown and suffered and now should be allowed to grow further off-screen without us watching. I feel that this direction is the best way to go, and though I hate to let this story go I feel that it is right choice. Thank you for accompanying me on this wild ride. I love you all so much!

Warnings for this chapter:

1. Kidd's graphic past about his mother's death (i.e. all that implies.)

In the world of the present, Law slept soundly in his cocoon on Kidd's bed. It had been two hours of hell in which Law recounted his depraved past, and at the end he'd wilted from sheer exhaustion. Kidd's stomach was tangled in a labyrinth of knots, nausea wicking his eyes and thickening in his throat.

"Kil?" He was crying now, unintelligible and inconsolable. His den den mushi nervously slid across the nightstand as its master blubbered into the receiver.

"Captain? What's wrong?"

"Please, I c-can't...just come over..."

Killer arrived before he could put down the receiver. Kidd tried to stay quiet as he cried, muffling his sobs into Killer's shoulder.
Soon Kidd couldn't keep his eyes open, and Killer wordlessly slipped the man onto the couch, draping a thick blanket over him. He kept the candles lit and closed the door softly.

Killer pressed the heels of his palms against his eyes, sparking light behind his lids. He heaved a deep sigh and wondered how life managed to fuck people up at the best of times. Penguin was waiting for him at the top of the stairs, wringing his hat with a tear-stained face. He let his boyfriend drop his head into the hollow of his neck, burying his fingers in the dark hair that slipped through his fingers like tendrils of black lace. He hadn't missed the bloodstains at the foot of the couch nor the dense smell of sex. Penguin undoubtedly smelled it on him, and began to wail pitifully. Nothing Killer did could console him, and he thought that perhaps that was best.

When the day gave way to wakefulness, as the night pulled over the world in a cover of darkness, Law slipped into a catatonic state from which Kidd could not reach him. Penguin and Shachi spirited him to their submarine, leaving Kidd to flounder helplessly in their wake. Law's absence was an oozing gash, and Kidd nearly broke Killer's legs in his attempt to follow. He did, in fact, snap Wire's arm, and Killer's tried to use his seastone gauntlets to bully him into submission. Unbeknownst to anyone, the familiar drag of seastone on his consciousness triggered a panic attack. Killer sequestered him back into his bedroom, and locked them both in the bathroom.

There was no way Heat would warm the water for a bath, not with his boyfriend's arm bent backwards. He went to the laundry basket to find a few towels to spray with essential oils to wrap around his shaking captain. The last thing he expected to find was a giant heart in the bottom of the basket.

Killer choked on his tongue, the hamper top tumbling from his fingers. He had no doubt who it belonged to, only how it got there. He made do with what he had, finding a vial of mint oil with trembling fingers. He uncapped the top and let it waft beneath Kidd's nose, rubbing his shoulders encouragingly. Kidd's eyes were blank, his lips pale, and Killer didn't want to know what he was seeing. When the oil didn't work, Killer held him close and rubbed his back, hoping beyond hope that the new reality they lived in was just a dream. There wasn't a Shichibukai, King, and former Celestial Dragon's heart in the laundry basket, Kidd's room didn't smell like a den of foul acts, that his boyfriend wasn't crying over his captain's coma-like state.
Kidd's mind swam beneath the lake of arousal, drifting closer to a memory he had long suppressed. A memory he knew was true but avoided at all costs, knowing if he touched it he would be ruined. He reached out, unwilling but unable to look away, and fell into the past.

Kidd watched in morbid wonder as the man turned to face him. His leather jacket protested, blood beaded across the leather like virulent perspiration. The man's eyes were Kidd's own, reflecting the bright sheen of his mother's gore illuminated in the shop's streetlamp. In a moment Kidd knew who this man was, but could not yet understand what had been done. All he knew was that his mother was bleeding and this man was the cause, this father of his which had never given him anything but another reason to worry for his mother's health. The purple flowers he left behind on her skin stood out to him like violent tattoos. They never seemed to fade, only renewing in color whenever his father was near.

Kidd took a stumbling step forward, bare foot catching on the decimated music box. He screamed but couldn't hear himself over his fear, his rage. He threw himself at his father, digging his nails into his nape, scraping at his jugular. It was a short fight, one-sided at best. He found himself sprawled on the vanity, makeup scattering across the floor.

The mirror was broken, raining shards of reflective glass into his hair. He jerked himself to the floor, jamming his thumb against the floor. Kidd scrambled onto the bed, screaming hysterically when his mother's limp hand brushed his forehead. He attacked again, his adrenaline spiking as his tackle failed and he sprawled across his mother's corpse. Her blood smeared on his face, his hand skirting his father's penis. He screamed again when his father tried to continue raping his mother, his vision tunneling to their point of grotesque contact. He registered that the diaphragm beneath him wasn't moving. The sounds beat him from every angle. He wrapped his arms around the blonde's waist, forcing him onto the floor. They fell in a tumble of limbs, and Kidd tried to claw out the man's eyes. His joints were locked, his movements cumbersome and off-mark.

He screamed again and the music box jumped to life, the metal crank slowly winding a faulty tune. Each off-note punctuated their struggle, his father trying to flip them to no avail. The blonde's eyes were blown wide and red with drugs. Kidd dug his heels into the blonde's thighs, oblivious to how the music box scraped across the floor in their direction. Of its own accord the device began to rattle, screws and wires peeling away to gather about its creator. A nail follow Kidd's punch and buried into his father's temple, and several cogs jammed into pink gums. Teeth shattered and Kidd's punches became frenzied tearing at the man's face, unfocused on the metal pieces serrating into his victim's flesh.
When it was over it was all over.

His father lay dead and impaled with his mother's forgotten gift. Kidd's knuckles were split and weeping, his eyes fluttered with white spots as the adrenalin waned. He crawled sluggishly onto the ruined bed and curled besides his mother's corpse, draping an arm protectively over her bare stomach dressed in bruises. The music box slithered after him, dislodging from bone and muscle to comfort their master. Cogs and pins seemed to dance around his mother's head like a halo, weakly reconstructing the music box with its basic components, the melody off-kilter and abhorrent. Kidd sobbed once and the metal shuddered and lay still, debris scattered around the sheets as he curled into a ball, his cries drowned out by the rain.

A hand brushed his cheek.

Kidd leaned into the touch, desiring its warmth and comfort even through layers of sleep. As the vignette peeled away, the hand followed, returning to a waiting lap. His body felt heavy and uncoordinated, but he managed to pull himself upright on his sofa. Penguin sat dutifully beside him in a chair pulled from somewhere else.

"Hey."

"...How's Law?"

Kidd tried to hold hold himself together, regulating his voice so he didn't shout. Penguin sighed and
removed his hat. He could see why Killer fell for him. His eyes were stunning.

"He was catatonic when we brought him in, but soon became hysteric. Whatever catharsis he gleaned last night that helped him sleep, it didn't last. We had to sedate him. He woke up three hours ago and was coherent enough to fend us off and self-induce an abortion."

Kidd swallowed his panic, the information settling like a weight on his lungs.

Penguin cast his eyes to his feet.

"I have no excuse to my inability to restrain him."

"Did he...hurt himself?"

"Yes, but the damage healed itself within several minutes. We administer analgesics and an anti-inflammatory in the meantime."

"..."

"Bepo calmed him down and Mela, our ship's therapist, managed to get him to talk. He asked us to remove the brand on his abdomen."
"I thought that was impossible because his body couldn't heal it."

"You're half-right. His body can't heal the actual mark, but it could heal the area if the entire mark was removed. It was always a risky surgery option because the brand burned so deep. It's nearly charred down to his pelvic bone. But he asked Shachi to remove it. So we agreed."

"Is he going to be okay?!"

"He will be, he's still in surgery now. We have to scrape it off his bone to make sure none of the burn remains, the brand was done with a certain powder added that prevented his body from healing itself whenever Law tried to cut it out. I take it you've seen his marks."

Trenches in swarthy flesh made by desperate nails.

"I have."

"Then you can understand why the surgery is taking so long. There's hardly a chance of complication, but in case I wanted to give you my personal den den mushi."

"Couldn't I just use Killer's?"

"He's asked that you stay in the room while he charters us to Zou, Bepo's home island, no one will bother us there."
"I also wanted to thank you."

Shame rose like a tidal flood. Penguin's words struck him with enough force to turn his stomach. An angry blush prickled along his scalp, and he let the tears fall freely.

"I didn't do anything!"

He turned away, tucking his knees and slamming his fist into the sofa's headboard.

"I fucking went out there to save him and all I did was end up as a fucking voyeur! Law was the one who got his shit together! Not me! I never-"

Penguin said nothing, only reached out and rested his hand on his hip.

"I've been friends with Law for as long as I've been called Penguin, and even though there are some things he will never tell me, I do know the full extent of his powers. Teleportation without a room isn't within his control."

"That wasn't...I don't know...I just wanted to come home. Maybe I did something with gravity? I'm not sure."
"You still brought him back. The Heart Pirates are forever in your debt."

"..."

"If you don't mind I'd like to give you a once-over. I can tell you've got seastone burns and you've started to bleed from there."

He gestured to the back of his head and Kidd mimicked him, fingers coming away flaked in red. The decorative pillow Killer had propped under his head was forever stained, just another thing he'd have to throw out.

"You've stubborn as all hell, you know that. I can tell why Killer likes you."

"Well, I can tell why Law loves you."

"...And why's that?"

"I think I'll let him tell you himself. But being well-built definitely helped."

"Asshole."
"Dick."

"Truce?"

"Truce."

Kidd gathered Law against him, breathing in the taint of antiseptic and blood. He was still sluggish post-operation, and clutched his back weakly. He let his head rest on Kidd's chest, breathing deeply as his hair was carefully combed with calloused fingers. Kidd playfully nibbled at his hair and Law huffed a soft laugh.

"You'll be alright," Kidd whispered, "It'll be okay."

He rocked him gently, wishing he could take away his pain. The skin pulled tight over taut abdominals was healing nicely, flesh neatly puckering as muscles grafted together. There would be no physical scar, but Kidd knew well that Law's true scars would never heal. They could only grow more scar tissue, make the lesions less painful...if Law ever fully healed from his history, it could only be from personal growth. There was no moving past this, only living with it.

"I can hear you overthinking things."
"If there's anyone who could read minds, it'd be you." Kidd guffawed, tightening his hold on his boyfriend. Law leaned to the side and Kidd let them fall onto the pillows of his bed. Law burrowed sleepily into his broad pectoral, humming contentedly.

"I want to cuddle."

Kidd rolled his eyes, running his thumb over the jut of Law's shoulder blade.

"Isn't that what we're doing?"

"Shut u-!"

Law's breath hitched and he wiggled away discomfort flitting across his face for a moment. Kidd was upon him in an instant, tenderly cupping his cheek.

Law blushed, "It's, ah, healed now."

He looked away and rubbed absently at his stomach. Kidd didn't miss the tiny smile, and mimicked in full. He chuckled and pulled Law towards him, ruffling his hair. He was so proud of Law, so damn happy that he was able to remove the mark that had plagued him for so long. Law kissed his nose, letting himself linger. They kissed, brief and innocent. Their breath's intermingling, they breathed each other's air.
He pressed their lips together, and Law hesitantly swiped his tongue along Kidd's mouth. Law's eyes were vibrant pools of gold, pulling Kidd into the depths of his mind. He let his arm fall lax at Law's side, giving him an out, and reciprocated. Kidd licked his way into Law's parted mouth, the other letting out a small sigh.

They stayed that way for quite a while, kissing languid and deep with no intention of doing anything else.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!