The Vinsmokes have very vaguely threatened Princess Vivi due to the Straw Hats keeping Reiju prisoner. But there’s something fishy about just how much power Judge Vinsmoke and Germa 66 have gotten in such a short time, and Admiral Fujitora is very suspicious… And Zoro? Zoro just wants to kick some Germa 66 ass.
“So…how do we do this?” Nami asked as Marco stretched his arms.

“Do what?” Ace asked.

“Well he’s going to turn into the Phoenix. How do we, you know…” Nami rubbed the back of her head. “Get on?”

Ace’s eyes widened, “Oh. Yeah, going to be a bit tricky with a passenger…I mean one that’s not me, I can get on fine…”

“You two ready?” Marco asked, adjusting his bag so it hung around his neck. He’d changed into long pants that went to his ankles and an additional shirt underneath his usual jacket. A shirt he’d left unbuttoned wide open to show his tattoo.

“Give me a sec,” Ace said. He’d dug out most of his old gear from the last time he was in Alabasta, though he too had caved into longer pants…which he did not own, leading to him stealing some of Zoro’s when it turned out Sabo owned no cargo pants.

Ace needed to talk to him about his wardrobe choices.

Nami meanwhile had donned her old Alabasta robe over her usual jeans and bikini top. After some convincing from Robin and Koala, she’d swapped her high heeled sandals for low heeled boots. “Stilettos sink in sand dunes” Robin had said with the air of someone who had found that out before the hard way.

“So…” Marco said, sighing, folding his arms, and tapping his foot. “Any time now.”

“Since when are you impatient?” Ace asked. “Yeah okay, do it the normal way, I’ll get Nami on.”

“I find it very suspicious you’re not telling me what you have planned,” Nami said as Marco changed forms, his duffel bag now acting almost like a collar.

“Uh-huh,” Ace said, shifting her satchel forward. “Hold this.”

Nami frowned as he passed her his bag. “Why what are you going to—hey!”

“Don’t squirm, this is hard to do one handed!” Ace said, cradling her as he took a running start and jumped, flames from his feet and other hand giving him a massive boost.

“Then why not use both to hold me?” Nami shrieked as they rocketed upwards.

“Two people. Needed more lift!” Ace laughed as the dropped, landing on Marco’s back as he flew up to meet them. “See, worked fine—ow! How the hell do you do that without Haki?

“Want another?” Nami demanded, hauling her hand back for another slap.

Marco rolled his eyes. This was going to be a long flight. He angled himself towards the Red Line and started raising their altitude little by little. With any luck they’d be in Alabasta in three days…assuming Ace didn’t eat all the food, making them stop for more.
So probably four days.

“How long until the ships are ready behind us?” Ace asked Nami.

“I’d give them a day or two to get started. Even with using Coup de Burst multiple times to cross long distances, I’d say they reach Alabasta weeks after we do. We’re going to be on our own for a long while,” Nami said.

“What’s the backup plan? In case we have to leave Alabasta altogether?” Marco asked.

“Ah! How do you talk like that?” Nami yelped, almost slipping off before Ace steadied her. “A beak should not be able to talk like that!”

Marco rolled his eyes. Not feeling like answering, he refocused on flying.

Nami huffed at him. “Anyway, the plan is we’ll go to Water 7 and get Iceburg to contact the others for us. I don’t think it’ll come to that. Even if we have to leave the palace, hell, the capital city, Alabasta is on a pretty big island. We can hide out for quite a while.”

“Plus the desert plays to my strengths,” Ace said. “Heat and lots of it!”

“Oh no, we’re in for so many heat related puns, aren’t we?” Nami asked Marco in despair.

Marco chuckled ruefully. He’d known Ace longer than she had and had already heard all the puns over many years of snail calls.

Hearing them all again would be torture.

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“Here,” Sanji said, giving Law a plate of grilled fish and rice balls.

“Thanks,” Law said quietly.

Zoro watched him pick at the food, eating it very slowly. Sanji had given him a slightly larger portion than normal, since Law hadn’t been eating much lately. Probably why Sanji was usually giving him his favorite foods, too.

Zoro hoped Law would be all right. Reiju’s poisoning had clearly done a number on his head. He was more withdrawn than usual, and even Luffy looked worried about him sometimes.

And when Luffy was worried enough to actually look it, something was wrong.

Still, not much Zoro could think to do. He couldn’t challenge Law to a spar to try and rev him up a bit—the surgeon’s energy was clearly still on the low side so no Rooms and Zoro could easily whup his ass if they were just using swords.

Zoro would talk with Law like Law did for him, but frankly he could be even more shit with words than Law was so that probably was a bad idea.

But Law was his friend. “How’d you sleep, Dr. Heartstealer?”

“Adequately,” Law said.

Bullshit. Law’s eye bags normally just looked like he used eyeliner. Right now he was nearing raccoon status. Then again, Law was like Zoro. Zoro knew he’d never admit to having trouble
sleeping…except maybe to Sanji. Which he’d kind of have to do since they slept in the same bed…

“So what have you been working on in the labs?” he asked. He had no real idea what Law did in there when no one needed patching up. Luffy insisted it was mad science but the rooms were nothing like the Punk Hazard labs, which were Zoro’s new mad science standard.

“No working. Cleaning.”

Even Luffy looked a little surprised at that. Sure Law had a few neat freak tendencies but spending a few days cleaning the same rooms?

“Want some help? Maybe some extra muscle will help you get done faster.”

“Oh yeah, hey! Traffy, I can help too!”

Law’s disinterested mask slipped for a moment as he blanched, “I am not trying to supervise both of you in my operating rooms.”

Luffy shrugged, “Fine, I’ll help you clean and Zoro can help Sanji clean the kitchen!”

“Wait, what?” Zoro asked Luffy. That hadn’t been where he was going with this…then again, Law was more likely to talk to Luffy about his problems, right?

Sanji smirked, “What, Zoro, you don’t want to help out your boyfriend?”

“You’re all terrible people,” Zoro said. Offer to do one chore, get roped into a totally different one…

“Pirates,” Law pointed out dryly.

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They’d decided to land far enough away from the capital city of Aluburna so as to not be seen. Despite their high bounties, none of them had particularly distinctive features once Ace and Marco’s tattoos were covered, and so they’d simply added a day of travel and walked to the city.

Which meant Nami was too tense to even get the code phrase out once they reached the gate guards. Marco passed it along instead, “Delivering some special birds and tangerines for Princess Vivi.”

They were instantly hustled inside the walls and escorted towards the palace. Ace didn’t like it. It felt like a less lethal march to the scaffold on Marinford. Then again he’d never liked guards.

Nami on the other hand buzzed with nervous energy. The guards clearly didn’t seem worried so nothing had happened to Vivi yet. That meant they could find her, plan, and…whatever else they needed to do!

“Nami! Ace!”

Both of them instantly had their nervousness transform to joy as the princess of Alabasta rushed down the hall and threw her arms around them.

“Vivi!” Nami cheered as Ace laughed, got a good grip on both girls, and lifted them off the ground in an even tighter hug. “Oh, Ace put us down you lug! Vivi I’m so glad you’re all right!”

“Well you did send us a pretty good warning,” Vivi said. “We had one attempt but it was pretty weak. My father and I both think it may have been a false flag—lure us into a sense of security with a shoddy assassin and then send a good one.”
“Given they’ve already had someone sneak in and get a bit of your hair, no shit they could do that,” Ace said.

“Don’t remind me,” Vivi said, shuddering. “How did you get here so fast?”

“Ahh, that would be Marco’s doing. Marco, Princess Vivi. Vivi, my boyfriend Phoenix Marco,” Ace said, introducing the two.

“Pleasure, yoi,” Marco said shaking her hand when she offered it.

“I’ve heard so much about you! Ace bragged,” Vivi said.

“Did he now…?” Marco asked, smirking as Ace blushed. “Heard quite a bit about you too. Your crew misses you a lot.”

“I miss them too,” Vivi said, smiling at Nami when the navigator reached over and grabbed her hand. “Alabasta needed me to help it recover after Crocodile.”

“And with you held in such high esteem for helping with that recovery, your death could be a massive disaster for the country,” Nami noted. “Don’t worry. We’re here to keep you safe. And when the others show up, we’ll root out the Vinsmokes plan and crush it so much that they never do this again.”

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“How much longer until we reach the Red Line?” Sanji asked.

“About another day,” Bepo said. “Then if we follow the maps and log pose correctly and Coup de Burst lands us right all three times, two and a half weeks until we get Alabasta. It’s easier and faster when you know where you’re going, that’s for sure!”

“And when the ships can fly,” Zoro chuckled.

“That too,” Bepo admitted, rubbing the back of his head. “I’m sure the others have everything under control.”

“I should have gone. This is my fault,” Sanji sighed.

“It’s the Vinsmoke’s stupid fault, not yours,” Zoro said. “And we’re going to make sure they learn not to do this again.”

Sanji nodded, looking out over the sea. “I’m sure Sweet Nami is happy, seeing our Lovely Vivi again.”

“Yeah. Can’t wait to see Vivi myself. Think she’s gotten stronger?” Zoro asked eagerly.

“Always the fighting with you,” Sanji said, rolling his eyes.


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“Kind of like a vacation instead of a mission,” Marco noted on the morning of their fourth day at the palace.

Ace nodded. They’d updated the guards with all they knew of the Vinsmokes and he, Marco, and
Nami had all poked around with their Observation Haki, but so far not much had really happened.

King Cobra had been all too happy to greet his daughter’s friends, pirates or not, but they’d preferred to stay out of the way instead of deal with all the royal guest treatment’s trappings. Nami could handle it just fine, but Ace and Marco were already feeling a bit cooped up.

On the upside, a swanky palace had nice toiletries, Ace mused as he shaved.

“Not going for your dad’s permanent five o’clock shadow look?” Marco asked.

“Don’t like how I look with facial hair,” Ace said. “Plus it’s kind of itchy.”

“Oi!” Marco complained, rubbing his own scruffy chin fuzz.

“Well, mine is, yours is fine,” Ace said, looking at himself in the mirror.

Shanks had one of his captain’s old wanted posters in his room. Ace had always taken pride in the fact that he didn’t look much like Roger—Shanks claiming he took after Rouge. But as he was getting older, he wasn’t so sure that was true anymore. To be fair, he didn’t have any pictures of his mother to compare with…

He smirked, running a finger over his upper lip. At least he wouldn’t have a weirdo-mustache.

Seriously, what had Roger been thinking with that thing?

“Something up?” Marco asked, rolling over on the bed and resting his chin on his arms.

“…Hey, Marco? You…remember when you said I reminded you of Roger? When I killed Weevil?” Ace asked.

“Yeah,” Marco said, looking a bit guilty.

“Do I really look that much like him?”

Marco laughed, “Not really. Got the same coloring but that’s about it. Assume you got your looks from Mom. It was your actions that reminded me, not the guy in the mirror, Ace.”

Ace frowned, glancing at his reflection. He was pretty sure Marco wouldn’t lie to him…unless he was really trying to make him feel better. There weren’t exactly many images of what Roger looked like at Ace’s age.

“He’s not the dad you look like anyway,” Marco said, standing up. Birdbrain was such a mind-reader.

“What?” Ace asked.

Marco smiled, picking Ace’s hair tie up off the table, “Let me.”

Ace usually wore his ponytail high at the back of his head, but Marco instead tied it off at the base of his skull. Marco then looped a finger through some hair by his forehead, freeing a lock that the blonde twisted around his finger idly before letting drop to hang in Ace’s face.

“There you go. Dead ringer when you get the hair right.”

Ace chuckled. Despite Marco’s insistence he knew he didn’t look exactly like Benn used to, even with the same hairstyle. Benn’s face had squarer features and lacked freckles, but…it was nice to think he looked a little like him, all the same. “Guess there’s a bit of a similarity. Hope I don’t go
gray as soon as he did, though.”

“Well he’s with Shanks, that’s got to be stressful. I’m not so hard on the nerves,” Marco joked.

“Unless you’re getting stalked and almost killed by a Warlord, that is,” Ace muttered.

Marco frowned, “You’re really blaming me for that?”

“Blame you for not calling soon enough,” Ace shot back.

“Ace, I didn’t know Weevil was with the Hatto Navy,” Marco sighed.

“I can’t keep you safe if you don’t call me!”

Marco’s eyes narrowed, “Ace, you might have finally realized you’re pretty damn powerful, but I could put you on your ass and we both know it. Keeping me safe is not your job, yoi.”

Ace flinched and Marco sighed. He usually didn’t get snappish and defensive but damn it he wasn’t someone Ace should see as needing protecting, he was Ace’s partner, not…

“This isn’t even about me, you idiot. You’re still mad at Luffy.”

Ace groaned, flopping facedown on the bed, “Why do you have to be so freaking perfect?”

“I’m not perfect, dumbass, I’m a big brother like you are. Almost all my crew are my little siblings, even the ones who are older than me. Which, yeah, head trip, but I make do.”

“…Why didn’t he call me?” Ace asked softly.

“We couldn’t have gotten there in time, yoi,” Marco said. “The fight was going to start in less than an hour when they knew they couldn’t slip away. So you’d have been freaking out and unable to act on it.”

“…I kind of hate that he doesn’t need me so much anymore,” Ace said.

“They’ll always need you,” Marco said. “People change when they get older, I won’t lie…but the people we care about? We always need them.”

“Did you change?” Ace asked.

“Yeah. I was more of a troublemaker as a kid. But as I got older, as I took on more responsibility…I stopped getting in as much trouble. Unless it found me,” Marco said. “First Mate. Had to set an example.”

“And I’m sure the crewmembers who knew you as a kid had serious head-trips.”

“Did they ever, yoi,” Marco said.

“…I just can’t imagine Luffy changing,” Ace said.

“Some people change less than others. It’s why Pops always loved messing with your dad—deep down, Shanks is still the same hot blooded cabin boy who needed Silvers Rayleigh to grab him by the collar and haul him back to the ship.”

“…You ever actually see something like that?” Ace asked eagerly.
Marco smirked, “You *really* want to know?”

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“How long do you think you three can keep laying low here?” Vivi asked.

“Oh, a while longer if things keep going like they are,” Nami said. “Ace might be a trouble magnet but Marco and I can keep him contained if we have to. I think he likes having some time to be just them…”

“Well we certainly know the horrors of the long distance relationship. Though you really need to thank Marco for coming up with transponder sex.”

“Rule one: don’t look at the snail, you’ll die laughing,” Nami snickered.

“Exactly!” Vivi said.

“I’m glad you’re all right,” Nami said. “When Reiju had your hair…”

“I’m sure that was quite a shock,” Vivi said.

“It was nightmarish,” Nami said. “We were so worried. I thought they might have already had you and we just didn’t know because of how crazy things had been lately.”

“It sounded like it. That forgetting thing sounded horrifying. I’m sure I forgot Ace too but there weren’t any immediate reasons to be thinking about him like there were for his parents,” Vivi said. “I just…never would have known.”

She chuckled, “And then he went and beat up a Warlord.”

“Yeah. And he helped in kicking Doflamingo’s ass too,” Nami said. “Observation Haki has only made him more of a pain for opponents.”

“I’ve been trying to train up my Haki a bit but it’s slow going,” Vivi said. “I don’t want to get blindsided by a logia reforming again.”

“We could probably teach you. Marco especially, he’s been in the New World his whole life and is super used to Haki,” Nami said.

“The New World sounds so amazing whenever you tell me about it,” Vivi sighed. “I miss you guys so much. Miss the sea.”

“Offer’s always open to come back,” Nami said, running a hand through Vivi’s hair. “We miss you too. And hey, we’re not the only girls anymore, there’s Robin, Perona, and Koala now!”

“It’s tempting,” Vivi admitted. “Maybe once this assassin business is over—did you hear that?”

“Yeah,” Nami said grimly, grabbing the Clima Tact. “Let’s move.”

Vivi stuffed some Peacock Slashers into hidden pockets in her dress and followed Nami to the window. “Marco and Ace’s room should be three windows down.”

“Okay, princesses people are trying to assassinate first,” Nami said, helping Vivi out onto the molding along the sides of the palace. Vivi carefully shuffled along the narrow ledge.

Right as she was about to tap on the boys’ window it opened.
She and Marco stared at each other. Marco recovered first, “Was about to come and get you, yoi.”

“We heard it too,” she said as he helped her inside and reached back out for Nami.

“Three people,” Ace said from the door. His ear was pressed against it. “Guns. Think they might have knocked out a guard and that was the noise.”

“Three people? That’s lame,” Nami said. “Vivi, how hot do you think this tile can get?”

“It’s baked at more than two thousand degrees,” Vivi said.

“Ace!” Nami said and the logia nodded, dropping to his knees.

“Superheating the floor?” Vivi guessed.

“Well under two thousand degrees isn’t all that super but yeah,” Ace said. “I’ll trip them up, Nami can shock them, and then you, Marco, and I can beat them up.”

“Tell us when they get right in front of the door, Ace,” Marco said, getting ready to kick it open.

They waited for the longest six seconds of their lives before Ace said, “Now!”

Marco kicked the door open and Ace shot flames along the floor tiles.

The door clipped one assassin, sending him off balance. He was still caught in the lighting that Nami called from the Clima Tact, and his poleaxe was cut down by Vivi’s Peacock Slashers. The other two, another man and a woman, were cornered by Ace and Marco. Ace grabbed both their guns and superheated them. The guns exploded, sending the assassins flying back. Before they could get up a very angry Phoenix pinned them down.

“Talk,” Nami told the man with the axe.

He said nothing. Ace growled, stepping forward as his eyes blazed into angry embers, “The lady said talk.”

The man winced, but said nothing.

“You’re here for me, aren’t you?” Vivi asked. “Aren’t you!”

The man nodded once. He still said nothing.

“He’s well trained,” Vivi commented.

“Ace, set his pants on fire,” Nami said.

“Yeah, okay,” Ace said.

“We were acting alone!” the man squawked before Ace could.

“Like hell you were,” Vivi said.

“We’re not stupid,” Marco added, still pinning the other two.

“Oh my god that bird talked!”

The pirates and princess turned to see the castle guards, including the captain who had yelled in shock at seeing the phoenix speak. Marco groaned.
“Still nothing?” Vivi asked her father.

“Two days of interrogation and no results,” Cobra sighed. “Several attempts at martyring themselves, but no information.”

“Sanji said Germa 66 troops are fanatically loyal,” Nami said. “We may get nothing.”

“Maybe we should go for the backup plan after all,” Ace said. “Hide out with Franky’s brother.”

“They’re still not sending very good assassins so I don’t see why,” Vivi said.

“Vivi, people are trying to kill you!” Nami said.

“And admittedly failing quite hard,” Marco noted, wincing as Nami glared at him. He’d learned over the last week and a half how scary she could be.

“Thank you!” Vivi said. “Can we please get back to breakfast now?”

“I suppose that’s for the best,” Cobra agreed before one of his aides rushed in. “What is it?”

“Urgent missive from the World Government! A diplomatic visit from North Blue!” the man said, bowing.

North Blue. The five at the table shared wary looks. Cobra took the letter and read it. Then he scowled and read it again.

“Father?” Vivi asked.

“Nami, remind me of the name of the head of this organization after us?” Cobra asked.

“Judge. Judge Vinsmoke,” she said.

“And he is a…king?” Cobra asked.

“Oh no,” Vivi said. “He’s coming here?”

“As a freaking diplomat?” Ace groaned.

“Worse, a diplomat with the blessing of the World Government?” Vivi added.

Cobra nodded, passing her the letter. “This changes things. If he is under their protection, we will have to alter out tactics.”

“I’ll say,” Marco said. “What the hell is going on that he can do this?”

“And he’s bringing an ‘entourage’ oh joy. More assassins, probably better ones,” Nami sighed as she read over Vivi’s shoulder.

“We only prepared for them to come as assassins,” Cobra said. “There’s not much we can do when they come officially.”

“Crap,” Nami muttered “This things says they’ll be here in two days, too…”

“I can’t just accuse another king, who I’ve never met even, of wanting to kill my daughter,” Cobra said. “Especially since King Judge seems to have some pull with the World Government.”
“…You don’t have to,” Vivi said.

“Well good because he just said he can’t—ow!” Ace said as Nami smacked him upside the head.

“Vivi, we can’t just let him come here and get close to you,” Nami said firmly. “We have no idea what he’s capable of!”

“We won’t,” Vivi said.

“All right, now I’m interested. What’s the plan, princess?” Marco asked, leaning on the table.

“King Vinsmoke will come here and will be…entertained diplomatically,” Vivi said. “But he will not be introduced to the princess.”

“Not introducing a fellow king to my heir would not be considered diplomatic, Vivi,” Cobra said.

Vivi grinned and pretended to swoon, “But how can you introduce me to the King from North Blue…when I’ve been tragically abducted by pirates?”

Chapter End Notes

Yup, time to fake a kidnapping! Next time the kidnapping does not go as planned in "Where There's Smoke..."

VIVI'S BACK! Also, Law is still suffering from the trauma Reiju's poisoning did to his mind. We'll be seeing more of the effects of that as time goes on. Ace and Marco are working out their boundaries and who needs protecting when. And Sanji is on the mother of all guilt trips over this mess.
Law personally didn’t like the new plan. Sure it kept Vivi away from Sanji’s biological father—and any siblings or relatives who may have come with him—but it was risky. Kidnapping a princess, even when her kingly father and the main guards knew it was all a sham and the princess was cooperating to the point of being the mastermind, was not exactly low profile.

Given his clout with the government, there was nothing prevent Vinsmoke Judge from getting Marines involved…potentially very powerful Marines.

And when Law needed help with something involving dealing with Marines, there was one person he would talk to first, “Hello, Cora-san.”

“Law! Nice of you to call, how are things?” Rocinante asked.

“Ah, well…we’re in the middle of something,” Law admitted. He didn’t want to go into too much detail to avoid worrying his father.

“Is something wrong?” Rocinante asked.

“No…yes. But it’s our fight,” Law said. He didn’t need Rocinante and Kuzan trying to help too much. His crew had to fight their own battles. “I just need something from you. A transponder number.”

“Well, I’ll see if I remember it, whose?” Rocinante asked.

“Actually…I think this one Ice would know,” Law admitted. “Can you put him on for me?”

“O.o.o.

“So do we actually go to Water 7 or only make them think we left the island and just ‘return the princess for ransom’ when they’re gone?” Ace asked as they set up camp.

“I’m pretty sure returning me won’t work,” Vivi said, rolling out some blankets to sleep on. “They’ll just go back to trying to kill me.”

“They won’t leave,” Marco said. “For whatever reason this island is their chosen battleground. They could have threatened Sanji’s father instead, but they didn’t. There’s a reason.”

“Yeah but that would have brought Mihawk down on their heads,” Nami said. “He made that pretty clear: no messing with his favorite restaurant.”

Marco shook his head, “Mihawk may make short work of their goons, but for whatever reason they have the government behind them on some things, like controlling Sanji’s bounty.”

Nami frowned, “Wait…then Zeff would have been a much better target, wouldn’t he? He’s a former pirate, not a legitimate noble. The World Government could have forced Mihawk to stand down…or, well, told him to. Not sure forcing would work with Mihawk…”

"We should still leave and group up at Water 7, though," Ace said. "It's easier than trying at a port here, and we can restock with the Franky Family."
“All right. Water 7 it is,” Vivi said. “They’ll expect us to leave from Nanohana, most likely, since it’s closer. If we fly over the river and leave from Erumalu we’ll have a better chance.”

“Think we should go through Rainbase and Yuba to get there?” Nami asked, pulling out her map of the island.

“We have enough supplies to them,” Vivi said. “We’ll have to move quickly. Even if my father and his top guards know this is a hoax, we’ll likely have Marines on our tails soon…”

“I think we can make the river in under a week,” Marco said, tracing his finger along the map. “Then Erumalu is just a quick jaunt across. That short a distance, I can probably handle carrying three.”

“That should work. Let me mark some of the new oases and quicksand spots,” Vivi said, pulling out a pen.

“Want to talk?” Zoro asked as he dried another dish. He’d been helping with the dishes every night in an attempt to give Sanji some time to relax by lightening his load. Sanji hadn’t been taking it. He was pretty sure that left talking as their only option.

“No…and you’re going to make me, aren’t you?” Sanji asked.

“I won’t make you do anything, asshole. Just…if you want to,” Zoro huffed. “You know. If it would help.”

“Will it?” Sanji asked.

Zoro shrugged. Hell if he knew. “Well, we both want Law to talk to Luffy, right?”

Sanji chuckled at that. Zoro was going with the idea that it was the right move.

“…I told you my mother helped me get out, right? Of the family?” Sanji asked, passing him a pan.

“Yeah, I remember that part,” Zoro said. “You said she died.”

“She did. We made it to a port on the island. The plan was to hide out in East Blue, since it’s such a nondescript sea. Lie low, start over,” Sanji said. He set the glass he was washing down heavily. “We were in a pretty crowded square by the docks. Trying to blend in, you know.”

“So wait, you made it pretty far then!” Zoro said. “What happened?”

“Someone shot her,” Sanji said, shrugging limply as his eyes went somewhere far away. “It was…it was really fast.”

“She was just…shot?” Zoro asked. It reminded him of what had happened to Nami’s mom…it felt so weird, someone being taken so easily. No big moment just…gone. And even Nami’s mom had technically been an execution...

Sanji nodded, “I think she noticed something was off as early as that morning. She told me to run to the nearest departing ship if anything went wrong. She was my mom so…so I listened. When she fell the crowd panicked and I used the confusion to get away. I ended up on the cruise liner as an assistant chef and when we reached East Blue Zeff’s men attacked it and…the rest is history.”

“You think it was Judge’s doing?” Zoro asked.
“Yeah. Yeah, I do. It hitting her in a crowd that big when we were near the middle? It wasn’t random,” Sanji said. “…I never actually saw her body, you know. She pushed me as she fell and I just…started running and didn’t stop. Didn’t look back.”

“Then that’s what she wanted. She wanted you to run,” Zoro said firmly. “Mihawk made me run a few times when he was fighting someone better than the average idiot. Parents want their kids to be safe.”

“And Judge wants to kill my friends and kidnap me.”

“Well yeah, he’s not your real parent. You don’t see Zeff trying to kill us,” Zoro said, scoffing. “Hell if we told him what was going on he’d probably try to kick Judge’s ass for us.”

“Which is why we’re not telling him,” Sanji said. “He’s safe as long as Mihawk’s protection means anything. I’d like to defeat the Vinsmokes before that happens.”

“…He’s going to come kick your ass when he realizes you didn’t tell him to try and keep him safe,” Zoro noted.

“Shut up and put these glasses away, moss for brains.”

Zoro chuckled. Back to regular snippy Sanji instead of mopey snippy Sanji. Much better. “Yeah, yeah, I hear you, you shit cook, don’t get your briefs in a bunch-”

He ducked the kick that was aimed at his head. Yep, much better!

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“You know, I kind of like camping better than hanging at the palace,” Ace said. “More freedom.”

“You are the son of the Wandering Emperor,” Vivi said, smiling. “We’re almost at the river, should reach it a bit before noon, right Nami?”

“If I calculated our speed correctly, yes,” Nami said. “Which is great since I’m sick of trudging up sand dunes.”

“Fun to slide down them though,” Ace commented. “That one up ahead is pretty big, we’ll get a nice slide.”

“After one heck of a climb,” Marco chuckled ruefully.

“Just keep telling yourselves we’ll be on the sea soon,” Vivi said.

“Hell yes. I miss water,” Ace said. “I’m a Fire Man and I miss water.”

“Well you’ll see it soon and—oh shit!” Nami squeaked as she got to the top of the dune. “Get down!”

They all ducked and peered over the crest of the sand dune. It was the highest for a few miles, letting them see the small Marine camp in the distance.

“Oh shit…walked right into them,” Ace said.

“You’d think they’d be closer to Nanohana!” Nami complained. “Why swing out like this?”

“They may just be sweeping the area. I was only kidnapped three days ago,” Vivi pointed out.
“We’ll go around them.”

“May be easier said than done. Isn’t that the new Admiral with the amazing Observation Haki?” Marco asked, pointing. His eyes had changed to the Phoenix’s to let him see farther.

“Oh yep, that’s Fujitora,” Ace cringed as he used his own Observation Haki to help him see. “Shit.”

“He could have made his ship fly to get here if he wanted with his gravity powers,” Nami said. “Like Kizaru, he’s definitely someone you can summon on short notice.”

“But he’s also blind so…he hasn’t seen us,” Ace said. “Now his subordinates on the other hand…”

“We’ll go around, quietly,” Marco said. “But quickly.”

“The time works in our favor,” Nami said. “We’ve got a few hours to noon. As it heats up, Ace becomes more effective.”

The carefully crept through the sand, staying low and moving in a wide arc as Nami carefully marked their position on the map. It got harder to move quickly as the day heated up, and finally they had to rest.

“Water break,” Vivi said, pulling out some of the canteens. Ace thankfully only needed a few small sips, but Marco and the girls needed more.

“So dehydration also works on you, huh?” Nami asked weakly.

“Lots of long term stuff can weaken me. Probably won’t kill me though,” Marco said. He glared at Ace as his boyfriend stretched in the hot sun. “Showoff.”

“Hey, less water for him means it’ll last longer,” Vivi said. “And we’ll be at the river soon.”

“Yeah, if you peer at the horizon the sand starts to change,” Nami said. “We’re getting closer to the fertile stuff. And that’s only a hop, skip, and a jump from the river.”

Ace stiffened, “And we’re going to need to make that jump pretty fast; get going!”

It was too late. Admiral Fujitora landed less than fifty yards from them. His men were surely following him.

“Ace! Heat it up to disorient him!” Marco said.

Ace nodded. Two rivers of fire poured from his hands, encircling Fujitora.

Fujitora merely floated himself over the barrier, “Should be careful about that, Fire First. Your friends are already close to overheating.”

Ace sent them a worried glance—which was apparently what Fujitora wanted as the large man’s cane went black with Haki and cracked Ace across the face while he was distracted.

“Ace!” Nami, Vivi, and Marco yelled.

“Stay back, don’t give him reason to worry about you!” Marco told the girls before lunging at Fujitora. The gravity well the Admiral tried to pin him with made him shudder—it reminded him too much to Teach’s ambush. His Haki was just enough to stop it from pinning him, but it slowed him down.
This was bad. Marco was the only one capable of fighting Fujitora and they all probably knew it. Ace was at least strong enough to help, but Nami and Vivi were enough out of the Admiral’s league to where Marco wasn’t even sure if they could help.

“I’m not kidnapped!” Vivi yelled desperately as Marco managed to knock Fujitora away from Ace. “They didn’t kidnap me I ran away!”

“People are trying to kill her!” Nami added, realizing Vivi’s tactic of distraction-by-honesty. “We want to keep her safe!”

“As Princess of Alabasta I give you my word!” Vivi pleaded as Ace got pinned again.

“I understand your situation and I therefore implore you to understand mine,” Fujitora said. “You have no proof of this.”

“I am the proof! I willingly ran with them!” Vivi said firmly.

“But they could have deceived you,” Fujitora said. “Princess, you have been declared kidnapped and so-”

“WE HAVE YOUR PROOF, ISSHO!

The pirates looked up and Fujitora’s head tilted in the direction of the yell.

Smoker came flying on a stream of smoke across the sky, Tashigi hanging on around his neck. They landed between the group and the Admiral, backs to the pirates in an unusual show of trust.

“Admiral, I have proof. You have my word.”

“Oh so his word counts,” Ace grumbled from where he was sprawled on the sand.

“We shall see if it does,” Fujitora said, sending Ace an annoyed look. “Your word, is it Smoker?”

“My word as a Vice Admiral and devotee of true justice,” Smoker said firmly. “Judge Vinsmoke plots to assassinate Princess Vivi as recompense for the Straw Hats holding his daughter, who attacked them and their…allies…a month ago. For some reason, the government is aiding him in doing so.”

“And it’s worse: we did some digging,” Tashigi said. “We have reason to believe Vivi’s…history with the crew will be used to justify her father’s overthrow at Judge’s hand.”

“No!” Vivi yelled, horrified.

“No!” Vivi yelled, horrified.

“Sadly…yes,” Smoker said. “All that work done nearly two years ago…it will be rendered moot.”

“You have to be fucking kidding me!” Ace exploded. “We have to stop him!”

“Admiral, it’s not right, not just! It’s not right to let Judge do it!” Vivi said. “Please, Admiral, my friends have told me you are a good man! Surely you see the injustice here! Erm…pun not intended.”

Fujitora frowned, “I do understand…but what leverage does Judge have, then, that they would allow him to do it?”

“Money, power, pledged allegiance of his army, who knows?” Tashigi sighed. “But they’re letting him break the rules as if…as if he were…” Her eyes went wide as it dawned on her.
“A Warlord,” Smoker, Fujitora, Nami, and Vivi all said at once.

“Of course, with Doflamingo gone they went looking—” Marco said, running a hand through his hair.

“That’s why he felt safe attacking Hancock!” Nami said.

“By declaring Blackleg Sanji his subordinate, he takes control of Sanji’s bounty!” Tashigi added. “And instead of suspending it—”

“He altered it to live capture!” Ace said.

“But wouldn’t working with Big Mom void a Warlord pact?” Nami asked.

“Jinbe was Pops’ ally and they looked the other way until Marinford,” Marco admitted. “Warlords get an awful lot of leeway…”

“Yeah, I mean Mihawk hangs around Dad, and Buggy and Dad talk all the time too,” Ace added. “And Doflamingo worked with Kaido…”

“Plus we don’t know how close he is to her, he could be trying to just use her too,” Vivi added. “Play both sides, stick with whatever pans out.”

There was a loud cracking noise. Everyone turned to look at Fujitora, fingers clenching his cane tightly enough to crush the wood beneath them.

“First they ignore a coup until it is nearly too late. Then they allow a successful coup to go unchallenged. And now, now they give their blessing before one has even begun?” he growled. “This is intolerable.”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this but…I actually can’t believe Sakazuki would back this,” Ace said slowly. “Save face for the Navy after Dressrosa? Sure. Toss a great spy out on his ass due to connections to pirates? Why not? Kill the biological son of the pirate king with a sucker punch? Hell yeah. But sponsor the takeover of a peaceful, law-abiding nation?”

“It wouldn’t be like him,” Tashigi agreed. “He only got upset about Dressrosa because Admiral Fujitora allowed the Navy’s reputation to take a hit, but he was glad Doflamingo was out of power since he’s so uncontrollable and vile.”

“Then who is it like?” Vivi wondered. “Who would allow it?”

“I have my suspicions,” Fujitora mused. “But they have no place here.”

“It’s not exactly a long list, people who outrank the Fleet Admiral,” Marco said dryly. “Kong and the Elder Stars should be it, right?”

“There are other high ranking nobles who theoretically could overrule him,” Tashigi said. “But your list is the most probable.”

“Fucking hypocrites. Crocodile tries to take this place and they kick him out, but then they hire a guy to take this place when they suddenly feel like it!” Marco complained.

“You need to leave,” Fujitora said. “My men will be here soon. Smoker, Tashigi, I task you with getting them to port safely. What you do after is your own business.”

“We’d do it anyway,” Smoker said, smoke spilling from his hands and condensing over the group.
“There, shade. Get moving.”

“Start more fires,” Fujitora told Ace. “We will plead your plan to disorient me with obscene amounts of heat worked.”

Ace nodded slowly. “Hope your men get to you before you cook.”

“My Haki is sufficient to protect me from your fire, Portgas.”

The use of his preferred last name seemed to please Ace, and he quickly bathed the area around Fujitora with flames.

“Good luck,” Tashigi called to him.

“I am not the one who will need it!” Fujitora called back as the group hurried away.

“Come on already,” Smoker said, walking away with his cloud.

“You’re not in charge here,” Ace said.

“Which one of us is a Vice Admiral?” Smoker asked.

“The one of us who seems to think that matters!” Ace growled.

“So…this is….awkward,” Vivi offered as Smoker and Ace sized each other up.

“Well, we have a gameplan, at least,” Tashigi said. “Right, Smoker?”

“We do,” Smoker agreed. “We’ll have to find disguises. No sense making this obvious…”

“Translation, no sense in tarnishing the Navy’s rep,” Ace scoffed.

“Says the boy who allegedly pitched a conniption fit over his real surname being on a poster,” Smoker said.

“Portgas is my real last name!” Ace snapped.

“Knock it off, both of you,” Marco said. “The plan is to meet up with the crew quietly while keeping Vivi safe and we’re going to do that. As a team. Got it?”

“…This is going to go terribly,” Nami commented to Tashigi, who nodded.

Ace and Smoker stopped their arguing after Marco’s rebuke, but their eyes stayed on each other, silently warring. Nami idly wondered how long it would take for Marco to get jealous Ace was staring at another guy for long periods…did Marco get jealous? She wasn’t sure. The bird was annoyingly hard to read.

She was fairly certain that was a reason Shanks didn’t like him. Shanks seemed to like expressive people. From the short time she’d been around Benn Beckman, even he was fairly open compared to Marco’s usual calm.

It did compliment Ace well, though. Ace often ran more hot-blooded than even Luffy when he got passionate…and Luffy was with Law.

Someone cunning with someone who wore their heart on their sleeve. She glanced at Vivi and grinned. She could relate. Of course, Vivi was smarter than the D brothers by miles and Nami was
far more charismatic than Marco or Law.

Especially Law. How the guy got a nickname as charming-sounding as “Dr. Heartstealer”…okay, well, the physical taking of hearts, yes…

“Damn it, Ace!” Marco barked, snapping her out of her thoughts.

“I didn’t do it.” Ace was using the same tone of voice that cropped up when Law’s hat had “mysteriously” caught fire one morning. No one ever bought it and Ace always got reminded that Law could in fact disassemble a logia just fine.

“Ace don’t bait the Marines,” Marco sighed.

Ace sulked, “He started it.”

“I did no such thing,” Smoker said.

Nami grabbed Ace by the ponytail, “Ace, don’t cause problems! I don’t care how you feel about Marines! These guys are Kuzan and Rocinante’s pals, remember? And we like Kuzan and Rocinante!”

Wait…she frowned and turned to Tashigi, “Kuzan and Rocinante. Did they send you? Are they coming?”

Tashigi shook her head, “No, they just gave Trafalgar Law our contact information. He’s the one who warned us about Judge.”

“That’s Law for you. Several steps ahead,” Marco chuckled. “So, let’s keep the plan simple. Get to the port and wait for our backup. Not so hard at all. Right everyone?”

Ace and Smoker both glared defiantly at each other. Everyone else sighed.

“Oo.oo.oo.

“Oh thank god,” Nami said days later. “The road trip from hell is over.”

Ace and Smoker lived up to their animosity and pointedly did not get along. For five days. Straight.

When Phoenix Marco gagged his own boyfriend, you knew things were bad.

“So we have a few options,” Tashigi said. “I think we should get on a ship and go to a nearby island to group up. That way there’s less chance of commotion. They might even think we ran off with Princess Vivi and some forces may leave to look for us while we sneak back in to defeat Judge.”

“No, that will only add time,” Vivi said. “We need to be able to act quickly. We don’t know how patient Judge is willing to be. My father is in danger, even if Fujitora is trying to watch his back.”

“We’ll have to go to the docks either way to watch for the ship,” Nami said. “We just-”

“Shh! Hide!” Marco hissed, pushing the other back around the corner.

“Why?” Ace asked.

They peered over towards the port and everyone panicked.

“Kizaru?” Tashigi whispered, wide-eyed.
“What the hell!” Ace hissed. “Fujitora’s already here! Since when do they send two Admirals?”

“Sabaody” Nami pointed out.

“Yeah but that was all the Supernovas and their crews and a mess of New World pirates!” Ace said. “This is ‘hey three pirates nabbed the princess!’”

“If we have to get away from him, we can. I can take him and the rest of you can go,” Marco said.

“Are you sure? Because if it’s just you as his target I’d say no,” Smoker said. “His speed is brutal, Phoenix.”

“I can help,” Ace said. “We-”

“You’re not going up against another Admiral,” Marco hissed. “Remember last time you fought one?”

“Are you fucking serious?” Ace asked. “After that chat we had about Weevil and now you’re bring a flaming hypocrite-”

“This can wait,” Vivi said firmly.

“No it can’t!” Ace growled. “You didn’t worry when it was Fujitora!”

“Fujitora has honor! Kizaru will kill you!” Marco snapped. “Kill any of us! But he can’t kill me so I should do it!”

“I’m not letting you-!”

“There’s no letting-!”

Both of them jerked as Nami smacked them upside their heads. “Be quiet! Smoker, how long do you think Kizaru will stay watching the docks?”

“He’ll probably blink between here and Nanohana,” Smoker said. “Keep them both covered, and people will be watching for us at both. If someone sees us they’ll call him and he’ll teleport to our exact location.”

“Good thing you and Tashigi ditched the coats,” Vivi said. “We’ll just have to get better disguises for while we wait here, and a good hiding place.”

“…Look, you two, deal with your issues,” Nami said, patting Ace on the shoulder. “We’re going to watch the docks, see if we can figure out a good way for the ships to dock and how to disguise ourselves in the meantime.”

“That could take a while,” Smoker said.

“It’s all we’ve got. Then we’ll stick to the original plan: our crew shows up and we go kick Judge’s ass,” Nami said. “We’ll sail up the river and get close to Aluburna. Then we’ll handle Judge.”

“Sounds good,” Smoker said. “I can fly, so I’ll take the high ground. Find a good place to stay.”

“All right. You two, try and work this out,” Vivi said as they left Ace and Marco alone.

Marco sighed, running his hand through his hair. Ace scowled and folder his arms, glancing away from Marco.
“Nami, is that what I think it is?” Vivi whispered, pointing.

“It is! Sanji has three of those, Mihawk gave them to him!” Nami gasped.

“…What?” Tashigi asked.

“The 66 on that man’s outfit! He’s a Germ agent!” Vivi said.

“Germa,” Nami hissed.

“Oh, Germa 66,” Vivi said. “Anyway, he might be able to tell us what’s going on! The 66 designates someone more than just a foot solider, right?”

“Right. Sanji’s siblings all had them,” Nami said. “So maybe unlike the assassins at the palace, this one will talk.”

“We can’t let him contact anyone, though,” Vivi said.

“Leave it to me,” Tashigi said, squaring her shoulders.

“What are you going to do?” Nami asked.

“Report. I’m a Commodore,” Tashigi said. “I just received news that the Straw Hats who kidnapped the Princess are heading for Nanohana and have found him as our ally. If he has any means of contacting anyone, he’ll pull it out…”

“And Vivi and I will stop him from using it before we capture him!” Nami said.

“Let’s go,” Tashigi said. She approached the agent, pretending to be out of breath and related her news while subtly leading him towards an alley. The man seemed distracted from her words by her breasts, to her annoyance. She deflected a grope with a quick smack and a glare before returning to the fake message. As she finished her report he pulled out a mini Den Den Mushi.

Vivi lashed out with a Peacock Slasher, sending the snail airborne by striking its thankfully protective shell. Nami leaped up and caught it, whipping out the Clima Tact with her free hand.

“We have you surrounded,” Tashigi said, drawing her sword. “Cooperate and we will be merciful.”

“Fail to, and we will not,” Nami said fiercely.

“I thought you said I was strong,” Ace said.

“I never said you weren’t.” Marco rubbed his arm.

“But you won’t let me help you here. Why is this different?”

“Ace…sweetheart…he’s an Admiral, yoi,” Marco said, sighing heavily.

“So?” Ace asked. “Bit more outside my league than a Warlord. Big deal.”

“Yes big deal!” Marco said. “Last time-”

“Last time, last time!” Ace snapped. “What is it with you?”
“Are you out of your mind?” Marco hissed, grabbing Ace’s shoulders and shaking him. “What’s with me? You almost died and you want to ask me what’s wrong with me?”

Ace slugged Marco, knocking the wind out of him, “You almost died too you fucking asshole, and you told me to get over it!”

“I can’t lose you!” Marco yelled, clutching his stomach after the blow. “I can’t lose you either you stupid bird, that’s why I said we should work together!” Ace yelled back. “So we don’t lose each other you…you dumb blue chicken!”

Marco gaped at him in shock, “What did you just call me?”

“Dumb! Stupid! Featherbrained asshole of a bird!” Ace yelled, tearing up. “You’re acting stupid and scared so you’re a dumb chicken!”

They stared at each other for a few moments before they both burst out laughing, Ace wiping the tears for his eyes.

“Oh, Ace, I love you so much,” Marco snickered, pulling him in for a hug. “Scared chicken? You are so Shanks’ brat, yoi.”

“I’m still mad at you and I love you too,” Ace said. “But still mad. Because you’re being stupid.”

“Ace I…I can’t lose anyone else. Especially you,” Marco said. “I-”

“We were in the process when someone interrupted,” Ace growled.

“Well you can try again when we get to the room. Come on, the girls caught us a snitch,” Smoker said.

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“Just let me set his feet on fire, he’ll squeal,” Ace said.

“It’s not going to be that easy, Ace, and people might notice if we set a guy on fire in the hotel,” Nami said.

“Look, we just wait until he talks to feed him—ow!” Smoker hissed as Nami smacked him.

“How dare you! This is for partly Sanji damn it and I will not deny someone food partially in Sanji’s name!” she scolded.

“Could let Marco peck him. That looks painful,” Vivi said.

Jim the Germa 66 agent really just wished they’d pick something. Between the Phoenix and Fire Fist working out their relationship drama, Smoker being passive aggressive with the pirates, and Cat Burglar constantly poking him with her stick he was pretty sure things would get embarrassing when he cracked over them trying to decide how to make him crack!

“Does he have any allergies?” Tashigi wondered.

“That sounds too complicated,” Marco said. “I’m with Ace: set him on fire.”
“That’s a bit vicious for you,” Nami said.

“Vicious mercenary,” Marco said, pointing at Jim. “So you going to talk or what?”

“Oh wow, Phoenix, I’m surprised none of us thought of just asking,” Smoker said dryly.

“Ahh! Shut up, shut up!” Jim complained. “I’ll talk if you all stop!”

“…Ha,” Ace told Smoker.

“All right, you said you’d talk so do it,” Nami said.

“King Judge is planning to attack Nerfertari Cobra if he thinks it’ll draw your crew!” Jim said. “But—but if it won’t, he’s going to go after some Water 7 shipwrights instead!”

“Well, no going to Water 7…” Vivi sighed.

“Why Alabasta?” Smoker asked.

“The Princess’ ties to pirates!” Jim said and Vivi winced. “Judge was told if he could arrange her father’s overthrow and blame your crew he could keep it! And he thinks he has an ace in the hole for battle here—um, no offense,” he added, nodding at Ace.

“A trick up his sleeve, huh?” Ace mused.

“As a Warlord, he’ll have exceptional leeway in who he hires,” Tashigi said. “He could take just about any infamous criminal under his banner legally, even one of the Worst Generation or an escapee from Level Six!”

“What is your plan for my crew?” Nami asked.

“Kill or capture you all except for Sanji and Vivi!” Jim said. “Sanji will be taken back to the family and Vivi will be married in so he can control Alabasta!”

“Over my dead body!” Vivi gasped.

“More like your wannabe groom’s dead body,” Nami growled.

“That’s all I know, okay? So no more weirdness, right?” Jim asked.

“…You have never met these pirates,” Smoker scoffed as Marco laughed at Jim.

“We’ll beat him up and ship him to Eines Lobby. Claim he’s a criminal,” Tashigi said. “Well…he is. But that’s beside the point. We’ll just need a crate and postage.”

“Tashigi, we’re pirates. Acquisitions are a huge part of our business,” Nami said, smirking as Jim began to sweat.

Luffy sighed. Law had fallen asleep in the labs again.

He hopped up into the stool Law was sitting on and patted Law’s head as it lay on the countertop. He wished Law would tell him what was wrong. It wasn’t like Law to be this much of a hypocrite: they’d gotten Zoro and Sanji to talk eventually. But then again, it was a lot like Law to be stubborn.
Law hummed softly as Luffy’s fingers combed through his hair. After a moment his eyes fluttered open, “Luffy-ya?”

“Hey there, sleepy Traffy.”

“Sorry,” Law said, sitting up and stretching. Luffy noticed he’d been laying on a book. “Must’ve lost track of time…”

“Yeah,” Luffy said. “What were you reading?”

“Adjusting my notes on Amber Lead, given there’s now the Vinsmoke’s bastardized variant,” Law said. “So I’m ready for it.”

“You were pretty ready already, you cured you and Chopper fine once Reiju stopped attacking you,” Luffy said.

“That’s still a big hole in my defenses. I’m not saying I’m afraid to die or anything but…not to that. Never to that,” Law said.

“I’d prefer you not die to anything,” Luffy said, putting his nose in the air.

“No one lives forever, Luffy-ya. And as a D I don’t run away from Death in fright,” Law said. “I just refuse to let it be that.”

“Well then killing yourself over it’s a dumb way to go about it,” Luffy scoffed. “You know, you’re supposed to be the smart one.”

“Oh I am, am I?” Law asked.

“Yeah, not the one who does…stuff like not talking and obsessing and stuff.”

“Luffy, I’m not exactly talkative. And I am typically obsessive,” Law said.

“But not when it’s dumb like this,” Luffy said. “When stuff like that happens you get better so it doesn’t happen again, yeah, but you don’t drive yourself into the ground over it.”

Law sighed, resting his head on his arms, “I’m just not sure what to do.”

Luffy grinned, “Well right now you let your awesome boyfriend take you to bed!”

He grabbed Law before the surgeon could protest—not that Law didn’t start when he was flung over Luffy’s shoulder. “The hell! Put me down you straw-hatted menace!”

“I’ll put you down when we get to bed, jeez!” Luffy laughed.

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After a few more days passed, it was nearly time to meet up with the crew. There was only one problem…

“Kizaru’s still hanging around!” Nami groaned. “The ships can’t get close enough even at night with him here!”

“Or even close enough for Law to get us with a Room!” Ace muttered as Vivi told their crews to keep hanging back through the snail.
“He must have noticed Jim go missing,” Tashigi sighed “Or someone else did. We need to get him to go away!”

“Well since know that, now what?” Nami asked.

“Now I return a favor,” Smoker said, pulling out another snail. “This is Vice Admiral Smoker. I have apprehended Portgas D. Ace in Nanohana, requesting backup.”

The pirates and Tashigi gaped at him after he hung up.

“Kizaru will go there, giving us time to get to the ships and move out for the river,” Smoker said. “Let’s go!”

“You…you just…” Vivi whispered.

“That was treason,” Tashigi said. “Smoker!”

“Why?” Ace asked.

“I got credit for you all saving this nation. That was not right,” Smoker said. “I owe my rank to you. So for that, and to save this country again… I’m giving it away.”

“Law, he’s gone,” Nami said into the snail as Kizaru vanished. “Make a big Room. Six coming over, us and… Smoker and Tashigi. Bring them too.”

“…I hope you know what you’re doing,” Law said sternly.

The blue edges of the Room raced past them before they were suddenly on the Sunny.

“Nami, Vivi!” Chopper cheered, racing over.

“Smokey!” Luffy added, grinning as he hugged the smoke logia. Smoker grimaced.

Sanji took Vivi’s hands in his, “I’m so glad you’re all right. Look, this is all my-”

“I’ll smack you if you say it’s your fault!” Vivi said, hugging him. “Oh it’s so good to be back, everyone! I’m sure we can fix this if we work together!”

“Well, we’ve got the gang back together now… plus two,” Zoro said, glancing at Smoker and Tashigi. “Let’s go kick Judge’s ass!”

Chapter End Notes

Dun dun DUN! Yup, Judge is a Warlord in this universe, which is where his sudden influence comes from. In this universe Germa 66 are less some nobles with a massive army and more of a powerful assassin clan who have an army work for them. And we have some of Sanji’s differing backstory here, including how he left and how his mom died in this universe.

Smoker and Tashigi return! And Smoker pays the kids back for last time in Alabasta, when he got credit for their heroics! Will they be valuable allies? Will Fujitora? Is Ace right about Sakazuki?
“So their plan is essentially a hostile takeover? A sanctioned one?” Robin asked. “Crocodile would foam at the mouth if someone told him…”

“Technically Judge is only to take over if he finds evidence King Cobra has colluded with your crew,” Smoker said.

“…Which is pretty much Vivi,” Luffy said with a guilty grin as Vivi groaned. Several other Straw Hats chuckled nervously.

“Judge is then to arrest us all, keep Sanji for himself, and marry one of his other sons to Vivi,” Nami said, patting Vivi on the shoulder. “…Find out which one. I want to kick his ass.”

“They’re pretty tough, Nami, remember?” Shachi said.


“Not for several months of recovery time, anyway,” Law corrected. “Anyone who can fund an army can afford proper medical care for a broken pelvis. But even if I did the operation I doubt it’d be fully repaired by now.”

“And Hancock turned Ichiji to stone,” Nami said. “…Does that wear off on its own?”

“She says she has to undo it when it’s total petrification,” Law said. “Of course if Judge is a Warlord she may have been ordered to undo it…”

“She’d have told us,” Luffy said. “And vented to us.”

“Probably for hours. We’d remember that,” Law agreed. “So it’s probably Niji. The one who was chasing Luffy during the fight.”

“Oh have I got plans for him then…” Nami said with an evil smirk.

Smoker would like to know what those plans were, simply to be assured that someone here had an actual plan. Most everyone seemed to simply be planning on how to get there, not what they’d do when they did. Law was supposed to be some sort of strategic mastermind and yet he’d barely contributed!

They’d been sailing for two days now and he’d learned more about everyone’s emotional reactions to the situation than anything else. How Blackleg was stressed due to the trouble his family was causing. How Pirate Hunter was concerned because Blackleg was stressed. How Straw Hat wanted to beat Judge’s head in. How Nico Robin seemed to find the whole situation darkly amusing given her past with Baroque Works.

But none of them seemed to have a concrete plan. “Has anyone given thought to what we’ll do when we get there?”

“Well I mean we’ve all been vying for preferred injuries to inflict on Judge if that’s what you mean…” Nico Robin said, smiling despite her obvious hedging.
“And of course some of us will go looking for my father at once,” Vivi added. “To protect him—without being too obvious about it, of course…”

“But mostly it’s beating the tar out of Germa 66 until we’ve crippled the members present enough that they’ve gotten our message,” Zoro grunted. “That they should stop this shit or we won’t stop crushing them.”

“That is simplistic in the extreme,” Smoker said. He turned to Jinbe, hoping for something better from the experienced Warlord.

“You’ll find our crew works best with a simple plan that we can adapt as needed,” Jinbe said. “We’re also loathe to split up too much given what happened in Dressrosa.”

“Kuzan told us about that,” Tashigi said. “Still, you might not be able to prevent some of you getting pulled off into your own separate battles…”

“With some of the stronger ones that’s not going to be a danger,” Smoker grunted. “But Kizaru will be around and so will plenty of other Marines. Grouping up too much might be just as bad.”

“You’re a Marine. I won’t ask you for a plan to beat Kizaru but what can we do to mitigate him as a problem?” Law asked.

“I don’t know of any real weaknesses,” Smoker said. “Light doesn’t have much of a counter-”

“Mirrors?” Marco offered. “Vista always wanted to try mirrors.”

“With how strong his stuff is you’d need a damn sturdy mirror,” Smoker said. “And Kizaru’s a physical powerhouse besides. You’re also not going to pull a trick on him like you did to Kuzan on Dressrosa, Surgeon. He’s not going to care if it looks like civilians are in danger.”

Law’s expression darkened at the reminded of his and Kuzan’s forced fight. Smoker didn’t much care, the point needed to be made. “You all remember Sabaody, pirates? Kizaru didn’t care who was around or what he hit so long as he routed you.”

“We did not face him on Sabaody. We faced Kuzan,” Robin said.

“It is true Kizaru will put civilians in danger if he thinks it will work on us, though,” Jinbe said. “He threatened the humans of Koala’s village to get them to lure Fisher Tiger.”

“He’s an asshole, all right,” Koala said, folding her arms with a dark scowl. “You really can’t think of anything, Smoker?”

“He can get distracted,” Smoker said after some thought. “Not sure how much good it’ll do you since whatever draws his attention is likely to be in the line of fire but it’s a possibility.”

“Judge is the real priority,” Tashigi cut in. “Expose him as being just like Crocodile and do so in public. Then Kizaru will have to follow the law and turn on him. And Kizaru does follow the letter of the law, even though he doesn’t care for the spirit.”

“So we need a confession,” Sanji mused. “And usually when we get the villain to confess it’s because we’ve driven them to it somehow…”

“What are you planning, Cook?” Zoro asked.

“Well if anyone’s going to set that shit-kicker off, it’s going to be me, isn’t it?” Sanji asked.
Several of his crewmates sighed, nodding. Luffy didn’t look particularly happy, “But…but I never get to fight the big bad guy anymore! Not fair!”

“You can still fight him, Luffy-ya. Blackleg just needs to piss him off first,” Law said.


“Well technically Kizaru is more powerful than Judge so…oh why did I say that,” Usopp whispered in horror as Luffy clearly started considering the comment. “Luffy, I didn’t mean it!”

“No fighting an Admiral. I can still lay you out most days,” Jinbe said firmly. “Until you can defeat me one hundred percent of the time no fighting Admirals.”

Smoker’s suspicions were confirmed. Jinbe was probably the person handling the crew’s training as the most experienced member, possibly barring Brook. He didn’t know enough of the skeleton’s history to tell on that angle. But Jinbe was likely the strongest on his crew overall…yet Smoker would never bet on him against Kizaru while Luffy, Law, and Ace felt more possible. Not good odds at all…but somehow more possible.

Was that the Will of D?

“What if Traffy helped?” Luffy asked.

“I don’t want to fight Kizaru,” Law said. “I haven’t got enough information-”

“But if we get cornered…” Luffy said innocently.

“If we’re cornered I’m going to teleport us both out of there, idiot,” Law said.

Luffy stuck his tongue out at Law.

“We shouldn’t fight Kizaru unless we have to,” Ace admitted. “Marco?”

“I can stall him at the very least if you all help keep him distracted,” Marco said. “Smoker was right though, giving him a single target isn’t the best idea…”

The discussion quickly devolved into minutiae about ideas to distract Kizaru and Smoker resisted the urge to bang his head on the table when the topic of water balloons began to be taken seriously.

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“It’s nice being back with everyone, but I do miss the Going Merry,” Vivi admitted.

“She gave out saving us,” Nami said softly. “She was one of a kind all right.”

“Still, the Sunny is pretty amazing, and so is the sub,” Vivi said. “I never imagined a ship designed to sail underwater as its main purpose!”

“Yeah, well Law is a sneaky asshole,” Nami said, shrugging. “That kind of ship had to be his thing.”

“I can’t believe Luffy just declared them boyfriends!” Vivi giggled. “And dragged him into Impel Down!”

“Yeah…so you probably heard Crocodile got out, huh?” Nami asked.
“Luffy did what he had to do to save Ace,” Vivi said, her fist clenching. “Have you heard anything about him since?”

“No. It’s like he and Daz Bones just vanished,” Nami said. “To be fair with all the chaos the New World’s been in for the last year and a half with the arrival of the other Supernovas and Blackbeard and then our crew…not too hard to stay under the radar.”

Vivi got up and paced the cabin, “Crocodile’s not someone to lie low without a plan. What else could he want?”

“Well, maybe the other Ancient Weapons,” Nami said. “We warned Princess Shirahoshi since she’s pretty much Poseidon but really I doubt Crocodile would go to Fishman Island.”

“Too much water” Vivi agreed, pausing her steps. “He’d be at a serious disadvantage.”

“Yeah. Now, enough about Warlords who have disappeared into the ether!” Nami said. “We’ve got more than enough to take him on now. We know how Haki works and he probably won’t have time to trap Ace like he did last time to stop Ace from glassing him.”

“…I’m pretty sure ‘glassing’ means smashing a glass in someone’s face, not turning them into glass,” Vivi giggled.

“Eh, we’ll let Ace know to do that too,” Nami said, waving a hand idly in the air. “He’s already offed one Warlord, I’m sure another wouldn’t be an issue. Unless you want to try?”

Vivi shook her head, “Just because you all have been helping me with Haki doesn’t mean mine’s anywhere near good enough to take on Crocodile. Especially if he’s been in the New World…didn’t you say logia without Haki don’t last long there?”

“Yeah, Marco claims it’s a fact: logia fresh from paradise almost always get their butts kicked since they think they’re invincible and don’t know Haki,” Nami said. “If Crocodile hasn’t gone and gotten himself killed, he probably knows how to use it.”

“So, lighter topics: how bad was it once Sabo finally got with Koala?” Vivi asked. “I remember him mooning over his spy girl and they still seem pretty solid…”

“Oh my god. They made us look platonic,” Nami said. “Lovey-dovey weirdos…”

“You’re kidding,” Vivi said.

“I. Wish.”

.o.o.o.

“You know, it was pretty smart of you to call Smokey, Traffy,” Luffy said.

“I thought he made a good choice, given his past experiences in Alabasta…with a rogue Warlord… and with you,” Law said, yawning. He’d been reading in the lab. Luffy had managed to restrict himself to messing with some of the less-fragile equipment but must have reached his breaking point.

“Come on, you need sleep,” Luffy said, taking Law by the arm. “And I need my favorite pillow.”

Law rolled his eyes as he was tugged along, “Pushy brat.”

“Sleepy surgeon.”
“That’s not even an insult,” Law said, confused.

“Because I’m a good boyfriend who doesn’t insult my partner,” Luffy said, pouting.

“Sorry.”

“You’re forgiven if you come to bed,” Luffy said.

Law stretched, “Oh fine. But we really do need to come up with a way to get into Alubarna.”

“Maybe you’ll think of it in a dream!”

Law tried to give Luffy a flat stare, but that was hard to do to someone who was towing you along by the wrist. The angles were all wrong. “Oh really?”

“Yeah, your brain’s smart enough to come up with stuff in dreamland.”

“You really see to have pigeonholed me as the brains of the bunch,” Law noted as they entered their cabin.

“Well, yeah, cause you’re really smart. But not Robin-smart or Jinbe-smart where it’s kind of boring, you can make it make sense. When you want to. Sometimes you still make it boring,” Luffy said.

“Well sometimes you’re still an annoying lunatic so we’re even for when I’m boring,” Law said.

“I said no insulting me!” Luffy said, wagging a finger in his face.

Law hooked his index finger around Luffy’s wagging one, tugging it down, “And I’ve said no telling me what to do, Luffy.”

“Aw come on, Traffy, don’t be a grump. You’ve been getting better,” Luffy wheedled.

Law frowned, “Better?”

“Since…you know,” Luffy said. “Since Reiju was a jerk and…you know.”

“I know,” Law said. Since he’d been poisoned and it had fucked him up. Again. Things kept doing that. He was beginning to think he was cursed. “Look, I…I just really don’t want to keep dealing with that shit. I mean, what’s it going to be next time?”

“Wat do you mean?” Luffy asked.

“What’s going to blindside us next?” Law asked angrily.

“…Don’t know,” Luffy said, flopping down on the bed.

“Exactly!” Law said.

“So? We can’t plan for everything and it’s dumb to try,” Luffy said. “Everybody who’s tried to out-plan us has failed, you know. We’ve kicked all their butts. Cause we’re tougher and you’re smarter and Robin’s smarter and Sanji’s smarter and anyway it’s going to be fine. We’re going to win.”

Law sighed and shook his head. When Luffy got like this there was no reasoning with him. “So you say.”
“Cause I know!” Luffy said imperiously. He frowned and sat up, “Hey, you’re not going to do anything stupid, right?”

“What?” Law asked.

“You know, like…something stupid,” Luffy said. “When we get to the city to fight. You’re not going to do something stupid.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s my line,” Law said.

“Yeah when things are normal but you’ve been not normal so now it’s my line.”
Law groaned, “I don’t even know what you’re talking about. But fine. Nothing stupid, okay?”

“Good!” Luffy grabbed Law, yanking him onto the bed. Law was too used to that happening to even manage a halfhearted protest squawk as he hit the blankets hard enough to bounce up off the mattress for a moment.

“Why are you so worried?” Law asked.

“Because…we’re the same,” Luffy said, looking guilty. “We’re not afraid of dying, we’re not. But we don’t like it when our friends might die.”

“You think I’ll draw fire like I did with Kuzan,” Law said, realizing what this was about.

“Yeah. You’re bad at not doing that kind of thing,” Luffy said. “…Same as me.”

“See, we do have something in common,” Law chuckled darkly.

“I’m serious. If you die it better not be because you were stupid,” Luffy said. “I’ll get Brook to go find your ghost so I can beat it up.”

Law was about to ask exactly how one went about beating up a ghost, but thought better of it. It was Luffy. He’d figure something out. “I won’t do something stupid, Luffy. Like you said, I’ve been getting better.”

“Yeah but I needed to make sure. Now I just got to work with Marco so Ace doesn’t do anything…” Luffy mused.

“Good luck with that one,” Law muttered, burying his nose in Luffy’s wild hair.

Much to Law’s surprise, Luffy ended up being right and he did have an idea when he woke up.

.o.o.o.

_A few days later_

Marco was mostly here for Ace. He didn’t know Vivi all that well, had next to zero investment in Alabasta personally, and while he did want to kick the Vinsmokes around a bit for being an exceptionally shitty family there was a bit of a line in front of him for injuring rights.

So, mostly here because Ace was.

That, and the look on Smoker’s face right now.

Were the Marine the massacring sort of man Marco would term it an ‘I’ll kill you all’ sort of face.
He was less sure of what it meant on a man of Smoker’s temperament but it was glorious all the same.

Marco had always loved messing with Marines, deep down. He’d never outgrown it, from cabin boy on it had always been a bit of a hobby. Being nearly impossible to injure had only made it better. And goodness knew he and Ace had gone on a fun few dates that essentially involved pranking Marines in the New World before Ace’s crew had set sail…

“Okay seriously, that smirk is starting to scare me,” Sabo muttered, eyeing Marco.

“It’s a smirk at Smoker’s expense so I love it,” Ace declared resolutely. He and Smoker had another brief glare battle. Tashigi huffed and resolutely stepped between the two of them, holding up her hands to stop their gazes from meeting.

“Smoker, please. It’s a good plan,” she said.

“I’m going to have so much fun arresting Law one day,” Smoker growled, his glare moving to the back of the Surgeon of Death’s head. Law didn’t seem to notice, but then he was a man who’d had to put up with Doflamingo as a major part of his life. Marco assumed that was more evil intent than Smoker could ever hope to accomplish.

“You’re kind of a traitor to the Marines I don’t think you get to arrest anyone, yoi,” Marco pointed out.

Smoker’s eye twitched. Marco’s smirk widened. Yep, still had it.

“It is a good plan,” Jinbe pointed out. “It explains our crew’s large amount of unusual people quite handily.”

“Yeah. Who’d have thought the mastermind Trafalgar Law would come up with something this dumb and yet this workable?” Sabo asked, taking off his top hat and idly twirling it.

“I did!” Luffy yelled proudly. Law and Nami both shushed him.

“You’re just happy because you got made ringmaster,” Ace said.

“I knew this hat would lead to great things one day,” Sabo said, laughing as he plopped it back on his head. Koala patted his shoulder with a ‘yes, dear’ expression.

“I still doubt the guards will fall for this,” Smoker muttered.

“Cheer up, oh fearless lion tamer,” Marco said, chuckling as he got another eye twitch. “They’re not the problem, the Marines and Germa 66 are. Of course the local guards will recognize their princess…and do whatever the hell Vivi says.”

“Like pretend we’re supposed to go right to the palace!” Koala said brightly.

“…Odds on that actually happening?” Tashigi asked.

“Oh, nonexistent,” Jinbe admitted. “Someone will get sidetracked halfway there and Luffy will probably punch the first member of Germa 66 we see. But we’ll get as close as possible.”

“Nami has a betting ring going if you want in,” Ace told Tashigi. She tapped her chin thoughtfully.

“You know, I might have to get in on that…what are the odds on Roronoa getting lost within five minutes of getting inside?”
Marco grinned. Best rescue mission vacation ever.

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Fujitora answered the snail, “Admiral Fujitora speaking.”

“I’m here, as requested,” the caller said bluntly before hanging up.

Fujitora set the receiver down. That was one trouble taken care of…still it would have been better to have an actual conversation, not just a snippy bit of information.

Oh well. He wouldn’t have summoned them if they couldn’t do the job.

.o.o.o.

“King Cobra the circus you requested a few weeks ago has arrived in the city,” the messenger said.

“The what?” Judge Vinsmoke asked.

“The circus,” Cobra said, mustering all of his political skill to run with was he was fairly sure was his daughters’ friends’ plan. “That I requested come here. For a festival.”

“Yes, we have a festival coming up,” the messenger said, nodding. “A very fun festival. Hence the circus.”

“Yes, hence the circus,” Cobra said. “You know this sounds like an excellent diversion while we wait for news of my daughter. Would you like to come and help me inspect it? Bring Niji, I’m sure there are some lovely ladies there…”

Was it possible to lead someone into a trap you knew nothing about? Cobra wasn’t sure but he was certainly going to try. He considered it fair play given the situation Judge was trying to put him in.

He really hoped it was the crew.

He frowned, looking at the messenger. Something seemed a bit off…but he wasn’t sure what…

“King Cobra!” A second messenger came into the throne room. “Admiral Fujitora requests your presence at once!”

“Excuse me,” he said, leaving Judge and Niji. He turned to the first messenger, “Perhaps you could take them ahead to the circus for me?”

If it was an actual circus, well, he’d apologize later…

Judge rose from his chair. Cobra frowned as the man proceeded to tower imposingly over everyone else. A king should have more manners than to just loom like that.

“I never agreed to go to a circus,” Judge said flatly.

“Well then you’ll have to wait here, as I shall be inspecting it as soon as the Admiral is done with me,” Cobra said. “Do let me know if my daughters’ kidnappers send any demands. It has been so long, quite distressing of them…”

“Father, maybe we should go and look at this circus,” Niji said. “Something seems…odd about all this.”

“Well they seemed very reputable to me,” the first messenger said, walking over to Cobra. “Do you
wish for me to escort them after all then, my king?"

To Cobra’s shock the messenger’s face briefly changed into that of the man who had once impersonated him. The assassin who once worked for Crocodile.

The man who was now on Straw Hat Luffy’s crew.

“That would be excellent,” he said.

“O.o.o.

“That’s one way to get Luffy to sit still and be quiet,” Nami said, stunned.

“I am a master planner, Nami-ya,” Law said smugly.

“I wondered why you made Sanji bring all those ham sandwiches,” Zoro admitted as Luffy kept digging in.

“Yeah. Hey, Marco, thanks for handling Ace,” Law said.

Marco did not respond, as his job of keeping Ace from rushing ahead essentially consisted of a very long make-out session.

“Do we think Bentham’s taking too long?” Vivi asked, worried.

“Nah, he had to get inside, remember?” Usopp said.

“He’s coming out with some people—lots of soldiers, guys, and that Niji guy and—huh, Sanji, guess you got your looks from mom, then?” Shachi said, glancing away from his telescope.

“Yeah,” Sanji said, taking another spyglass from Robin. “Yeah, that’s him all right…”

“His hair is atrocious!” Perona said. “I wouldn’t let you be my future brother in law if your hair looked like that!”

“Is he trying to look like a lion with a mane or something?” Shachi asked.

“Let me see!” Franky said, forming a magnifier around his eye. “Huh, yeah…it’s like he’s going for long blond locks with pointy black mustache, so not a super combo there…”

“Can we stop talking about Judge’s hair, you’re weirding me out,” Sanji said.

“But it looks so bad!” Nami gasped, having taken Person’a’s binoculars. “It makes Niji’s look sensible!”

“Oh please, those flippy bangs must take so much gel,” Bellamy said. “Seriously, you do not get a look like that without hair gel.”

“Well I know where he is, so as soon as he’s close enough it’s Lightning Tempo time!” Nami declared. “Try to marry my princess, will he…”

“Wait, Judge is that way?”

“Luffy, no!” several members of the crew yelled as Luffy stuffed the last sandwich in his mouth and ran off.
Law sighed. “Room. Shambles.”

Luffy reappeared next to Law. “Not fair!”

“You made me come up with a plan and now you want to ignore it!” Law said. “That’s not fair, Luffy-ya!”

“Um, you know with how big this Room is, a ton of Marines and Germa 66 guys have probably seen it,” Tashigi said.

Law paled, “Damn it.”

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“That’s one of those Rooms!” Niji cried. “The ones that Surgeon of Death made when fighting Reiju!”

Bentham fought the urge to groan. So close! He feigned panic. “Oh NO! The dreaded pirates who kidnapped the princess must be attacking the circus!”

“Why would pirates attack a circus?” Judge asked suspiciously.

“Erm…well their crew has done battle with your fellow Warlord Buggy the Clown. Maybe Straw Hat Luffy hates clowns?” Bentham offered.

Judge seemed unconvinced but Niji nodded, “Sounds like that rubber lunatic all right…”

“Oh, whatever shall we do?” Bentham asked, looking for an exit route. He fingered one of the smoke bombs Usopp had given him in case of needing to run like hell.

“It won’t take long for Kizaru to get here,” Judge said. “I say we wait. The circus can handle itself.”

Bentham scowled. They’d really wanted this taken care of before Kizaru could arrive. “Oh…of course…”

He fought the urge to tap his foot. Any time now, really…he had some of the most impatient friends in existence; what were they waiting on?

Oh, he realized as the blue barrier of the Room expanded. They were waiting for Law to make the Room bigger. Well okay then.

He suddenly found himself standing before his crew, “What did you switch with me?”


Bentham did a headcount and realized they were actually short quite a few people. “So they’re going to fight Germa 66 while we fight Marines?”

“You catch on fast,” Smoker said.

“I did used to work for Crocodile. That was pretty much a requirement,” Bentham admitted.

.o.o.o.

Zoro cracked his neck as Team We Hate Judge faced down the Warlord and his men. After some bickering it was decided that he, Sanji, Robin, Nami, Vivi, Luffy, Law, Koala, Sabo, and Jinbe were
the best team to send, while Smoker, Marco, Ace, and the rest hung back in case Kizaru showed up to back up the Marines.

“Dibs?” he asked Luffy.

“My dibs,” Luffy said seriously, only to pout as Judge’s men closed ranks around the Warlord. “Darn it! I’m going to fight the final boss and you’re gonna let me!”

“Judge Vinsmoke, get out of my kingdom!” Vivi declared.

“I’d say this is pretty good proof of you collaborating with pirates, Princess!” Niji mocked.

“We’re going to collaborate you right into the hospital!” Luffy yelled.

Sabo facepalmed, “Luffy…damn it, Lu…”

The moment broken, both sides rushed for each other. Zoro couldn’t wait.

Chapter End Notes

Mostly a transition chapter, but a fun one. We get some Namivivi, some Lawlu, some Smoker, and King Cobra...plus some foreshadowing for next time, Chapter 4: Warlord’s Game

Law's still trying to pull himself together after what happened with Reiju, and Luffy knows he's not as all right as he's pretending to be. I mean, it's got to be bad if Luffy's warning you to not be reckless, right?

Next time: Kizaru arrives, we find out Judge's ace in the hole, and the fight gets way more complicated.
Law wasn’t quite as confident about the situation as he would like to be. They didn’t really know who any of these people were beyond Judge and Niji. After their crew and Hancock’s had humiliated his children’s forces Judge was sure to bring stronger men, or at least be more prepared for powerful opposition.

In a more general sense, Law was to play defense. Particularly he was to keep Robin as unimpeded as possible so she could cripple and grapple to her heart’s content.

Zoro had made it to Judge and Niji first, but had apparently remembered the dibs Luffy and Nami had called and contented himself with knocking Niji at the weather witch while dueling several of Judge’s bodyguards.

Seriously, bodyguards in a fight. Even Doflamingo wasn’t that pathetic…puppets were at least him fighting, technically…

Law stopped himself before he accidentally complimented Doflamingo again.

“They certainly have quite the numbers advantage,” Robin said.

“Yeah, it’s annoying as hell,” Law said, idly bisecting someone who got too close. “It does leave me worried, though. What if even more are off doing things we don’t know about?”

Robin’s eyes widened at the same time his did.

“Like grabbing Cobra as a hostage?” she asked.

“Fuck. Vivi!” Law called.

“Don’t yell it across the field, I’ll tell her,” Robin said.

“Your grown mouths can speak without attached vocal chords? Interesting,” Law mused. “All right, inform everyone of the problem.”

Robin nodded, doing so. The relay caused a slight problem when Luffy and Nami both paused to hear it correctly, requiring Sanji and Vivi to bail them out before Judge and Niji could get in a proper attack.

“Do you have a plan for that or were you just telling us?” Sabo asked as his pipe deflected an axe before conking the wielder in the head.

“Suggestions are welcome!” Law said.

“I don’t want to split up more but if we have to…” Luffy huffed. “Then we have to! Zoro, Sabo, Koala, you guys are closer to the palace, go!”

The three nodded and began to fight their way through the edges of the crowd even as the soldiers tried to block the path.

“Niji’s almost out,” Law said as Nami knocked him back with a thunderclap from her staff and
Vivi’s Peacock Slashers got around one of his knives and yanked it from his hand.

“Move!” Jinbe yelled, barreling into Law and Robin as a large flash lit the square.

Law quickly checked Jinbe’s back, but the fishman’s Haki had been enough to protect him from more than a light, spotty burn. Law swallowed and look at the new arrival.

Admiral Kizaru.

Damn it. They’d hoped Smoker’s group would keep his attention…unless he’d skipped over them entirely…

This was why splitting up was bad.

“Admiral, so good of you to arrive!” Judge laughed before hurriedly ducking a punch from Luffy.

“Oh my, this looks like quite the mess,” Kizaru mused. “It seems you may have been right about the kingdom collaborating with pirates, Judge…”

Vivi went pale.

“He’s a **criminal** staging a coup! Crocodile was arrested for this exact thing!” Nami snapped angrily.

“I’m afraid he’s a Warlord, so arresting him is not on the docket,” Kizaru said. “All of you, though-”

Law would have known it was a bad idea if he’d bothered to think. But Kizaru was raising a finger to point at Luffy, and Law knew what those lasers could do. “Room! Shambles!”

Kizaru vanished. Law didn’t know quite to where as he hadn’t been aiming.

“…He is going to be very upset when he gets back,” Jinbe said.

“Yep. Let’s deal with Judge before then,” Law said, turning his attention to the Warlord. Luffy had dibs, but this was an emergency. Better to beg forgiveness than haggle with a D’s stubbornness for permission, especially when short on time. “Tact!”

The soldiers protecting Judge were knocked aside, leaving Law a clear path. He had a plan now—take Judge’s heart, force a confession. Easy.

Law was slammed to the ground so hard his head rattled.

“Law!” he heard Robin say before everything blurred and he was thrown into a column.

“You really need to not cause me so much trouble,” Kizaru sighed.

Law looked around. He didn’t recognize their location. He had no idea where Kizaru had teleported them to. The architecture matched the rest of the city, but he had no clue beyond that.

Law couldn’t teleport back without knowing where he was starting from in relation. What a time to not have Observation Haki…

Law teleported across the room when he saw Kizaru preparing a laser. Oh *sh*t*, he remembered Smoker’s warning about not giving Kizaru a single target.

He was so screwed.
“Traffy!” Luffy gasped as Kizaru vanished with Law.

“They went that way!” Sanji said, pointing.

“You think you’ll be fast enough to save your friend from an Admiral that fast?” Judge asked.

Luffy growled at him.

“Given all you’ve done against us is stall your inevitable defeat, I don’t see why Luffy even needs to bother with you,” Jinbe said calmly. “Luffy? You wanted to fight the big boss. I’d say Kizaru is a lot stronger than Judge.”

“Go,” Robin said. “You’ll have the best chance of getting Law away from Kizaru. We’ve got this.”

“All right, stay safe!” Luffy said, bounding off.

“Does this reinstate Zoro’s dibs on Judge?” Sanji asked.

“I think going by the lineup remaining we’ll have to go with your dibs, Sanji,” Robin said as Nami and Vivi finished beating Niji to a pulp.

“Still, the number of reinforcements is annoying,” Jinbe said. “I’ll clear the crowd. Get ready! Arabesque Brick Fist!”

The soldiers began to drop as Jinbe unleashed his wrath on them.

“They’re getting away!” Sanji yelled as Judge and the men in the back broke into a retreat.

“Jinbe, I’ll go with Sanji. You take Nami and Vivi back to the others, maybe they can come up with something for Kizaru!” Robin called over her shoulder as Sanji raced after Judge and she pursued both.

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“Okay, I’ll take the east side, Koala, you and Zoro take the west,” Sabo said.

“Me and Zoro?” Koala asked.

“So he doesn’t get lost,” Sabo said before turning to Zoro…or where he should have been. “Unless he already has.”

“Maybe we’ll get lucky and he’ll find the king first!” Koala suggested.

“I’ll totally take that kind of wishful thinking right now,” Sabo sighed. “Okay, so maybe we should-”

“Down!” Koala said, forcing him to the floor as a blade sailed over them.

“Fight the new person,” Sabo finished weakly.

“Well you know you love to watch me work,” Koala said, cracking her knuckles as she stood. “All right, who are you anyway?”

Sabo finally got a look at their opponent and snarled, “You? What the hell are you doing here?”
The man shrugged, “Wouldn’t you like to know?”

Law was struggling to even stay in the fight at all, much less get away from Kizaru. He could teleport himself a short ways, but even as he tried to get his bearings and figure out where he was the Admiral would catch up and attack again. Law had tried randomly teleporting several times in a row, but that had only made him tired and seriously disoriented him, leaving him wide open for an uppercut that had nearly broken his jaw.

“I’ll take you alive, don’t worry,” Kizaru said pleasantly. “I’d hate to think of what Kuzan might be driven to if I killed you. Plus while you are allowed to be turned in dead there is a strong preference for alive in your case.”

“You can’t lock me up. It’s dead or nothing!” Law barked.

“I’d rather not,” Kizaru said. Unlike Kuzan, his Haki seemed strong enough to resist Law just slicing him to little bits. That left Law with few options. His own Haki protected him from the majority of the light attacks, but Kizaru was so fast that he had blindsided Law a few times and left glancing burns.

Law heard Kizaru say, “But then, crippled isn’t dead,” before pain tore through his side.

He teleported first, trying to buy himself some time. The laser had caught him in the gut, but off to the side so he wasn’t dead yet.

Law staggered, falling to his knees as he reappeared. The Room blinked out. He needed to make another Room…just make a Room…

It hurt too much to draw on the kind of power a full Room would need after his teleporting sprees. A small Room then, just enough to handle the injury…just the critical parts…

Everything felt so slow as he got to work. Logically Law knew they were only seconds but they were hours in his head, aching hours of pain and stress.

A kick to his shoulder knocked him onto his back, startling him. The small Room vanished.

Fuck. Right. Kizaru. Kizaru had caught up.

Had he fixed the injury enough for it to be nonfatal? Would it be fatal without a fix, even with Kizaru’s intention? He didn’t know. Things were fuzzy. Law chuckled, smiling though the pain.

What an interesting way to go.

“That will be enough of that.”

Kizaru’s foot moved off his chest. Law jerked as the seastone cuffs Kizaru had been about to clamp on him were dropped, hitting him right in the still injured abdomen.

He turned his head to see the speaker.

Fujitora.

That wasn’t much better.

“Well I’m not trying to kill him, Fujitora,” Kizaru said. “But you have to admit, Trafalgar D. Water
Law is annoyingly hard to subdue, hmm?”

“He’s not important right now. Protecting Alabasta is.”

“I am protecting it. You do know what this kid can do, right?” Kizaru sounded amused.

Law tried desperately to summon the energy for a Room big enough to escape. Just Room and Shambles. He could do it…fuck no he couldn’t there was seastone sitting on him…

Fujitora’s sightless eyes bored into Law’s soul as the Admiral turn his head towards him, and he saw a small head shake.

Well why…why not…?

Law was still confused when he passed out.

Zoro wasn’t sure how he’d ended up outside the city and huffed, turning around. He really couldn’t afford to waste time right now!

“Look, I know Sakazuki said you have to be the one to turn the kid in. That’s fine,” Kizaru said. “But we need to get the cuffs on him. Before he wakes up and does something silly.”

“No, we are not arresting Trafalgar Law today,” Fujitora replied. “This nation needs its defenders and he is one of them.”

“Well technically Judge is its defender now. I know that makes no sense given almost two years ago but hey, I don’t give the orders form that high up,” Kizaru said.

“This isn’t about that. You are not going to arrest Trafalgar Law,” Fujitora said. “Not right now, anyway.”

Kizaru frowned, “Well now you’re the one making no sense, Issho.”

“Law is currently under my protection until this situation is resolved,” Fujitora said. Law was yanked through the air and landed at Fujitora's feet. He glared at Fujitora. The Admiral ignored him and merely stopped pulling him with gravity. Law rolled back onto his back with a huff.

“Oh, so you’re…betraying the Marines?” Kizaru asked. “Well, I supposed that—Amaterasu!”

The laser missed, bending around Fujitora and Law’s position. Law was baffled.

“What are you doing?” Kizaru demanded. “What’s going on?”

“Your Glint-Glint Fruit made you a Light Man,” Fujitora said calmly. “Whereas my Devil Fruit made me a Gravity Man.”

“That doesn’t explain you being able to affect my aim,” Kizaru said.

“Of course it does. Strong gravity bends light,” Fujitora said. “You should maintain your human form, Kizaru. Your elemental one will not react well to the gravity fields I am currently controlling.”

Kizaru frowned before unleashing a large burst of light. It merely warped around Fujitora and Law’s
position before smashing into the walls and windows behind them, cracking stone and causing glass to rain upon the field in a downpour of jagged knives. The ones that would have hit Law and Fujitora were repelled by another gravity wave, instead flying at Kizaru.

“Also your light is hot enough to make the air sizzle, so yes, I can hear it,” Fujitora added idly. “We are at a stalemate, Kizaru. You light cannot hit me but your speed will likely prevent me from hitting you in turn. I request that you actually listen to me this time. We are not going to aid the takeover of a law-abiding nation. And I’m willing to stalemate you until that takeover fails.”

.o.o.o.

“You’re not getting away!” Sanji snapped, finally getting close enough to Judge to attack. This was intolerable! Attaching his friends, his friends’ nation, and then trying to run? Sanji was going to beat him into the dirt for this shit!

Some of the soldiers got in the way. Sanji growled at them before glancing at Robin, “Fair Robin, can you keep them out of my way?”

“Certainly!” Robin said, arms sprouting from the ground and tripping the soldiers.

“You don’t know when to give up, do you?” Judge asked disdainfully. He drew a knife. Given how polished and new it looked, Sanji was fairly sure it wasn’t poisoned. A few injuries wouldn’t hurt, Chopper or Law could easily fix a cut.

He rushed in close. Judge parried the first few kicks but Sanji finally caught him off balance. He went to follow up but a spear forced him to twist out of the way.

Robin glared at the man who’d thrown it and broke his arms. “That won’t happen again.”

“Thank you!” Sanji said before turning back to Judge—who had gone around him to get at Robin for impeding his men. “Robin!”

Robin rolled her eyes and caught Judge’s foot with another hand from the ground. She cried out as the Warlord slammed a haki-coated boot into it, making her lose her grip on him and the rest as something fractured in her wrist.

Sanji quickly put himself between Judge and Robin, “Robin are you-”

“Sanji!” Robin said, looking behind him.

Sanji turned at exactly the wrong angle, the angle Judge had been hoping for going by the glint in the Warlord’s gaze, and reeled back as the knife slashed across his eye. He stumbled as his foot caught a small hole in the pavement and landed in a heap.

“Useless,” Judge scoffed. “As ever.”

“Sanji!” Robin said. She sounded very far away. “Sanji!”

He was twelve. Zeff had taken him onto the top deck of the restaurant, wanting to show him something.

“He was twelve. Zeff had taken him onto the top deck of the restaurant, wanting to show him something.

“Now I’ve been showing you how to fight back, but I think maybe you’re ready for something more advanced,” Zeff said.

Sanji nodded. Zeff had been pleased with how easily he’d picked up basic self-defense. Sanji could
prove himself even more here!

“It’s a little tricky to show you since I’ve only got the one leg, but it works like this!” Zeff said. He balanced on his peg leg and swept his other leg upwards, knocking a sack of sand into the air. He pulled his leg in as the sand dropped and then swung it out and up sharply, the bag catching on his shin at such a force that it exploded.

“It’s one of the first kicks I ever perfected, eggplant,” Zeff said to Sanji’s awed expression.

Sanji nodded, resolute. He’d heard the word perfect in there. He’d get it perfect.

“Got you a smaller bag. You’re still growing, not as strong as me,” Zeff said, setting up a small sandbag. “Now you don’t have a peg leg, so position the leg you’re balancing like this, okay?”

Sanji nodded, “Okay!”

“Good, brat,” Zeff said, ruffling his hair. “Go for it!”

He got the bag in the air all right but the struggle to lift the weight threw him off-balance. He slipped and landed on his back, the bag landing on his stomach with a harsh thud and knocking the wind out of him.

“Sanji!” Zeff yelled.

Sanji winced, tears welling up. He’d messed up. Zeff wouldn’t be proud of him anymore.

“Ah, shit, how much did that hurt you, brat?” Zeff asked, pulling the bag away and sitting him up. Sanji felt something, probably a shirtsleeve, drying his eyes as Zeff’s other hand prodded his abdomen. “Should have used a pillow…damn it, I’m s-”

“I’m not hurt!” Sanji choked out, pulling away. “I…I can do it!”

“Eggplant-”

“I’m not weak!” Sanji yelled as he staggered to his feet. “I’m not!”

“Of course you’re not. You got the bag up, didn’t you? Just need some practice,” Zeff said. “It was too heavy for a starter and I should have figured and gotten you started with something lighter. I’m sorry is what I was saying.”

“…You’re sorry?” Sanji asked. “But…but I’m the one who…”

“Need some practice, is all. Good first go, pretty impressed you got the bag up at all if it was too heavy,” Zeff said.

Sanji felt more tears, “You’re not mad at me? I’m not useless?”

Zeff scoffed, “Please. You’re a pain in the ass troublemaker with a big mouth. But you’re not useless. And anyone who says otherwise gets a good kick, you hear?”

“Sanji!”

Sanji snapped back to the present. “What?”

He could only see red out his right eye, and it was fuzzy at that. Right, Judge had stabbed him. He combed his bangs out of the way of his left eye so he could see what was going on, “Fair Robin?”
“Are you going to be able to finish this fight?” Robin asked.

Sanji’s eyes widened. Robin had raised a wall of Haki-coated giant arms around them, all left arms. Her right wrist still sat at a bad angle. “How long was I-?”

“Only a few minutes,” she said. “Can you get up?”

“I have to,” Sanji said, eyes blazing as he stood. “Nobody calls me useless. Ever.”

Zoro sighed. At least he was back at the palace now.

He frowned. Something was very, very wrong.

He spun, drawing his swords. He swore loudly.

“Hello to you too, son,” Mihawk drawled, not bothering to draw Yoru in turn.

What was he even doing here? There needed to be a one-Warlord-per-crisis limit because Zoro did not need to deal with this right now! He didn’t even know what it was but he really didn’t have time for it!

Wait…if Mihawk was here, then he was going to be fighting. As a Warlord, Mihawk worked for the government.

Damn it. Zoro was fairly certain the best he’d be able to do was stall his father, not beat him. And since Zoro was the one needing to go look for something that wouldn’t work…

“I won’t let you stop me,” Zoro told Mihawk with as much bravado as he could manage under his father’s mildly amused gaze.

Mihawk chuckled, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Zoro kept his guard up. His father was an opportunistic attacker by nature, “We know Judge is a Warlord, Dad. And so are you.”

“Ah, so you think I’m assisting him. Because of course the Warlords have such a history of getting along.”

Zoro hated when his dad used that voice. It always came out when he thought Zoro was being stupid and wanted to tease him about it. This was really not the time for that. “It doesn’t matter whether or not you get along with him! If you get ordered, you go! I know you! I fucking remember about Marinford!”

“And here I thought we were past that,” Mihawk said. “I’m not here on Kizaru’s order, no. I’m here on Fujitora’s. There’s more going on than you think, Zoro. And Fujitora wants to keep King Cobra alive as much as you do.”

Zoro tried to think it through while keeping his focus on his dad. One slip was seriously all it would take to get enough of an injury to keep him out of the fight.

All right, Ace had agreed Fujitora was on their side and had suspicions about…something that he didn’t share because he wasn’t sure. “So if there’s more going on than I think, tell me what it is. Let me think about it, Dad.”
“Judge is mishandling his Warlord position. Fujitora does not like that. Fujitora hired me to make sure Judge’s actions don’t result in the Nefertari family’s overthrow,” Mihawk said.

“And my crew?”

“Officially we’ll arrest you if we get a chance…unofficially Fujitora knows you’re a bunch of generally good brats and I’m allowed to look the other way. I feel like looking the other way,” Mihawk said.

“Then why did you stop me if you’re not going to stop me?” Zoro demanded. “Shouldn’t you be protecting Vivi’s dad?”

“Because I’m not the only Warlord you have to worry about.”

“Ugh, Dad, I know Judge is here, stop being an asshole,” Zoro said.

“I meant Crocodile, Zoro.”

…Okay maybe Zoro did deserve the ‘you’re an idiot’ voice right now. “WHAT?”

“Judge has brought him into Germa 66, Daz Bones as well. His reward will be Alabasta and revenge on the Straw Hats and Nefertari Vivi.”

“What, has he gotten a lot stronger or something?” Zoro said. “We beat him last time. Well, Luffy did the third time they fought and Ace did some decent damage the time before that and they both got their butts kicked on the first go-”

“Yes he has gotten stronger, Zoro,” Mihawk said flatly.

“Wait if Crocodile’s running around why the fuck aren’t you with Vivi’s dad?”

“I swear you’re going to drive me mad one day,” Mihawk muttered, pinching the bridge of his nose. “The King is nearby and my Observation Haki is keeping tabs on him. We decided it was best to inform your crew of the situation to make sure everyone is on the same page. It was easier for me to do than Fujitora.”

 “…Fujitora’s here too?” Zoro asked. “Ace and Smoker thought he’d left.”

“Alabasta is at the center of a major potential schism within the government and the Navy,” Mihawk said. “It would be best for your crew if Fujitora’s faction wins out today.”

“The fuck do I care about the government and their shit?” Zoro asked. “Why should I care if they really hate us or really, really hate us? We’ll kick their asses either way and make Luffy King of the Pirates!”

To his surprise, his father smiled, “That’s my boy. Now, if you’d like to show me what you’ve learned, Crocodile has just entered the palace.”

“Show you what I’ve learned, bullshit. You want me to do your job,” Zoro said. “Won’t that make people suspicious?”

“As far as the world’s concerned, I was your captain until around the Dressrosa incident and am still your father. Why wouldn’t you do what I say once in a while?” Mihawk asked.

“You want me to do your job,” Zoro laughed. “Never change, Dad. Where is the asshole?”
“Making his way through the main hall. I hope your Armament Haki is up to the task…he’s become a lot stronger.”

“If I can’t beat him, I’ll never beat you,” Zoro said.

“A good point. Now get going, I think it’s time Cobra and I moved,” Mihawk said.

.o.o.o.

Marco sighed. They were having a rousing game of “who can defeat the most Marines while seriously injuring the fewest?” which has quickly become slanted entirely in Tashigi’s favor as the Captain was apparently very popular and unlike Smoker her treasonous status was less concrete. So all she had to do was ask opponents to stand down and they usually would.

Perona was a gleeful second, her ghosts dropping Marines into existential despair with ease. Third was Usopp, who just shot tons of nets at people. Everyone else just had to rack up injuries and see who did the least damage.

It didn’t help that Ace was sulking up a storm because there were very little ways to not injure people with fire. “Look, yoi, just use Conqueror’s Haki if you’re so upset…”

“…I forgot I could do that,” Ace admitted sheepishly.

“Not Super, Ace-bro!” Franky scolded. “Come on, show us what you’ve got!”

“All right then…it’s not as strong as Shanks or Luffy’s but what the hell!” Ace said.

Quite a few of their opponents dropped.

“All right Ace!” Bellamy said, glad to be freed from a fight with a Bobcat Zoa that had been messing with his springs.

“I suppose that puts him above me in the rankings. So not a cute way to do it though,” Perona said.

“Hey Smoker, are we going to fight anyone but these guys or what?” Penguin called. “I’m sure some of us could go help the others by now!”

“Yeah, I don’t want to miss the fun because we’re fighting these guys!” Ace added.

“I’ll fly up, see if Kizaru’s about,” Marco offered, transforming.

“No need, he’s already here!”

The turned to see Jinbe, Nami, and Vivi running towards them.

“Already here?” Bepo asked fearfully.

“He kidnapped Law,” Nami said. “Niji’s out for the count but Sanji chased after Judge and I’ve got a feeling there’s more going on than that. Sabo, Koala, and Zoro went to find and protect Vivi’s father and they’re not back yet. Something had to have happened.”

“…By waiting here to stall Kizaru we totally missed Kizaru?” Marco asked flatly. He had the strong urge to peck someone. Maybe several someones.

“Yep,” Nami said.
“Marco, fly up and see if you can figure out where Kizaru took Law. We know which direction it should be,” Jinbe said. “It’s the same way as the palace.”

Marco nodded, taking flight.

He didn’t see any odd flashes of light coming from that direction, but there was something else odd…

Massive amounts of sand swamped one of the other streets leading to the palace, from the rear side. Had there been a big enough fight over there to displace that much dirt? Well, it looked like they needed to converge around the palace at any rate...

Still, Nami was right. This felt a lot like they were missing something…

Chapter End Notes

Now you know, last time's foreshadowing was for...Crocodile! Like he'd pass up a chance for revenge this good! Also if it's not clear, the mysterious person Sabo and Koala ran into was supposed to be Das. And it was Mihawk that Fujitora called in for help--aka the only remotely reliable Warlord the Navy has besides Kuma.

I've been wanting to bring up Fujitora's potential ability to mess with Kizaru's powers for a long time and I finally get to! Gravity bends light!

And yes. I'm beating up Law again. He's good for it. Here, let me distract you with a heartwarming Sanji and Zeff flashback!

Next time: Zoro takes on Crocodile, Sanji has a showdown with Judge, and Luffy shows up to the faceoff with Kizaru, his toughest opponent yet, in "Monkey vs. Monkey"! Stay tuned!
Luffy was able to find Law pretty fast. Mostly because Kizaru’s attacks were really flashy and so easy to follow. Just go in the direction that had a ton of blinding flashes!

The building he followed them to was in a far corner of the city…and probably hadn’t looked that bad when Law and Kizaru had showed up. Luffy couldn’t really see Vivi or her dad just leaving around a big building with tons of smashed windows and holes in it. Didn’t seem like them.

There was a flash from inside one of the broken windows. Luffy bounded inside only to bounce off an unseen force. “Hey!”

“My apologies, Straw Hat,” Fujitora said. “That was instinctual.”

Luffy frowned. Law was on the ground by Fujitora—not good!—but Fujitora was clearly standing between Law and Kizaru—what the heck?

Luffy slowly cocked his head, “…Just what the heck is going on here?”

“We were waiting for you to show up,” Fujitora said. “While having a debate on the nature of our jobs as upholders of justice.”

“Oh. Sorry I left you with boring old guys, Traffy,” Luffy said.

Law merely groaned. Luffy went to check on him and had to duck a laser, “Hey!”

“Are you going to interfere with my fight with him too?” Kizaru asked Fujitora. He had a funny look on his face. Luffy thought it was weird he was making a face like that, all exaggerated and stuff, when he knew darn well Fujitora wouldn’t see it. Did Kizaru just make a lot of faces or something?

“No,” Fujitora said. “I will simply prevent you from attacking Law, as I said I would. Monkey D. Luffy will have to handle you on his own.”

Luffy grinned—he got to fight the big boss! And he had just the thing, something he’d been working on for a while but hadn’t been ready in time for Mingo. Something he’d pull out right off the bat because Kizaru was fast and dangerous so Luffy would have to try and be faster and more dangerous.

“All right! I was saving this for something special and now I’ve got it! I’ll teach you to mess with my crew!” Luffy yelled. “Gear Fourth!”

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Sanji was grateful Robin kept making sure his path to Judge was relatively free of obstruction. Those soldiers had gone from pests to flat out annoyances what with their constant attempts to take hits for Judge.

Hits that Sanji, quite personally, felt that Judge could take better than them anyway. He thought Judge knew it too and had his men do it because he was trying to get Sanji to weaken his blows, to falter and leave himself open rather than do serious damage to a weaker opponent.
Judge clearly hadn’t paid attention to any time the Straw Hats decimating an army had made the
news. Sanji wasn’t kicking hard enough to kill anyone, and short of that he was fine with causing
damage to those who threw their lot in with his hated family.

Besides, Judge would run out of men eventually. This was just a battle of attrition. Either Robin
would have all of them caught in her webs of arms, Sanji would render them all unconscious, or
backup would arrives and deal with them. Then Judge would be finished and Sanji would finally be
done with him.

The best part was, Sanji was fairly certain Judge knew it too. The rage in his eyes made it very
obvious.

“You’re not going to win this!” Sanji said. Sometimes villains really needed the obvious spelled out
to them. Sure it made some of them more indignant, but they wanted Judge to have a breakdown that
led to a confession anyway.

“I have the government behind me. They won’t send me to jail, they’ll send me on my way,” Judge
said, smirking as one of his men took a blow for him.

Sanji winced as he heard the man’s ribs crack. Damn it, he wasn’t aiming for those idiots…

“And on my way I will go…right back to getting you. And if you don’t come along, that old codger
in East Blue will pay the price,” Judge said. “Mihawk can’t be everywhere and if the government
sends him to a different sea, well, that leaves a certain restaurant wide open doesn’t it?”

Sanji froze, “Zeff…”

“That’s right,” Judge said. “Keep defying me and I will kill Red Leg Zeff!”

.o.o.o.

Finding Crocodile had been pretty easy in the end, actually. There was a shit-ton of sand around the
palace by now and the guy eventually came to Zoro, probably using it to find him.

Which was good because Zoro had somehow ended up on the roof twice already and was just
running through the throne room again when Crocodile tried to skewer him on sand spikes that Zoro
quickly parried.

“So, how you want to do this?” Zoro asked. “You’re used to fighting guys like Ace or Luffy,
right?”

“If you don’t get all chatty like them I won’t crush your swords after your death,” Crocodile offered.

Zoro was pretty sure Crocodile was lying. Ace hadn’t been very chatty during their fight. He’d been
really upset at how badly Luffy had been hurt, and Crocodile had backed off pretty fast at the threat
of a pissy fire man turning him to glass.

Plus the guy was a sneaky liar in general. So good rule of thumb to not trust him.

On the other hand Zoro wasn’t normally chatty…except he did need information…

“I’ll talk if I want to!” he said slicing apart waves of sand.

“Your funeral. I’ll be sure to send my condolences to Mihawk,” Crocodile said.

“I won’t lose to someone like you!” Zoro said. “And I will get to the bottom of what you’re doing!”
“You’re kidding right?” Crocodile asked. “The day Mihawk’s dimwit son figures out my plans is the day I eat my hook…”

.o.o.o.

Fujitora’s grip tightened on his cane. He pushed his Observation Haki to record every detail of this “Gear Fourth” technique.

Straw Hat was using quite a lot of Haki. His form seemed expanded, particularly his torso. His heartbeat was greatly accelerated, blood rushing though him at breakneck speeds that would burst veins and arteries in another person.

For a moment, he was still.

Then, motion.

Kizaru was quicker, blinking out of the way. But the projectile—a fist, greatly enlarged—ricocheted from the wall wildly. It struck Kizaru from behind when he reappeared. Straw Hat had used Observation Haki to predict the reappearance?

No hiss. No burning from striking a man who could turn to light. Straw Hat’s armor was strong enough to resist the Kizaru’s element then.

Fujitora frowned. That was quite the improvement from Dressrosa, where he had only matched Doflamingo with help. Now a bit over two months later he was facing down an Admiral. An Admiral who had already fought Trafalgar D. “Surgeon of Death” Water Law and been stalled by Fujitora himself…but Kizaru was no weakling.

“Luffy…”

“Stay down,” he told the Surgeon of Death. It was difficult to assess the surgeon and the fight at the same time, but he managed. Kizaru was dodging, knowing his lasers were unlikely to piece the Haki-blackened rubber and likely biding time for a physical strike. The surgeon was awake, but his heartbeat was sluggish. He was tired and adrenaline had not yet kicked in.

It likely would when he saw-

“Luffy!”

“He calls it Gear Fourth,” Fujitora informed the Surgeon. “Don’t sit up. You are in no state to interfere.”

The Surgeon’s breathing rate increased and the breaths themselves became heavier. He was trying to center himself, trying to pull together enough to do something more than turn his head towards the fight.

He wouldn’t be able to for a few minutes yet. By then this would be over.

“Save your strength. If he wins, you’ll need it.” And if Straw Hat Luffy lost, the Surgeon of Death would need it even more.

.o.o.o.

Sanji stared at Judge blankly for a moment before his face morphed into the deepest snarl it had ever borne, accentuated by the blood leaking from his right eye. “Shut up! You are not fit to even say his
“I am not fit?” Judge bellowed, stunned at Sanji’s lack of compliance. “You hold a mere cook above a king—”

“I hold one of the greatest chefs on the sea above a piece of trash!” Sanji bellowed. “I hold my savior above a shitty excuse for a parent like you any day! You are nothing compared to the man Red Leg Zeff is!”

“How dare y—oof!”

Judge went flying into the wall from Sanji’s kick before anyone could react. Sanji easily swept some of the soldiers away when they finally managed to move, gaze never leaving Judge.

Robin acted quickly, limbs sprouting from the ground and walls to restrain the rest of the soldiers before the uninjured could act. This was Sanji’s moment, and no one would interrupt it on her watch.

“Shut up. He saved me! After what you did to me he loved me! Do you have any idea what that felt like? To realize a father can love his children after a whole childhood of seeing otherwise?” Sanji snarled as he advanced on Judge like an angry jungle cat. “To realize there was nothing wrong with me, it was you! All along it was you!”

His heel collided with Judge’s helmet at incredible speed, smashing the facemask inwards. Blood leaked from Judge’s surely-broken nose. Bits of the blaze from the kick caught the Warlord’s mustache, but he didn’t have time to try and put it out as Sanji’s next kick sent him airborne.

“You claimed I was unteachable! Want to see what I learned from him?” Sanji yelled as Judge finally succumbed to gravity and dropped. “This is what you do when someone threatens family!”

His leg snapped upwards. It was blackened with hard Haki armor that shimmered in the brief blaze generated by how quickly Sanji raised it. Right as the kick reached its peak momentum it met Judge as he fell.

A loud snap echoed through the square as Judge’s spine folded over Sanji’s shin.

Sanji dropped his leg as quickly as he’d raised it. Without its support, Judge landed in a heap.

“He did that whenever some hotshot rookie East Blue pirate thought it’d be fun to kidnap the little kitchen kid,” Sanji said softly. “And he only had one leg to do it with. Not that a thing like that would ever stop a man who’d sailed the New World during the time of Roger. But that was who he was…and that’s who I am.”

He crouched, taking Judge by the collar. The soldiers didn’t move, knowing there was no way to get to their leader in time if Sanji decided to hurt him further even if Robin didn’t stop them again.

Sanji smirked, his good eye cold and glittering in dangerous triumph, “I am Blackleg Sanji. Son of Red Leg Zeff. And the only reason I’m not going to kill you is because I know it would make you proud if I did.”

Judge glared at him. Sanji’s smirk became a smile as he set Judge down and turned to Robin. “Fair Robin? Do you have any ideas for restraints?”

“Nothing outside my usual,” Robin said.

“Not that. This piece of filth would probably get off on it,” Sani scoffed, flicking some dust and dirt
off his trousers.

“Sanji, as someone well-versed in the breaking of backs, that man is not going anywhere even without restraints.”

Sanji chuckled, “Good. One less thing to worry about”

“Do you feel better?” she asked.

“Yeah, a lot. Fucker’s lucky he only threatened Zeff. Imagine if he’d actually tried dragging you all in.”

“You would have kicked him until some of his bones disintegrated,” Robin said after a moment of thought. “Zoro alone would have gotten a shattered ribcage, at the very least, Nami and Vivi a fractured skull…goodness knows what you’d have added to that for the rest of us.”

“Exactly,” Sanji said proudly.

“Jinbe should be back with Chopper or Law soon,” Robin said. “How is your eye?”

“Can’t see a thing anymore. Was seeing blood but now…nothing,” Sanji said, waving his hand in front of that side. “Unless Law has the energy for regenerating cells like he did for Ace, we may have to write it off. It’s fine, my observation Haki more than covers for it…”

Some of the blood had made it to his mouth by then. He’d tasted his own before many times, the first time was from an early age when Ichiji had pushed his face into pavement for no real reason at all. It had badly skinned his nose and the blood dribbled down.

Mother had been horrified of course. Raising your children to be assassins was all well and good but raising them without manners? Without love? Turning them into heartless weapons?

Sanji chuckled softly as he pulled out a cigarette and lit it. She would have approved of Zeff’s attempts to police his manners…and punched the chef for letting him pick up coarse language around the kitchen to begin with. He missed her.

“Was it you?” he asked softly.

Robin looked at him. He shook his head and nodded at Judge. “You. The gunshot. Was it you?”

Judge said nothing. Sanji rolled his eyes, “Of course it wasn’t you personally. You never were a sniper. Was it your order, though? To kill her? I always assumed it was.”

Still nothing. Sanji placed a foot on Judge’s left hand and began to grind it against the flagstones. He didn’t look at Judge, his eye focused on the cigarette. “Well? Did you tell them not to bother bringing her back alive? That’s how you deal with people, right? Toss them away once you have no use?”

Judge glared at him, “If I’d tossed her away she’d still be alive.”

“So it was you,” Sanji muttered, shoulders tightening. “You should have been happy, you know. She wouldn’t be influencing my siblings against you and you wouldn’t have to put up with me anymore. Was her death necessary?”

“No one steals from a king.”

“You and Doflamingo should have a club. You can rant about Mother stealing me and he can rant about his brother stealing Law. Stealing. As if we were things, not children,” Sanji said, gazing far
away. “Is that why you came after me, then? Worried someone might realize I was related to you and not under your control?”

“That and you were perfect to offer to Big Mom,” Judge admitted.

“Why? You see me as worthless, well, saw,” Sanji said, punctuating the sentence with a firm press that likely cracked Judge’s wrist.

“Exactly. As if I would turn over a child I cared for to her tender mercies! Or her darling daughters,” Judge scoffed.

“I’ve heard some of them can be quite nice,” Sanji said idly. “Though I’m sure one of the Four Emperors will be oh so happy to have it confirmed you were trying to offer her nothing and think poorly of her daughters.”

“You think she’ll believe you?” Judge asked.

“We’ll find out. It’s rude to leave a lady hanging. I’ll have to phone up Pekoms and deliver the message.” Sanji tapped his cigarette, letting the ashes fall on Judge’s face.

“Sanji! I’m coming!”

“Oh thank goodness,” Robin said as Chopper bounded up to them in Jump Point, Usopp and Tashigi behind him. “I’ve been getting worried. The longer we leave it…”

“I’ll have to make sure it’s not infected—or poisoned!” Chopper said.

“Nice chatting with you,” Sanji said to Judge. As Usopp took aim at Judge to keep him still and Tashigi cuffed him, Sanji turned his back on the leader of Germa 66.

He didn’t matter. Not anymore.

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“You know I don’t think we’re doing this right!” Sabo said, blocking another blow from Daz.

“What do you mean?” Koala asked.

“Well this guy’s fought Zoro before, and me, and he’s not usually fighting like this!” Sabo said.

“I’m standing right here,” Daz said.

“Yeah Sabo. If you’re going to say he’s fighting weird, tell him that,” Koala said. “It’s not like we’re secretly strategizing; he’s kind of locked in combat with us!”

“Oh, my bad,” Sabo said, taking a swing at Daz’ head. “See, this fight shouldn’t be taking this long.”

“I could have gotten a lot stronger,” Daz pointed out.

“Yeah and you’re merciless and all get out. If you were weaker we should have won by now, if you were stronger you should have won—you’re stalling!” Sabo snapped, lunging back, drawing his rifle, and firing a volley.

Daz easily sliced the bullets apart, moving much faster than he had been when blocking Koala’s kicks and Sabo’s pipe.
Koala’s eyes widened in panic. If Daz was fast enough to do that, then they were really screwed if their Armament Haki didn’t hold up to his blades…and he probably should have done it before when they weren’t using much armor to start with.

“Yeah he’s totally stalling,” she agreed. “Who gives an assassin a stall job, anyway?”

“Koala, it’s Crocodile, I’m not sure we couldn’t figure it out if we tried…unless Daz Bones tells us?” Sabo asked hopefully.

“No,” Daz said and the fight resumed.

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“So you planned to backstab Judge too, probably?” Zoro asked. “Would be your thing.”

“I’m not just going to explain my plans to you,” Crocodile said. “How you father taught someone denser than iron I’ll never understand…”

“Nah, it’s fine. He probably planned to backstab you too anyway,” Zoro said. “You plotting types are assholes like that. Probably have tons of other things planned too.”

He cut through another wave of sand. Crocodile had stopped bothering to get close now, clearly knowing Zoro’s Haki was strong enough to let him get in a debilitating blow against the sand logia.

“Better a plotter than a fool, Roronoa,” Crocodile said. “You haven’t even noticed I’ve won.”

“Like hell you have!” Zoro yelled before a loud crack startled him.

Keeping some of his attention on Crocodile, he glanced at the walls.

Oh shit.

There was sand moving between every brick.

Crocodile had been playing him. The fight was just a distraction.

The room collapsed. Zoro sheathed the swords in his hands and dove near a falling column. He grabbed it, hoping it was wide enough to prevent any debris from crushing him. More and more weight landed on the column, but Zoro was strong enough to keep it balanced above himself.

Eventually the rumbling stopped and no more weight was added to the load.

Zoro swallowed. The column had created a small pocket, but he was the only thing holding it up.

He was surrounded by sand, and only had one sword out, the one in his teeth.

He was trapped. Crocodile could take him out at any time, worse, could go after his friends!

Zoro swallowed around Wado Ichimonji’s hilt and tried to focus. His specialty was always Armament Haki, but he could use Observation. In his case it was almost always instinctual, occurring in the heat of battle. He didn’t often use it consciously.

Usopp could use it to hit a foe around a corner or miles away. Ace could set someone on fire that he couldn’t even see. Mihawk could track anyone anywhere on an island.

Zoro didn’t need anywhere on the island. He just needed here. So he focused.
It was faint.

It was a little fuzzy.

It was more than enough.

Wado Ichimonji’s blade bled black with Haki as Zoro swung with all the force his neck could manage.

He caught Crocodile in the collarbone, a deep gash drawing rich red blood. Crocodile jerked in surprise. A single second of mistake from the master planner.

In that second Zoro rose, swinging the column upright and displacing thousands of tons of sand and brick. He jumped as soon as air was visible and landed atop the column which was held in place as the displaced sand surrendered to gravity and fell into the hole, stabilizing the base.

Zoro knew damn well he couldn’t bury Crocodile.

But he could drown him.

The fallen walls had exposed the palace plumbing and even as Crocodile reformed above the sand Zoro drew his other blades, leaped for the pipes, and swung.

He was knocked back by the force of the jet that spewed from the pipe. He cracked his head on the wall hard enough to dazedly wonder if Jinbe had taught the pipe Fishman Karate to control water so well.

“What?” he heard Crocodile yell.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, chuckling as a tiny bit of blood dribbled down his back from his head, sticking to the base of his neck. “I came up with that in, what, a second? Don’t tell me Mihawk’s dense son out-planned you in a second.”

He saw the rage in Crocodile’s eyes and knew he’d won even as the sand began to turn to mud. Crocodile was Mr. Big Plans but when you got lucky—when he hadn’t known about Sanji, when Ace realized he could turn sand into glass, when Luffy came up with the trick with the blood—he was totally thrown off.

Just like right now.

“So…what’s your plan again?” Zoro asked. “Cause…I’m not really buying revenge. Not when it’s just you here. You wouldn’t rely this much on someone else’s army for revenge.”

Crocodile chuckled softly, “Well what do you know…not such a sack of rocks in that skull of yours after all, Roronoa. Tell you what, kid, you get a hint. What else happens if Judge loses?”

“…Huh?” Zoro asked.

“I said a hint,” Crocodile scolded as he managed to haul his soggy, if barely holding together, body onto a pile of rubble that stuck out of the water and probably would continue to since some of it as flowing out of the room.

Zoro frowned. What was Crocodile playing at? If Judge lost, so did he…oh. This was some overcomplicated plan where if Judge won, Crocodile got his revenge, with a bonus at taking out Zoro to hurt Mihawk, but if Judge lost, Crocodile got something else…but who else would be happy
if Judge lost? Fujitora? But then Mihawk would have been working with Croc, not warning Zoro against him…except Croc hated Mihawk…

Oh great. There were three sides now, weren’t there?

Zoro sliced through the air, the force causing more water to spray on Crocodile.

Croc glared at him, “Wise of you to not let me dry out.”

“Thanks.”

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The symphony of the fight was beginning to slow down. Fujitora was surprised to sense Kizaru slowing as Straw Hat did.

“I envy you. This must be quite a sight,” he told the Surgeon.

“Yeah…holy shit,” the Surgeon muttered. “On the upside, you’re not getting disoriented by the lightshow…but yeah.”


“They’re moving insanely fast. I don’t have Observation Haki so I’m barely keeping up and sometimes I’m not, it’s like flashes across the field. The building’s breaking apart around us,” the Surgeon said softly. “Your gravity field is keeping debris from us, same for crossfire. But it’s not as crazy as it was…it’s ending, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Fujitora said. “We’ll know where this is going soon. They’re both tired. I hear their lungs weep.”

“Ooh, there’s a visual,” the Surgeon chuckled.

“You will have to run either way,” Fujitora said. “I sense Marco the Phoenix very, very far to the left. So if you keep going that way you may be safe if Kizaru is victorious.”

The cacophony increased suddenly and then…silence.

“What’s happened?” Fujitora asked.

“I’m…going to…win,” Straw Hat growled.

“They’re both on the floor,” the Surgeon said. “Both trying to get up, having trouble…”

Fujitora smirked. “A tie…?”

“You have to be kidding me… Kizaru groaned. “A tie with a rookie?”

“With a supernova,” Fujitora chuckled. “Amazing…”

“What? No, I wanna win!”

The Surgeon made his move, as Fujitora knew he would, shooting to his feet and rushing across the floor. Kizaru went to aim a laser but was too tired to prevent himself from telegraphing the move.

The Surgeon dodged and grabbed Straw Hat, “Room! Shambles!”
Fujitora groaned when he sensed where the boys reappeared...going the wrong way. “I meant my left, Trafalgar...”

“That’s funny…” Kizaru groaned as he got to his feet, using a tall bit of rubble to brace himself. “…Think they’ve kicked Judge’s ass yet?”

“We’ll have to see,” Fujitora said.

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“…Fuck, where are we?” Law muttered, shifting Luffy to his shouldered. He could sort of see the palace...that didn’t look left to him but oh well. He’s work with it.

“Did you see that...see me?” Luffy chuckled weakly.

“Oh I saw,” Law said. “Room. Shambles.”

Closer to the palace now.

“We did it! And you’re okay!” Luffy laughed.

“You have an interesting definition of okay,” Law said, setting Luffy down so they could take a breather. “But nothing I can’t fix later...I think, anyway. But Luffy...you fought an Admiral to a draw.”

Luffy nodded, giddy. “I know!”

“You fought a fucking Admiral!”

“Yes, and so did you!”

“We should probably be getting farther away while Fujitora lets us.”

“I know!” Luffy laughed. “Shishishi, I tied with an Admiral, Traffy!”

“I know and I love you,” Law said, smiling and creating a Room big enough to reach right next to the palace. “Shambles.”

Oh he shouldn’t have done that, should have made the breather longer. His legs nearly gave out and Luffy had to steady him. At least they probably close to their crews by now. Law took a deep breath, “Okay, so where do we-”

“Luffy! Law!”

Sabo and Koala ran up to them. Good. Non-exhausted people were good things.

“Have you seen Daz Bones? He just ditched us when people started yelling judge lost!” Koala growled. “Asshole assassin…”

“What happened?” Sabo asked, checking over their injuries.


“Why are you both standing?” Koala demanded as if their remaining vertical was an affront to all decency. She grabbed Law and studied him. The part of his brain that wasn’t in shock from pain or
giddy from Luffy’s tie got nervous as he realized she was genuinely considering carrying him.

The idea died in her eyes and she simply hauled his arm over her shoulder. Law sighed in relief. Even if she was a powerhouse someone her size had no business carrying someone his height, it was just uncomfortable. He had it bad enough when Luffy decided to pick him up…

He chuckled. Sabo had tossed Luffy over his shoulder. “Having fun, future Pirate King?”

“Shut up, Traffy. You should be walking less than me.”

“You both shouldn’t be walking which is why we’re looking for a camel,” Koala said. “You seriously took on an Admiral?”

“I was just warping him away from the others!” Law said. “Or trying too…look I wasn’t trying to fight him, he grabbed me. And then Fujitora fought him and then Luffy showed up to fight Kizaru and Fujitora and I watched. After being unconscious for a while.”

“Traffy has a hole in him,” Luffy informed Sabo and Koala as if he was telling them about the weather.

“He has a—oh my god, Law!” Koala yelped. “How are you walking? Why are you walking? Sabo switch with me, I can take Luffy and Law will be easier for you-”

“Nobody’s picking me up!” Law said hastily.

“Law, you’ve barely healed that thing, I can almost see through it!” Koala snapped.

Law felt that was a bit of an exaggeration. Sure the light had bored all the way through but really it just tunneled through muscle and the small intestine, it had missed his right kidney and colon just fine…okay sure fixing the small intestine was a pain in the ass which was why he wasn’t done yet but Ace had been worse and Law had fixed that…

“Holy cow you’re right,” Luffy said, dropping to his knees to observe the injury more closely. However he’d forgotten how long Law’s legs were and ended up looking at Law’s thighs instead of his stomach.

“Chopper’s going to kill them both,” Sabo observed dryly. Law didn’t like the look on his face. Sabo was going to try to pick him up. Oh hell no. People who picked him up lost limbs.

A pipe clanged against his skull and he knew no more.

Chapter End Notes

Oh dear god the giant fight scenes of doom are finally done!

Yep, as some of you guessed, this isn't pure revenge for Sir Crocodile! The man's always got more plans...poor Zoro, his straightforward brain was not made for this...

Sanji finally gets his closure! Good for him! It only cost an eye!

And Luffy...Luffy just tied with an Admiral. With a handicap, sure, Kizaru fought a bit before fighting him...but that's going to be big...
“What the hell happened?” Ace demanded as he and Marco landed in front of the palace.

“These idiots thought fighting Admirals was a good idea,” Koala said, holding Luffy in place as he tried to squirm away from Ace even as Koala kept him upright.

Ace scowled, “Seriously? Luffy I leave you alone for what, an hour-”

“I had to save Traffy!” Luffy said.

Marco winced as he got a better look at Law, out cold and slung over Sabo’s shoulders, “Shit. Is he all right? What happened?”

“Kizaru,” Luffy said angrily.

“He said he mostly healed it but we need to get him to Chopper,” Sabo said. “Ace, Daz Bones is running around, we don’t know what’s going on but Crocodile might be involved.”

“That would explain the sand we saw…” Ace mused. “I can take Croc easy. Marco, can you help the others find Chopper?”

“Ace, Kizaru’s still running around, we need to stay together,” Marco said. “I’m the only one we’ve got who can-”

“Kizaru’s in the same shape as me,” Luffy said. “We tied.”

Ace and Marco stared at him.

“What?” Marco asked.

“He…he fought Traffy and then Fujitora when Fujitora wouldn’t let him fight Traffy anymore… then me. We tied. We’re both kind of out of it,” Luffy said. “It was awesome Ace! I wish you and Sabo could have seen it; Traffy’ll have to tell you all about it!”

“I…I mean you…you actually,” Ace said, grinning. “You seriously-”

“Tied on an Admiral and walked away,” Sabo said, wearing a proud smile of his own.

“Well, teleported away,” Koala noted as Ace pulled Luffy away from her to hug him and crow about his fight. “Fujitora’s not after us, though, so it should be safe for Ace to handle Crocodile… jeez, so many different people to handle!”

“If we’re lucky the Vinsmokes should be out by now…” Marco mused. “They were pretty outclassed…”

“Starting to wonder why Big Mom even bothered with them,” Ace laughed.

Koala bonked him on the head, “Seriously? Did you forget what Reiju did to Sandersonia? If she hadn’t stuck around as part of that gambit to lure Sanji she wouldn’t have been caught, and if Hancock couldn’t turn her sister to stone and known Law then Reiju would have been the only way
“Assassins don’t have to be powerful, they have to be specialized,” Sabo said. “They’re not always meant to fight like we do, like CP-9 was. Look at Law’s dad. He grabbed Nami and ran off to kill one of Doflamingo’s top men. And did.”

“Yeah but Rocinante wasn’t that weak…” Ace said.

“His main technique is shooting people silently,” Sabo pointed out. “Usopp, Shachi, and I had sniper talks with him. The guy could probably kill Sakazuki if he put his mind to it, but in an open, non-ambush fight he’s probably somewhere around my level.”

Marco laughed, “Are you calling the Vinsmokes Paradise Rookies? I’m not sure you’ve been in the New World long enough for that!”

“I’m calling them Blue Rookies, I don’t know how they’d even last in Paradise without that army of theirs…” Sabo said.

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“It’s over. They lost.”

“Which ‘they’?” Crocodile asked, sputtering as Zoro used a sword swing to spray him with more water. “Cut that out, you brat, our fight’s over now!”


“The fuck are you talking about?” Zoro asked.

“Vinsmokes lost. I’m just here to collect my boss and leave,” Bones said. “Blackleg beat his father, looks like he was injured though-”

“Brilliant as always, Daz,” Crocodile said as Zoro raced out of the room.

“Or he knew I was outside and could handle you.” Daz and Crocodile sighed as Mihawk stepped into the flooded room. “His Observation Haki has certainly gotten better. Now, Crocodile, do I strike you down while you’re weak or do you tell me enough to make you running worth my while?”

“What’s there to tell?” Crocodile asked. “I worked for the Vinsmokes and they lost.”

“This pathetic attack by you was not ‘working for the Vinsmokes’ and we both know it. Zoro probably figured it out too,” Mihawk said. “You wouldn’t have strayed so far from them if you were working for them. Who else was a player in this mess?”

“Mihawk. I’m stunned,” Crocodile said, clutching his heart dramatically. “I doubt she’ll be pleased people forgot her so quickly!”

“Crocodile,” Mihawk said sternly.

“Charlotte Linlin wanted to see how things turned out,” Crocodile said. “And if her getting tired of the Vinsmokes’ bullshit was the right assessment. I bring her my observations of the Straw Hats and Hearts and she lets Miss Goldenweek look at her part of the map to Raftel.”

“Which Goldenweek will memorize and later reconstruct perfectly for you,” Mihawk said.

“And a few other copies or Linlin, in case some fool steals her original at an inopportune time,”
Crocodile said. “She gave up on the Vinsmokes the second they told her this idea. Now she wants to know about her new opponents.”

Mihawk raised an eyebrow. “You only fought Zoro. What will you have to tell her? ‘Mihawk’s son is an excellent swordsman’?”

Crocodile laughed. “Come on, Mihawk. Like I didn’t have other eyes and ears around. People will peer at a battle anyway, pay them to do it and they’ll take notes.”

Zoro barreled out in the courtyard and looked around. Chopped was sitting on the ground with Robin, and getting to his feet upon seeing Zoro was-

“Sanji!” Zoro said, running over and pulling him into a hug.

“Well someone was worried,” Sanji joked. “Look at you, public affection and everything…”

“Are you all right?” Zoro asked. He squinted at Sanji’s bangs being on the other side. “Hey, your hair-”

“It’s fine,” Sanji said.

“Don’t fucking lie to me,” Zoro said. “You switch your bangs around and expect me not to notice?”

Sanji sighed, “Oh fine, moss head. Have a look.”

Sanji brushed his bangs aside, revealing an eyepatch. “Chopper couldn’t do anything and we couldn’t find Law in time. I said just to leave it.”

Zoro wanted to apologize because this felt like his fault somehow, but he was pretty sure that would get him kicked or at least yelled at. Sanji would blow off the idea that it was his fault and assume Zoro was judging the patch or something stupid because Sanji had a weird thought process like that.

So he kissed him instead.

Sanji, being Sanji, kissed back. “Eyepatches turn you on, cactus?”

“Eh, you make anything look good.”

Sanji smiled, “So, how did you do?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, the soldiers were pathetic. But I kicked Crocodile’s ass!”

“*Crocodile*!? Sanji yelped.

“I know, right?” Zoro said, grinning proudly.

“Well where the fuck is he now?” Sanji demanded.

“Oh, my dad’s got him. He’ll deal with it. Maybe arrest him, I don’t know.”

“Mihawk’s here?” Robin asked.

“Fujitora hired him to protect the king. He knew something was up. I kind of like him,” Zoro said.
“And you still want to fight him,” Chopper sighed.

“Well yeah, Law’s stepdad didn’t let me…” Zoro grumbled.

“Where is Law, anyway?” Nami asked. “The rest of us ran all over looking for him…but then Kizaru did kidnap him…”

“What? Do we have to save Law now?” Chopper asked, alarmed.

“It’s cool, we got him. But You’ll need to look at him, yoi,” Marco called.

“And Luffy!” Ace added, helping Koala dump Luffy on the ground as Sabo set Law down. “Guys, Luffy fought Kizaru to a draw!”

“No way!” Vivi said. “Oh my gosh, that’s amazing! You’ve all gotten so strong!”

“Well from what we know Kizaru did fight Law and Fujitora for a bit first,” Marco said as Chopper yelled at Ace to grab Law and help get him back to the Scalpel. “Shit, how bad is he?”

“Well it’s partly fixed but all this running around with open wounds can cause infection!” Chopper flailed. “Why didn’t anyone bandage it?”

Luffy, Sabo, Koala, Ace, and Marco all winced, “Whoops.”

“Why are the strongest people all idiots?” Nami asked.

“Hey, I’m strong too!” Zoro said.

“…That does not disprove the theory,” Usopp muttered.

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“So…now what?” Brook asked.

“Well you won, the most people stopped fighting because of you,” Smoke admitted, stretching. “Cyborg? Should we help your comrades?”

“Yeah, that’d probably work,” Franky said. “Okay, so how should we-”

“Hey guys, we won!” Ace laughed as the rest of the crew reappeared.

“Also Smoker was right, Fujitora’s cool,” Sabo added. “Law needs medical attention and Luffy needs a nap-”

“No I don’t!” Luffy protested.

“-so we’re headed back to the ships,” Sabo continued as Nami hit Luffy outside the head. “So Tashigi arrested the Vinsmokes, we’re good now right?”

Smoker sighed, “Yeah, we’re good. Where did you last see Fujitora?”

“Uh…that was Law and Luffy,” Koala said. “I think it was east of the palace, Kizaru fought Law somewhere with big windows that got blown out.”

“Maybe a church?” Ace suggested tapping his chin.

“I’ll…just wait for him to find me,” Smoker said. “I think everyone needs a break…wait you all
fought Kizaru?!!”

“Well Sanji and Penguin are clearly planning one hell of a feast after this fight, you want food?” Zoro asked.

“…Yeah sure, let’s go with that,” Smoker sighed.

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Hancock rolled her eyes. Apparently someone had decided her story of bending the Straw Hearts to her will was a little fishy and had sent a Navy Crew to summon her to the new headquarters.

Like hell she was going anywhere. They had no proof, fishy or not. She only hadn’t turned them to stone out of courtesy.

Also because it would make her look guilty.

“I told you, I easily bent those boys Luffy and Law to do my bidding,” she repeated. “I am a loyal Warlord.”

The door banged open. The Vice Admiral jumped. Hancock and her sister did not.

Garp strode in. Hancock was torn between panic and relief…if it depended on what he said next.

“Monkey D. Garp, a pleasure,” Garp said. “Now what the Warlord was trying to explain to you through her obvious shock at your sheer impertinence was that she was on a mission from Admiral Fujitora.”

Hancock kept her mouth shut. She didn’t have enough details yet to work with Garp’s rather outrageous story.

“You see, Fujitora’s not fond of the Warlords system but knows Boa Hancock is kept in by a strong quid pro quo and therefore could be trusted. He wanted her to make sure the Straw Hats and Hearts were set against the Vinsmokes in order to makes sure Judge didn’t take over Alabasta.”

“Exactly,” Hancock agreed. “Straw Hat Luffy made sense, of course, given his prior actions in Alabasta against Crocodile. By getting them to take Reiju Vinsmoke prisoner we all-but assured Judge could come into conflict with that crew.”

“If Judge was loyal he’d have defeated them and handed over all but Sanji to be jailed. Instead he tried to have Nefertari Cobra and Vivi killed and seemed to be plotting a coup,” Garp said.

“Precisely!” Marigold said, jumping in. “After all, if we hadn’t had the plan we simply could have tortured Reiju Vinsmoke into giving us the antidote. It’s not as if we needed the Straw Hearts.”

“We totally were in on Admiral Fujitora’s plan,” Sandersonia agreed.

“It was a great plan, and therefore we were happy to be part of it,” Marigold agreed.

“I take it the rest of the plan worked?” Hancock asked Garp.

“Like a charm. Though, ah, the Straw Hats and Hearts might have done more than we expected so check their bounties,” Garp said proudly.

“Oh we shall,” Hancock said.
“We have news!” Izo called as he entered the dungeon. Why on earth Jozu had gone so far as to turn holding cells into a full dungeon when they only needed one cell refurbished for Reiju, he’d never know.

“Really?” Haruta asked, looking up from the board game.

“You’re playing with her again?” Izo asked.

“Not much else to do,” Rayuko said, shrugging. Reiju didn’t even bother to look at Izo, keeping her eye on the angled mirror that allowed her to properly see the board on the table outside her cell. “You rolled a four for me. Move three squares to your right, Haruta, and one forward.”

“No curiosity, princess?” Izo asked.

“You’re not furious. Obviously your ragtag bunch kept Vivi safe,” Reiju scoffed.

Izo laughed haughtily, snapping out his fan to cover his smug smirk. “Oh they did more than that. They routed your father and his men and turned the tables. Judge and Niji Vinsmoke have been arrested. Germa 66 is done.”

“…What?” Reiju whispered.

“Mm-hm. Conspiracies are such fickle things,” Izo gloated. “I heard Blackleg did a number on your father, dear.”

“Sanji beat up his evil bio dad? Sweet!” Haruta said.

“…S-s-sanji…Sanji beat…” Reiju stuttered.

“Oh yes,” Izo said, fanning himself. “I’m told he did so quite easily once he was pushed too far. Mihawk and Admiral Fujitora arrested the lot of them for trying to overthrow Alabasta. Looks like someone wasn’t trying hard enough to get you back…”

“Shut up!” Reiju snapped.

“So what do we do with her?” Haruta asked. “We can’t just find some Marines and hand her over…”

“We’ll figure something out,” Izo said. “Big Mom and the Government through Cipher Pol have both been picking up the remains of Germa 66. She can be a bargaining chip with either if we play it right. Ah well, we’ll check when the Captain Trio gets back, I suppose…”

“They annihilated a major military power and you don’t care!” Reiju gasped.

“Oh, right. Like we’ve never toppled kingdoms,” Rayuko chuckled.

“Destroyed organizations full of fighters,” Haruta added wistfully.

“Brought armies to their knees…” Izo sighed. “The world is changing, princess. And looks like we know some of the people who will be bringing the changes.”

“Speaking of bringing things, can you bring dinner by later?” Haruta asked.

“No, lazybones, get it yourself. Oh, but stay indoors, Namur said there’s a bad squall coming up on
the frozen side,” Izo said.

.o.o.o.

Linlin chuckled as Pekoms finished relating Vinsmoke Sanji’s message. Everything had gone exactly as she’d hoped.

The Vinsmokes had been getting uppity lately, thinking they were ready to play in the New World for more than an assassination or two. Controlling wars and bringing kingdoms to their knees in the Blues was all well and good but they didn’t even hold power in Paradise. Judge had gotten too big for his britches by far.

Playing him against the only family member of his who did have credibility in the Grand Line had been almost insultingly easy. Linlin knew how to use her kids’ strengths while not utterly alienating them. Sure, she’d kicked their fathers to the curb once she was done with them, but she never outright killed the schmucks. They had uses and kids generally liked their parents alive, even if they didn’t know them. Everyone had uses…to a point, anyway. And a child’s uses should be limitless and only require giving them a bit of affection here and there, with attention and training as needed.

She didn’t know what Judge was thinking in pushing Blackleg Sanji away so harshly. He was powerful, polite, and clearly exceedingly loyal. The sort of boy she’d like one of her kids to kidnap and bring home. Pity he was on a rival crew.

“Do the Straw Hats and Hearts even realize they did what I wanted?” she asked Pekoms. He’d become much more useful lately as a liaison to the dangerous alliance of rookies.

“I don’t think so, Mama. But they probably will eventually,” Pekoms admitted. “Trafalgar Law will think of it or Phoenix Marco already knows. Or Reiju will tell them, since she’s still their prisoner.”

“Ah yes…Reiju…” Linlin mused, tossing a basket of chocolate covered strawberries into her mouth. She chewed ponderously. “Reiju…is a complication…”

“They might just turn her in themselves,” Pekoms said. “Straw Hat Luffy’s loony enough to mail her to his grandpa and say she’s a prisoner-present.”

“He does have Garp’s genes,” Linlin conceded. “We’ll let it be. I’m not sure she has value to me right now…”

Right now Reiju was worthless. If that changed, she’d act. For now, she’d expand her empire and let Kaido run into the rookies. No need to do the work when the idiots would do it for her…

.o.o.o.

“What are you doing?” Luffy said, grabbing the list away from Law. “No working! Not til you’re fine!”

“I’m fine,” Law said. “Fully recovered. Now let me finish checking provisions or I’ll remove your stomach.”

“Nuh-uh. Not til you’re fine!” Luffy said.

“Chopper tell him I’m fine!” Law groaned.

Chopper looked up from sorting through his medical bag. “He’s fine, Luffy.”
“Oh, okay,” Luffy said, letting Law take the list back.

“Idiot,” Law muttered.

“Nah. It’s smart not to trust you about whether or not you’re okay,” Luffy said. “You lie.”

“Ha!” Ace called from across the deck.

“You want to lose your organs too, Ace-ya?” Law growled.

“Grump,” Luffy teased.

“I was stuck in a bed for three days. That’ll piss off anyone,” Law muttered. “Okay, this all checks out. We should be good to go.”

“Um, question?” Zoro asked. “…You know how Vivi and her dad were going to get in trouble for knowing us since they said they were helping us?”

“Yeah, so?” Usopp asked.

“How does Vivi sail off with us without making that look really probable?” Zoro asked, pointing at the princess.

“Oh shit, moss head’s got a point,” Sanji sighed. “I supposed we could concoct some cover story.”

“Shishishi. Relax! I got this!” Luffy laughed, heading over to the rail.

“…I’m scared,” Nami admitted.

Luffy leaned over the rail and took a deep breath, his chest expanding like a balloon.

“We’re kidnapping Princess Vivi and nothing you can do will stop us! …Okay bye!” Luffy called, waving.

“…Think that’ll do it?” Sanji asked as Nami laughed kissed Vivi.

“Eh, should be fine,” Zoro said.

“Let’s just go,” Law said. He gave Luffy a quick kiss on the forehead, “See you when we get to the next stop. Shambles.”

He vanished, presumably to the interior of the sub.

“How many people are going to kiss today? Oh come on…” Zoro muttered as he turned to see Ace and Marco going at it. “You all have no shame!”

“You kissed me in public three days ago!” Sanji said.

“Yeah but…I….you…” Zoro groaned. “Shut up, cook.”

“Take your lumps, grass brain.”

“I’m just saying—mmph!”

Sanji pulled back with a smirk, “Come on, Zoro. Let’s see if some sake won’t keep you from whining until dinner, hm?”
The way he tilted his head made his bangs slip, exposing the eyepatch again. Zoro was briefly torn between alcohol and kissing him more…nah, alcohol. They could kiss later.

“I love you,” Zoro said.

“That won’t get you drunk just any day but it’s been a long few weeks so today…it gets you places,” Sanji said.

.o.o.o.

“I hear you have an explanation,” Sakazuki said.

“Yes,” Issho agreed. “We’re low on Warlords as is and letting one of Big Mom’s lackeys join would be terrible. Judge had every intention of milking his position both ways, sending us information on her while also sending her information on us. He was a security risk in a way Jinbe was not.”

“And letting the Straw Hearts go? Again?” Sakazuki asked, the air sizzling.

“Well someone needs to keep Big Mom and Kaido busy for us,” Issho admitted. “Straw Hat Luffy is their main competition for Pirate King, after all.”


“I didn’t forget anyone,” Issho said confidently. “Ha! *Never* Red Haired Shanks!”

“You say never about a man who keeps the Grand Line on its toes with a crew of under forty people?” Sakazuki asked.

“I say never about Roger’s prize apprentice who never bothered to claim the throne,” Issho said. “Think about it. A rookie in his early twenties, captain of a small crew…and he becomes one of the feared Emperors of the New World, matching Newgate, Linlin, and Kaido. Oh they’d dismiss him as a child, joke about his youth behind his back…but never without knowing he was still a threat. He’s been to Raftel, he was on that final trip…but he never claimed One Piece for his own. Why?”

“He was young. Could have forgotten where it was,” Sakazuki noted. Issho could hear it in his tone that the man didn’t even believe his own idea.

“No, never. And Buggy was too weak to claim it but Shanks? Shanks is possibly the most naturally gifted man on this earth and never bothered to try. Because for all his Haki, his power, his threat…he’s missing something.”

“What?” Sakazuki asked.

“Let me repeat myself. A man who’s sailed to Raftel under Roger but never went again after Roger’s death, never even sought Roger’s title. A man who captains a small crew made up of his friends who mostly do things for their own amusement. A man who is so satisfied with what he has, with his friends, his ship, his sons, his lover in his heart and his bed, his going wherever he pleases, that he outright supports his own son to take that which he never even gave a damn about with his own defeat as a part of the challenge.”

“Ambition,” Sakazuki said as it dawned on him. “Red Haired Shanks has no ambition.”

“Exactly,” Issho said. “He only wants modest things in life. The fact that he rose to greatness, to the place of Emperor, while getting them is entirely coincidental. A man that strong could have brought
the world to its knees if he wished, Sakazuki. But he won’t. No need to.”

“Unless it’s over his sons,” Sakazuki noted. “And it will be.”

“Monkey D. Luffy wants One Piece and once he’s strong enough, Shanks will help him find it,” Fujitora said.

“But only once he’s strong enough…we have time,” Sakazuki said. “He can fight an Admiral to a draw but Kizaru’s getting on in years and had just fought you and Law…too strong for a Warlord, true.”

“But not too strong for those whole rule in the New World,” Fujitora noted. “The question being…do you really want one of them to be his end?”

Sakazuki chuckled. Fujitora heard the drum of heavy fingers on the desk. “Two birds, one stone. Kaido’s been trying to absorb the Supernovas ever since Doflamingo fell and stopped supplying him with the means to raise an army. Bonneý’s been laying low since her escape and Bege is with Big Mom, but Kaido’s been grabbing at the rest. Drake was already his and he’s got Uroge and Hawkins as well.”

“You think Kaido will kill Luffy and Shanks will kill Kaido in retaliation,” Fujitora said.

“Leaving us with only two Emperors to deal with, the biggest candidate for Pirate King out of the way in the meantime, and time to focus on other threats,” Sakazuki said. “Fujitora, you know much of gravity. I think we’re going to need you to help us combat Blackbeard before he rises any more than he already has.”

Fujitora nodded. Blackbeard was a far more deserving opponent of his wrath than Monkey D. Luffy. “And just what do you have in mind?

.o.o.o.

“New wanted posters,” Roci mused. “After what went down in Alabasta I wouldn’t be surprised —oh come on!”

Kuzan snickered. The new photo for Law was from a market square in a port city…and he was flipping off someone out of the frame. “Aw look, they’re being accurate.”

“Kuzan!”

“Roci,” he acknowledged, before whistling at Law’s new bounty, “Nine hundred and fifty million. Got into a scrap with Kizaru and walked away…”

“How?” Roci asked.

Kuzan wondered that himself. Kizaru’s speed was one of the best defenses against Law’s power—he could do things before Law could react, even if he was master in his Rooms. “I’m sure he’ll tell you if you call him up in a panic.”

Kuzan smirked as Roci punched him in the shoulder. Didn’t hurt a bit…but it was cute. “Tell me I’m wrong.”

“What about the others?” Roci asked.

“Let me see, here’s Monkey D. Luffy—”
“Monkey D. Luffy, one-point-one billion!” Shanks crowed, waving the paper around. “That’s my kid!”

“Ace at nine hundred million, Sabo at seven,” Benn whistled. “Boys are moving on up.”

“Don’t forget Usopp’s at three hundred million now!” Yasopp added.

“Aw man they are on fire…literally with Ace’s picture, someone give the photographer a raise,” Lucky Roo said.

“Oh, hey, what’s Hawky’s kid at?” Shanks asked.

“Roronoa Zoro, five hundred million. Kicked Crocodile’s ass, as well as a ton of Judge’s men!” Benn said.

“Bet Mihawk’s proud,” Doc said.

“But Luffy made a billion! Come on, that’s worth a few rounds on it’s own!” Shanks laughed.

“That’s pretty impressive for Luffy,” Rocinante said.

“I know,” Kuzan agreed. “He’s been in the New World for only about four months now…”

“You’ve got good genes,” Rocinante said, handing the paper back to the man they were meeting with.

“I’m not so sure I’m the person to thank for Luffy’s power,” Monkey. D Dragon said. “Shanks did one hell of a job with him.”

“So, now that we’ve all cooed over the kids, what’s it you wanted our help with?” Rocinante asked.

“We’re going to find something very important,” Dragon said. “The treasure your brother used to blackmail the World Nobles.”

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and Happy Holidays! My gift is the final chapter of this tale!

And the person everyone forgot was involved in this mess was the Emperor Big Mom herself! It was a win-win for her. If the Vinsmokes lose, she takes their territory and resources. If they won, the Luffy and co wouldn't be a threat to her anymore. She got what she wanted either way, and with Croc giving her info on the Straw Hearts she gets even more! Also...GODAMNT ODA STOP DOING SHIT SIMILAR TO WHAT I'M DOING! I PLAN TO HAVE LINLIN LET THE VINSMOKES FALL MONTHS AGO AND NOW YOU'RE JUST GONNA HAVE HER DO EVEN WORSE TO 'EM? REALLY?
Okay, rant over.

VIVI'S BACK ON THE CREW, WHOOP-WHOOP!

So we've wound up this saga. Sanji's family's out! So anyway now we see where things stand in the world. The Navy plans to manipulate Luffy and co. against Kaido, Roci and Kuzan have teamed up with the revolutionaries, and everyone's going to have some fun next time when we get back to Punk Hazard in: "No We’re Not Adopting! (Or Kidnapping!)" Time to meet Momonosuke, gang!

edit: Tweaked Linlin's mental monologue very slightly to bring it a bit more in line with both canon an what I have planned.

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